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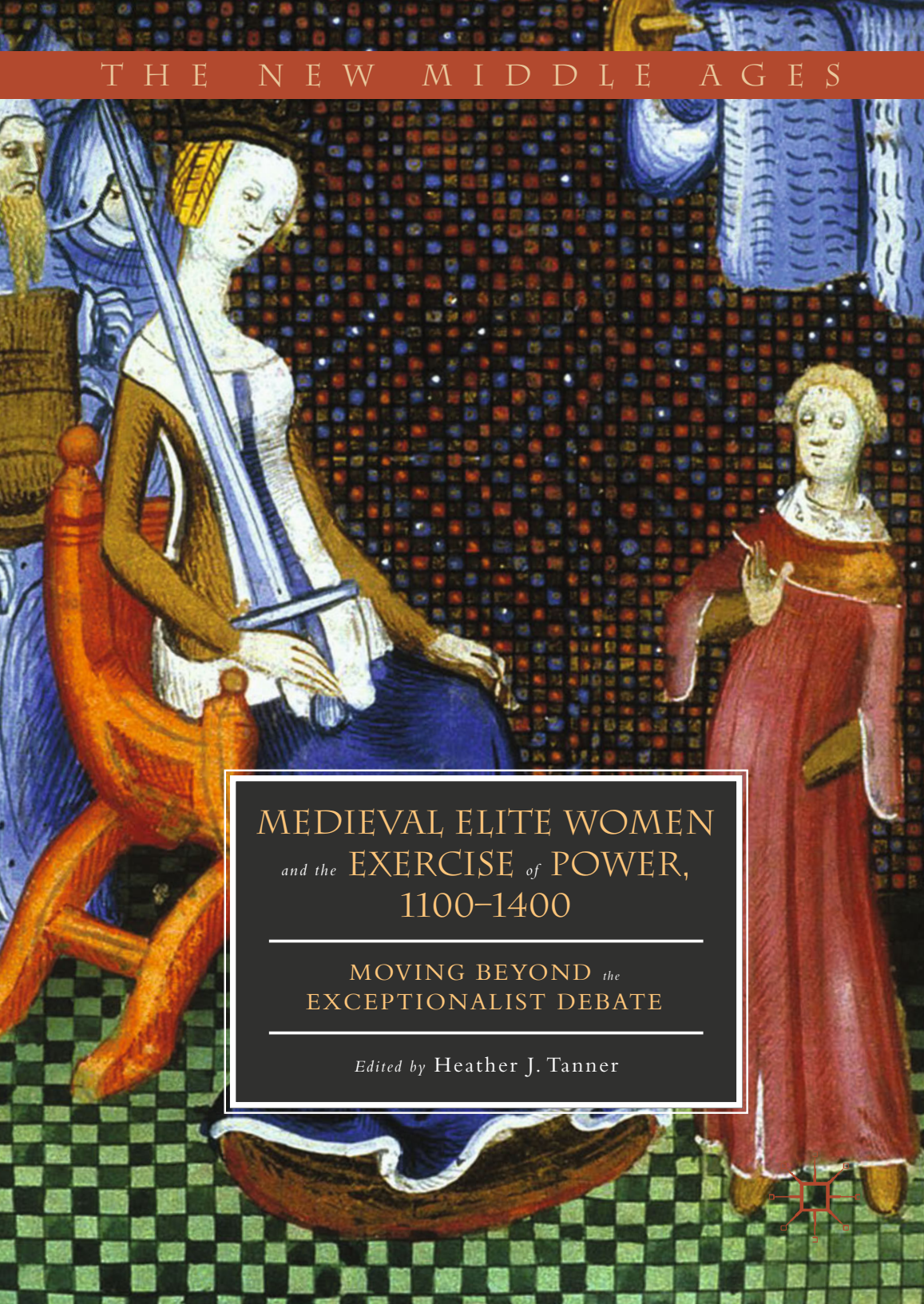

MEDIEVAL ELITE WOMEN *and the* EXERCISE *of* POWER, 1100–1400

MOVING BEYOND *the* EXCEPTIONALIST DEBATE

Edited by Heather J. Tanner

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Editor

Medieval Elite Women and the Exercise of Power, 1100–1400

Moving beyond the Exceptionalist Debate

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To Julie Tanner and Holly Cortelyou
With love and gratitude for all your support

Preface

The chapters in this book are drawn from and inspired by an international conference entitled *Beyond Exceptionalism* that I organized in September 2015. The conference aimed to foster new avenues and analysis of elite women and power in the central medieval period (c. 1050–c. 1400) and push beyond the paradigm established by Jo Ann McNamara and Suzanne Fonay Wemple in 1973. McNamara and Wemple argued that 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. Since the early 1980s, the study of elite women (noble and royal) has flourished and undermined their theory both in the timing and in the extent of elite women's loss of power during the Central Middle Ages. This body of work has disproved the "exceptional" status accorded to elite women who exercised power; however, the master narratives of medieval history still present any woman who rises out of anonymity—whether queen, countess, or brewster—as somehow unique. Therefore, "exceptional" medieval women are either excluded because they are not representative or included as an exception to the general experience of medieval women. The goal of this book is to change the discourse, promote new analysis and interpretation, and encourage the routine inclusion of medieval women into main narrative of medieval history. No matter how constrained by patriarchy, medieval women were, to quote Linda Mitchell, "ubiquitous, not exceptional, and influential." The scope of the book is wide-ranging, both geographically and topically: queens, noble women, urban

women, and religious women from England, France, Germany, the Latin East, Portugal, and Spain. Each chapter offers a new lens or approach to understanding the role of elite women in the power structures of the central and late medieval periods.

As the spelling of medieval names and place can be inconsistent, as editor, I have taken the following approach. For those who lived primarily in England and Germany, I will use a modern English version of their name unless the individual is usually identified otherwise. I use the modern French version for those who lived in what is now France and the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem rather than the Latinate form. I have retained the Portuguese spellings of names and kingdoms. Given the rather restricted first names in some families, I have distinguished the holder with a regnal number in the index. I have retained the "de" in toponomics when that is how the person is routinely designated; otherwise, I have used "of" for those who lived in England and the continent. Place names have been anglicised where a suitable form exists (Normandy, Castile), and left in the original (Béthune) where not.

I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to thank Laura Gathagan, Lois Huneycutt, Kathy Krause, Amy Livingstone, Linda Mitchell, and Miriam Shadis (in alphabetical order) for their advice in planning the conference and this book. Their generosity, wisdom, and encouragement have been immensely helpful and truly appreciated. To all those who contributed to the volume, presented at the conference, and shared in the ongoing sessions and conversations, it has been wonderful to share in the insights and camaraderie. I look forward to the continuing collaboration. I am also grateful for the financial support from The Ohio State University, Mansfield Campus, The Ohio State's History Department and the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies which made the conference possible.

Columbus, USA Heather J. Tanner

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Heather J. Tanner, Laura L. Gathagan and Lois L. Huneycutt

This collection is a result of a meeting of the minds over breakfast. Like so many fertile conversations in our discipline, it took place in the interstices between conference panels and networking, at a round dining table during the International Medieval Conference at Kalamazoo. It was born of equal parts frustration and incredulity; the women around that table found themselves engaged in the same educatory work that their forbearers had done thirty years ago. Why, after three decades of historical advocacy, of producing and teaching excellent books and articles bringing to light of dozens of women whose political behavior fails to fit modern assumptions of medieval women's experience, were we still hearing papers describing powerful women in positions of authority as exceptions to the norm. And not only a "norm" but a norm that presumes that a medieval elite woman was a cipher on the arm of her husband, whose only influence came through whispers in male ears and

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who, should widowhood allowed her a small measure of influence, was merely a placeholder for her male children. The conversation turned to a rhetorical question: How many "exceptional" women in positions of authority does it take before powerful elite women *become* the rule?

The ensuing discussion engaged the slipperiness of definitions of medieval power for both women and men. It began to grapple with how previous trajectories of women's status and activity might be reexamined and reinterpreted. In the face of a growing mountain of evidence of elite women's agency, self-determination, and control over the last three decades of research and discovery, how might we now characterize these models? Such questions provided the impetus for eight presentation panels across the space of two years: at the International Medieval Congress, Kalamazoo (2014), The Haskins Society Conference (2014), The Medieval Academy Conference (2015), and the International Medieval Congress at Leeds (2015). The inquiry culminated in its own event; the "Beyond Exceptionalism" conference hosted by Dr. Heather Tanner at The Ohio State University, Mansfield campus in September 2015. The participants of the conference, by now a much larger group of scholars engaged in examining medieval elite power, argued for a new paradigm for discussing the power, authority, and agency of medieval elite women. Every essay in this volume starts from the premise that elite women in positions of authority in the central medieval period were expected, accepted, and routine. The routine nature of a woman exercising power does not mean that every woman was successful, or that a particular woman might not face challenges to her authority. It does not mean that misogyny did not influence medieval culture, both lay and ecclesiastical, at every turn, and at every level on the social spectrum much as it does today. It does recognize that the texture of medieval women's control and influence was incredibly varied and situated in virtually every *locus* of medieval life.[1] Women used myriad strategies to gain their objectives. These included the "hard" power of martial authority, directing and commanding militias and soldiers, and the "soft" power of diplomacy and social pressure. Their agency was demonstrated in their bureaucratic activity through the rhetoric of charters, the production of cartularies, and through patronage of religious houses, hospitals, artists,

[1] Constance H. Berman, "Gender at the Medieval Millennium," in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, ed. Judith Bennet and Ruth Karras (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 545–558.

and poets. Their administrative activity was multi-faceted, polyvalent, and, most importantly, often unremarkable to their contemporaries. It must, however, be pointed out that the fact that women regularly, habitually, and ordinarily had responsibility for governing kingdoms, counties, and abbeys did not create some sort of "golden age" for women in the central medieval period. Medieval commentators were willing to believe that God could place individual women in positions of power and that individual women could overcome the natural limitations of their sex and at the same time assign qualities such as "capriciousness, physical weakness, lust, instability, lack of intelligence, and a tendency toward duplicity to the female sex as a whole."[2] These deeply embedded gender stereotypes could be and were invoked at any time against a woman, or even in a positive context to encourage a woman in carrying out her duties, as in the oft-cited case of Bernard of Clairvaux urging Melisende of Jerusalem (d. 1161) to "act as a man" as sovereign in Jerusalem.

While medieval misogyny may have shaped how elite women were included, or not, in chronicles, charters, and other documents of practice, modern assumptions have shaped how female presence is interpreted. Male authors wrote about women in chronicles less frequently than they deserved, and the political and ecclesiastical concerns of the authors shaped their presentation.[3] If the women supported the author's concerns, their actions were presented favorably; if the authors opposed the women or their families, the very same actions were excoriated. Modern historians have sometimes failed to problematize and contextualize chronicle sources. Similarly, charters, writs, letters, and other administrative instruments document women's roles approximately thirty percent of the time.[4] Women's acta, in all likelihood, survive in fewer numbers than those of men because of patriarchal preferences.

[2] Lois L. Huneycutt, "Female Succession and the Language of Power in the Writings of Twelfth-Century Churchmen," in *Medieval Queenship*, ed. John Carmi Parsons (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 189.

[3] *Authority and Gender in Medieval and Renaissance Chronicles*, ed. Juliana Dresvina and Nicholas Sparks (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 32. Ben Snooks demonstrates that chroniclers name specific women at ten percent of the rate than men in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

[4] Heather J. Tanner, "Women's Legal Capacity—Was the Thirteenth-Century a Turning Point?" in *Paradigm Shifts in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age: Transformations, Reformation, and Revolutions in the Pre-Modern World*, ed. Albrecht Classen, ASMAR (Leiden: Brepols, 2019), 81–96.

The inclusion of noble and royal women with other family members in charters has often been interpreted to mean that the women were included as "window dressing," and fails to recognized that their presence was often necessary to give the act validity. The presence of women was also taken as a signal that the act in question was a predominately private one, consigning women—even those who acted publically—to the private sphere in a feat of circular logic.

Women's letters even to popes, bishops, and kings survive sporadically, but letters between women have rarely been retained. The responses of men, which were often entered into chancery records or episcopal records, indicate that women's letters were received, read, and taken seriously, but women's letters survive in far fewer numbers than do the responses of their male correspondents. It is well known that episcopal figures such as Anselm of Bec, archbishop of Canterbury, or Ivo, bishop of Chartres, corresponded with a wide circle of women including Countesses Ida of Boulogne and Adela of Blois, Duchess Matilda of Tuscany, and two queens of England, Matilda of Scotland and Matilda of Boulogne. It is unlikely that these women, many of whom were related by blood or marriage, would not also have corresponded with each other. We would have a much fuller understanding of the dynamics of power and compromise during the English investiture controversy, for instance, if these letters had been preserved.[5]

Family, as a key institution of the medieval period, and the modern conception of it as a private one, is also a key component of the current discussion that characterizes elite women's power and agency as exceptional in the central and late medieval periods. Ironically, the idea that once powerful women were excluded from the exercise of authority because of the rise of administrative kingship and impersonal institutions of government stems from the groundbreaking work on women

[5]See Sally N. Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God: A Study of Anselm's Correspondence with Women* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002); Elizabeth Tyler, *England in Europe: English Royal Women and Literary Patronage, c. 1000–c. 1150* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017); Kimberly LoPrete, *Adela of Blois: Countess and Lord (c. 1067–1137) (*Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007); Penelope Nash, *Empress Adelheid and Countess Matilda: Medieval Female Rulership and the Foundations of European Society* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Lois L. Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland: A Study in Medieval Queenship* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2003); and Heather J. Tanner, *Families, Friends, and Allies: Boulogne and Politics in Northern France and England, c. 879–1160* (Leiden: Brepols, 2004).

in the early medieval period by Jo Ann McNamara and Suzanne Fonay Wemple. They argued that noblewomen, prior to 1050, had access to wealth and control over land, and therefore power, because of the inheritance and marriage practices of noble families. Political fragmentation in that era prompted noble families to assume formerly royal powers. The McNamara-Wemple thesis is predicated upon a public–private dichotomy; in other words, the early medieval period is characterized by the private exercise of governmental powers by elite families in the absence of public royal authority. With the revival of royal centralized government, or public power operating through bureaucratic institutions, families relegated female members into the private realm. They did so through restricting their rights to inherit land and legal personhood through the institutions of primogeniture, the rise of church-enforced monogamy, coverture, and the renaissance of Roman legal principles. These changes were accompanied by the slow diffusion of a new gender model and "the substitution of gender for class as the basic organizing principle in the new society."[6] Within the McNamara-Wemple model then, elite women who exercise lordship in the central and late medieval periods were exceptions to the "rule" of female exclusion from wielding power.

Since the early 1980s scholars have been working within this framework, however, several of key tenets of the argument have been undermined. First, analysis of inheritance practices and conceptions of family has refuted the extent and timing of primogeniture and patrilineage.[7]

[6]Jo Ann McNamara, "Women and Power Through the Family Revisted," in *Gendering the Master Narrative*, ed. Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 23. Within the modified Aristotelian gender continuum, women of the fifth through twelfth centuries were enabled to act in masculine capacities (although inherently inferior). This was because the Aristotelian system posited a single set of gendered elements—anatomical features and intangible character traits—that were distributed in varying proportions to individuals through sexual reproduction. Over the course of the thirteenth century, a complementarity gender system gained ascendancy which disqualified women from masculinity and hence from potentas (dominion or rule) and potestas (power). Jo Ann McNamara, "The Herrenfrage: The Restructuring of the Gender System, 1050–1150," in *Medieval Masculinities*, ed. Clare A. Lees. Medieval Cultures (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 3–29.

[7]For critiques which undermined the earlier model, see Constance Brittain Bouchard, "The Origins of the French Nobility: A Reassessment," *American Historical Review* 86 (1981): 501–532 and "Family Structure and Family Consciousness Among the Aristocracy in the Ninth to Eleventh Centuries," *Francia* 14 (1986): 639–658; Stephen D. White, *Custom, Kingship and Gifts to Saints: The Laudatio Parentum in Western France, 1050–1150* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), chap. 4 and Amy Livingstone,

Women routinely inherited land and wealth and therefore continued to access to land and therefore the associated rights of rule after the twelfth century. Second, legal historians have also begun reexamining married women's legal capacity from the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries.[8] This work problematizes coverture and suggests that husbands' control of wives' property varied both regionally and over time and was generally less complete than previously presumed. Third, scholars have broadened the definitions of governance from strictly office-holding, law, and military force. Using cultural and political anthropological methodologies to explore non-institutional means of ruling such as intercession, ritual, emotional performances, and gift-giving, scholars have deepened our understanding of how medieval rulers governed.[9]

The work of the last thirty years has undercut the public–private dichotomy of governance and highlights the need to consciously abandon nineteenth- and twentieth-century categories of analysis. As Katrin Sjursen argues in her study of Jeanne of Belleville (d. 1359), "traditional labels of wife, mother, and widow are not self-explanatory and do not necessarily equate to our modern definitions." Sjursen demonstrates that by focusing on women's actions, in Jeanne's case as a litigator, political ally, traitor, military commander, and pirate, we see how elite women participated in all aspects of medieval noble life. Erin Jordan's examination of the political culture of the Latin East through the reigns of Alice

Out of Love for My Kin: Aristocratic Family Life in the Lands of the Loire, 1000–1200 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010). For a clear and useful summary, see David Crouch, *The Birth of the Nobility: Constructing Aristocracy in England and France 900–1300* (Harlow: Pearson/Longman, 2005), chap. 4, and 121–123 for the lack of a new model.

[8] *Married Women and the Law in Premodern Northwest Europe*, ed. Cordelia Beattie and Matthew Frank Stevens. Gender in the Middle Ages, 8 (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2013).

[9] Philippe Buc, "Political Rituals and Political Imagination in the Medieval West from the Fourth Century to the Eleventh," in *The Medieval World*, ed. Peter Linehan and Janet L. Nelson (London: Routledge, 2001), 189–213; Carolyn P. Collette, *Performing Polity: Women and Agency in the Anglo-French Tradition, 1385–1620* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006); John Carmi Parsons, "The Queen's Intercession in Thirteenth-Century England," in *Power of the Weak: Studies on Medieval Women*, ed. Jennifer Carpenter and Sally-Beth MacLean (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 147–177; Barbara Rosenwein (ed.), *The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle* Ages (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); and Barbara Rosenwein, and Ricardo Cristiani, *What Is the History of Emotions?* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2018).

of Antioch (d. c. 1145) and her daughter, Constance (d. 1163), posits that using the single category of gender obscures our understanding of the factors that determined political participation. Jordan argues that the volatile dynamics of military and political life in the region meant that there were an "array of factors, ranging from religion to diplomacy to dynastic principles that comprised the political culture of the region and determined the ability of individuals, men and women, to exercise authority." Elite men as well as women faced a complex and challenging political situation; gender was not the predominate factor in acquiring political support and success.

Theresa Earenfight's contribution to this volume also refers to the "gender trap" that often obscures the "complex interplay of family and power." She proposes that rather than looking at binary categories of "hard power" exercised by kings and regnant queens, sometimes complimented by "soft power" exercised by consorts and other family members, scholars would do well to focus on "circumstances that shape the degree to which one can exercise power." Using Catherine of Aragon (d. 1536) as her example, she shows how power and its exercise is a "shapeshifter," changing over time, and can be conceived of as latent, dynastic, governmental, diplomatic, charismatic, religious, and potential. It can also be resisted. Earenfight's discussion of Catherine's active presence in the records of Henry's court until 1513, her Anglo-Iberian diplomacy, and her regency over England, Ireland, and Wales in 1513 leading up to the Battle of Flodden is further evidence that the twelfth-century demise of the politically active queen consort is much more apparent than real. Even after Catherine's fall from grace and the rise of Cardinal Wolsey, her continued resistance to Henry's divorce remained a form of power that had profound consequences.

Critique of the public and private dichotomy is also at the heart of Kathy Krause's study of Marie, countess of Ponthieu. Krause argues that by categorizing women's patronage of art and literature as private or domestic, scholars miss the political work that these texts and objects could perform. She demonstrates how Marie deployed literature as a political instrument in her efforts to secure the restoration of her iretage (inherited lands) and a royal pardon for her husband, as well as political propaganda to demonstrate her loyalty to the king. Like those of her male counterparts, who used similar strategies in their patronage of prose

works, Marie's actions exhibit agency. Elite women and men, in Geoffrey Koziol's phrase, begged pardon and favor, in similar fashion.[10]

Modern classification of marriage and family as part of the private sphere has also obscured the public activities and status of elite women. Charlotte Cartwright focuses on Emma of Ivry (1008–1080) in the context of her kin group. As castellan of Ivry, Emma was a member of the inner circle of the Norman ducal family. She later acted as matriarch to the younger generation of Norman aristocrats growing up in Rouen, including the adolescent duke William after the death of his father. The loyal performance of her lordly responsibilities in Normandy was a vital constant in the uneasy early years of William's rule. Indeed, she maintained control over her inherited properties even as she took up the reins of abbatial lordship as the head of Saint-Amand de Rouen. In co-creating a new Benedictine foundation, Emma acted within the structure of networks, not only those of blood relation, but of friendship and *fidelitas*. Emma was once again matriarch and head of a new generation—this time of female religious—and as their leader she constructed Saint-Amand's abbey buildings, creating an identity for them within the heart of the city.

Miriam Shadis's work on the foundation of Portugal demonstrates that a king alone was not sufficient to establish a new monarchy on the Iberian peninsula in the opening years of the twelfth century. Monarchy was a family affair, beginning with Teresa, daughter of King Alfonso VI of León. After receiving the county of Portugal as her marriage portion, Teresa adopted the title of queen and governed the county from about 1112 until 1128. Teresa continued to be the lynchpin of the new monarchy after her son Afonso Henriques secured a crown by conquest supported by papal fiat. Even after mother-son conflict erupted, Afonso Henriques continued to stress that Teresa's ownership of the county was crucial to its identity. He further stressed the corporate nature of the new monarchy by extending the use of the title of queen beyond the traditional consort and mother of the ruler to include his daughters. Portuguese royal daughters continued to prop up the monarchy even after they stopped being referred to as queens in the middle of the thirteenth century. As Shadis demonstrates, even the kings' children by women other than their legitimate wives had public roles and responsibilities, so that royal sexual liaisons were never just private matters.

[10]Geoffrey Koziol, *Begging Pardon and Favor: Ritual and Order in Early Medieval France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

Nina Verbanaz's chapter on the Salian empresses complements Shadis's discussion of role of family members in establishing and furthering dynastic power and royal authority. Beginning with Gisela of Swabia (d. 1043) and Conrad II, Verbanaz analyzes the way in which each royal couple, and particularly the empresses, courted chroniclers and artists whose work celebrated the accomplishment of the dynasty. The construction of the royal mausoleum at Speyer Cathedral, patronized by successive empresses, contributed to the majesty of the family and the stability of the realm. As Verbanaz argues,

> charters, chronicles, and manuscript images all demonstrate that the women of the Salian dynasty saw themselves, and were viewed by their contemporaries, as an integral feature of the medieval governing fabric. Their participation in governing was entirely expected. They were considered a necessary component of the framework of rulership. Chroniclers praise them according to their ability to successfully aid in governing the realm, highlighting their positive characteristics, both feminine and masculine. Manuscript artists portray the shared royal authority of the queen and empress alongside that of her husband, through symbols of earthly authority divinely bestowed.

The argument that royal women were necessary components to the institution of monarchy holds true for Shadis's Portuguese queens as well as Jordan's women of the Latin East.

Family power and molding family ethos are also a key element of Linda Mitchell's analysis of the careers of Isabella de Clare (d. 1221) and her daughters Maud (d. 1248), Isabelle (d. 1240), and Eva (d. 1246). Mitchell also examines how the seemingly private roles of wife, daughter, and sister obscure the unexceptional involvement of noblewomen in not only conveying land and heirs to their husbands, but as integral actors in the political community. *The History of William Marshal* demonstrates the centrality of Isabella de Clare to the governance of her family's lands during her husband's life. Isabella routinely engaged in politics and governance and inculcated these abilities in her daughters. "Although among the most prominent noblewomen of the first half of the thirteenth century, Isabella de Clare and her daughters were not unique. Indeed, they were only four in a host of active, engaged, effective noblewomen." Through marriage alliances, noblewomen transmitted these skills and formed matrilinities. By relegating their actions and work to

the domestic sphere and indirect political influence, we fundamentally misunderstand medieval politics and governance.

The division of activities into public and private spheres, a construct developed to describe changing conditions after the industrial revolution (and problematic even in that regard), utterly belies medieval practices.[11] As Kimberly LoPrete has summarized the problem,

> The political powers of aristocratic women were woven into the texture of a society in which 'domestic' household management included what we might consider public political duties: commanding armed warriors and organizing the defense of lands and tenants; adjudicating disputes among fief-holding knight and other dependents, as well as their monastic neighbours; managing revenues from entire lordships, as well as disbursing them – not only to purchase day-to-day necessities, but also to buy political favours, and armed allies, in addition to spiritual support for both the living and the dead.[12]

Similarly, modern assumptions about how bureaucratic institutions and written law function have led scholars to assume that medieval offices, bureaucracies, and law codes sought to function as those in the modern period do.[13] Thus, effective and successful medieval rulers have centralized institutions that controlled by the king or his officers. In addition, only these institutions or office-holders constitute "government"; indirect expressions of power are categorized as influence or soft power. However, Kristin Geaman's examination of Anne of Bohemia's reign (1382–1394) reveals the routine deployment of intercession by both men and women, and how intercession functioned as an integral component of medieval politics and governance. The routine use of non-formal

[11] Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text* 25/26 (1990): 56–80.

[12] Kimberly A. LoPrete, "Gendering Viragos: Medieval Perceptions of Powerful Women," in *Victims or Viragos?* ed. Christine Meek and Catherine Lawless (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), 37.

[13] Patricia R. Orr, "Non Potest Appellum Facere: Criminal Charges Women Could Not—But Did—Bring in Thirteenth-Century English Royal Courts of Justice," in *The Final Argument: The Imprint of Violence on Society in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Donald J. Kagay and L. J. Andrews Villalon (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998), 141–160. Orr demonstrates that despite the promulgation of coverture in Bracton, the practice for the next century did not conform to written law and not out of absence of knowledge of the statute.

means of governance throughout the medieval period strongly indicates that we need to abandon the presumption that medieval institutions were intended to function as their modern counterparts do. As Theresa Earenfight has shown, the person of the prince was supported by a ruling circle whose administrative and consultative influence has often been ignored. Elite women and men made up such circles and their actions are often best analyzed within such ruling groups.[14]

Prosopographical analysis thus, lies at the heart of many of the essays featured in the collection. RāGena C. DeAragon links legal sources with prosopographical methods to examine one of the first chronological periods to receive attention by historians of gender: the "divide" on either side of the Norman Conquest.[15] Using pipe rolls, rotuli, and Magna Carta, she takes issue with reductive models of lordship that are a poor fit for the twelfth century. As governments centralized in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, the nobility experienced a constriction of their rights and the markers of lordship, such as the ability to independently raise an army, which changed the terms of governing for men as well as women. DeAragon parallels the pipe rolls and Henry II's *Red Book of the Exchequer* to tease out women's position as these sources at once reveal and obscure them. The increased use of legal writs shows evidence that women as well as men found ways to push back against increased centralization in the twelfth century that affected the nobility.[16]

DeAragon's analysis demonstrates that we also need to reassess the impact that bureaucracy and institutionalized feudal structures had on elite women's access to and exercise of power. This element of the McNamara-Wemple thesis has not yet been systematically evaluated, and recent work on medieval women, law, and governance (c. 1150–1500) suggests that a new model is needed. It is well established that the development of the legal profession and institutional courts did not prevent unmarried women and widows from defending their rights. Although the work is in the early stages, legal historians are beginning to explore

[14]Theresa Earenfight, *The King's Other Body: María of Castille and the Crown of Aragon* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 4.

[15]Pauline Stafford, "Women in Domesday," *Reading Medieval Studies* 15 (1989): 75–94.

[16]Alexis Miller, *Fording the Severn: The Influence of Intermarriage and Kin Networks on the Development of Identity in Shropshire and Montgomery, from the Norman Conquest to the Edwardian Conquest* (Ph.D., University of Missouri-Columbia, 2018).

married women's experience of the law and suggesting that the enforcement of coverture between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries was mixed.[17] In a similar fashion, the influence of bureaucracy on elite women's access to power is also being questioned. Royal and noble administration of large estates was routinely overseen by elite women.

Anne Crawford has shown that English queens, starting in the thirteenth century, had their own council, exchequer, wardrobe, and secretariat and that queenly households were the norm throughout Western Europe.[18] Noblewomen supervised the sophisticated administrative apparatus that their large estates required.[19] Noblewomen also, upon occasion, served as castellans, financial officers, manorial officers, and

[17] *Married Women and the Law in Premodern Northwest Europe*, ed. Cordelia Beattie and Matthew Frank Stevens, Gender in the Middle Ages, 8 (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2013); Orr, "Non Potest Appellum Facere," 141–160; and Tanner, "Women's Legal Capacity," 81–96.

[18] Anne Crawford, "The Queen's Council in the Middle Ages," *English Historical Review* 116:469 (2001): 1193–1211. See also, Theresa Earenfight, "Absent Kings: Queens as Political Partners in the Medieval Crown of Aragon," in *Queenship and Political Power in Medieval and Early Modern Spain*, ed. Theresa Earenfight, Women and Gender in the Early Modern World (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 33–51; Véronique Flammang, "Une femme à la tête du domaine: le cas de Jeanne de Werchin, sénéchale de Hainaut," in *Lieu de pouvoir, lieu de gestion: Le Château aux XIIIe–XVIe siècles. Maîtres, terres et sujets*, ed. Jean-Marie Cauchies and Jacqueline Guisset (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 277–290; Martha Howell, "The Resources of Eleanor of Provence as Queen Consort," *English Historical Review* 102:403 (1987): 372–393; and Monique Sommé, "Les conseilleurs et collaborateurs d'Isabelle de Portugal, duchesse de Bourgogne, au milieu du XIVe siècle," in *A l'ombre du pouvoir: Les entourages princiers au Moyen Âge*, ed. Alain Marchandisse and Jean-Louis Kupper (Genève: Droz, 2003), 343–359.

[19] Sarah Salih, "At Home; Out of the House," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, ed. Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 124–140; Louise J. Wilkinson, "The Rules of Robert Grosseteste Reconsidered: The Lady as Estate and Household Manager in Thirteenth-Century England," in *The Medieval Household in Christian Europe c. 850–c. 1550: Managing Power, Wealth, and the Body*, ed. Cordelia Beattie, Anna Maslakovic, and Sarah Rees Jones, International Medieval Research, 12 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 293–306; Rowena E. Archer, "How Ladies … Who Live on Their Manors Ought to Manage Their Households and Estates': Women as Landholders and Administrators in the Later Middle Ages," in *Woman Is a Worthy Wight: Women in English Society c. 1200–1500*, ed. P. J. P. Goldberg (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1992), 149–181; and Ángela Muñoz Fernández and Cristina Segura Graiño (eds.), *El Trabajo de las mujeres en la Edad Media hispana: V Jornadas de Investigación Interdisciplinaria* (Laya, 3) (Madrid: Asosiación Cultural Al-Mudayna, 1988).

sheriffs.[20] Likewise, recent studies of vassalage and lordship have revealed that noblewomen routinely swore oaths of homage, administered and conducted military activity, and continued to rule their territories as heirs and regents in the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries.[21] Sharon Farmer has argued that while Parisian merchant women (1270–1450s) were excluded from municipal office and royal and administrative offices (held by men in their families), they were concierges of royal and aristocratic residences as well as official purveyors of luxury goods.[22] These were official as well as unofficial administrative and courtly positions.

Similar assumptions about the official, public role of nuns and abbesses have led historians to exclude them from discussions of women's power. Female religious have often been overlooked in terms of their active political influence and agency, but their self-determination is a crucial aspect of medieval religious life. While abbatial lordship may remain the most explicit expression of women's monastic power, communities of women together also acted as a whole to make choices that affected the surrounding political landscape, offered opportunities for their own advancement, and allowed them to forge new identities. Christopher Kurpiewski demonstrates how the urban Penitent Sisters

[20] Ellen E. Kittell, "Women in the Administration of the Count of Flanders," in *Frau und spätmittelalterlicher Alltag*, ed. M. Heinrich Appelt, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Mittelalterliche Realienkunde Österreichs, 9 (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1986), 487–508; Louise J. Wilkinson, "Women as Sheriffs in Early Thirteenth Century England," in *English Government in the Thirteenth Century*, ed. Adrian Jobson (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2004), 111–124; and Mark Forrest, "Women Manorial Officers in Late Medieval England," *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 57 (2013): 47–67.

[21] Michelle Armstrong-Partida, "Mothers and Daughters as Lords: The Countesses of Blois and Chartres," *Medieval Prosopography* 26 (2009): 77–107; Kimberly A. LoPrete, "Women, Gender and Lordship in France, c. 1050–1250," *History Compass* 5:6 (2007): 1921–1941; Jeffrey A. Bowman, "Countesses in Court: Elite Women, Creativity, and Power in Northern Iberia, 900–1200," *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 6:1 (2014): 54–70; Amy Livingstone, "Extraordinairement ordinaire: Ermengarde de Bretagne, femmes de l'aristocracie et pouvoir en France au Moyen Age, v. 1090–1135," *Annales de Bretagne et des pays de l'Ouest* 121 (2014) 7–21; and Katrin Sjursen, "The War of the Two Jeannes and the Role of the Duchess in the Lordship in the Fourteenth Century," *Medieval Feminist Forum* 51 (2015): 4–40.

[22] Sharon Farmer, "Merchant Women and the Administrative Glass Ceiling in Thirteenth-Century Paris," in *Women and Wealth in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. Theresa Earenfight (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 189–208.

of St. Maria Magdalena in Speyer navigated the political crisis of their city and used these moments of unrest between the merchants and the cathedral authorities to their advantage. Even their need for clerical support to perform the Mass, the *magisterium*, was used as a form of currency—an honor to be granted to clerics who met with their approval. They flew in the face of their bishop's interdict as he attempted to bring the merchants of Speyer into line, opening their cloister to the citizens to hear mass against his ruling. In doing so, they broke the bishop's stranglehold on power and helped strengthen the city's independence, despite his monetary support for the sisters. Kurpiewski traces out changes in the nuns' political alignment after the incident and finds that while they sometimes acted in accord with their bishop, they later affiliated themselves with the Dominican Order. The move strengthened their institution and resulted in greater freedoms for them. It also encouraged the sisters to revisit their commitment to the monastic life and brought new donations and new spiritual vigor to their community. Protecting their self-determination and autonomy was at the center of their actions whether they took support from the city burghers, the lord bishop of Speyer, or the Dominican Friars.

Tiffany A. Ziegler also examines women in urban spaces, but centers her essay on laywomen donors to the hospital of St. John in Brussels. She traces women's giving to this central feature of the city throughout the thirteenth century as revealed through documentary evidence and legal disputes. While male aldermen made up the administrative body of St. John's hospital, Ziegler's analysis demonstrates that women inserted themselves into the hospital's community through benefaction. The women of Brussels also used St. John as a partner in tangled legal disputes when family members and co-benefactors sought to curtail their rights over property. As the hospital built a permanent endowment, Ziegler identifies the citizens of Brussels through 278 extant documents issued through the mid-thirteenth century. She finds single, married, and widowed female lay patrons in these records ubiquitously participating in what had become a new civic enterprise, thereby entering into the public space of the city. Through pious donation, they exercised their autonomy as they donated alone, with their husband's approval, as consenters to their husband's donations, and along with their children and other relatives. Ziegler reveals urban laywomen making choices about their land, goods, and identity; they were civic actors very much in the public eye. In her hands, the modern conception of a line between public

and private spheres suffers another erasure. Like Kurpiewski's Penitent Sisters, the laywomen of thirteenth-century Brussels manipulated the structures and dynamics of urban life to support their autonomy and to create and maintain identities for themselves. Both Kurpiewski and Ziegler offer further evidence to support the conclusion, as Constance Hoffman Berman has recently expressed it in her study of thirteenth-century Cistercian nuns and their benefactors in the diocese of Sens, that "in all this the many examples of women's power and authority can no longer be regarded as exception."[23]

General scholarly acceptance of the quotidian nature of elite women's power is arguably the last hurdle to clear for those seeking to understand not only medieval elite women, but also the operation of medieval power structures as a whole. The underlying objective of the "Beyond Exceptionalism" movement is the acceptance of female public agency, authority, and power as a "non-story" in medieval society, without losing sight of the predominance patriarchy and accepted misogyny. The essays in this collection contribute to this effort.

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[23] Constance Hoffman Berman, *The White Nuns: Cistercian Abbeys for Women in the Diocese of Sens* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 99.