

‘An Entirely Masculine Activity’?
Women and War in the High and Late
Middle Ages Reconsidered

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Abstract

The field of medieval gender studies is a growing one, and nowhere is this expansion more evident than the recent increase in studies which address the roles of medieval women in times of war. While this change in research has been invaluable in helping to reveal the many important wartime roles performed by medieval women, previous studies have been too narrowly focused. Scholars have examined particular aspects of women's military activities without analysing the full extent and significance of their involvement, and their studies have focused geographically either on women in Western Europe or on women in the crusade movement without considering the relationship between these two areas.

This thesis bridges the geographic and analytical gap by looking longitudinally at the female military experience from the late-eleventh to the early-fifteenth century in Western European society (predominantly France and England), on crusade, and in the Holy Land. An examination of medieval legal, philosophical, and political debates and discussions provides theoretical understanding of contemporary attitudes toward women and their perceived roles in war. Subsequent chapters focus on how women functioned as military leaders, supporters of military activity, and victims of wartime violence. Perceptions of these women in the writings of contemporary chroniclers are also evaluated. The disparity between theoretical attitudes toward women in war and the realities of medieval women's military experiences is revealed through discussion of their extensive, though largely unstudied, participation in wars of the period. It is argued that historians must adopt a broader understanding and awareness of not only women's 'involvement' in war, but also the importance of their contributions to medieval military history.

Acknowledgements

History has long been my passion. Ever since I first studied the discipline in high school I have found that learning about people, places, and times long past has held a certain attraction for me. My interest in medieval history was sparked by a first year course I took at the University of Canterbury in 2004, which covered the history of Europe from Rome to the Black Death. Over the years my interest in this area of history continued to grow, so it was easy for me to decide to do my honours thesis – and then my masters – on something or someone from this period. For both theses I owe a large debt of gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Chris Jones, who has provided guidance, encouragement, as well as careful and constructive criticism at every step along the way. It was he who suggested the topic for my honours thesis and he was thankfully able to serve as the senior supervisor for my masters as well, even though it has been completed at a distance. Thanks must go as well to Professor Geoff Rice, who taught that first course so many years ago and who served as another supervisor for this work. I am also grateful not only to the many excellent tutors and lecturers who have taught me in my time at Canterbury, but to all of the staff in the History Department and the friends I made in my time here who have made it worthwhile. Additionally, I wish to thank Dr David Hay of the University of Lethbridge for taking the time to respond to my queries and providing useful suggestions of articles and books. Michael Harland also deserves my thanks for proofreading and offering helpful suggestions in the writing of this thesis, as does Laura Dopson for providing hard to obtain but highly useful books when I needed them most. For my family's continued support and interest in this project, along with the Dopson family, I am likewise very much appreciative. Last but most certainly not least, I cannot thank enough my wife, Jana, who has provided perpetual love and support and has put up with my ramblings about this thesis through it all.

Abbreviations

AA	Albert of Aachen, <i>Historia Ierosolimitana: History of the Journey to Jerusalem</i> , ed. and trans. Susan B. Edgington (Oxford: Clarendon, 2007).
ASC	<i>The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle</i> , ed. and trans. M.J. Swanton (New York, NY.: Routledge, 1998).
EHR	<i>English Historical Review</i>
FC	Fulcher of Chartres, <i>A History of the Expedition to Jerusalem: 1095-1127</i> , trans. Francis Rita Ryan, ed. Harold S. Fink (Knoxville, TN.: University of Tennessee Press, 1969).
GS	<i>Gesta Stephani</i> , ed. and trans. K.R. Potter (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976).
HH	Henry of Huntingdon, <i>Historia Anglorum: The History of the English People</i> , ed. and trans. Diana Greenway (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996).
JMH	<i>Journal of Medieval History</i>
Venette	Jean de Venette, <i>The Chronicle of Jean de Venette</i> , trans. Jean Birdsall, ed. Richard A. Newhall (New York, NY.: Columbia University Press, 1953).
JW	John of Worcester, <i>The Chronicle of John of Worcester</i> , 3 vols., vol. III, ed. and trans. P. McGurk (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998).
Orderic	Orderic Vitalis, <i>The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis</i> , 6 vols., ed.

- Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968-80).
- RT William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis, and Robert of Torigni, *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, 2 vols., ed. and trans. Elisabeth M.C. Van Houts (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995).
- WM William of Malmesbury, *Historia Novella: The Contemporary History*, ed. Edmund King, trans. K.R. Potter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- WP William of Puylaurens, *The Chronicle of William of Puylaurens: The Albigensian Crusade and its Aftermath*, trans. W.A. Sibly and M.D. Sibly (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2003).
- WT William of Tyre, *A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, 2 vols., trans. and annotated Emily A. Babcock and A.C. Krey (New York, NY.: Octagon, 1976).

Introduction

Throughout history war has commonly been associated with the actions of men. From Ancient Rome to the Middle Ages and on into the modern world, in societies great and small, men were the ones who strategised and fought, who savoured victory and suffered defeat, who made tactical decisions and drove the whole process of war. Women, by contrast, were never so active. They were the ones who remained at home, tending to domestic concerns while awaiting the return of their loved ones and as such, were far removed from any significant military roles or responsibilities.¹ Or were they? What if women did play a more significant part in military history than traditionally has been assumed? If so, why have they been ignored or overlooked? These questions must be asked of the historical evidence, irrespective of common assumptions, since they can help us ascertain the true nature of women's place in military history. This thesis focuses on the High and Late Middle Ages and aims to show that in fact medieval women from Western Europe (predominantly the kingdoms of England and France), as well as women on crusade, and in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, did fulfil a variety of military roles and were an important part of medieval military history. It argues for a greater understanding of what constituted women's 'involvement' in war and contends that the narrow conception of female militancy adopted by some historians has obscured the full significance of medieval women's military contribution within Western European society and while on crusade.

The need for this study in the context of modern historical scholarship and the methodological outline of this thesis is detailed below. It is first necessary, however, to identify the study's temporal limits and define the term 'High and Late Middle Ages'. As with any broad label applied to historical periods, there is no clear consensus over when the so-called 'High' (sometimes called the 'Central') Middle Ages began and the 'Late' ended, nor indeed does there seem to be much agreement as to the duration of the 'Middle Ages' more generally.² Historians might broadly consider the 'High and Late Middle Ages' to cover the years 1000 to 1500 A.D., but

¹ For a discussion of how war reinforces the idea that men are warriors and women passive observers see Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (Chicago, IL.: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 163-225.

² Fred C. Robinson, 'Medieval, the Middle Ages', *Speculum* 59 (1984), pp. 749-50.

there will always be some degree of subjectivity in any decision over specific termini for when one period ended and another began. How are we then to define these terms for the purposes of the present work? Since the focus here is on women in war, it is logical to approach this question in terms of some significant event relating to female military history. Accordingly, this thesis takes as a starting point the debate engendered by the career of Countess Matilda of Tuscany (1046-1115), one of the major militant female figures in the High Middle Ages. It is within the context of this debate about her career that we find the earliest theoretical arguments articulated in support of a woman's military activity – specifically that of Matilda – in the High Middle Ages.³ Although the military career of Joan of Arc (c.1412-1431) may seem at first to be a logical terminus for this study, a more appropriate end point is the dual publication in 1405 of Christine de Pisan's *Book of the City of Ladies* and of her *Treasure of the City of Ladies*. Not only did these works contain the first scholarly acknowledgement and defence of noblewomen's military involvement in the Middle Ages, but also her arguments were applied to noblewomen in general, as opposed to the specific assertions made in support of Matilda's military career. Here the term 'noblewomen' refers to women who belonged to the landowning class of society which was, broadly speaking, united by the profession of warfare.⁴ This progression from specific to general support of female military involvement provides an interesting theoretical framework in which to examine both medieval approaches to the question of women in war, as well as the actual roles they performed.

Women in Military Discourse

Given that many previous studies have already explored the roles of medieval women in war, as will be documented below, why is this thesis even necessary? The answer has to do with understanding the sometimes wildly varying statements made about women in war. Mary Beard, for instance, wrote in the 1940s that when medieval women:

³ For Matilda's military career see below, pp. 57-60.

⁴ On the evolution of the noble class and a discussion of the perceived roles of noblewomen see Anne J. Duggan, 'Introduction: Concepts, Origins, Transformations', in *Nobles and Nobility in Medieval Europe: Concepts, Origins, Transformations*, ed. Anne J. Duggan (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2000), pp. 1-14.

...had power as rulers or in ruling families they often instigated and proclaimed wars and even marshalled the troops as they went into battle. They incited men to ferocity at the fighting fronts. They accompanied men on marauding expeditions. They fought in the ranks. They took up arms to defend their homes.⁵

Beard was evidently assured that women did have an active role in war and that they even fought in wars alongside men. Yet as recently as the last decade, the eminent military historian John Keegan asserted that while women supported the men off the battlefield:

Warfare is, nevertheless, the one human activity from which women, with the most insignificant exceptions, have always and everywhere stood apart... [Women] never, in any military sense, fight men. If warfare is as old as history and as universal as mankind, we must now enter the supremely important limitation that it is an entirely masculine activity.⁶

How are we to reconcile these two statements? Were women as militarily active as Beard made out or was war in fact 'an entirely masculine activity' in which women took no part? Answering these questions is no straightforward task, for as the quotes above suggest, historical recognition of both the roles women played in war and the significance of these roles has varied over time according to the contemporary social and political persuasions of each individual historian. The present work is an attempt to understand this debate as far as it related to women's military experiences in the High to Late Middle Ages.

Why study this period in particular? The answer becomes clear when one examines the changing attitudes towards women in war within both crusade studies and medieval European society more generally. Let us take the study of the crusades as a start. 'Crusades' in this sense refers not only to the major military expeditions undertaken to the Holy Land from the late-eleventh until the thirteenth century, but also to the 'crusading society' established in Palestine by Frankish settlers in that period. Additionally, the thirteenth century Albigensian Crusade to what is now

⁵ Mary Beard, *Women as Force in History: A Study in Traditions and Realities* (New York, NY.: Macmillan, 1947), p. 279.

⁶ John Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (New York, NY.: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), p. 76.

southern France is also examined since the ‘crusaders’ who took part in it came from northern France. What becomes clear when one examines the scholarship in this area is that historically many authors have focused less on how women contributed to the crusades and more on the actions and deeds of the major male figures that actively fought and made the decisions. Thus, while the first of Steven Runciman’s epic three-volume history of the crusades does mention that women on the First Crusade (1096-1099) were present at the battle of Dorylaeum (1 July 1097), and also at the sieges of Antioch (1097-1098) and Jerusalem in 1099,⁷ he says nothing of the hardships women faced on the march across Anatolia, or at the subsequent siege of Antioch, and confines their efforts at the siege of Jerusalem to sowing protective hides for the siege towers. Yet there is evidence that shows women did suffer during the march to and siege of Antioch and which suggests they were more active during the siege of Jerusalem.⁸ In a similar way, John France’s analysis of the military factors that determined the success of the First Crusade does not even discuss women,⁹ despite numerous references to the suffering they endured whilst present on crusade as well as the assistance which they rendered to the fighting men.¹⁰ Likewise, the crusade histories of Anthony Bridge and Ernle Bradford portray women only as victims of war, or else they are mentioned in passing and never as militarily active.¹¹ Aziz Atiya also surveyed the history of the whole crusade period, but refers to women in passing just three times, and in no case were they actively assisting the men in a military sense.¹²

At the same time, however, there are also many scholars who have focused on the experiences and position of women during the crusade era. While much of this work has occurred in the past decade or so, there have been earlier studies in which women figured prominently. Well over half a century ago, for instance, Walter Porges

⁷ Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades I: The First Crusade and the Foundation of the Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), pp. 185, 234, 284-85.

⁸ For a discussion of women’s experiences in Anatolia and while besieging Antioch and Jerusalem see below, pp. 76, 78-79, 91.

⁹ John France, *Victory in the East: A Military History of the First Crusade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 367-73.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 126, 137, 175, 180, 241, 294, 347, 353.

¹¹ Anthony Bridge, *The Crusades* (New York, NY.: Franklin Watts, 1982), pp. 52, 145, 148, 161, 167, 197, 221; Ernle Bradford, *The Sword and the Scimitar: The Saga of the Crusades* (Milan: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1974), pp. 86, 116, 179.

¹² Aziz Atiya, *Crusade, Commerce and Culture* (Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press, 1962), pp. 66, 69, 232.

examined the plight of non-combatants, including many women, on crusade.¹³ More than two decades ago, Ronald Finucane, too, provided a useful if somewhat brief examination of women's military roles on crusade,¹⁴ and Maureen Purcell explored the extent to which women who went on crusade were viewed as 'crusaders' by their contemporaries.¹⁵ The prolific crusade historian Jonathan Riley-Smith has also published several works over the years in which he has maintained a focus on the actions and participation of women within the crusade movement.¹⁶ Over the past twelve years, however, the work of historians such as Helen Nicholson,¹⁷ Christoph Maier,¹⁸ Yvonne Friedman,¹⁹ and Natasha Hodgson²⁰ has helped bring to light many different aspects of the female crusading experience and women's lives in the Holy Land that had hitherto remained largely unstudied. Nicholson, for instance, studied the extent to which we can trust accounts surrounding the activities of female combatants; Maier surveyed the many ways women helped to assist the crusade effort in a European domestic context; Friedman looked at when and how women suffered as a result of wars on crusade; while Hodgson's comprehensive study examined attitudes towards women in crusade narratives.²¹ Additionally, the edited volume *Gendering the Crusades* provides a useful collection of current research into many aspects of women's involvement in the crusades.²² All this activity suggests that while in the past some historians may have been largely content to ignore women's

¹³ Walter Porges, 'The Clergy, the Poor, and the Non-combatants on the First Crusade', *Speculum* 21 (1946), pp. 1-23.

¹⁴ Ronald C. Finucane, *Soldiers of the Faith: Christians and Moslems at War* (New York, NY.: St. Martin's Press, 1983), pp. 174-84.

¹⁵ Maureen Purcell, 'Women Crusaders: A Temporary Canonical Aberration?', in *Principalities, Powers and Estates: Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Government and Society*, ed. L.O. Frappell (Adelaide: Adelaide University Union Press, 1979), pp. 57-64.

¹⁶ Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading* (London: Continuum, 2003); *The First Crusaders, 1095-1131* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); 'Family Traditions and Participation in the Second Crusade', in *The Second Crusade and the Cistercians*, ed. Michael Gervers (New York, NY.: St. Martin's Press, 1992), pp. 101-08.

¹⁷ Helen Nicholson, 'Women on the Third Crusade', *JMH* 23 (1997), pp. 335-49.

¹⁸ Christoph T. Maier, 'The Roles of Women in the Crusade Movement: A Survey', *JMH* 30 (2004), pp. 61-82.

¹⁹ Yvonne Friedman, *Encounter Between Enemies: Captivity and Ransom in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Leiden; Boston, MA.: Brill, 2002), especially pp. 162-86.

²⁰ Natasha R. Hodgson, *Women, Crusading and the Holy Land in Historical Narrative* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007).

²¹ A similarly relevant German study which I have been unable to consult, but which catalogues female crusaders and their activities on crusade is Sabine Geldsetzer, *Frauen auf Kreuzzügen 1096-1291* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2003).

²² Susan B. Edgington and Sarah Lambert (eds.), *Gendering the Crusades* (New York, NY.: Columbia University Press, 2002).

experiences on crusade, scholars are now much more aware of the need to understand these experiences and their significance within the whole history of the crusades.

In a similar vein, it has been rare for studies on the history of medieval women in Western Europe proper to discuss in any depth whether women were significant military actors. Even though they were dealing with the broader social, economic, and political position of women within medieval society – all factors that had a direct bearing on women’s military involvement – such studies often paid little attention to women as a military force, or even as victims of war. Thus, while Shulamith Shahar’s *The Fourth Estate* provides a generally comprehensive analysis of female experiences within French and English society during the Middle Ages, she devotes less than one page to a discussion of noblewomen who helped defend their husbands’ property from attack.²³ Another multi-volume study of women throughout Western history similarly mentions only one noblewoman – Ermengard of Narbonne – who exercised military command in the High and Late Middle Ages, and even then it is only stated briefly that ‘she decided when to make war and when to make peace’.²⁴ More promisingly, a shorter history of women in the Middle Ages by Frances and Joseph Gies at least notes that women could take on important military and political roles and gave some examples of women acting as military commanders.²⁵ Even so, however, the descriptions of women said to be militarily active take up only a few pages and solely refer to powerful noblewomen who were in a position to exercise military command, thus leaving the impression that most women never had any meaningful influence or involvement in military affairs.

Recognition of women’s military roles has been likewise limited as far as specialised military history is concerned. Philippe Contamine’s *War in the Middle Ages* reduces the discussion of women in medieval war to about one page, despite asserting that ‘the participation of armed ladies [in war]...was considered, when everything is taken into account, as fairly normal’ – a statement which would seem to imply that such women did have a noted involvement in war.²⁶ John France’s study of

²³ Shulamith Shahar, *The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages*, trans. Chaya Galai (London; New York, NY.: Routledge, 1983), pp. 127, 150.

²⁴ Paulette L’Hermite-Leclercq, ‘The Feudal Order’, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, in *A History of Women in the West: II. Silences of the Middle Ages* ed. Christiane Klapisch-Zuber (Cambridge, MA.: Belknap, 1992), pp. 235-36.

²⁵ Frances and Joseph Gies, *Women in the Middle Ages* (New York, NY.: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1978), pp. 23-24, 107-09.

²⁶ Philippe Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, trans. Michael Jones (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), p. 241.

western warfare is less complimentary; he does not explicitly discuss the role of women in military affairs at all and indeed makes only a handful of passing references to women – usually as victims of wartime violence – in the entire work.²⁷ Even more unusual, in another recently edited volume on medieval war only two articles out of ten which discuss war in Western Europe during the High to Late Middle Ages mention women,²⁸ and of these only Christopher Allmand's article on non-combatants in medieval warfare provides any significant discussion of women's experiences.

Despite this apparent lack of interest in medieval women's military roles, recent studies of warfare in Western Europe have adopted a more direct focus on the ways medieval women were active in military affairs, much as current research into women on crusade and in the Holy Land has begun to include aspects of women's involvement in warfare. More than two decades ago J.F. Verbruggen published an early but comprehensive survey of women in medieval armies, both on crusade and in Western Europe.²⁹ This article was followed in 1990 by Megan McLaughlin's seminal paper on militant medieval women,³⁰ which briefly surveyed how prevalent 'women warriors' were across Europe and seemed to open the door for further research in this area. Subsequent scholarship has focused on militant women in both France and England,³¹ biographies of prominent female military commanders,³² and other generalised surveys which discuss women's military involvement in the High to Late Middle Ages.³³ This research has helped to show that, although medieval women in

²⁷ John France, *Western Warfare in the Age of the Crusades, 1100-1300* (London: UCL, 1999), pp. 46, 111, 124, 148, 192, 203, 204.

²⁸ John Gillingham, 'An Age of Expansion, c. 1020-1204', in *Medieval Warfare: A History*, ed. Maurice Keen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 81; Christopher Allmand, 'War and the Non-Combatant in the Middle Ages', in *Medieval Warfare*, ed. Keen, pp. 257, 258, 263, 265-66, 268-69, 271.

²⁹ J.F. Verbruggen, 'Vrouwen in de middeleeuwse legers', *Revue Belge d'histoire militaire* 24 (1982), pp. 617-34, trans. Kelly DeVries as 'Women in Medieval Armies', *Journal of Medieval Military History* 4 (2006), pp. 119-36. I would like to thank Dr David Hay for bringing this article to my attention.

³⁰ Megan McLaughlin, 'The Woman Warrior: Gender, Warfare and Society in Medieval Europe', *Women's Studies* 17 (1990), pp. 193-209.

³¹ Helen Solterer, 'Figures of Female Militancy in Medieval France', *Signs* 16 (1991), pp. 522-49; Jean A. Truax, 'Anglo-Norman Women at War: Valiant Soldiers, Prudent Strategists or Charismatic Leaders?', in *The Circle of War in the Middle Ages: Essays on Medieval Military and Naval History*, eds. Donald J. Kagay and L.J. Andrew Villalon (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1999), pp. 111-25.

³² David Hay, *The Military Leadership of Matilda of Canossa, 1046-1115* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008); Majorie Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda: Queen Consort, Queen Mother and Lady of the English* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

³³ See, for example: Barton C. Hacker, 'Women and Military Institutions in Early Modern Europe: A Reconnaissance' *Signs* 6 (1981), pp. 643-71; Linda Grant de Pauw, *Battle Cries and Lullabies: Women in War from Prehistory to the Present* (Norman, OK.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), pp. 82-97; Kimberly A. LoPrete, 'Gendering Viragos: Medieval Perceptions of Powerful Women', in *Studies on*

France and England rarely engaged in actual combat, the extent to which women were present or had some sort of role in times of war was greater than earlier works suggested, even if their actions often took place on a smaller and more local scale than the deeds of their male counterparts.

Methodology

Considered altogether, therefore, there is evidently a growing interest and effort to explore women's military actions within Western Europe, on crusade and in the Holy Land. While such efforts are commendable and undoubtedly important, there has been no systematic attempt to draw together all aspects of the female military experience in these areas, which perhaps explains David Hay's recent call for some study to 'consider the specific [military] roles women played in different periods' in the context of the 'feudal' system of military organisation'.³⁴ Examining these roles and the social and political factors that shaped them is the purpose of the present study, in order to provide a more complete synthesis of women's role in medieval western warfare.

Firstly, however, it is worth addressing the problems associated with the term feudalism and the 'feudal' system that was supposedly prevalent in Western Europe and the Holy Land at this time. As Elizabeth Brown noted in 1974, these problems are manifold: how, for instance, given the many confusing definitions that have developed over time, are we to define what constitutes 'feudal' society and what does not? When and where did it exist? How and why did it come to an end?³⁵ These are all subjective questions that have been answered differently by different historians. Some have adopted a so-called 'narrow' approach and stressed the primary aspect of feudalism was the fief-holding system in which vassals owed homage and military service to their lord, while others employ a 'broader' approach and use the term to

Medieval and Early Modern Women 4: Victims or Viragos? eds. Christine Meek and Catherine Lawless (Dublin: Four Courts, 2005), pp. 17-38; *Amazons to Fighter Pilots: A Biographical Dictionary of Military Women*, 2 vols., eds. Reina Pennington and Robin Higham (Westport, CT.; London: Greenwood, 2003), I, pp. 651-65.

³⁴ Hay, *Matilda of Canossa*, p. 252. Nicholson, 'Third Crusade', p. 342, and Hacker, 'Women and Military Institutions', p. 644 have also remarked on the lack of study into militant women in Europe.

³⁵ Elizabeth Brown, 'The Tyranny of a Construct: Feudalism and Historians of Medieval Europe', *American Historical Review* 79 (1974), pp. 1067-68, 1074-77.

refer to a society made up of ‘interwoven elements’ in which the fief was just one of many important parts.³⁶ While we might broadly, for the purposes of this thesis, define a ‘vassal’ as a free man who was bound by oath to the service of his lord and who held property (often termed a fief) in return, this definition is extremely broad. As Susan Reynolds has made clear, there is no single concise definition of terms like ‘fief’ and ‘vassal’ and what exactly they were supposed to represent, since the meanings of these terms have varied throughout time and place according to the different interpretations of not only modern historians but also medieval writers.³⁷ These issues serve to make the term ‘feudalism’ imprecise and subjective and highlight how no one label can adequately describe the nature of all social and political relationships that existed within Western Europe during the Middle Ages.³⁸

It is necessary, therefore, to define more clearly what factor(s) linked together the military experiences of women in the western European societies of England and France, along with women who went on crusade to, and who lived in, the Holy Land during the period under study. To this end, it is worth noting that at around the same time that Matilda of Tuscany’s military career was beginning in northern Italy, the Norman Conquest of England (beginning in 1066) established political and territorial links between the kingdoms of England and France that were to last throughout the High to Late Middle Ages. It introduced a French-speaking aristocracy into England and meant that henceforth English kings held land in France – technically as vassals of the French king, although in reality the ambiguous nature of this relationship was to be a constant source of friction between the two kingdoms for centuries to come (as witnessed, for instance, in the Hundred Years War).

Furthermore, in contrast to the few castles constructed pre-Conquest, England after 1066 saw a proliferation of castles throughout the land, resulting in a more heavily militarised kingdom³⁹ like that of northern France at the time. The building of castles enabled new lords to emerge who could control the surrounding land in a

³⁶ For a fuller discussion of the approaches to feudalism see Jean-Pierre Poly and Eric Bournazel, *The Feudal Transformation: 900-1200*, trans. Caroline Higgitt (New York, NY.: Holmes and Meier, 1991), p. 1; Susan Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals: The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), pp. 1-2. Two sources that remain influential in the debate on feudalism and how it should be understood are Mark Bloch, *La Société Féodale*, trans. L.A. Manyon as *Feudal Society* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 2nd ed., 1962); and F.L. Ganshof, *Qu'est-ce que la féodalité?*, trans. Philip Grierson as *Feudalism* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1952).

³⁷ Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals*, pp. 12-13, 22-34, 68-69.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 476-77; Brown, ‘Tyranny’, p. 1064.

³⁹ M.T. Clanchy, *England and its Rulers, 1066-1272* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2nd ed., 1998), pp. 55-56.

hierarchical pattern of lordship with the king, at least in theory, at the top – although in reality, less powerful English (and Norman) lords could and did exercise considerable autonomy,⁴⁰ especially while royal systems of government were still in development. The new Latin principalities that were established in the Holy Land from the late-eleventh century reflected much the same pattern as that found in France and England, where strong local lords were under jurisdiction of a king (or queen) whose power was limited in extent. The military experiences and activities of women in France, England and the Holy Land operated in the context of this social environment and were defined by this general model of lordship.

Although the relationship between France, England, and the Holy Land is clear and supports their inclusion in this study, it may be asked why women from the Christian kingdoms in the northern Iberian Peninsula, northern Italy post-Matilda, and the Western Roman Empire (that is, modern day Germany) have been excluded. After all, these areas all shared much the same class structures, were all primarily Christian, and undoubtedly women from all these areas went on crusade to the Holy Land. Yet there were social and political differences between women in these regions and those in the Western societies under study which must be taken into account. In the Iberian Peninsula, for instance, there is the specific crusading context of the *Reconquista* – the reconquest of the peninsula from the Muslims which was ongoing throughout the High and Late Middle Ages (until the capture of Granada in 1492). This region was influenced by its close contact with Muslim culture and the constant warfare between Christians and Muslims, which meant that armies were generally lighter and more mobile than those found elsewhere in Western Europe.⁴¹ In Italy, the rise of the city-states during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, after the military career of Matilda of Tuscany, created large independent republican communes that were distinct from the increasingly monarchic forms of government found elsewhere in Europe at that time. Military activities, whether of men or women, thus came to be dominated and defined by the city-state, rather than by a hierarchical system of lords and vassals, as was evident elsewhere in Western Europe.⁴² Lastly, military service in the Western Roman Empire was differentiated from that in the France and England by the

⁴⁰ Thomas N. Bisson, *The Crisis of the Twelfth Century: Power, Lordship, and the Origins of European Government* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 157.

⁴¹ For a study of warfare in the context of the reconquest see Joseph F. O'Callaghan, *Reconquest and Crusade in Medieval Spain* (Philadelphia, PA.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), pp. 124-51.

⁴² For the origins and development of the Italian city-state see Phillip James Jones, *The Italian City-State: from Commune to Signoria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), especially chapters 2-4.

emergence in the tenth century of the *ministeriales*, or ‘serf-knights’ – unfree, but privileged, members of the peasantry who performed administrative and military duties for their lord. Over the course of the Later Middle Ages the social status of *ministeriales* was assimilated with that of the free nobility, and they increasingly came to hold fiefs and became an important military force in dynastic conflicts within the Empire.⁴³ Nothing quite like the *ministeriales* existed in France or England, where free vassals performed military service; moreover, as the status of the *ministeriales* increased over the Later Middle Ages and beyond, so did the central power of the imperial monarchy decrease, in contrast to the English and French kingdoms where central power increased.

These differences in military makeup, social context, and political structure in northern Iberia, northern Italy, and the Western Roman Empire contrast with the closely related structures of France, England, and the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem, where power became increasingly centralised over the High to Late Middle Ages. The military experiences of women in the former three areas were shaped by such diverse influences as the constant warfare of the *Reconquista*, the city-state model, and the presence of *ministeriales* in society. Consequently, their military experiences need to be studied in separate contexts, whereas the military experiences of women in France, England, and the Holy Land are better studied as a unit. Despite these differences, a detailed study of women’s military experiences in these excluded regions of Western Europe would certainly compliment the present study.

Given these parameters, Norman, English, French and other crusade chronicles form the bulk of the sources used for this study. Some of these chroniclers seemed to have had a greater interest in the plight of women and hence are discussed more frequently, perhaps most notably the works of Orderic Vitalis and Albert of Aachen (who deal with women in Normandy and England, as well as on the First Crusade and in the early Latin kingdom respectively). On the whole, however, most of the sources employed rarely discuss the actions and activities of women, let alone in a military context. Classical, Byzantine and Muslim sources have also been examined as these provide different perspectives on women’s *perceived* military role as opposed to their *actual* military role. Moreover, a broad range of sources helps to highlight how the involvement of women in military affairs was an emotionally

⁴³ For the origins, duties and changing status of the *ministeriales* see Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 1984), pp. 34-37.

charged issue which gave rise to a range of conflicting attitudes. When these attitudes and emotions are accounted for, it is possible to answer some of the larger questions posited by this study. In what ways, for instance, did war intersect with the lives of medieval women during the High to Late Middle Ages? How did medieval theologians and canonists conceive of women's role in war? Did their conceptions match up with reality? Why have historians largely neglected, or only recently taken an interest in, the military history of medieval women? In asking such questions, this thesis seeks to understand all the ways in which women were involved with, affected by, and discussed in relation to military activity, both on and off the battlefield.

To understand the female military experience, however, we first need some sense of how ideas about women and perceptions of their proper role in medieval society developed over time and were incorporated into medieval philosophical and legal thought. This understanding provides the necessary background for the subsequent examination in chapter one of legal and political tracts that discussed women in relation to war, which in turn establishes the context for the following three chapters and their exploration of medieval women's actual military experiences in three key areas: as military leaders, as supporters of military activities, and as victims of wartime violence. Within each of these areas (which form the basis for chapters two to four), the focus is maintained on the particular circumstances and forces that dictated how and why women became involved in warfare, as well as the form this involvement took. The discussion of female military leadership is thus based around women who exercised military command and were involved with military diplomacy since both activities were key features of such leadership. Women's military support roles, on the other hand, were shaped by whether or not the women were physically present with the fighting men, hence these support roles are considered in two separate contexts – on campaign and on the home front. Finally, the many ways that wartime violence affected women are studied in light of the religious and political contexts in which the violence took place. Throughout these chapters, contemporary reactions, perceptions and portrayals of women in war are also examined as they reveal much about attitudes towards women in war and how they either reflected or contrasted with the theoretical ideas and beliefs outlined in chapter one. It should also be noted that although this study relies on secondary sources written or translated into English, this apparent limitation is not significant given that the conclusions of works

not presently available in English have been largely incorporated into the numerous recent English-language studies of medieval women and their roles in war.

In the end, the critical importance of this study is that it, unlike previous studies, focuses not just on one or two particular aspects of female involvement in medieval warfare but rather examines the broader context of women's involvement and participation in warfare in the High to Late Middle Ages. Consequently, it provides a more complete picture of the ways in which war overlapped with the lives of medieval women in Western European society and allows us to comprehend their larger importance to military history at that time. In doing so it offers a unique and ultimately more nuanced understanding of the forces that drove military history in the High and Late Middle Ages.

1. Societal Roles and Military Potential: Medieval Perspectives on Women

The idea that women might be involved in war has, throughout history, attracted the interest of many writers in both medieval and modern times. Driven by a range of assumptions and preconceptions about women in general, these writers attempted to explore the militant capabilities of women and define the ways in which women might or might not engage in military-related affairs. Collectively, the influence of their thought has had a profound effect upon the position of women, not only in military matters, but in society as a whole, and it is this precise effect which the present chapter intends to explore. Understanding the ways in which women have been historically understood throughout antiquity and on into the medieval period offers us a contextual base upon which to compare the theoretical and legal restrictions medieval women faced in war with the reality of their experiences. Moreover, it may also help explain why the wartime experiences of medieval women have been largely ignored or at least downplayed by historians of the High and Later Middle Ages.

Following a broadly chronological approach, therefore, this chapter outlines theoretical and legal arguments raised both for and against women's participation in warfare, and how theorists throughout this period justified women's exclusion from the realm of war. This approach makes clear the cumulative impact which centuries of misogynistic and male-biased thought had on women's place in medieval society in the High to Late Middle Ages and why it was so difficult for many chroniclers and other authors to conceive of women as effective military agents. It also helps explain the hostile attitude of some contemporaries towards certain women who did become involved in military affairs. Indeed, the biased nature of this debate only goes to highlight the importance of fully understanding all the issues and opinions at stake in order to make sense of women's wartime experiences in the High and Late medieval period.

Aristotle to Aquinas: Defining Women's Role in Society

It would be useful, before we examine the role afforded to women in wartime, if we first briefly explored the origin and basis of the underlying beliefs about High and Late medieval women's proper place in society. What ideas underpinned the theoretical discussions about women in the High and Late Middle Ages? Understanding women's societal roles in turn provides a base for understanding the medieval conceptions of militant women, as well as those women otherwise involved in or affected by war.

First and foremost, one of the strongest and most fundamental influences on medieval scholarship about women throughout the entire Middle Ages was the bible. Christian writers relied on the bible because of the fact that it represented God's holy word, and as such offered important and (at least theologically) irrefutable ideas about women, the majority of which cast women in a decidedly negative light. To be sure, there were (and still are) biblical verses that portrayed women in a more favourable – even militant – light, such as Deborah, a prophetess and leader of Israel who helped guide the Israelite army to victory over the Canaanites, and Jael, who it is written killed the Canaanite general Sisera,⁴⁴ but the overall image of women is a negative one. Various passages throughout the bible reiterated how women were supposed to be, for instance, silent in public,⁴⁵ submissive to their husbands,⁴⁶ periodically unclean to touch,⁴⁷ and scheming seducers of men.⁴⁸ Yet it was the Genesis story of creation and the Pauline Epistles which were to exert the most influence upon medieval conceptions of women.⁴⁹ Indeed, Paul himself used the Genesis creation story, specifically the idea that women were created of man and that they caused the Fall of

⁴⁴ See Judges 4:4-16 for Deborah and 4:17-23 for Jael. See also Phyllis Bird, 'Images of Women in the Old Testament', in *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York, NY.: Simon and Schuster, 1974), pp. 41-88 for a more detailed examination into the portrayal of Old Testament women, and Constance F. Parvey, 'The Theology and Leadership of Women in the New Testament', in *Religion and Sexism*, ed. Ruether, pp. 117-49 for a similar appraisal of New Testament women. For a more recent discussion of the scholarship surrounding biblical misogyny see Alice A. Keefe, 'Stepping In/Stepping out: A Conversation between Ideological and Social Scientific Feminist Approaches to the Bible', *Journal of Religion and Society* 1 (1999), pp. 1-14.

⁴⁵ 1 Cor. 14:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:11-12.

⁴⁶ Eph. 5:22-24; Col. 3:18.

⁴⁷ Lev. 12:2, 5, and 15:19-30.

⁴⁸ Judges 16:4; 2 Sam. 11:2-4; 1 Kings 19:2.

⁴⁹ Diana H. Coole, *Women in Political Theory: From Ancient Misogyny to Contemporary Feminism* (Boulder, CO.: Lynne Rienner, 2nd ed., 1993), p. 42.

Man,⁵⁰ to justify man's superiority over women and show how women cannot be trusted and require male guidance.⁵¹

Similar concerns about women were displayed by the early Church Fathers, whose writings bridged the gap between the biblical and the medieval period and helped formulate much medieval Christian doctrine. Their thought is indicative of why later medieval conceptions of women were primarily negative. There is, for instance, the uncompromisingly misogynistic view of writers like St Ambrose (c.338-397) and St Jerome (c.347-420), who contended that ultimately women were the root of all evil and defined them primarily as lustful beings who must strive for the ascetic life in order to be reconciled with God.⁵² Only through a life of reflection and controlled living could women achieve salvation, for nothing else would suffice. A slightly more temperate view is that of St Augustine of Hippo (354-430), whose writings, for various reasons, were highly influential in shaping the attitudes of the western Church in the Middle Ages and beyond.⁵³ He adopted a more subtle approach to the issue and argued that although God only made man in his image and not women, both sexes resemble God at the level of the soul, a level which occurs whenever anyone from either sex contemplates or spiritually seeks out God through prayer and religious devotion.⁵⁴ In that activity gender becomes redundant, and they both resemble God's likeness. Nevertheless, despite this spiritual unity of the sexes, women still differ from men physically and can only ever hope to be man's helper, as noted in Genesis,⁵⁵ thus it is *only* when a woman is together with her husband that she forms the image of God.⁵⁶ By identifying women's inferiority in their bodies

⁵⁰ See Gen. 2:21-22 and 3:6 in particular.

⁵¹ See, for instance, the aforementioned 1 Tim. 2:11-12, 'Let a woman learn in silence with full submission', and 1 Tim. 2:14, 'Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor'.

⁵² Elizabeth A. Clark, *Women in the Early Church: Message of the Fathers of the Church*, v. 13, ed. Thomas Halton (Collegeville, MN.: Liturgical Press, 1983), pp. 17-18; Coole, *Women in Political Theory*, p. 44.

⁵³ Gerald Bonner in his *St Augustine of Hippo: Life and Controversies* (London: Canterbury Press, 1986), pp. 10-11 has suggested that his personality, the 'depth of his experience of God', and his ability to communicate his ideas clearly to readers were among the reasons for his enduring popularity, but the sheer quantity of his writings and the range of subjects he addressed were also important in this regard.

⁵⁴ Coole, *Women in Political Theory*, p. 46.

⁵⁵ Gen. 2:20.

⁵⁶ Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Women: The Aristotelian Revolution, 750 B.C. – A.D. 1250* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 221-22; Coole, *Women in Political Theory*, pp. 45-47.

therefore, Augustine was free to highlight the inherent sinfulness of the body and hence argue that women were more prone to sin and must be under male control.⁵⁷

Patristic and biblical sources, therefore, were highly influential in shaping High and Late medieval conceptions about women. Yet in order to understand one of the key writers in this area during the high medieval period, Thomas Aquinas, it is necessary to understand the work of Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), whose ideas about the nature of women remained virtually unknown in Europe until the mid-thirteenth century, but which then became an important base for later medieval discussions about women. We shall come to the rediscovery of Aristotle shortly, but first it is necessary to explore the essential elements of his thought. He was, of course, the student of another great classical philosopher – Plato (c.428-c.347 B.C.), but unlike Plato, who suggested that men and women could to a certain extent participate equally in political life and military matters,⁵⁸ Aristotle's work left no doubt as to the subordinate and inferior role women should play in society.⁵⁹ The clearest expression of this inferior status is found in Aristotle's *Politics* and his ideas about the natural hierarchy of beings. This book described a natural order of ruler to ruled, where he contended that just as tame animals are by nature better than wild ones and should be ruled by humans if they are to be preserved, so 'the relation of the male to the female is by nature that of better to worse and ruler to ruled'.⁶⁰ Such a statement leaves little doubt as to the subordinate role women naturally assumed in relation to men. Nevertheless, evidently trying to clarify and further distinguish the nature of this male-female relationship, he states that within the household the male rules over the female 'for by nature the male is more fitted for leading than the female'.⁶¹ The male's right to rule 'by nature' stems from the fact that, although women have the ability to deliberate and make decisions, they are nevertheless 'not in control' of this ability.⁶² In other words, women are able to reason, but they are unable to control their

⁵⁷ Rosemary Radford Ruether, 'Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church', in *Religion and Sexism*, ed. Ruether, p. 157.

⁵⁸ See below, pp. 36-37.

⁵⁹ See Nicholas D. Smith, 'Plato and Aristotle on the Nature of Women', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 21 (1983), especially pp. 472-78 for the contrasting ideas these two philosophers had about women.

⁶⁰ Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Peter L. Phillips Simpson (Chapel Hill, NC.: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 1.5.1254b13-15, p. 16. For a detailed discussion of women's place in Aristotle's natural order see Maria Luisa Femenias, 'Women and Natural Hierarchy in Aristotle', *Hypatia* 9 (1994), pp. 164-69.

⁶¹ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1.12.1259a39b10, p. 30.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 1.13.1260a13, p. 32.

passions, unlike men, who can both reason *and* control their passions, and who therefore should rule over women.⁶³ Moreover, nature makes things for only one purpose;⁶⁴ for women, their natural role was in bearing children and tending the household, which left the men free to practise politics – a role that accorded with, and was dictated by, nature itself. As a consequence, women must also be excluded from military participation, since, as Aristotle notes, ‘the political way of life...[is one]...divided between the needs of war and peace’.⁶⁵ In other words, war was a political – and by implication – male-only affair. Women’s natural procreative purpose and inability to be in full control of their reasoning capacity shut them off from any political rule or military participation.

Important as these ideas would become in later medieval thought, however, they found no traction in medieval political thought until the mid-thirteenth century, when firstly the *Nichomachean Ethics* and then the *Politics* were translated into Latin in 1246/7 and c.1260/65 respectively.⁶⁶ Their translation formed part of the larger rediscovery of Aristotle’s philosophy in the medieval West at that time and coincided with the flowering of Aristotelian studies in the universities at Paris and Oxford during the 1240s and 1250s. Amongst the first to engage with this rediscovered material was Thomas Aquinas (c.1225-1274), whose *Summa Theologica* (written 1265-1274) is notable for the way in which it wove together the patristic writings of the early Church with the emerging naturalistic Aristotelian world view into a text which has been described as ‘at once more androcentric and less misogynist than the patristic inheritance’.⁶⁷ More specifically, Aquinas helped synthesise the rediscovered works of Aristotle with more traditional Christian notions regarding the body-soul duality, and in so doing offered a new foundation and justification for male superiority in the physical world.

Adopting the Aristotelian idea of a natural hierarchy, in which those with more rationality ruled those with less, Aquinas applied it to the Christian tradition by placing God at the apex of a divine order of beings, over which He had supreme

⁶³ Fred D. Miller Jr., *Nature, Justice and Rights in Aristotle’s Politics* (Oxford; New York, NY.: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 243; Mary P. Nichols, *Citizens and Statesmen: A Study of Aristotle’s Politics* (Savage, MD.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1992), pp. 29-35.

⁶⁴ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1.2.1252b1-3, p. 9.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 1.5.1254b30, p. 16.

⁶⁶ Joseph Canning, *A History of Medieval Political Thought, 300-1450* (London; New York, NY.: Routledge, 1996), pp. 125-26.

⁶⁷ Eleanor Commo McLaughlin, ‘Equality of Souls, Inequality of Sexes: Women in Medieval Theology’, in *Religion and Sexism*, ed. Ruether, p. 216.

control.⁶⁸ In this divine order man was possessed of a better intellectual capacity than woman, and although both sexes had a rational soul, men's greater ability to reason made them naturally superior to the female sex, and the logical rulers of society.⁶⁹ Women, on the other hand, were a sex created solely for purposes of reproduction and no other, since procreation was the only task which unquestionably required male-female cooperation, and in all other tasks man would be better served by another man in fulfilling that task. Moreover, although women help ensure the survival of the species, Aquinas maintained that 'man is yet further ordered to a still nobler vital action, and that is intellectual operation',⁷⁰ as man's ultimate goal must be in striving for rationality through the perfection of the soul. Thus, in his conception, women serve an inferior bodily-related function, unlike men's role as leaders and the natural rulers of the world in which they live. Furthermore, while both sexes have a rational soul and are formed in the image of God, men nevertheless have this image in a superior form to that of women.⁷¹

In essence, therefore, Aquinas used Aristotle's ideas on natural order to assert that the inferiority and subjugation of women was a natural state of affairs, and in so doing he helped reinforce the biblically based arguments earlier Christian theologians (such as the Fathers) employed to justify the subordinate position of women. Additionally, it is clear that his conception of women's avowedly domestic social function left no place for women to fight in medieval militia or command troops. In Aquinas' view, women's only true hope for equality with men lay in the resurrected state (after death) where, because both men *and* women are possessed of a rational soul, both sexes are able to come together in worshipping and loving God in a place where there is no need for any form of carnal expression or coitus.⁷² Thus, only once free of all bodily processes and temptations is Aquinas willing to afford women equal standing to that of men.

For all his efforts to reconcile Aristotelian philosophy with the bible, however, it was not Aquinas but rather one of his students, Giles of Rome (c.1243-1316), who

⁶⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, in *Aquinas: Selected Political Writings*, ed. A.P. D'Entrèves, trans. J.G. Dawson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1948), Qu. 103, art. 3, p. 107.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, Qu. 92, art. 1, p. 103.

⁷⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, vol. 20 (London: Burnes, Oates & Washbourne, 1921), pt. 1, Qu. 92, art. 1, cited in Coole, *Women in Political Theory*, p. 49.

⁷¹ McLaughlin, 'Equality of Souls', p. 218; Coole, *Women in Political Theory*, p. 50.

⁷² McLaughlin, 'Equality of Souls', pp. 220-21.

in fact made Aristotle's ideas accessible to more than just a university audience. His lengthy mirror-of-princes work *De regimine principum* (c.1281) – dedicated to the future French king Philip IV (1268-1314) and intended to help guide him in governance as well as princely conduct – was highly popular and widely translated into numerous languages (even today more than three hundred Latin manuscripts still survive).⁷³ Indeed, it has been described as ‘the most successful product of the mirrors for princes genre’,⁷⁴ probably because it was one of the few such works to bridge the gap between lecture theatre and noble household. This success can be attributed to the way in which Giles distilled the ideas contained in Aquinas' work and presented them in a very readable and systematic format.⁷⁵ While the specifics of Giles' arguments as far as they relate to female militancy are presented in the third subsection,⁷⁶ for now it is enough to note that it was his work that provided the most publicly accessible expression of Aquinas' political thought and of women's supposed inferiority to man.

Examining the development of political and theological thought up to its fusion in Aquinas' work, therefore, there was evidently a generally negative, even hostile, attitude toward women, combined with a broad denial of any possibility that they could be useful for any public leadership role. It is fair to ask then what prejudiced these men, and many others not mentioned here, against women, why they were so unwilling to acknowledge that women could reason, and why they were so quick to denounce their sinfulness. Although it is possible that individual experiences may have influenced what these authors wrote, the clearest explanation for such attitudes is that women's roles were classified on the basis of their biological differences from men, and they were held to a different standard because of it. As Susan Okin notes, philosophers and theologians were led to define women ‘by their sexual, procreative and child-rearing functions within [the family]’,⁷⁷ thus theoretically constraining the roles which women might perform outside of private life. Moreover, by linking women to temporal and less rational bodily processes, Christian theologians could argue that women were more prone to suffering a loss of

⁷³ Charles F. Briggs, *Giles of Rome's De Regimine Principum: Reading and Writing Politics at Court and University, c.1275-1525* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 11-13, 21-22.

⁷⁴ Chris Jones, ‘Giles of Rome, Political Thought’, in *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Henrik Lagerlund (Springer, forthcoming).

⁷⁵ Canning, *Medieval Political Thought*, p. 133.

⁷⁶ See below, pp. 37-38.

⁷⁷ Susan Moller Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 9.

control or reason (for instance, during sex), just as the first woman, Eve, was the one tempted and who caused the Fall of Man. Invariably this line of argument led them to conclude that all women were inferior to men in practically every way and that their only conceivable temporal purpose was as an aid in reproduction.⁷⁸ Such sweeping generalisations suggest that there was a subtle, if ill-defined, male fear of ‘female sexuality and reproductive functions’,⁷⁹ perhaps because the vast majority of medieval authors were members of an educated but celibate clergy who rarely came into contact with women and were, consequently, quick to point out the supposed faults and weaknesses of women.⁸⁰

Furthermore, we cannot rule out the role patriarchy had in shaping negative views of women in the High to Late Middle Ages. Patriarchy emphasised a certain core set of male-centred values and beliefs that included such qualities as strength, logic, rationality, calmness under pressure, control and toughness – all of which were well suited to the political and military arena. In medieval times (and even today) this meant that more traditionally ‘feminine’ values, such as cooperation, equality, compassion, and emotional awareness, were not emphasised and consequently less valued, especially when it came to war.⁸¹ As a result, medieval authors espoused a general belief in the universally passive or timid nature of women, as opposed to the ‘active’ nature of all men, which they used to help delineate the differences between the turbulent (but logical and rational) male world and the more tranquil female domestic sphere.⁸² Thus, female involvement in public affairs would have challenged or compromised the traditional image of men as the ones who engaged in public activity and who defended those believed to be unable to defend themselves, namely women and children. In the end, the fact remains that by the High to Late Middle Ages misogynistic and stereotypical views of women were an entrenched part of

⁷⁸ Okin (Ibid, p. 10) calls this simplification of women’s purpose ‘a functionalist attitude...[that]... pervades the history of political thought’.

⁷⁹ Joshua S. Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 372.

⁸⁰ Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, ‘Including Women’, in *A History of Women in the West: II. Silences of the Middle Ages* ed. Christiane Klapisch-Zuber (Cambridge, MA.: Belknap, 1992), pp. 7-8; André Poulet, ‘Capetian Women and the Regency: The Genesis of a Vocation’, in *Medieval Queenship*, ed. John Carmi Parsons (New York, NY.: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), p. 94.

⁸¹ Allan G. Johnson, *The Gender Knot: Unraveling our Patriarchal Legacy* (Philadelphia, PA.: Temple University Press, Revised ed., 2005), p. 7.

⁸² Corinne Saunders, ‘Women and Warfare in Medieval English Writing’ in *Writing War: Medieval Literary Responses to Warfare* eds. Corinne Saunders, Françoise le Saux and Neil Thomas (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), p. 188.

political commentaries that clearly favoured androcentric views.⁸³ The same was true, as we shall see, the few times women's military potential was directly or indirectly discussed.

Women and Military Theory: Traditional Views and Emerging Challenges

Having gained some insight into the historically negative debate about women and their broader place in society, one might easily assume that women never even figured in treatises on war and military strategy. As we shall see, this assumption is in large part correct. But at the same time women were not entirely ignored in military tracts – they did, after all, comprise half the population. As such, there were efforts in the High to Late Middle Ages to define in a more specific sense how and why women were, or were not, suited for war, despite centuries of hostility towards the idea that women could exercise public authority. It is worth asking then what prompted this exploration of women's military potential in this period given that this issue had been largely ignored in the past. How did theologians and canonists explore and explain female military involvement? As we shall see, the answers given by medieval authors were often dictated by the needs of their own circumstances or major changes in policy.

We might begin by asking what constituted the 'traditional' or common view of women in military theory during the High and Late Middle Ages. In this regard we cannot ignore the influence of the *De re militari* composed by the noted Roman military theorist Flavius Vegetius Renatus.⁸⁴ Although this particular text dates from the later-fourth/early-fifth century A.D.,⁸⁵ it was the standard work on military

⁸³ See James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago, IL.: University of Chicago Press, 1987) pp. 425-28 for more on canonical and theological beliefs about women's inferiority to men. For a more complete discussion of how the medieval misogynistic tradition evolved from antiquity see R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago, IL.: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

⁸⁴ For an overview of the impact of Vegetius' work in the Middle Ages see Charles R. Shrader, 'The Influence of Vegetius' *De re militari*', *Military Affairs* 45 (1981), pp. 167-72. See also Clifford J. Rogers, 'The Age of the Hundred Years War' in *Medieval Warfare: A History*, ed. Maurice Keen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 146, and Richard L.C. Jones, 'Fortifications and Sieges in Western Europe, c.800-1450', in *Medieval Warfare*, ed. Keen, p. 183.

⁸⁵ There have been a number of questions raised over the dating of this text and whether it was written in the late-fourth or early-fifth century A.D. On this issue see T.D. Barnes, 'The Date of Vegetius', *Phoenix* 33 (1979), pp. 254-57; Helen Nicholson, *Medieval Warfare: Theory and Practice of War in Europe, 300-1500* (New York, NY.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 13.

thought throughout the High and Late medieval period,⁸⁶ and was used by many different authors including Giles of Rome, who drew heavily from it in his *De regimine* (indeed, a number of later manuscripts contain copies of Giles' and Vegetius' work together).⁸⁷ It is thus useful as a guide to the established beliefs about war and its conduct, although the value of the work itself lay not in the originality of what Vegetius said, since the ideas presented were largely the result of the work done by other older military theorists,⁸⁸ but rather in the way he compiled and rearranged much of this earlier work into a format that was easily referenced. The clear structure is evident in Vegetius' division of the work into just four books: firstly covering recruitment and training; second, the formation of the army; third, tactics and strategy; and fourth, aspects of siege and naval warfare. The succinctness of the work as a whole and the way that it appealed to the 'practical needs' of its medieval audience was thus the reason for its appeal.⁸⁹ Crucially, however, women's military aid is discussed specifically just once, when Vegetius accepted that women might use rocks and other basic projectiles in a last-ditch effort to defend a besieged city.⁹⁰ Moreover, we can infer from Vegetius' comments regarding the need to shut out 'those unfit for fighting by reason of age or sex' when stocks were low in a besieged city,⁹¹ and his stated belief that military science consisted of 'arms and men',⁹² that women were certainly not expected to take any part in war, let alone in the fighting. Vegetius' attitude here is much more typical of medieval thought, which generally made no allowance for any female military involvement or recruitment of any kind, and which either largely ignored or vehemently condemned the thought of any female military presence.

⁸⁶ Shrader, 'Influence', p. 168. See also Charles R. Shrader, 'A Handlist of Extant Manuscripts Containing the *De re militari* of Flavius Vegetius Renatus', *Scriptorium* 33 (1979), pp. 280-305 and Nicholson, *Medieval Warfare*, p. 14, for a discussion of these MSS and translations of them. Michael Prestwich (*Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages: The English Experience* [New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 1996], p. 186) believes this work 'was the only...treatise read in the middle period that discussed military strategy.'

⁸⁷ Briggs, *De Regimine Principum*, pp. 45, 65; Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, p. 210.

⁸⁸ For a discussion of the identity of these older theorists see the introductory debate in Vegetius, *Epitome of Military Science*, trans. N.P. Milner (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2nd ed., 1996), pp. xvi-xxviii.

⁸⁹ Shrader, 'Influence', p. 168. Although his advice, given through the work of Giles of Rome, was not always followed: see Chris Given-Wilson, *Chronicles: The Writing of History in Medieval England* (London; New York, NY.: Hambledon and London, 2004), pp. 190, 255 n. 141.

⁹⁰ Vegetius, *Epitome*, p. 136.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, p. 124.

⁹² *Ibid*, p. 29.

At the same time, however, until the mid-eleventh century, the question of whether women were suited for militant activity had simply not been of any real concern to medieval scholars. To be sure, there were historical examples within Western Europe of women who were significantly involved in military activity, but they had not stimulated major debate on this issue. The legendary Boudicca, for instance, led a military revolt against the Romans in early Britain,⁹³ yet her existence remained unknown throughout the High and Late Middle Ages and was only rediscovered in the sixteenth century.⁹⁴ Much later, another more well-known female military leader, Æthelflæd, the so-called ‘Lady of the Mercians’, led an army that won several battles within England and even invaded Wales in the early-tenth century,⁹⁵ but her actions also aroused little comment in the contemporary sources.⁹⁶ Though unusual, the activities of these women were not sufficiently contentious for contemporaries to use them as a basis for an argument in favour of female militancy.

Thus, it was not until the military career of Countess Matilda of Tuscany in the late-eleventh and early-twelfth century that we find the first clear evidence of works written in support of female militancy. Matilda, whose military career is examined in more detail in chapter two,⁹⁷ inherited a large territory in northern Italy and became the chief means of military support and main defender of the Gregorian reform papacy in its struggle against the Western Roman Emperor Henry IV (1050-1106). Her continued military success raised fresh questions concerning women’s place in war, and forced many intellectuals who were dependant on Matilda to come up with new and inventive ways of defending and justifying her military actions. They were, in particular, driven by a desire to appease Matilda’s apparent reluctance to wage war against other Christians, as indeed she was doing by fighting the imperial German army. To this end, a range of innovative arguments were offered in support of Matilda’s cause and female military leadership in general.

⁹³ For Boudicca’s revolt see Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, trans. Michael Grant (Baltimore, MD.: Penguin, 1956), pp. 318-21.

⁹⁴ Richard Hingley and Christina Unwin, *Boudica: Iron Age Warrior Queen* (London; New York, NY.: Hambledon and London, 2006), p. xvi.

⁹⁵ ASC, D, 909, 913; C, 910, 912-18; E, 918; A, 922, pp. 94-101, 103. This chronicle consists of a number of different manuscripts labelled ‘A’ through to ‘F’ (plus another small fragment labelled ‘H’), which are referenced by MS number and the year described by that MS. For instance, the first part of the above cited reference refers to MS ‘D’ and the years 909 and 913 (other references sometimes give the adjusted date in square brackets), followed by the page number in this edition of the chronicle. For more on the relationship between the various MSS see the introduction, pp. xxi-xxix.

⁹⁶ Betty Bandel, ‘The English Chroniclers’ Attitude Toward Women’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 16 (1955), pp. 114-16.

⁹⁷ See below, pp. 57-60.

Amongst the first to do so was a grammarian in her entourage, John of Mantua, known only for a biblical commentary he wrote on the *Song of Songs* in c.1081. In this tract he attempted to convince Matilda that an ‘active’ life fighting heresy and schismatics in the Church was just as noble as and indeed more useful in God’s eyes than leading a more ‘contemplative’ life as a cloistered nun.⁹⁸ John also applied an allegorical form of biblical exegesis to argue that Matilda’s efforts in fact represented legitimate use of the ‘secular sword’ in defence of the Church, which itself wielded the ‘spiritual sword’ – an idea that was to later gain much currency amongst Church scholars.⁹⁹ Similarly Donizo, the author of a life of Matilda, employed biblical imagery to frame and contextualise Matilda’s accomplishments – military or otherwise – as the continuation of a long tradition in strong biblical female leaders, such as Deborah, Jael, Esther (an Old Testament queen), and Judith (another Old Testament heroine).¹⁰⁰ Although the use of these biblical figures cannot necessarily be said to have legitimised Matilda’s leadership (none of the figures were actually rulers), they nevertheless still illustrated, to medieval eyes, how certain women throughout history had divine support for their actions, and in Matilda’s case, how her use of military force must have been approved by God.¹⁰¹ A further attempt at explaining her success was that of Rangerius, bishop of Lucca, who defended Matilda’s actions by lauding her masculine qualities in ‘overcoming her sex and not fearing the brave deeds of men’.¹⁰² In thus construing Matilda as a sort of ‘honourable man’ as it were, Rangerius was able to avoid questions as to how the supposedly

⁹⁸ I.S. Robinson, ‘Gregory VII and the Soldiers of Christ’, *History* 58 (1973), p. 191. See also H.E.J. Cowdrey, *Pope Gregory VII, 1073-1085* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), pp. 302-03.

⁹⁹ The most important passage of note concerns John 18:11, when Jesus said to Peter ‘Put up thy sword into the sheath’. Although this passage appears to suggest that military force should not be used by the Church, John allegorically interpreted it to mean that the sword should be returned to its rightful place, namely, the papacy (Patrick Healy, ‘*Merito nominetur virago*: Matilda of Tuscany in the polemics of the Investiture Contest’, in *Studies on Medieval and Early Modern Women 4: Victims or Viragos?*, ed. Christine Meek and Catherine Lawless [Dublin: Four Courts, 2005], p. 52). Even though John was the first to develop the concept of a spiritual and a material ‘sword’ (Robinson, ‘Gregory VII’, p. 186), credit for the ‘two swords’ theory is sometimes erroneously attributed to a letter St. Bernard of Clairvaux wrote to Pope Eugenius III in 1146 (Healy, ‘*Merito nominetur virago*’, p. 52), although Bernard’s interpretation of the theory was the most influential. For a summary of Bernard’s role and the development of the two swords theory throughout this period see John A. Watt, ‘Spiritual and Temporal Powers’, in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c.350-c.1450*, ed. J.H. Burns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 367-423.

¹⁰⁰ Joan M. Ferrante, *To the Glory of her Sex: Women’s Roles in the Composition of Medieval Texts* (Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 89; Healy ‘*Merito nominetur virago*’, pp. 54-55.

¹⁰¹ Rosalind Jaeger Reynolds, ‘Reading Matilda: The Self-Fashioning of a Duchess’, *Essays in Medieval Studies* 19 (2002), p. 3.

¹⁰² Rangerius of Lucca, *Vita metrica sancti Anselmi Lucensis episcopi*, ed. E. Sackur, G. Schwartz and B. Schmeidler, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores* 30.2 (Leipzig, 1926), lines 3705-06, cited in Hay, *Matilda of Canossa*, p. 199.

weaker female sex could defeat the other in a military battle, especially as women were thought to be ‘inherently...unfit for [military and political] command’.¹⁰³

Two others to defend the Church’s use of secular armies and Matilda’s participation by way of canon law were Bishop Anselm of Lucca and Cardinal Duesdedit.¹⁰⁴ Both men wrote early, yet independent and influential collections of canons in the 1080s,¹⁰⁵ each of which were identically titled the *Collectio canonum*. Anselm’s *Collectio*, especially book 13, is particularly notable because it represented the first canonical collection of its kind, in that it was the first canonical collection designed specifically to justify the Church’s armed struggle against heretics and other perceived enemies of the faith.¹⁰⁶ More importantly however, at least in terms of legitimating female military command, both Anselm and Duesdedit were the first to employ a little known, and previously ignored, letter by Pope St. Gregory I (590-604) to the Frankish queen Brunhild,¹⁰⁷ in which the pope permitted the queen to use military means in order to defeat any aggressive or evil threats. In Anselm’s collection the letter is discussed under the heading ‘That the power to correct evildoers is granted to the queen’.¹⁰⁸ When placed in the context of Anselm’s support for Matilda and considering the significance and importance of his collection as the ‘the first major systematic justification of warfare in the Christian tradition’, this statement constituted a strong endorsement of female military leadership.¹⁰⁹

Lest we assume that efforts by intellectuals such as John of Mantua or canonists like Anselm to sanction Matilda’s military activities meant that they actually believed all women might be suited for military leadership, one must

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 200.

¹⁰⁴ David Hay, ‘Canon Laws Regarding Female Military Commanders up to the Time of Gratian: Some Texts and their Historical Contexts’, in ‘A Great Effusion of Blood’? *Interpreting Medieval Violence*, eds. Mark D. Meyerson, Daniel Thiery, and Oren Falk (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), p. 309 n. 60.

¹⁰⁵ Anselm compiled his version from 1081 to 1086 and Duesdedit from 1083 to 1087. For details on Anselm’s life and the specifics of his collection see Kathleen G. Cushing, *Papacy and Law in the Gregorian Revolution: The Canonistic Work of Anselm of Lucca* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 43-95, and for Duesdedit’s life and his collection see pp. 95-102. An extensive bibliographic survey of the MSS and other works specifically relating to Anselm’s *Collectio* is given by Lotte Kéry, *Canonical Collections of the Early Middle Ages (ca. 400-1140): A Bibliographical Guide to the Manuscripts and Literature* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1999), pp. 218-26, and for Duesdedit’s *Collectio* see pp. 228-33.

¹⁰⁶ Cushing, *Papacy and Law*, pp. 76-77.

¹⁰⁷ Hay, ‘Canon Laws’, p. 295.

¹⁰⁸ Anselm, *Collectio canonum* 13.23, cited in Cushing, *Papacy and Law*, p. 198.

¹⁰⁹ Hay, ‘Canon Laws’, p. 296. For a discussion of the ways in which Anselm’s *Collectio* modified old canons in order to help the Church expand its influence in society and combat heresy see Cushing, *Papacy and Law*, pp. 76-77, 124-26.

remember the context in which their works were written. As Hay has suggested, it is important to realise that Matilda's very support for the papacy and various persecuted clerics is what predisposed polemicists in the first place to find excuses for her military involvement and justify to both themselves and each other why they were supporting one woman's military activity.¹¹⁰ Indeed, were it not for the need to explain and defend Matilda's continued wartime victories and political savvy, her supporters may never have gone to the extent they did to justify her actions. Although their efforts to go against the centuries of anti-feminine thought in political and religious circles could not hope to change, in the space of one generation, long-standing beliefs about the legitimacy of female military involvement, their efforts indicate, if nothing else, that 'medieval conceptions of gender [allowed for] the occasional female combatant', without contradicting the established belief in male superiority.¹¹¹

Some of the more explicit arguments offered against the idea of women in war in the Middle Ages were also promulgated during Matilda's life by Bishop Bonizo de Sutri (c.1045-c.1094). Interestingly, although his earlier work, the *Liber ad amicum*, written in 1085 or 1086, represented an endorsement of her military struggle and the others fighting on her side for the Church, his later canonical law collection, the *Liber de vita Christiana*, completed 1089-1090, offers a decidedly negative assessment of Matilda and her illegitimate usurpation of masculine power.¹¹² The reasons for this shift in opinion have to do with Bonizo's career. Initially bishop of Sutri, he had been expelled and captured by the Emperor Henry in 1082, then forced to find sanctuary in Matilda's court where he composed the *Liber ad amicum*. In it he spoke glowingly of Matilda, calling her a soldier of God and a true daughter of St Peter, who must fight to defend the church against the anti-pope Clement III and his supporters, using 'every means, as long as her resources last'.¹¹³ His circumstances changed however when, after controversially being elected to the see of Piacenza with only weak support from Matilda and the papacy, he proved unable to maintain his position in the face of opposition, and in 1089 was cruelly mutilated and ousted by his opponents from his

¹¹⁰ Hay, *Matilda of Canossa*, p. 212.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

¹¹² Hay, 'Canon Laws', p. 289.

¹¹³ Bonizo de Sutri, *Liber ad amicum*, ed. E. Dümmler, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Libelli de lite imperatorum et pontificum*, 1 (Hanover, 1891), VIII, p. 618, cited in Hay, 'Canon Laws', p. 290; Robinson, 'Gregory VII', pp. 188-90.

seat.¹¹⁴ The *Liber de vita Christiana* therefore, reflects Bonizo's disillusionment with Matilda, an attitude that is evident in its argument that women must always be under male command; moreover, although he concedes that historically some women have held military or political leadership, he contends they have only ever brought destruction or misfortune to their subjects. Invoking various biblical and historical examples of women who he felt had gone against this divine order and suffered for it,¹¹⁵ Bonizo concludes by exhorting that a woman's place is at home, performing domestic tasks, not leading armies on the battlefield,¹¹⁶ the obvious implication being that Matilda's struggle could only bring harm to those involved and that she ought to desist in her military activities.

Bonizo may have felt strongly that the military was no place for a woman, but he was by no means alone in this sentiment. Although many works from the High Middle Ages shared the same misogynistic sentiments about women's unsuitability for war, they do not appear to have relied on Bonizo's somewhat innovative argument condemning female military leadership, but rather resorted to the older misogynous tradition found in classical and patristic writings. In terms of canon law, this fact becomes evident when we consider that neither the important *Decretum* (c.1093-1096) by Bishop Ivo of Chartres (c.1040-1115), nor the authoritative collection of canon law laid down in Gratian's *Decretum* (c.1140), appear to have been influenced by Bonizo's specific prohibitions against female commanders, even though they certainly argued that women must be subject to men.¹¹⁷ Indeed canonists such as Gratian appear to have forged a path largely independent of the polemical tracts found in the papal-imperial conflict in which Matilda was involved. Thus, for instance, Gratian took Pope Gregory I's letter to Queen Brunhild, previously used by Anselm to justify Matilda's military command, and in contrast to Anselm, placed it under the new title 'That omnipotent God is appeased by the correction of evil', which Hay has

¹¹⁴ Hay, 'Canon Laws', p. 290. For papal letters discussing Bonizo's difficulties in Piacenza see Robert Somerville and Stephan Kuttner, *Pope Urban II, the Collectio Britannica and the Council of Melfi (1089)* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), pp. 50-53.

¹¹⁵ These included Cleopatra, Fredegund, a Frankish queen, and Rosalend, a Lombard queen (Hay, 'Canon Laws', p. 289).

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 293. Among the evidence cited to back up his claim is the verse from 1 Cor. 14:34-35 ordering that women be silent in public, and also canon 19 from the council of Nantes (c.896), which decreed that women should not attend court unless absolutely necessary (Hay, 'Canon Laws', p. 294). See also Robinson, 'Gregory VII', p. 190.

¹¹⁷ Hay, 'Canon Laws', pp. 296-97.

argued lessened its legitimating force as a source for female military command.¹¹⁸ On the whole, Hay continues, Gratian's work reflected the 'traditional repressive orthodoxy of the late antique and early modern laws',¹¹⁹ though this approach is hardly surprising considering that Gratian wrote his *Decretum* decades after Matilda's death and was, moreover, not subject to the same personal circumstances which compelled Bonizo to adopt his radical argument against female militancy.¹²⁰

Alongside the development of the crusading era in the twelfth century, canonists and theologians also wrestled with the idea of female crusading vows to the Holy Land. As originally conceived, the Crusades were a call to arms for men alone, and in particular knights. Female participation, especially in the military side of crusading, was certainly not expected or envisaged. With the promulgation of Pope Innocent III's (r.1198-1216) decretals *Quod super his* in 1200 and *Ex multa* in 1201, however, the position of women, specifically the crusader's wife, and their vows came under greater scrutiny. These two decretals both stipulated that women could accompany their husbands on crusade in order to allow the couple to fulfil the marital debt – sex – which each owed the other,¹²¹ however the former decretal made one further important distinction in that it explicitly stated wealthy women who were ready and able should be allowed to take armed (and presumably male) warriors with them to the Holy Land.¹²² Commentary on the provisions of these decretals gives us some indication of how contemporaries reacted to this substantial change in papal crusading policy. One theologian, Alexander of Hales (c.1183-1245), argued that since husbands were better suited to fighting in battle than wives, they should be allowed to go on crusade without their wives' consent, but if wives wished for the marital debt to be repaid they had to accompany their husbands on crusade.¹²³ Others like Thomas Aquinas argued that a man could only go on crusade if his wife agreed to remain chaste in his absence, or if she were able to travel with him to the Holy

¹¹⁸ Gratian, *Decretum*, C.23 q.4 c.47, cited in Hay, 'Canon Laws', p. 297.

¹¹⁹ Hay, 'Canon Laws', p. 297.

¹²⁰ For a recent assessment of Gratian's work and the sources from which it is compiled see Anders Winroth, *The Making of Gratian's Decretum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹²¹ James A. Brundage, 'The Crusader's Wife: a Canonistic Quandary', *Studia Gratiana* 14 (1967), pp. 434-35; *Medieval Canon Law and the Crusader* (Madison, WI.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), p. 77.

¹²² Constance M. Rousseau, 'Home Front and Battlefield: The Gendering of Papal Crusading Policy', in *Gendering the Crusades*, eds. Edgington and Lambert, pp. 38-39.

¹²³ Purcell, 'Women Crusaders', p. 60.

Land.¹²⁴ Perhaps the most extensive examination of this change in policy as it related to women was that of the canonist Hostiensis (c.1200-1271). In his *Summa aurea* (c.1253) he argued that although women could indeed take the crusade vow without their husbands' consent, this was not the main issue at stake; rather, the key dilemma was whether the wife could effectively carry out her vow. Here he made a distinction: if the woman in question was young, or of doubtful character, her presence on crusade would leave her open to evil influences and she may lapse into sin. Thus, he argued, she should be persuaded not to carry out her vow in person but instead redeem it for a money donation to the Holy Land. On the other hand, however, he noted that if the wife were older and had been faithful to her husband, and especially if she could bring a number of armed warriors with her, then she was certainly qualified to go on crusade and must fulfil her vow regardless of her husband's feelings, since she would be better able to withstand the temptations, sexual or otherwise, present on crusade.¹²⁵ Hostiensis was thus willing to concede that a select number of women may go on crusade only if they had proven their fidelity. Whilst this was, in one respect, a novel acknowledgement of women's potential military usefulness, his fear that younger women would be morally corrupted by going on crusade still reflected the long history of suspicion about women's proclivity to sin.

A Difference of Sex: War and Female Nature

For all the efforts of theologians and canonists to define the limits of women's military involvement, their arguments still revolved around whether female involvement was spiritually or legally legitimate. Consequently, until the turn of the fourteenth century no work had yet approached the issue from a biological standpoint. As it happened, the first to do so was actually Giles of Rome in his *De regimine*, followed shortly after by another theologian, Ptolemy of Lucca (c.1236-1327). Both these men confronted the question of female militancy, and in particular whether women might make effective combatants, in an effort to provide a more systematic justification of the Aristotelian logic behind women's exclusion from the political and

¹²⁴ Brundage, 'The Crusader's Wife', pp. 438-39.

¹²⁵ Purcell, 'Women Crusaders', p. 60; Brundage, *Canon Law*, pp. 99-103, and 'The Crusader's Wife', pp. 437-38.

military way of life. Their arguments provide a fascinating insight into how the medieval Church understood the female body and female nature. Yet before we delve into these arguments, some historical context is necessary to understand what these authors were arguing against and why exactly they felt it necessary to support the Aristotelian view of female nature.

To this end it is necessary to understand Plato's conception of women and their military usefulness, for it is against this conception that Aristotle developed his argument on the inferior nature of women, later supported by Giles and Ptolemy. Plato's discussion of women takes place in book five of his *Republic* (a dialogue composed around 360 B.C. and arguably the work for which he is best known)¹²⁶ and fits into his broader discussion about the ideal form of government. In this particular book he offers a novel and remarkably modern argument for equality between the sexes, even in military matters, that some scholars have described as an early version of feminism.¹²⁷ His reasoning was simple enough; he merely asked whether there were not, amongst all the masses of women, some who were suited to a military form of life. Radical though the idea was at the time, it was Plato's belief (expressed in the book through the mouthpiece of Socrates) that just as there was no one job suited for all men, so there can be no single job for which all women are best suited, because 'the natures are scattered alike among both animals; and woman participates in nature according to all practises'.¹²⁸ In other words, nature itself dictates that not all women have the same attributes, or 'natures',¹²⁹ as some are more fitted for certain jobs than others, be it in medicine, in music, or in being militarily trained to defend and govern the city (what Plato calls 'guardianship').¹³⁰ Therefore even if men are, as a whole, always superior in fighting ability, it would be unnatural to deny those women suited for guardianship the chance to become warriors, for it would go against nature and indeed their very soul to deny them this opportunity.¹³¹

¹²⁶ See Nickolas Pappas, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Plato and the Republic* (London; New York, NY.: Routledge, 2nd ed., 2003) for a recent assessment of Plato's main arguments in this work.

¹²⁷ On the question of whether Plato's ideas in book five constitute an early form of feminism see Walter Soffer, 'Socrates' Proposals Concerning Women: Feminism or Fantasy?', *History of Political Thought* 16 (1995), pp. 157-73.

¹²⁸ Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York, NY.: Basic Books, 2nd ed., 1991), 455e, p. 134.

¹²⁹ By 'natures', Plato meant certain attributes held by each individual, such as strength, speed, 'spirit', and philosophic ability. For a description of these abilities, and what ones were preferable in guardians, see *Ibid*, 374e – 376c, pp. 51-53.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 451c – 456b, pp. 129-35.

¹³¹ Smith, 'Plato and Aristotle', pp. 472-73.

To be sure, the *Republic*, like some of Plato's other work,¹³² is not averse to making certain comments that appear, at least superficially, to denigrate or demean women. For instance, at one point he referred to the 'possession' of women by men,¹³³ and at another he used the term 'small, womanish mind' in a degrading sense.¹³⁴ Such statements do not, however, as Nicholas Smith has noted, detract from the overall civic equality Plato proposed.¹³⁵ Writing in the context of his own time, in a society presumably less attuned to the sensitivities of such remarks than our own, we should not be surprised he made such remarks; by far the more remarkable fact is that he even proposed a level of sexual equality in the first place, let alone advanced the idea of female military involvement. Considering that the ancient Greek society in which Plato lived was, like High and Late medieval society, not known for being one in which women participated equally in public life, Plato's ideas were certainly ahead of their time.¹³⁶ Yet the arguments expressed in the *Republic* were mostly unknown in the High and Late medieval period,¹³⁷ unlike those of Aristotle, whose views on women did influence political and military thought after their rediscovery in the mid-thirteenth century. Indeed, the only reason Giles and Ptolemy even knew of Plato's suggestion is because Aristotle, summarising some of the ideas in the *Republic*, noted without comment in his *Politics* that '[Socrates] think[s] that women should go along to war and share in the same education as the guardians'.¹³⁸ It is this statement, one which seems to imply that women should be educated and fight alongside men, that Giles and Ptolemy were refuting even though they had never read the *Republic*.

Giles, we have noted, was the first to confront the question of female militancy. He began in the typical scholastic fashion by posing a counter argument, in this case a question, and asked why, in some animal species, particularly 'rapine' birds like hawks and eagles, the female seems to be the more fierce and warlike, leaving the males 'worthless' by comparison. If birds are a part of the natural order

¹³² See Pappas, *Philosophy Guidebook*, p. 109 for examples of when women were negatively mentioned by Plato in his *Apology*, *Phaedo*, and *Timaeus*.

¹³³ Plato, *Republic*, 423e, p. 101.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 469d, p. 149.

¹³⁵ Smith, 'Plato and Aristotle', pp. 469-70.

¹³⁶ Pappas, *Philosophy Guidebook*, p. 107. For classical examples of perceived 'women's work' and hostility towards Plato's views in the *Republic* see David Herlihy, *Opera Muliebria: Women and Work in Medieval Europe* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1990), pp. 7-8.

¹³⁷ Cary Nederman and Kate Forhan, 'Introduction: the Formation of Medieval Political Culture', in *Readings in Medieval Political Theory: 1100-1400*, eds. Cary Nederman and Kate Forhan (Cambridge, MA.: Hackett, 2000), p. 2.

¹³⁸ Aristotle, *Politics*, 2.6.1264b37-39, p. 45.

just like humans, is it not, therefore, fair to say that men and women should both be ‘ordained to the practise of war’ because it accords with nature?¹³⁹ Giles emphatically answers no. Building on the work of his teacher Aquinas, who had argued that women have their own household duties and should ‘abstain from civil work’,¹⁴⁰ Giles began by contending that in fact women are physically unfit for war, because they lack ‘vigilant eyes, an erect back, hard flesh, tight sinews and muscles, long legs and [the] broad breast’ necessary for waging war.¹⁴¹ Rather, women are said to have soft skin, a small frame and lack the bodily strength required for fighting in war and wielding weapons. Furthermore, women are also mentally unsuited for the demands of war, demands that require reason and a strong intellect if warriors are to make effective wartime decisions, both of which are qualities women lack. In his conception this lack of intellect rendered women utterly incapable of so much as even learning about war.¹⁴² Not content to leave it at that, Giles then asserted that women’s bodies are also too ‘cold’ and ‘moist’, again rendering them unfit for war, an idea based on the medieval belief that there were four ‘humours’ or elements found in every living organism, though in differing amounts from one species – and one sex – to another.¹⁴³ Because women are excessively cold, they are too timid for war, whereas heat, the basic humour of men, leads to virility and military aptitude. As Giles explains it, ‘timidity prepares the way for fear, since it is the nature of cold to constrict and contract, whereas it is the nature of the spirited and virile to expand’.¹⁴⁴ Consequently, if women were to go to war, they would distract (male) soldiers and spread fear throughout the army. Under no pretence or situation, therefore, can women have anything to do with war at all; for them to do otherwise would go against nature and would have serious consequences.

¹³⁹ Giles of Rome, *De Regimine Principum Libri III* (Frankfurt, 1968; reprint of the Rome, 1556 edition), 3.1.7, cited in James M. Blythe, ‘Women in the Military: Scholastic Arguments and Medieval Images of Female Warriors’, *History of Political Thought* 22 (2001), p. 253.

¹⁴⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *In Libros Politicarum Aristotelis Expositio*, 2.5.12, cited in Blythe, ‘Women in the Military’, p. 252

¹⁴¹ Blythe, ‘Women in the Military’, p. 254

¹⁴² *Ibid*, p. 255.

¹⁴³ The concept of the four humours comes from the classical idea that all living objects are imbued with one of four basic qualities: moist, dry, cold or hot. Men were thought to be hot and dry, while women were cold and moist, and the balance between these humours was a crucial feature of Aristotle’s views about living objects. For more on how Aristotle adopted this idea from Hippocrates see Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 21-26.

¹⁴⁴ Giles of Rome, *De Regimine Principum*, 3.1.12, cited in Blythe, ‘Women in the Military’, p. 256.

Although Giles' discussion of militant women left the reader in no doubt as to why the very thought of a female warrior was abhorrent, the same issues were examined in even more depth just a few years later by Ptolemy of Lucca. A member of the Dominican order, and later a prior of the order who became the bishop of Torcello, Ptolemy confronted questions about female militancy in his own *De Regimine Principum* (c.1301), thought to have been begun by Aquinas himself, but written mostly by Ptolemy, and in which he discusses the best form of government and his preference for one modelled on that of the Roman republic.¹⁴⁵ His treatment of militant women, like that of Giles, can also be seen as a justification of Aristotelian arguments surrounding women's inherent unsuitability for the demands of war. Ptolemy engages the issue in typical scholastic fashion, first offering arguments in support of female militancy, and then offering multiple arguments against it, in order to discredit completely each of the supporting arguments. Probably the most balanced and complete exposition on women in the military in the whole Middle Ages,¹⁴⁶ his ultimate conclusions nonetheless reflect those of his contemporary Giles – a hardly surprising result given that both men were writing to support Aristotle's rejection of female militancy.

Like Giles, Ptolemy begins the discussion by way of an analogy, noting that amongst animals some species, such as beasts and certain birds, the females are the ones who are more aggressive and better at fighting.¹⁴⁷ This analogy obviously hints that the same thing may apply in a way to human women. Next, he pointed out that since peasant women are among the fittest and strongest, as a result of physically working in the fields every day, it would seem that women should fight in war because it would encourage them to keep fit and healthy, which would in turn strengthen female virtue.¹⁴⁸ His conception of 'virtue' here follows that of Aristotle, who defined it as something 'which makes a man good and which makes him do his own work well'.¹⁴⁹ Thus it may seem that perhaps exercise was one thing which

¹⁴⁵ Arthur P. Monahan, *From Personal Duties towards Personal Rights: Late Medieval and Early Modern Political Thought, 1300-1600* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), p. 18.

¹⁴⁶ Blythe, 'Women in the Military', p. 257.

¹⁴⁷ Ptolemy of Lucca, *On the Government of Rulers: De Regimine Principum, with portions attributed to Thomas Aquinas*, trans. James M. Blythe (Philadelphia, PA.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), Book 4, chapter 5, paragraph 1, pp. 229-30. Subsequent references to this work refer to the book, then chapter, then paragraph, followed by the page reference.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.5.2, p. 230.

¹⁴⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. David Ross, revised J.L. Ackrill and J.O. Urmson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1925, reissued 1998), 2.6.1106a17-24, p. 37.

helped women achieve the ‘good’ that was a healthy life and a readiness for war. In terms of the copious ‘moisture’ said to be in women’s bodies, he then proposed that perhaps fighting in war could help rid women of this excess moisture, since fighting involves motion, and motion was thought to help purge moisture (much like menstruation was believed to be nature’s way of compensating for the high levels of moisture found in women’s bodies).¹⁵⁰ Finally, he cited the classic example of the Amazons (a tribe of female warriors believed at that time to have actually existed), and noted that in these societies women were said have successfully fought in wars, as both leaders and soldiers, thus providing a clear precedent for the concept of female warriors.¹⁵¹

Against these examples, Ptolemy then put forward several opposing arguments. He began by stating that any comparison of human behaviour with that of animals is invalid, since animals lack reason and civil order.¹⁵² Moreover, women’s bodies are entirely unfit for fighting because women were only designed for reproductive and nurturing purposes. As their body shape indicates, only women’s breasts, buttocks and bellies are larger than men’s, whereas ‘[a]ll their other members are more slender and more feeble’, especially in those members such as arms and legs ‘which are the foundation of fortitude’.¹⁵³ These physical shortcomings indicate why women are destined for a life at home, where their main duty is in the governance of the household, in which capacity they are necessarily excluded from fighting in the military.¹⁵⁴ As for the Amazons, far from being a sign women should fight, they instead act as a warning: Ptolemy noted how they were said to have cut off their right breasts just so they could fire a bow, illustrating just how far women must go in order to overcome the bodily impediments that naturally render them unsuited for combat.¹⁵⁵ Repeating a common medieval belief, Ptolemy also maintained that women were defective humans whose minds were inferior to male minds, and also reiterates the argument – derived from classical antiquity – about the timidity and fearfulness of women due to a lack of heat.¹⁵⁶ Their inferior minds mean that women lack the reason and wisdom necessary for fighting and making rational decisions – the

¹⁵⁰ Ptolemy of Lucca, *De Regimine Principum*, 4.5.3, p. 230 and n. 85.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 4.5.4, p. 230.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 4.5.6; 4.6.2, pp. 231-33.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 4.6.2, p. 233.

¹⁵⁴ Blythe, ‘Women in the Military’, p. 262.

¹⁵⁵ Ptolemy of Lucca, *De Regimine Principum*, 4.5.7, p. 231.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.5.8, p. 231.

very argument Aristotle used against female militancy centuries beforehand. Consequently, because of women's irrationality, they would be easily swayed or influenced by persuasive enemy forces, and when combined with their lack of courage, such shortcomings make them even less useful for fighting. Lastly, Ptolemy felt that women would distract the troops too much by their very presence, which would weaken the soldiers' ability to fight effectively, as women's propensity to lust and corrupt men would inevitably cause men to go astray and lose their focus on war.¹⁵⁷ For all these reasons, he suggests that women cannot and must not go to war; they should remain at home where they belong and where they are most useful, far away from any battlefield.

Clearly then, despite his lengthy discussion, Ptolemy's final conclusions still reflected the pervasive and deeply entrenched beliefs that women's only proper place was in the home. Although both Giles and Ptolemy gave the matter due consideration, unlike perhaps the more reactionary arguments surrounding the legitimacy of Matilda of Tuscany's military leadership, neither of them were able to accept any female military involvement whatsoever. Classical beliefs about women's proper place in society, rediscovered in the work of Aquinas, popularised through Giles, and also found in the work of Ptolemy, made no allowance for female militancy of any sort or in any situation. In essence, women were too weak, physically and mentally, to shoulder weapons and make grave wartime decisions, too dangerous to have around lest they tempt soldiers away from their focus and too prone to lust and sin. The most constructive thing they could do was remain at home and tend to domestic concerns, where they were not a distraction and, indeed, where their very nature dictated they should remain.

Law and Custom: Female Exclusion from Violence

Concurrent with High and Late medieval efforts to justify women's exclusion from war was a growing belief that women, along with other non-combatants, should be safeguarded from the violence of war. The origins of this belief can be traced back to the Church-driven Peace of God (*Pax Dei*) movement, which emerged in southern

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 4.5.9; 4.6.3-4, pp. 232-34.

France during the late-tenth century as a response to growing local violence in that region.¹⁵⁸ This movement constituted the earliest and most notable attempt to guarantee the protection of unarmed or non-combatant groups, such as women, from the ravages of war by attempting to extract promises from the nobility that they would not attack clergy, women or children. Over time, a growing belief that certain groups such as women should be granted immunity from the violence of war led to secular authorities slowly expanding the Peace throughout France, into England, and across Western Europe,¹⁵⁹ where it survived in some form until the thirteenth century, even though it was not successful at eliminating violence.

Despite this expansion, the Peace attracted little comment from canonists, most likely because they were influenced by emerging notions of ‘just war’. Such wars were waged in defence of the Church, but only remained ‘just’ so long as soldiers fought other soldiers, hence any war which harmed non-combatants was unjust, should not be fought, and was therefore not worth discussing.¹⁶⁰ Nevertheless, in the mid-twelfth century Gratian did include women among the groups he thought should be exempted from violence, and a later canon of the Third Lateran Council (1179) similarly granted immunity to non-combatants in war.¹⁶¹ In time, these ecclesiastical prohibitions found their way into secular law codes such as that of Philippe de Beaumanoir, who in the late-thirteenth century argued that women were among ‘certain persons’ who should be kept ‘out of danger of war’.¹⁶² A century later, Honoré Bonet’s widely-read *L’Arbre des Batailles*, ‘The Tree of Battles’ (c.1387) likewise explored the issue of non-combatants affected by war and came to similar conclusions. In book four of the work, he briefly touched on the issue of those people who ‘cannot and must not be compelled to go to war’, and merely notes that ‘women should not be compelled to go to war, even though they were wise, rich and strong’, although he does seem to suggest that they could send substitutes to fight in their

¹⁵⁸ Allmand, ‘War and the Non-Combatant’, p. 254. For details of this movement and its origins see H.E.J. Cowdrey, ‘The Peace and Truce of God in the Eleventh Century’, *Past and Present* 46 (1970), pp. 42-67; Georges Duby, *The Chivalrous Society*, trans. Cynthia Postan (London: Arnold, 1977), pp. 123-33.

¹⁵⁹ Allmand, ‘War and the Non-Combatant’, pp. 255-56.

¹⁶⁰ Frederick H. Russell, *The Just War in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 186, and see also pp. 2, 273, 306, 308 for more on non-combatants and just war theory.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, pp. 70, 186; Allmand, ‘War and the Non-Combatant’, p. 258.

¹⁶² Philippe de Beaumanoir, *The Coutumes de Beauvaisis of Philippe de Beaumanoir*, trans. F.R.P. Akehurst (Philadelphia, PA.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), p. 617.

place for their lord.¹⁶³ Later he writes how ‘it is common knowledge that they [women, children and old men] can have no part in war’, since old men lack strength, while women and children lack knowledge. Similarly, Bonet notes, ‘ancient law’ and ‘custom’ dictate that these same three groups should never be imprisoned during war, or be held to ransom.¹⁶⁴ The overall impression is that it was ‘common knowledge’ women simply do not take any part in war, and hence should not be subject to the devastation and cruelty usually apparent during war. The fact that Bonet, even in the late-fourteenth century, was appealing to ‘common knowledge’ when it came to excluding women from war reinforces the fact that throughout the High and Late Middle Ages women continued to be seen as vulnerable to war and certainly not part of the military establishment.

Christine de Pisan: A New Approach

Of all the arguments mustered for or against women’s involvement in war, perhaps the most striking is that offered by Christine de Pisan (1363-c.1434) in her *Book of the City of Ladies* and also *The Treasure of the City of Ladies* (both published 1405). In these two works Christine (sometimes described as medieval Europe’s first professional female writer)¹⁶⁵ put forward what can be seen as the first independent defence of female militancy in the entire Middle Ages, in that she wrote not to defend or justify the military actions of any one women, but rather women – specifically noblewomen – in general. What makes her argument all the more remarkable is the fact that she drew on the work of Vegetius and Giles (as well as Bonet),¹⁶⁶ but still supported and indeed encouraged female militancy. In her *Book of the City of Ladies*, for instance, Christine provides historical examples of not only women whom she feels governed wisely and ably, such as Fredegund, Queen of France, Blanche of

¹⁶³ Honoré Bonet, *The Tree of Battles of Honoré Bonet*, trans. G.W. Coopland (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1949), p. 168. The sentence suggesting others might fight in the place of women reads ‘As for service by substitute, I do not say that they [women] are not bound to it’.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 185.

¹⁶⁵ Jenny Redfern, ‘Christine de Pisan and *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*: A Medieval Rhetorician and Her Rhetoric’, in *Reclaiming Rhetorica: Women in the Rhetorical Tradition*, ed. Andrea A. Lunsford (Pittsburgh, PA.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), p. 74.

¹⁶⁶ Briggs, *De Regimine Principum*, pp. 18, 45.

Castile, and Jeanne d'Évreux, widow to Charles IV, amongst others,¹⁶⁷ but also women whom she feels were renowned for their military prowess, including many from among the Amazons and also Queen Fredegund.¹⁶⁸ Interestingly, although some Flemish and French copies of the text contained illuminations of women, only two such miniatures portray militant women as actually wearing armour – the rest show women in traditional dress.¹⁶⁹ Thus, while the text itself is radical in that it argues women have often been involved in war, most of the images present these same warring women as passive and unarmed, most likely because the workshop which created them had no real visual models of female warriors on which to draw.¹⁷⁰ The lack of such models, of course, only goes to highlight further the highly unconventional nature of Christine's argument.

The second book, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, is more pedagogical and attempts to advise women from all classes on their role in society. As part of her discussion she centres in on the duties of noblewomen running their estates, one of which involved coordinating and commanding the defence of their property from attack if their husband's were absent:

...she [the lady of an estate] ought to have the heart of a man, that is, she ought to know how to use weapons and be familiar with everything that pertains to them, so that she may be ready to command her men if the need arises. She should know how to launch an attack or to defend against one, if the situation calls for it. She should take care that her fortresses are well garrisoned.¹⁷¹

In this passage we have a complete reversal of the position taken by Giles and other medieval (and pre-medieval) writers who, as we have seen, either ignored or made no allowance for women's involvement in war. Christine seems much more aware of the realities facing medieval noblewomen – many women, as will become

¹⁶⁷ Christine de Pisan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. Earl Jeffrey Roberts (New York: Persea, revised ed., 1998), Book I, 12.1-13.8, pp. 32-36.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, I, 14.1-25.1, pp. 36-62.

¹⁶⁹ Laura Rinaldi Dufresne, 'Woman Warriors: A Special Case from the Fifteenth Century: *The City of Ladies*', *Women's Studies* 23 (1994), pp. 128-29.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 119-20.

¹⁷¹ Christine de Pisan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies, or The Book of the Three Virtues*, trans. Sarah Lawson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 129. For a study of Christine's military thought in general see Charity Cannon Willard, 'Christine de Pizan on the Art of Warfare', in *Christine de Pizan and the Categories of Difference*, ed. Marilyn Desmond (Minneapolis, MN.: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), pp. 3-15.

clear, did perform in this role – yet in simply acknowledging this reality she was breaking with long established views that questioned the very ability of women to participate in military affairs. All the same, Christine’s pragmatic approach, remarkable for someone of her time, could never hope to alter the general hostility shown toward female militancy that so characterised medieval writings in the High and Late Middle Ages.

If one thing is clear about women in medieval discussions of gender roles, therefore, it is that they were consistently cast into negative stereotypes which conveniently reinforced the idea of male supremacy. By defining women as the weaker vessels, not only physically, but emotionally and intellectually, men were able to condemn women for their decidedly inferior temporal nature and justify the need for male guidance over women at all levels of society. Their subordinate status and perceived moral weaknesses continued to be reflected in military treatises which afforded little in the way of military agency toward women even after Matilda of Tuscany challenged the status quo. The arguments advanced in support of her military activities were novel, but limited by the particular circumstances of her struggle, moreover, as Bonizo’s case showed, when circumstances changed, so might the views of men who at first supported the idea of female military leadership. As Giles and Ptolemy well illustrated, for every argument that could be put forward in defence of women’s military involvement, the litany of women’s vices and supposed faults far outweighed any endorsement of their military capabilities. The Peace of God and subsequent legal work only further reiterated this belief that women did not belong in, and needed to be protected from, war. In short, medieval conceptions of women and their place in the military were dominated by longstanding ideological beliefs, unlike the more practical, and certainly unique, perspective of Christine de Pisan. In the end, however, we must ask whether the beliefs in women’s subordinate societal and military role matched up with reality. As the following chapters show, the answer may be more than a little surprising.

2. From Defence to Diplomacy: Women and Military Leadership

At first glance women seem to have little place in the male-dominated history of High to Late medieval warfare. Yet this initial impression belies a complex and multifaceted involvement in a range of military related activities, not the least of which were positions of military leadership. These leadership positions enabled medieval women to exercise considerable influence over the actual course of events during times of war or in situations where the potential for military conflict existed. Indeed, their actions provided perhaps the most visible sign of women's military involvement in the High to Late Middle Ages and illustrate the sometimes pivotal role they had in determining the outcome of affairs of military significance.

What, however, is meant by the term 'military leadership'? This thesis contends that the military leadership of women occurred in two different capacities. The first and most common form of leadership occurred when women held a position of military command, whereby the woman in question could order the movement of troops, make strategic decisions, and had ultimate responsibility for the outcome of the battle or siege in which they may have been involved. Many women who assumed a military role of this sort did so in a defensive situation and only temporarily, until circumstances permitted a male to once more assume the position of military leadership. They were usually forced out of necessity to defend their home castle or territory, and although the responsibility thrust upon them may have been fleeting or temporary, this reality should not detract from the fact that they performed an important military function. Some women, however, had a greater freedom to influence military affairs and a very few were even able to conduct military campaigns or assaults of their own initiative, although none of the women in this chapter who had military command actually fought the enemy on the battlefield as combatants or 'warriors'.¹⁷²

A second, less common, but by no means less relevant leadership role women engaged in was wartime diplomacy, wherein they were generally involved as mediators or intercessors on behalf of warring third parties, and in which capacity they could have a significant role in ensuring the negotiations were successful. Their 'leadership' role in this sense comes from the fact that the women involved used their

¹⁷² On this distinction see Hay, *Matilda of Canossa*, pp. 9-11.

own position to influence one or both of the leaders of the warring parties to come to an agreement and in so doing decreased the likelihood of war, even if only temporarily. As shall become clear, sometimes the women who were involved with diplomacy also commanded men as well, reflecting the close associations between holding command and using diplomacy in war.

Women as Military Commanders

In terms of direct military influence, perhaps the most visible role that certain medieval woman achieved were positions of command over an army or militant force. This fact alone is remarkable, especially given the aforementioned patriarchal nature of society and fact that war was an activity dominated by men at all levels throughout the High to Late Middle Ages, and leads us to ask several questions relating to women's role as military leaders. Foremost is the question of how women were able to attain the command of an army or other important leadership position in the first place. What circumstances enabled them to take command? Could they make effective leaders? How did contemporaries respond to such women? The answers to these questions enable a broader understanding and awareness of how women functioned as military commanders.

Firstly, however, it is worth touching upon the position of women with regards to secular law, since such law defined the social limitations of medieval women's public authority. While these laws varied from one place to another, sometimes significantly,¹⁷³ and were also influenced by whether women were single, married or widowed, as well as the level of society to which they belonged (making a full examination of this complex topic beyond the scope of the present work), there can be little doubt that throughout England and France during the High to Late Middle Ages women had a lower legal standing than that of men. They were barred from holding any public office, including any governmental positions and did not have the right to participate in town councils or any representative assembly.¹⁷⁴ Under these laws

¹⁷³ For a comprehensive account of legal developments across the medieval period see Manlio Bellomo, *The Common Legal Past of Europe, 1000-1800*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2nd ed., 1995).

¹⁷⁴ Sandy Bardsley, *Women's Roles in the Middle Ages* (Westport, CT.: Greenwood, 2007), p. 132; Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, p. 12.

women were essentially restricted to the private domestic sphere and were not supposed to serve the king ‘either in the army or in any other royal service’.¹⁷⁵ Indeed, for married women, their legal identity was subsumed into that of their husband, and as a result the husband legally had full control and responsibility for all the possessions of his wife, including all land or property she may have brought to the marriage. Furthermore, married women most often required their husbands’ consent before they could litigate on any matter (except in case of rape or bodily harm) and were represented in law by their husbands – unlike widows or single women, who could litigate on their own behalf and represent themselves in court.¹⁷⁶

At the same time, however, marriage also had the potential to give women significant military responsibility. In order to appreciate why, it is important to understand how women, as wives, fitted into the particular social structure of the medieval household and also how the system of marriage worked. These elements of marriage are examined briefly below with the focus on women who were part of the upper aristocracy, or nobility, not only because it is possible to form some idea about the married life and responsibilities of noblewomen, but also because war was a profession of the upper class.¹⁷⁷

As an institution, marriage was an accepted part of medieval life. For noblewomen in particular marriage meant many things, but rarely did it mean love. Marriage was a business conducted between families for political or economic reasons – or both, and in which, at least among the nobility and others in high society, women had little input.¹⁷⁸ Once married, however, noblewomen took on many responsibilities integral to helping run the household and aided in many of the duties necessary for it to function effectively. These duties included everyday activities such as supervising the supplies of the house, directing the activities of servants or serfs, as

¹⁷⁵ F. Pollock and F. Maitland, *A History of English Law* (Cambridge, 1898), vol. I, p. 485, cited in Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, p. 11.

¹⁷⁶ Cordelia Beattie, *Medieval Single Women: The Politics of Social Classification in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 25-26; Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, pp. 92-97; Bardsley, *Women’s Roles*, pp. 132-39.

¹⁷⁷ Georges Duby, *Medieval Marriage: Two Models from Twelfth-Century France*, trans. Elborg Forster (Baltimore, MD.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 2.

¹⁷⁸ For a recent broader overview of women’s role in marriage: Fiona Harris Stoertz, ‘Young Women in France and England, 1050-1300’, *Journal of Women’s History* 12 (2001), pp. 22-46. For specific studies of England and France respectively: Joel T. Rosenthal, ‘Aristocratic Marriage and the English Peerage, 1350-1500: Social Institution and Personal Bond’, *JMH* 10 (1984), pp. 181-94; Duby, *Medieval Marriage*, pp. 3-22.

well as administering household revenues and using them to dispense dues or gifts.¹⁷⁹ In cases of emergency (for instance, if besieged) women could also be made responsible for the defence of the castles in which they lived, especially when their husbands were absent or deceased. Moreover, the nature of the union of marriage, in which husband and wife were united as one in the marriage alliance,¹⁸⁰ assured that women, if they took on this additional public responsibility, were not breaking the ‘socio-political or the gender logic of their day’;¹⁸¹ instead it was merely a ‘natural extension’ of their duties as *domina* or lady of the household.¹⁸² This social acceptability enabled married noblewomen in this position to circumvent the restrictive nature of their legal rights, as outlined above.

It is also important to consider the relationship between the household and the makeup of militant forces. Western European noblewomen and those in the Holy Land at this time lived in societies where the basic fighting group was small and based on ties of kinship; hence knights, squires and other fighting men were usually drawn from and closely tied to their local lords’ households.¹⁸³ Consequently, it has been argued, noblewomen who lived and worked in the household had a greater chance of interacting with these men, as well as possibly overhearing or being part of military discussions, and thus may have had a greater awareness of military concepts. This in turn may have aided noblewomen when they were called upon to defend their estates and facilitated their acceptance by the men whom they commanded.¹⁸⁴ Conversely, however, it has also been argued that the increasingly centralised nature of government and the rise of professional armies during the thirteenth and especially fourteenth century may have combined to decrease the chances for female political

¹⁷⁹ LoPrete, ‘Gendering Viragos’, pp. 18-19, 36-37; Duby, *Medieval Marriage*, pp. 3-4, and *The Knight, The Lady, and The Priest: The Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France*, trans. Barbara Bray (Chicago, IL.: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 47.

¹⁸⁰ Jo Ann McNamara, ‘Women and Power through the Middle Ages Revisited’, in *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, eds. Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Ithaca, NY.: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 26; Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, pp. 81-88.

¹⁸¹ Kimberly A. LoPrete, ‘The Gender of Lordly Women: The Case of Adela of Blois’, in *Studies on Medieval and Early Modern Women: Pawns or Players?*, eds. Christine Meek and Catherine Lawless (Dublin: Four Courts, 2003), p. 110.

¹⁸² LoPrete, ‘Gendering Viragos’, p. 37. See also Linda Elizabeth Mitchell, *Portraits of Medieval Women: Family, Marriage and Politics in England, 1225-1350* (New York, NY.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 44-45.

¹⁸³ J.F. Verbruggen, *The Art of Warfare in Western Europe during the Middle Ages: from the Eighth Century to 1340*, trans. Sumner Willard and R.W. Southern (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2nd ed., 1997), pp. 64-72; Duby, *The Knight, The Lady, and The Priest*, p. 238.

¹⁸⁴ McLaughlin, ‘The Woman Warrior’, pp. 202-03.

(and consequently military) involvement,¹⁸⁵ although this view has more recently been called into question.¹⁸⁶ In any case, even if this trend did exist, there is still no doubt that throughout the High and Later Middle Ages marriage offered noblewomen an opportunity to assume a legitimate and important military role in defending their husbands' property when and if the situation arose.¹⁸⁷

Several medieval accounts within England and France attest to women's military command in this capacity. In 1075, for instance, the wife of Earl Ralph of Norfolk and Suffolk held his castle at Norwich while he fled for the coast, once he realised that a revolt which he had helped instigate against King William I (1027-1087) had failed.¹⁸⁸ Similarly the Norman chronicler, Orderic Vitalis, in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, described how in July 1092, Radegunde, the wife of one Robert Giroie, attempted to hold her husband's fortress at Saint-Céneri in Normandy from an attack by Robert of Bellême, earl of Shrewsbury, whilst her husband was away aiding the future King Henry I of England (c.1068-1135).¹⁸⁹ When rumour spread that her husband had died, defections from her side forced her to surrender, and Orderic placed responsibility for the surrender in her hands.¹⁹⁰ Likewise, in 1121 Hugh of Montfort's wife was made responsible by him for defending the stronghold of Montfort-sur-Risle in Normandy against Henry I's advancing army, while Hugh, who had conspired against the king, fled.¹⁹¹ Also notable was Margaret of Flanders, who married Baldwin V count of Hainaut in 1169 and was forced to fortify and defend his castles, not just once but many times, due to repeated attacks by unfaithful, ambitious vassals.¹⁹² Nor were accounts of women left to defend their husband's possessions limited to France or England. In the Holy Land Lady Eschiva of Tiberias commanded the castle of Tiberias' defence against Saladin's forces in 1187 (her husband,

¹⁸⁵ Jo Ann McNamara and Suzanne Wemple, 'The Power of Women through the Family in Medieval Europe, 500-1100' *Feminist Studies* 1 (Winter-Spring, 1973), pp. 137-38; McLaughlin, 'The Woman Warrior', pp. 204-05.

¹⁸⁶ Hay, *Matilda of Canossa*, pp. 251-52; Nicholson, 'Third Crusade', p. 345.

¹⁸⁷ Ferrante, *Glory of her Sex*, p. 12. For more on women's place in marriages amongst the nobility see Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, pp. 131-38; Duby, *The Knight, The Lady, and The Priest*, chapters I, IV, V, X, XII, XIII.

¹⁸⁸ ASC, D, 1076 [1075], pp. 210-11.

¹⁸⁹ This chronicle was written in the two decades leading up to 1137, and thence sporadically updated until 1141: see Chibnall's introduction to Orderic, I, pp. 31-34. For more on the Giroie family and Saint-Céneri see *Ibid*, II, pp. 26-29, 78-83; III, pp. 34-35; IV, pp. 154-57.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, IV, pp. 292-94.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid*, VI, p. 335. For Henry I's eventual victory over the conspirators see RT, II: viii, pp. 234-37. The ASC (E, 1123, p. 253) also alludes to this uprising.

¹⁹² Karen S. Nicholas, 'Countesses as Rulers in Flanders', in *Aristocratic Women in Medieval France*, ed. Theodore Evergates (Philadelphia, PA.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), p. 126.

Raymond of Tripoli, was absent fighting with the Christian army),¹⁹³ the same year that Maria Comnena, widow of King Amalric, defended Nablus from Saladin's army because she had received the city as dower from Amalric.¹⁹⁴ In all these cases women were forced to take on a military responsibility as a direct result of the marriage alliance, often in the face of considerable enemy pressure and irrespective of whether they were actually able to manage the task ahead effectively.

At the same time, however, it seems some noblewomen did cope ably after having military responsibility thrust upon them by their husbands. In 1148 Countess Sybilla of Flanders, for instance, successfully led her troops against an invasion by Count Baldwin of Hainault on behalf of her husband, while he was absent on crusade.¹⁹⁵ Robert Guiscard's wife, Sikelgaita, accompanied him on campaign in Italy in the 1080s and supposedly helped prevent retreat of his forces during one battle by charging at them with a spear, convincing them to return to battle.¹⁹⁶ Simon de Montfort, leader of the Albigensian Crusade, displayed an even greater reliance on his wife Alice de Montfort, whom Laurence Marvin has described as 'one of his most trusted lieutenants'.¹⁹⁷ Not only was she mentioned bringing a party of knights to meet up with Simon, but she also made up part of his war council and was active in contributing towards its decisions, even acting as castellan to Narbonnais Castle in Simon's absence during the second siege of Toulouse in 1217.¹⁹⁸ In her case, while it is not known if she commanded men in battle, she does appear to have played an active and important role in supporting her husband's military strategy.

¹⁹³ Ibid, p. 344; Zvi Razi and Eliot Braun, 'The Lost Crusader Castle of Tiberias', in *The Horns of Hattin*, ed. B.Z. Kedar (London: Variorum; Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi and the Israel Exploration Society, 1992), pp. 216-17.

¹⁹⁴ Sylvia Schein, 'Women in Medieval Colonial Society: The Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem in the Twelfth Century', in *Gendering the Crusades*, eds. Edgington and Lambert, p. 147. For further examples of medieval women defending their property from attack see 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 (Wolfeboro Falls, NH.: Sutton, 1992), pp. 160-61.

¹⁹⁵ Nicholson, 'Third Crusade', p. 344; Nicholas, 'Countesses as Rulers', p. 123.

¹⁹⁶ Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad of Anna Comnena*, trans. E.R.A. Sewter (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 147. For more on Sikelgaita's actions in Italy see Patricia Skinner, "'Halt! Be Men!": Sikelgaita of Salerno, Gender and the Norman Conquest of Southern Italy', in *Gendering the Middle Ages*, eds. Pauline Stafford and Ameke B. Mulder-Bakker (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 92-111.

¹⁹⁷ Laurence W. Marvin, *The Occitan War: A Military and Political History of the Albigensian Crusade, 1209-1218* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 56. For a more detailed study of Alice's role in this crusade, but one that I have not been able to consult, see Monique Zerner-Chardavoine, 'L'épouse de Simon de Montfort et la croisade albigeoise', in *Femmes, Mariages, Lignages, XIIIe-XIVe siècles. Mélanges offerts à Georges Duby*, eds. Jean Dufouquet, André Joris and Pierre Toubert (Brussels: De Boeck Université, 1992), pp. 449-70.

¹⁹⁸ Marvin, *Occitan War*, pp. 71, 81, 148, 271.

Most remarkable and successful of all, it might be said, was Nichola de la Haye, hereditary castellan of Lincoln castle. Nichola was the daughter of Richard de la Haye, sheriff of Lincolnshire, from whom she inherited her rights as castellan, and through whom her husbands' received the title of constable. In 1191, as a response to her husband Gerard of Camville's quarrel with William Longchamp, Chancellor and Justiciar of England, Nichola was besieged at Lincoln castle while her husband was absent. Commending her efforts, the chronicler Richard of Devizes noted that Nichola, 'whose heart was not that of a woman, defended the castle manfully'.¹⁹⁹ Over twenty years later, in 1217, she again led the successful defence of Lincoln castle when it was besieged by forces loyal to Louis VIII of France (1187-1226), as part of his failed attempt to claim the English throne. In a further sign of her resolute nature, she still had to fend off later attempts by, William, the earl of Salisbury, to force her eviction from the castle.²⁰⁰ These defensive efforts reflect her loyalty to King John (1167-1216) and, at least in the case of the siege of Lincoln in 1217, aided King Henry III's cause immensely by effectively ending any chance of Louis VIII succeeding in his rival claim to the throne.²⁰¹ Her experiences in defending the castle clearly illustrate that Nichola was more than capable of organising military defensive measures in the face of multiple attacks. Furthermore, though she had to pass on the title of constable to her husbands, her evident suitability as castellan is highlighted by King John refusing a request from Nichola that she be allowed to give up responsibility for the castle on account of her age, following the death of her husband Gerard in 1215.²⁰² Evidently, even men recognised her capability in her role as castellan.

The offspring of marriage also influenced women who were forced to defend their property. Consider the actions of one Juliana, an illegitimate child of King Henry I by a concubine, after her husband Eustace (a vassal of the king) was incited to claim the ducal castle at Ivry on misguided advice. Henry, wishing to retain Eustace's trust, sent a hostage to him while keeping the couple's own daughters as his own hostage, but for reasons unknown Eustace had his hostage blinded. Henry then turned over his

¹⁹⁹ Richard of Devizes, *The Chronicle of Richard of Devizes of the Time of King Richard the First*, ed. John T. Appleby (London: Thomas Nelson, 1963), pp. 30-31.

²⁰⁰ Louise J. Wilkinson, *Women in Thirteenth-Century Lincolnshire* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007), pp. 17-22.

²⁰¹ Susan M. Johns, *Noblewomen, Aristocracy and Power in the Twelfth-Century Anglo-Norman Realm* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 22-23.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 23; Wilkinson, *Women*, p. 19.

hostages to the father of Eustace's now blind hostage, who took his revenge by putting out the daughters' eyes. On learning of this action Juliana and Eustace rebelled, and while Eustace secured their other castles, Juliana fortified herself within their fortress at Breteuil. Henry, learning of these developments, soon laid siege to the castle at Breteuil in February of 1119. Orderic then recounts how Juliana, under the pretence of wanting to meet with her father, fired a crossbow at Henry when he appeared for their meeting, but missed 'since God protected him'.²⁰³ Powerless to hold out against the siege and with no help on the way, she surrendered the castle, but being unable to leave freely by the King's orders, 'the unlucky Amazon got out of the predicament shamefully as best she could' by leaping off the castle walls into the moat, before fleeing to her husband.²⁰⁴ In this case, marriage and family combined to play an important role in driving Juliana to defend her property from other family members. Moreover, the use of phrases such as 'God protected him' and 'unlucky Amazon' suggest Orderic disapproved of Juliana's actions, and highlight how chroniclers sometimes used certain emotive words or phrases to portray an incident in a certain light.

This use of emotion by Orderic is well illustrated in a second case involving a woman in an important military position. In 1139, Matilda of Ramsbury, commander of the stronghold of Devizes and mistress to Roger, bishop of Salisbury, was forced into action when King Stephen (c.1096-1154) besieged Devizes on suspicion that rebellious forces stirred up by Roger and his nephews were hiding there.²⁰⁵ Attempting to force its surrender, Stephen brought out Bishop Roger's son (by Matilda) and ordered that he be hanged unless Devizes surrender. According to Orderic, when Matilda saw her son about to be killed she apparently cried out 'I gave him birth, and it can never be right for me to cause his destruction', whereupon she handed over the castle to the king, thus forcing the surrender of the castle's

²⁰³ Orderic, VI, p. 215. For a summary of these events see Judith Green, *Henry I: King of England and Duke of Normandy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 147-48.

²⁰⁴ Orderic, VI, pp. 213-15; RT, II: viii, p. 231. Note that Orderic uses the term *bellatrix* in describing Juliana's escape, a term that could alternatively be translated as 'warrior woman' rather than 'Amazon' (McLaughlin, 'The Woman Warrior', p. 196). On the difficulties inherent in translating Latin texts, medieval or otherwise, into English see Annabel Brett, 'Issues in Translating the *Defensor Pacis*', in *The World of Marsilius of Padua*, ed. Gerson Moreno-Riaño (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), pp. 91-108, especially pp. 91-92. Although this article is primarily focused on an unrelated tract, it discusses issues that are universal and apply to all translators.

²⁰⁵ Edward J. Kealey, *Roger of Salisbury, Viceroy of England* (Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 1972), pp. 175-79. For an account of the accusations against Roger see the anonymous *GS*, pp. 72-77. On the question of this chronicle's authorship see R.H.C. Davis, 'The Authorship of the Gesta Stephani', *EHR* 77 (1962), pp. 209-32.

garrison.²⁰⁶ Orderic's inclusion of Matilda's outburst, however, conflicts with other sources which do not mention this incident. William of Malmesbury's *Historia Novella*, written only a few years after the incident, omits all mention of Matilda when describing the castle's surrender,²⁰⁷ as does the *Gesta Stephani*,²⁰⁸ Henry of Huntingdon's *Historia Anglorum*,²⁰⁹ and Roger of Wendover's much later *Flores Historiarum*.²¹⁰ Nevertheless, Matilda's role as guardian of the keep at Devizes reveals that she did have command of the castle and thus would have played a central part in any decision to surrender, even if the actual specifics of her involvement in the bishop's surrender remain unclear.²¹¹ Given that the other sources omit her outburst, Orderic's version of events appears less tenable, which only goes to show that we should be aware of possible distortions in chroniclers' portrayal of women in a position of command.

Amongst the upper nobility, marriage also offered some women an opportunity to demonstrate military leadership of their own initiative. One unusual case comes from 1321, when Isabella of France (c.1295-1358), queen consort to King Edward II of England, was involved in an incident in which she ordered her marshals to force an entry into Leeds castle, after she was denied lodging there for the night by Lady Badlesmere (whose husband had been supporting Edward's enemies and who held the castle). In response, Lady Badlesmere ordered her archers to fire on Isabella's men, killing six of them, and forcing the Queen to retreat. Lady Badlesmere and the rest of her family were later imprisoned by Edward for their actions following a siege of Leeds castle.²¹² What makes this incident remarkable is that two women were commanding military forces against one another, one defending her husband's property, the other ordering the attack which began the whole skirmish. For Isabella at least, this was not her only initiative that required military force: just five years later,

²⁰⁶ Orderic, VI, pp. 531-35; ASC, E, 1137, pp. 263-64. See Kealey, *Roger of Salisbury*, pp. 174-86 for a full account of this incident.

²⁰⁷ WM, p. 49.

²⁰⁸ GS, p. 79.

²⁰⁹ HH, pp. 720-21. Henry's chronicle, of which there are multiple versions, was composed in the mid-twelfth century (Ibid, p. lxvi).

²¹⁰ Roger of Wendover, *Roger of Wendover's 'Flowers of History', Comprising the History of England from the Descent of the Saxons to A.D. 1235*, 2 vols., trans. J.A. Giles (New York, NY.: AMS, 1968), I, p. 490. This work was composed sometime in and around the early 1230s (Ibid, pp. v-vii).

²¹¹ Kealey, *Roger of Salisbury*, p. 186.

²¹² Michael Prestwich, *The Three Edwards: War and State in England, 1272-1377* (London: Routledge, 2nd ed., 2003), p. 80; Alison Weir, *Queen Isabella: Treachery, Adultery and Murder in Medieval England* (New York, NY.: Ballentine, 2005), pp. 135-37. For another perspective on this incident see Sophia Menache, 'Isabelle of France, Queen of England – a reconsideration', *JMH* 10 (1984), p. 109.

in 1326, she helped plan an invasion of England with the support of French nobles and disposed of her husband King Edward, ruling as regent for her son Edward III alongside her lover Roger Mortimer.²¹³

Perhaps one of the most striking examples of military initiative by a woman forced to defend her husband's domains, however, is that of Jeanne de Montfort (c.1295-1374), Countess of Montfort and wife to John IV of Montfort (1295-1345), later Duke of Brittany. She is noted for her actions during the siege of Hennebont in 1342, during the Breton War of Succession between the houses of Blois and Montfort for control of the duchy of Brittany. The Countess was in Hennebont along with other lords when an army led by Charles of Blois, the rival claimant to Brittany, laid siege to the town in response to her husband's refusal to surrender the duchy to Charles, as determined by the judgement of the King and peers.²¹⁴ On the third day of the siege the French lords launched a determined assault on Hennebont, motivating the Countess (who led the defence of the city) to ride through the streets urging on the townsfolk to defend the city, encouraging damsels and other women to 'cut short their kirtles' and carry 'stones and pots full of chalk to the walls', that they might be cast down on their enemies.²¹⁵ Leading by example, the Countess then rode out armed, together with three hundred horsemen, and led the charge into the French camp while its inhabitants were away fighting, destroying it by setting the tents on fires, before escaping to the castle of Brest, rearming, and returning to Hennebont to defend it from another assault. The Countess's courageous defensive actions proved crucial to allowing the defenders, men and women alike, to hold off the besiegers until English forces arrived by sea and relieved the siege.²¹⁶ Two things are worth noting about this incident. First, the involvement of women – young and old – in the defence of the town, which reflects the support roles medieval women often fulfilled whilst their men-folk were fighting.²¹⁷ Second are Jeanne's efforts in leading the defence of Hennebont as well as the attack on the French camp, for though she may not have

²¹³ For the invasion and Edward's disposition see Prestwich, *The Three Edwards*, pp. 85-87; Weir, *Queen Isabella*, pp. 199-260; Michael Prestwich, *Plantagenet England, 1225-1360* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005), pp. 214-17.

²¹⁴ See Jean Froissart, *The Chronicles of Froissart*, trans. John Bouchier, Lord Berners, ed. and reduced by G.C. Macaulay (London; New York, NY.: Macmillan, 1904), p. 72 for John of Montfort's capture by Charles's army in 1341.

²¹⁵ Ibid, p. 76. The term 'kirtle' here refers to a long dress or loose gown worn by women in this period.

²¹⁶ Ibid, pp. 75-78. For a more detailed account of these events see Jonathan Sumption, *The Hundred Years War I: Trial by Battle* (Philadelphia, PA.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 389-95.

²¹⁷ See below, pp. 70-80.

actually fought the enemy with her own hands, hers is nevertheless an extremely unusual case in that we have a woman who actively commanded and participated in a military attack. It is little wonder then that Jean Froissart, the great fourteenth century chronicler, evokes a masculinised image of Jeanne as a woman who had ‘the courage of a man and the heart of a lion’.²¹⁸ While his description is intended as a compliment, it nevertheless illustrates how even the most competent of medieval militant women were sometimes described as having male attributes.

Alongside marriage, a noblewoman’s inheritance could also, on occasion, play an important role in facilitating female military leadership. Female inheritance (of land) usually took the form of dowries which the bride’s family gave to their daughters upon marriage. Upon divorce or widowhood, dowries served as women’s inheritance and provided them with a living,²¹⁹ since the practise of male primogeniture throughout much of Western Europe made it unlikely that women would inherit all of the family property and any seigniorial (or ruling) power that may have come with it. Even if women did happen to inherit such property, they were certainly not expected to perform military service by involving themselves in its defence. And yet, some women did exactly that. Shahar gives the example of Mahaut, Countess of Artois (1268-1329), who inherited her father’s county in 1302 and who, according to Shahar, ‘crushed all attempts at rebellion by vassals.’²²⁰ A more personal struggle was that of the widow of Arnoul II, count of Guînes, who waged war on her own son Baldwin III – Arnoul’s heir – for two years from 1220 to 1222, apparently because he did not cede to his mother control of certain properties to which she was entitled as widow.²²¹ Then there was Giralda of Laurac, to whom belonged the *castrum* (defensive fort) at Lavour in southern France and who, along with her brother Aimeric of Montréal, led its defence when it was besieged by Simon de Montfort, leader of the Albigensian Crusade, in 1211. Upon its capture by Montfort’s army, Giralda was unceremoniously thrown in a well and crushed by the heavy stones thrown upon her.²²² Marvin has suggested that the reason she was executed was

²¹⁸ Froissart, *Chronicles*, p. 72.

²¹⁹ Bardsley, *Women’s Roles*, p. 152; Henrietta Leyser, *Medieval Women: A Social History of Women in England, 450-1500* (New York, NY.: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), p. 107.

²²⁰ Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, p. 147.

²²¹ Archille Luchaire, *Social France at the Time of Philip Augustus*, trans. Edward B. Krehbiel (New York, NY.: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 265.

²²² WP, p. 40.

because she actively commanded men during the siege,²²³ although Jones believes it is more probable she was executed for heresy instead.²²⁴ In any case, the key point is that while it may not have been common for women to become involved in the military defence of their inheritance, given the means and sufficient motivation, some women did fight to prevent the loss of that inheritance.

At the same time, not all women were limited to defensive actions. Indeed, when a woman's inheritance was extremely large and entailed extensive ruling privileges, as might occur with a woman of the high nobility, she was more able to exercise leadership and initiate offensive military action. Thus, for instance, in January 1229, Blanche of Castile (1188-1252), widow of King Louis VIII and regent for her son Louis IX, commanded a successful attack on rebels based at the castle of Peter Mauclerc, count of Brittany, as part of her efforts to quell rebellious lords who had allied themselves with the English king Henry III's supporters in western France.²²⁵ Further afield in the Holy Land, Melisende (1105-1161), daughter of King Baldwin II, inherited the kingdom of Jerusalem after his death, and ruled the kingdom independently for nearly a decade after her husband's death in 1143, largely excluding her son – Baldwin III – from government.²²⁶ Even after Baldwin gained power forcefully from Melisende, she still had much influence in government, and in 1157 she played an important part in organising a military expedition to recapture a stronghold across the Jordan, assisted by one Baldwin de Lille.²²⁷ In both these cases, the women involved were able to use the authority derived from their inheritance to take a leading role in a military action.

Another woman whose inheritance allowed her to display her military prowess, though to a much greater extent than either Blanche or Melisende, was Matilda, Countess of Tuscany, one of the most active and widely successful female

²²³ Marvin, *Occitan War*, pp. 103-04.

²²⁴ Chris Jones, 'Review of: Marvin, Laurence W. *The Occitan War: A Military and Political History of the Albigensian Crusade, 1209-1218* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008)', in *The Medieval Review Online* (20 March 2009): <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=tmr;cc=tmr;q1=occitan%20war;rgn=main;view=text;idno=baj9928.0903.020;hi=0> (Accessed: 2 April 2009). See also Jim Bradbury, *The Medieval Siege* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1992), p. 135.

²²⁵ WP, p. 81 and n. 168; Marty Newman Williams and Anne Echols, *Between Pit and Pedestal: Women in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ.: Markus Wiener, 1994), p. 193.

²²⁶ C. Levin, D. Barrett-Graves, Jo E. Carney, W.E. Spellman, G. Kennedy and S. Witham, *Extraordinary Women of the Medieval and Renaissance World: A Biographical Dictionary* (Westport, CT.; London: Greenwood, 2000), pp. 209-10.

²²⁷ WT, II, p. 269. For more on her dispute with Baldwin and her continued influence see Bernard Hamilton, 'Women in the Crusader States: The Queens of Jerusalem (1100-1190)', in *Medieval Women*, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), pp. 152-55.

military leaders in the entire Middle Ages. Her life offers a rare example of a woman who was able and willing to engage in military actions over an extended period and is thus worth exploring in more detail. Matilda was the daughter of the Margrave Boniface (c.985-1052) of Tuscany, who ruled a large territory on the plain of Lombardy in northern Italy. Her father and brothers' deaths (at age six), along with her mother's re-marriage the following year to Duke Godfrey of Upper Lorraine, left her the heir apparent to her father's estate. Having learnt martial skills from an early age, Matilda may have accompanied her parents on some of their military campaigns in the mid 1060s, but it appears unlikely she exercised any military leadership at that time and instead only gradually assumed a level of military command with her stepfather Duke Godfrey's death in 1069.²²⁸ Intensely loyal and devoted to the reformist pope Gregory VII (r.1073-1085) and his successors, she grew increasingly distant from her first husband, Duke Godfrey 'the hunchback', but with both his death and her mother's in 1076 she gained full control over all her father's lands.²²⁹ Matilda's importance in the conflict that developed between the Western Roman Emperor Henry IV (1050-1106) and the papacy was largely the result of the extensive land holdings and cities she controlled, in addition to the strong military support she offered the papacy as part of her devotion to the papal cause.²³⁰ Yet Matilda's military participation in what has come to be known as the 'Investiture Controversy' may not have come about at all were it not for Gregory's belief that the aristocracy ought to be politically active,²³¹ along with a spiritual incentive in promising Matilda full remission of her sins,²³² as well as the persuasive arguments put forward by grammarians in her entourage defending her military actions.²³³

Matilda first took up arms in defence of the papacy in 1080 after a synod of bishops, responding to Gregory's excommunication of Henry that same year, declared Gregory deposed and elected Wibert of Ravenna as the anti-pope Clement III.²³⁴

²²⁸ Hay, *Matilda of Canossa*, pp 34-52.

²²⁹ Antonia Fraser, *The Warrior Queens* (New York, NY.: Vintage Books, 1990), pp. 133-41.

²³⁰ Anat Tcherikover, 'Reflections of the Investiture Controversy at Nonantola and Modena' *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 60 (1997), p. 158.

²³¹ Robinson, 'Gregory VII', p. 177. On the origins and course of the Investiture Controversy see Uta-Renate Blumenthal, *The Investiture Controversy: Church and Monarchy from the Ninth to the Twelfth Century* (Philadelphia, PA.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), pp. 106-73.

²³² Robinson, 'Gregory VII', p. 184; Hay, *Matilda of Canossa*, p. 206. For a discussion of indulgences: Alfred J. Andrea, *Encyclopedia of the Crusades* (Westport, CT.: Greenwood, 2003), pp. 165-66.

²³³ For their arguments see above, pp. 30-31.

²³⁴ Hay, *Matilda of Canossa*, p. 76. For the reasons behind Gregory's excommunication of Henry see *Ibid.*, pp. 72-76.

Defeated at Volta in October 1080 by Lombard supporters of Henry,²³⁵ Matilda had her lands declared confiscated by Henry on account of treason in 1081, but in June 1084 she won a crucial victory against royalist forces at Sorbara.²³⁶ The victory enabled Matilda to take the offensive in the struggle against Henry IV in the decade that followed, leading campaigns to close Henry's route into Italy over the Apennines and installing a new reformist pope, Victor III, upon Gregory's death in 1085.²³⁷ She also supported an attack led by the Pisans and Genoese on the Muslim city of Mahdia in North Africa in 1087, which not only proved successful, but the similarities between this campaign and future crusade expeditions gave an ideological boost to the Gregorian concept of Christian holy war.²³⁸ In the end, the failure of Henry's army to take Matilda's mountain fortresses of Canossa in October 1092 proved the emperor's undoing, for it enabled Matilda to retake many of her possessions, cut off Henry's reinforcements by regaining control of the Alpine passes, and confine the emperor's movements to north-eastern Italy for several years.²³⁹ In the years that followed Matilda continued to support the reform papacy, mounting numerous military expeditions to establish her authority in northern Italy and later reconciling relations with the new emperor, Henry V, in May of 1111.²⁴⁰

The religious cause for which Matilda strove throughout her life left an indelible mark on her place in history. Comments such as those of William of Malmesbury, who lauded how 'unmindful of her sex and a worthy rival of the Amazons of old, [she] led into battle, woman as she was, the columns of men clad in mail'²⁴¹ have tended to solidify her image as one of the few women (and even fewer medieval women) remembered primarily for their military accomplishments. It was not for nothing that Matilda became known as *la gran contessa* (the great countess),

²³⁵ Cowdrey, *Gregory VII*, p. 301 n. 139.

²³⁶ Hay, *Matilda of Canossa*, pp. 92, 97-100.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 117-49.

²³⁸ In particular, the badges worn by those who fought at Mahdia reflected the cross worn by later crusaders, whilst the strong response to the call for participants indicated to Cardinal Bishop Odo of Ostia (the future Pope Urban II) the enthusiasm present in Europe for the idea of a divinely sanctioned war. For more on this expedition see H.E.J. Cowdrey, 'The Mahdia Campaign of 1087', *EHR* 92 (1977), pp. 1-29, especially pp. 22-23.

²³⁹ Hay, *Matilda of Canossa*, pp. 136-46. Henry did eventually return to Germany in the spring of 1097: see I.S. Robinson, *Henry IV of Germany, 1056-1106* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 286-95.

²⁴⁰ Hay, *Matilda of Canossa*, pp. 160-84. Matilda died on 24 July 1115 (*Ibid.*, p. 184).

²⁴¹ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum: The History of the English Kings*, 2 vols., ed. and trans. R.A.B. Mynors, completed by R.M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), I, p. 381.

or what Hay calls ‘one of the most feared and respected generals of her age’.²⁴² Even so, however, Matilda did not escape criticism from imperial critics (besides that of Bonizo) desperate to discredit her achievements. The antipope Wibert of Ravenna portrayed her as a ‘scheming Jezebel’, whose actions were governed by a ‘woman’s insanity’, while the anonymous biographer of Henry IV accused her of using her ‘womanly guile’ to ‘corrupt and deceive’ men who defected to her side.²⁴³ Their efforts were clearly meant to counter the steady stream of propaganda produced by Matilda’s own polemicists defending her military actions.²⁴⁴ In the end, however, the constant criticism directed toward Matilda by Henry’s supporters and fired back at the imperialists failed to halt her successes and they were never able to convincingly discredit her actions. What their arguments do highlight, however, is the difficulties many of Matilda’s contemporaries had in accepting a woman’s military command, not to mention success, given their own predominantly misogynistic view toward women who deliberately wielded public and especially military power.²⁴⁵

The same debate over female militancy was again witnessed in the protracted battle for the English crown between Stephen of Blois and King Henry I’s only legitimate daughter Matilda (1102-1167), and is thus also worth exploring in more depth. ‘Empress’ Matilda, as she is sometimes known,²⁴⁶ had been the designated heir to the English throne ever since the death of Henry’s son William in 1120. Re-married to the ambitious Geoffrey, count of Anjou, in 1129, Matilda’s succession to the throne had seemed assured after her father had various bishops and magnates swear allegiance to her if he died with no other legitimate heir.²⁴⁷ Yet it was Stephen who moved quickly into England upon Henry’s death in 1135 and gained the support needed to persuade the archbishop of Canterbury into crowning him king, thus usurping the throne and looming as a clear enemy to Matilda’s inheritance of the

²⁴² Hay, *Matilda of Canossa*, p. 198.

²⁴³ Beno et al., *Benonis aliorumque cardinalium schismaticorum contra Gregorium VII. et Urbanum II. Scripta*, ed. Kuno Francke, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica Libelli de lite imperatorum et pontificum II*, no. VII, p. 408, cited in Hay, *Matilda of Canossa*, p. 205; ‘The Life of the Emperor Henry IV’, in *Imperial Lives and Letters of the Eleventh Century*, trans. Theodor E. Mommsen and Karl F. Morrison, ed. Robert L. Benson (New York, NY.: Columbia University Press, 2000), pp. 118-19.

²⁴⁴ See above, pp. 30-31.

²⁴⁵ See Hay, *Matilda of Canossa*, pp. 198-226 for a fuller overview of the medieval arguments surrounding Matilda’s military actions.

²⁴⁶ For the Empress Matilda’s early life and first marriage to the Western Roman Emperor Henry V see Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, pp. 5-63.

²⁴⁷ ASC, E, 1127, p. 256; WM, pp. 7-9; JW, III, pp. 166-67.

kingdom.²⁴⁸ Matilda was slow to respond to Stephen's provocations, though it is likely that she had command of troops around this time, for she is mentioned joining up with her husband Geoffrey's army at the siege of Le Sap in September 1136, bringing 'many thousands of soldiers with her'.²⁴⁹ Further evidence that Matilda had soldiers under her command is hinted at when Orderic describes how some of her retainers captured Ralph of Esson, a local lord, and gave him to Matilda 'to be kept in fetters',²⁵⁰ suggesting she had men under her to guard and shackle the prisoner. At any rate, it was not until 1139 that Matilda entered England alongside her half-brother Robert, earl of Gloucester, who had also rebelled against Stephen.²⁵¹ There followed two years of minor skirmishes and sieges, with neither side gaining much ascendancy until the battle of Lincoln on 2 February 1141, which resulted in Stephen's defeat and subsequent imprisonment. Matilda soon acquired the title 'Lady of the English' and seemed assured of obtaining the crown.²⁵²

Matilda, however, had not counted on the actions of Queen Matilda (of Boulogne), King Stephen's wife – 'a woman of subtlety and a man's resolution' according to the *Gesta Stephani*.²⁵³ She too displayed qualities of military leadership much like the Empress (once even leading a siege of Dover in 1138).²⁵⁴ Responding to the latter's snubbing of the Queen's envoys' requests to release Stephen, the Queen ordered her army to plunder the countryside in view of London, not far from where the Empress had encamped outside the city. Forced into action, the citizens made a pact with the Queen and then swarmed out towards the Empress' camp, putting her and her retinue to flight.²⁵⁵ Rallying her forces at Oxford, the Empress then moved to Winchester in August, and besieged the bishop's castle within the city to force his compliance. While the siege was still ongoing, however, relief forces loyal to Stephen and under the command of Queen Matilda arrived 'magnificently equipped with helmets and coats of mail, [and] besieged the inner ring of besiegers from outside

²⁴⁸ Orderic, VI, pp. 454-55; *GS*, pp. 12-15; Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, pp. 65-66. For the early life of Stephen up to 1135 see Edmund King, 'Stephen of Blois, Count of Mortain and Boulogne', *EHR* 115 (2000), pp. 271-96.

²⁴⁹ Orderic, VI, pp. 467, 472.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid*, VI, pp. 513-15; Truax, 'Anglo-Norman Women at War', p. 112.

²⁵¹ *WM*, p. 41; *HH*, pp. 722-23; *JW*, III, pp. 268-69.

²⁵² *Ibid*, pp. 89-97; *GS*, pp. 116-17; *HH*, pp. 738-39.

²⁵³ *GS*, pp. 122-23.

²⁵⁴ For this siege and the reasons behind it see Orderic, VI, pp. 520-21; *HH*, pp. 712-13.

²⁵⁵ *GS*, pp. 124-25; *WM*, pp. lix-lxii, 98-99. See also Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, pp. 104-05.

with the greatest energy and spirit'.²⁵⁶ Blockaded by the Queen's forces, the Empress escaped to the castle of Devizes, but her army was not so fortunate and suffered a heavy defeat.²⁵⁷ For the following six years (until she gave up her own claim to support that of her son Henry) Matilda and Earl Robert continued their struggle against Stephen, during which time Matilda still had her own troops under her command, including paid mercenaries, along with other vassals and knights, who sometimes took part in local fighting and whose presence enabled her to keep prisoners when necessary.²⁵⁸

In assessing the attitudes of contemporaries to Matilda, we might first ask whether or not the Empress actually fought on the battlefield. Chibnall has argued that she never did 'both from total inexperience in military leadership and because her capture would have meant the end of her cause'.²⁵⁹ This assertion is quite reasonable, since Earl Robert was the one who actually led her army in the fighting, with Matilda responsible for broader strategic decisions. Nevertheless, given the fact that, for instance, there is disagreement over whether the *Gesta Stephani* and John of Hexham provide a more accurate account of the battle at Winchester in September 1141, or whether the account provided by John Marshal in the *Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal* should be favoured, it can be difficult for historians to determine the actions of historical figures during battle and when exactly the events of the battle took place.²⁶⁰ Especially in the case of militant women, therefore, it is important to stress again the need for one to be aware of the potential for bias or confusion in medieval chroniclers unsure of how to portray women like Matilda.

This bias is indeed evident in the contemporary response to the Empress' somewhat unique situation. At that time no woman had ever inherited the throne in England, let alone contested or sent an army to challenge the accepted king, hence it is interesting to note the ways in which the chroniclers contextualised her war with Stephen and conceived of Matilda's place within the war. While Orderic is largely silent on the contested succession and Matilda's role in it,²⁶¹ other sources were not so neutral. Robert of Torigni, for instance, appears to favour Matilda's claim to the

²⁵⁶ *GS*, pp. 130-31.

²⁵⁷ *ASC*, E, 1141, pp. 266-67; *WM*, pp. 99-107; *HH*, pp. 738-41; *JW*, III, pp. 298-303.

²⁵⁸ *GS*, pp. 138-43, 150-51, 178-81; Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, pp. 120-21.

²⁵⁹ Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, p. 97.

²⁶⁰ For the debate on this issue see Sidney Painter, 'The Rout of Winchester', *Speculum* 7 (1932), pp. 70-75. See also Truax, 'Anglo-Norman Women at War', pp. 120-23.

²⁶¹ Majorie Chibnall, 'Women in Orderic Vitalis', *Haskins Society Journal* 2 (1990), pp. 113-14.

throne, since he refers only twice to King Stephen as the crowned ruler,²⁶² and all other references are to Matilda as her father's heir. Moreover, he goes to great lengths to show how all of Matilda's sons were the legitimate heirs to the English throne through both their mother and their father Geoffrey.²⁶³ But while Robert praised Matilda's virtues,²⁶⁴ he said nothing of her military failures, unlike the *Gesta Stephani* and William of Malmesbury. In the case of these two sources, although they were aware of Matilda's intentions to win back the crown for herself, they also stress the tactical military leadership of her foremost male supporter Robert of Gloucester, and essentially blame the failure of Matilda's campaign on her overconfidence.²⁶⁵ Thus Malmesbury stressed that Robert 'nobly fulfilled the duty of a knight and a leader',²⁶⁶ while Matilda's diplomatic success at winning over barons after the battle of Lincoln is implied to be the result of Robert's efforts in 'speaking affably to the chief men, making many promises...and beginning the restoration of justice and of the ancestral laws and peace in every region that supported the empress'.²⁶⁷ The *Gesta Stephani* also disapproved of Matilda, whose successes are overshadowed by criticisms deriding her 'extremely arrogant demeanour' and her later misfortunes blamed on her 'haughty' nature.²⁶⁸ Thus, as Chibnall has noted, 'what may have passed in a man as dignity, resolution and firm control were condemned in her as arrogance, obstinacy and anger'.²⁶⁹ There is some evidence, however, that this hostility may not have lasted that long. Just thirty years after her death she is eulogised for having 'masculine courage in a female body' and for being 'an example of fortitude and patience'.²⁷⁰

King Stephen's wife, Matilda of Boulogne, is also lauded for her efforts, this time by the *Gesta Stephani*. Unlike Orderic and William of Malmesbury, who revealed little of their attitudes toward this Matilda, the *Gesta's* author felt that in her actions the queen 'bore herself with the valour of a man' and showed she was 'a

²⁶² RT, II: viii, pp. 262-65, 274-75.

²⁶³ Ibid, I: introduction, pp. lxxxvii-lxxxviii; II: viii, pp. 241-45. See also Elisabeth M.C. Van Houts, 'The *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*: a history without an end', *Proceedings of the Battle Conference on Anglo-Norman Studies* 3 (1981), pp. 113-15 for more on Robert's defence of Matilda's claim to the throne.

²⁶⁴ Amongst other things, Robert described her 'wisdom and religious devotion', as well as her generosity and 'admirable virtue' (RT, II: viii, pp. 244-47).

²⁶⁵ Carolyn Anderson, 'Narrating Matilda, "Lady of the English" in the *Historia Novella*, the *Gesta Stephani* and Wace's *Roman de Rou*: The Desire for Land and Order', *Clio* 29 (1999), pp. 48-50, 55.

²⁶⁶ WM, p. 73.

²⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 97.

²⁶⁸ *GS*, pp. 118-21, 138-39.

²⁶⁹ Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, p. 97.

²⁷⁰ Ralph of Diss, *Radulfi de Diceto Decani Ludoniensis Opera Historia*, 2 vols., ed. W. Stubbs (Rolls Series, 1876), II, pp. 15-18, cited in Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, p. 194.

woman of subtlety and a man's resolution',²⁷¹ though of course, he was favourable toward Stephen's cause. Still, his attitude is revealing for it again reinforces how militant medieval women were defined in terms of male warrior attributes such as 'courage', 'fortitude' and 'valour', both as a way of praising them and pointing out their virtues.²⁷² Yet, at the same time, the misogynistic attitudes which the chroniclers adopted to explain the Empress Matilda's success and their willingness to associate the failings of her campaign with her 'arrogant' and 'haughty' nature are predictable reactions to a woman given the opportunity to wield significant power and military responsibility. On the whole, they seem to have been more interested in portraying her as a victim of her own feminine temperament, rather than as a woman capable of making her own independent decisions.²⁷³ Their reservations reflect the fact that the Empress Matilda, like Matilda of Tuscany before her, was breaking with the normal social order in which men performed the major military roles.

Women and Military Diplomacy

Military diplomacy was another area of war where noblewomen sometimes took a leading role. The term 'diplomacy' in this case refers to negotiations undertaken either to find peace between two warring sides or in order to forge an alliance. Many noblewomen had a significant role to play in the diplomatic process and an interest in successfully completing the negotiation process. However, the limited military role most noblewomen enjoyed meant that in practise female diplomacy in the Middle Ages was affected only by royal, or other similarly highly placed women whose importance, symbolic or otherwise, compelled their inclusion in the negotiations.²⁷⁴

Several instances of diplomacy stand out in this regard. During the Investiture Controversy, for example, Matilda of Tuscany pursued diplomacy alongside her military support of the reform papacy. At the Lenten Synod in 1075 she tried to ease

²⁷¹ *GS*, pp. 122-23, 126-27.

²⁷² Lois L. Honeycutt, 'Female Succession and the Language of Power in the Writings of Twelfth-Century Churchmen', in *Medieval Queenship*, ed. Parsons, p. 200.

²⁷³ Anderson, 'Narrating Matilda', pp. 49, 56.

²⁷⁴ As has been suggested in the case of the queens of Jerusalem: see Keren Caspi-Riesfeld, 'Women Warriors during the Crusades, 1095-1254', in *Gendering the Crusades*, eds. Edgington and Lambert, p. 96.

tensions in a bitter dispute between Gregory and Censius Stephani, a noted enemy of the reform papacy, by calling for clemency on Censius' behalf, after he was arrested and sentenced to death.²⁷⁵ The following year at the Synod of Worms Matilda and Pope Gregory were accused by the Emperor Henry of an overly intimate and improper sexual relationship. Matilda and the pope responded by toning down the frequency of their correspondence and thenceforth only communicating through legates, thus stifling any further allegations of misconduct and illustrating a diplomatic solution by Matilda to another potential source of conflict.²⁷⁶ Most well-known of all were Matilda's efforts in negotiating a truce between pope and emperor at her castle of Canossa in January 1077. The fortress itself and the protection offered by her troops undoubtedly encouraged Gregory to meet with the emperor when he otherwise would not have; moreover, Matilda's personal efforts to convince the pope to receive Henry after his three day penance outside the gates and her sponsoring of the final agreement played a major part in achieving a peaceful accord.²⁷⁷

Noblewomen were also diplomatically active in the French and Anglo-Norman domains. Adela of Blois (c.1067-1137), countess of Blois, Chartres, and Meaux, was known for her efforts in reconciling a conflict between Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, and King Henry I in 1104, by arranging a face-to-face negotiation that resulted in their eventual reconciliation.²⁷⁸ Adela was also active in creating an Anglo-Norman-Thibaudian alliance against Louis VI in the early 1110s, after he threatened Thibaudian autonomy in the Chartrain by revoking castle-building privileges and claiming certain ecclesiastical properties.²⁷⁹ A few years later Adela played a pivotal role in helping King Henry I's negotiator Thurstan (Archbishop of

²⁷⁵ For Censius' actions against Gregory see Robinson, *Henry IV*, p. 147; Cowdrey, *Gregory VII*, pp. 327-28; Hay, *Matilda of Canossa*, p. 62.

²⁷⁶ Hay, *Matilda of Canossa*, pp. 62-64; Robinson, *Henry IV*, pp. 144-45; Cowdrey, *Gregory VII*, pp. 166-67. For the main allegations directed at Gregory see 'The Letters of Henry IV', in *Imperial Lives and Letters*, trans. Mommsen and Morrison, p. 149.

²⁷⁷ Hay, *Matilda of Canossa*, p. 70.

²⁷⁸ Kimberly A. LoPrete, 'Adela of Blois: Familial Alliances and Female Lordship', in *Aristocratic Women in Medieval France*, ed. Evergates, p. 33. For a primary account of the dispute and Adela's role in it see Eadmer, *History of Recent Events in England – Historia Novorum in Anglia*, trans. Geoffrey Bosanquet (London: Cresset, 1964), pp. 175-76.

²⁷⁹ For specific details of her activities see Kimberly A. LoPrete, *Adela of Blois: Countess and Lord (c.1067-1137)* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2007), pp. 324-35. 'Thibaudian', in this case, refers to the counts of Champagne, one of whom was Adela's own son, Theobald II. For more on the various Thibaudian Counts of Champagne see Robert Fawtier, *The Capetian Kings of France: Monarchy and Nation, 987-1328*, trans. Lionel Butler and R.J. Adam (New York, NY.: St. Martin's Press, 1960), pp. 21-22, 126-27, 172.

York) reach a favourable settlement resolving Henry's dispute with King Louis.²⁸⁰ Blanche of Castile (1188-1252) was likewise active in negotiating treaties that helped to ensure royal power in the north of France while ruling as regent for her son, Louis IX.²⁸¹ Among the more notable agreements were the 1229 Treaty of Paris-Meaux between Louis IX and Raymond VII of Saint-Gilles, count of Toulouse, which brought an end to the Albigensian Crusade, and the 1242 Peace of Lorris that essentially confirmed the terms of the 1229 treaty and ended any chance of southern France remaining independent from royal authority. The importance of Blanche's role in both cases is worth noting: in 1229 Blanche was still regent (Louis' personal government did not begin until around 1236) and thus her acceptance of the treaty was significant, even though she did not personally negotiate the actual conditions of the treaty, while in 1242 Raymond had Blanche act as an intermediary on his behalf in achieving a final peace with the king.²⁸² In England, the Countess Mabel, Robert of Gloucester's wife, held King Stephen in captivity after his capture at the Battle of Lincoln in 1141, which enabled Robert to bargain for his release after he had himself been captured by Stephen's forces during the same battle.²⁸³ For her part, Stephen's wife Matilda of Boulogne was simultaneously active in negotiating her husband's release.²⁸⁴

In the Holy Land noblewomen were also at times an important part of the diplomatic process. Baldwin II's wife, Morphia, was said by Orderic to have been active in the negotiations for Baldwin's release from captivity in 1124.²⁸⁵ Likewise, when in 1152 Queen Melisende found herself under siege in Jerusalem by her own son Baldwin III, who was fighting her for control of the Latin kingdom, she was able – through the mediation of the Church – to secure the city of Nablus and surrounding

²⁸⁰ LoPrete, 'Familial Alliances', pp. 36-38; For the course of the negotiations between Henry and Louis plus Adela's role in them see LoPrete, *Adela of Blois*, pp. 374-87, especially pp. 376-77.

²⁸¹ Williams and Echols, *Between Pit and Pedestal*, pp. 192-93; Levin et al., *Extraordinary Women*, pp. 17-21.

²⁸² For the 1229 treaty see Joseph R. Strayer, *The Albigensian Crusades*, with a new epilogue by Carol Lansing (Ann Arbor, MI.: University of Michigan Press, 1992), pp. 136-37. For her involvement in the 1242 treaty see Zoé Oldenbourg, *Massacre at Montségur: A History of the Albigensian Crusade*, trans. Peter Green (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), pp. 337-38, and for a primary account of the same: WP, p. 105.

²⁸³ WM, pp. 116, 118.

²⁸⁴ JW, III, pp. 302-03.

²⁸⁵ Orderic, VI, pp. 114-15.

lands to which she could retire.²⁸⁶ Evidently, her sixteen years as ruler must have counted for something in the negotiations with Baldwin, for she was able to emerge just a few years later to a position of relative power and freedom in Baldwin's government.²⁸⁷

Occasionally, women in the Holy Land were even said to have attempted diplomacy with Muslims. According to William of Tyre, Melisende's sister, Alice of Antioch, attempted to send an alleged peace offering to the Muslim leader Zengi, as part of her efforts to gain control of Antioch in the early 1130s, but was unsuccessful.²⁸⁸ Asbridge has cautioned against accepting the testimony of William of Tyre too uncritically, as no contemporary Muslim accounts mention this offer of peace.²⁸⁹ Similarly unclear is the role played by Queen Marguerite (c.1221-1295), wife of Louis IX, whom Louis' biographer Jean de Joinville portrayed as a dignified, pious, and thoughtful noblewoman,²⁹⁰ and who was mentioned during the course of Louis' negotiations with the Saracens following his capture at the battle of Mansourah in April 1250. According to Joinville, the king could not guarantee to his captors that he could pay their ransom because he would have to get the queen to consent to paying it and 'as his consort, she was mistress of her actions',²⁹¹ although as Hodgson notes, 'this may have been a bargaining ploy'.²⁹² Whatever the case, Marguerite did display some leadership in helping to keep together the Christian forces in the city of Damietta during the king's captivity by arranging to buy all the food in the city at her own expense, although she was eventually forced to give up the city as part of the conditions of surrender.²⁹³

²⁸⁶ WT, II, pp. 204-07. See Hamilton, 'Queens of Jerusalem', pp. 153-54, and Hans Eberhard Mayer, 'Studies in the History of Queen Melisende of Jerusalem', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 26 (1972), pp. 164-69 for a more detailed examination of this incident.

²⁸⁷ Hamilton, 'Queens of Jerusalem', pp. 154-55.

²⁸⁸ WT, II, p. 44.

²⁸⁹ Thomas Asbridge, 'Alice of Antioch: A Case Study of Female Power in the Twelfth Century', in *The Experience of Crusading: 1. Western Approaches*, eds. Marcus Ball and Norman Housley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 34-35.

²⁹⁰ See Jean de Joinville, 'The Life of Saint Louis', in *Chronicles of the Crusades*, trans. M.R.B. Shaw (London: Penguin, 1963), pp. 315, 316, 326-27. This chronicle covers the Seventh Crusade (1248-1254) and was likely composed in the early-fourteenth century, but the precise date is much debated in modern historiography. For a summary of the debate: Chris Jones, *Eclipse of Empire? Perceptions of the Western Empire and its Rulers in Late Medieval France* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), p. 60 n. 10. See also Caroline Smith, *Crusading in the Age of Joinville* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 48-58 who believes Joinville's account of his experiences on crusade was composed independently from the rest of the text.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

²⁹² Hodgson, *Women, Crusading and the Holy Land*, p. 120.

²⁹³ Joinville, 'Life of Saint Louis', pp. 262-63.

Medieval noblewomen, therefore, sometimes played an integral part in initiating or indirectly assisting the diplomatic process, even if they were not necessarily the ones who argued and finalised the treaties themselves. As we have seen, their role was often one of intercession or intervention on behalf of other parties, conveying messages back and forth between sides so that opposing enemies did not have to meet face-to-face. Blanche of Castile's intermediary role in concluding the 1242 Peace of Lorris and the meeting between Henry IV and Pope Gregory VII sponsored by Countess Matilda were both clear examples of the mediating role noblewomen might assume, but they were not the only noblewomen to perform this function. Philippa of Hainault, wife of Edward III, was known to have interceded for the burghers of Calais to prevent their execution following Edward's successful siege in 1347.²⁹⁴ In a similar way Ermengard, viscountess of Narbonne (c.1127-c.1196/97) helped arbitrate peace on behalf of Count Raymond V of Toulouse when he was in negotiations with one Roger of Béziers in 1171, and again in 1176 when she acted played a mediating or 'go-between' role in a separate peace between Raymond and Alfons of Aragon.²⁹⁵ Likewise, Jeanne d'Évreux, third wife of King Charles IV of France, and Queen Blanche d'Évreux, second wife of King Philip VI of France, twice interceded on behalf of Charles II, king of Navarre. In 1354 they helped Charles obtain a pardon from King John II of France for Charles' involvement in the murder of the Constable of France, while in 1357 they helped to reconcile relations between Charles and the Dauphin, (the future Charles V) who was regent of France due to John's imprisonment in England at that time.²⁹⁶ Their success, and that of the other noblewomen cited, is indicative of the impact intercession could have in effectively contributing towards peace negotiations, and as such, they decreased the likelihood of war. Together with women like Adela who forged alliances for their safety, therefore, these women's actions must be included as a part of medieval military history.

If one thing is certain, therefore, it is that medieval women could make effective political and military leaders when given the opportunity, and were certainly capable of pursuing diplomatic resolutions to war. Their military agency as leaders

²⁹⁴ Prestwich, *Plantagenet England*, p. 39.

²⁹⁵ Frederic L. Cheyette, *Ermengard of Narbonne and the World of the Troubadours* (Ithaca, NY.: Cornell University Press, 2001), pp. 265, 270-73. For the background to this latter dispute see *Ibid*, pp. 266-70.

²⁹⁶ Venette, pp. 57-58, 69.

was influenced by marriage and rights of inheritance, which helped determine the power they might wield and the extent of their influence. Responsibility for castle defences might have been the most common of military obligations, but this is hardly surprising, for it was part and parcel of a married woman's duties as *domina* of the household. More remarkable are women whose political or geographic position afforded them a wider sphere of influence. Thus Matilda of Tuscany's strategic landholdings and vast inheritance enabled her to influence the political struggle between Papacy and Empire, while the Empress Matilda used her claim to inheritance as the basis for a military campaign in England. At the same time, however, their military presence in an otherwise masculine activity engendered mixed responses from some of their (male) contemporaries unsure of how to cope with the concept of militant women. The actions of Matilda of Tuscany, not surprisingly, evoked clear support or disapproval by propagandists on both sides, but for other militant women, the distinction between their military roles and effectiveness as leaders was less clear. William of Malmesbury, for instance, was sympathetic to the Empress Matilda's cause, but still subtly hinted that the failures of her campaign were due to Matilda's own decisions. Similarly subtle and indirect were women's diplomatic actions, but the fact that they acted more as intercessors or sponsors of peace terms was no less important than the actions of the parties involved in actually haggling out the specific provisions of peace. Without women's intervention to encourage or help convey messages, peace may never have been achieved and treaties never concluded, especially in the case of women like Matilda of Tuscany, Adela of Blois, and Blanche of Castile – all of whom were central figures in the disputes or the alliances which required their (successful) diplomatic efforts. Their success – and that of other women who acted as military leaders – not only demonstrated that women could be effective and important military actors, but also illustrated that men could and did recognise and accept the involvement of women in military affairs. Similarly notable and often no less essential than the activities of female military leaders, however, were the numerous military support roles women filled, both at home and alongside the men who fought.

3. At Home and Abroad: Women's Military Support Roles

Wars cannot be fought and military campaigns cannot be conducted without a host of people supporting those who fight. This fact was as true in the High and Late Middle Ages as it is today and medieval women played an important – indeed integral – role in enabling men to fight and helping make success on the battlefield more of a reality. Though less immediately visible than the actions of female military leaders, the deeds of medieval women who acted in these ‘military support roles’ still form a crucial part of medieval military history that is only now starting to be studied. The support roles they assumed were many and varied depending on the type of assistance required and the particular means by which each woman was able to contribute to the war effort.

One important factor affecting the type of support which women were able to render is whether or not they were present with the armies themselves. This distinction provides a basis for the current chapter's exploration of, firstly, the more direct support rendered by women to men on the battlefield, and secondly, the indirect efforts at supporting military activity made by women who remained behind. ‘Direct’ support here refers to those actions or services of a spiritual, emotional or physical nature performed by women that took place in the presence of the men while on campaign or under siege and which therefore had a more direct bearing on the chances of military success, as opposed to the ‘indirect’ (or ‘home front’) support of women who did not accompany the army, but whose involvement in the financial, administrative and logistical aspects of preparing for war were just as important. Ultimately, the military support of women can be seen as providing a base for the success and viability of wars, and illustrates that war was a phenomenon driven by both men *and* women from a range of backgrounds who together shaped the fortunes of medieval military history.

Women on Campaign

It is true that men were the ones who usually wielded arms and in most cases had command during wars of the High to Late Middle Ages, so it is not surprising that

we find the vast majority of female military involvement in this period was in more of a supporting capacity. In turning to the evidence for this support, however, it becomes clear that the military actions and experiences of women who accompanied medieval armies were far less noteworthy to the contemporary scholars, poets and chroniclers who spoke of war than the prominent military actions and decisions of men. In order to build up a picture of the ways in which women present with medieval armies lent assistance to their cause, it is logical to examine the military campaigns which contain the most evidence of their supporting roles. Since the crusade chronicles that chart the course of the crusading movement from the late-eleventh/early-twelfth centuries onwards offer some of the only examples of women, especially the masses of peasant women, who provided this sort of support, the current section is primarily focused around the experiences of women on crusade. The reason for their presence in crusade accounts is that, compared to the military campaigns that took place within Western Europe, the armies which left to recover the Holy Land were generally much larger and more diverse, and for a variety of reasons outlined below included large numbers of women from every level of society, in addition to other non-combatants such as clergy and children. This meant that women had more of an opportunity to effectively support the men who fought and contribute in some manner to the success of crusade armies.

If the crusades were primarily military expeditions, and women were not expected to fight, we might first ask why they were present in significant numbers. What motivated their involvement? The answer to this question is not easily discernable since there were women from all classes of society present on crusade. Moreover, historians have no way of knowing for sure how many women and other non-combatants actually left with the crusading armies. The sheer length and size of many campaigns meant that for any medieval army to function effectively, it required many non-combatants – engineers, bakers, artisans, tailors, squires, prostitutes and so on – in addition to the presence of fighting men and their commanders.²⁹⁷ Numerous women formed a part of this retinue; however, the vast majority of women were poor and, in comparison to the knights, foot soldiers and other male warriors who set out alongside them, militarily unsuited to the task of conquering the Holy Land. Many of these women came alone or unmarried, while others had left their homes to come on

²⁹⁷ Yuval Noah Harari, 'Strategy and Supply in Fourteenth-Century Western European Invasion Campaigns', *Journal of Military History* 64 (2000), pp. 301-02.

crusade with their whole family in search of a better life,²⁹⁸ no doubt influenced to some extent by the enthusiasm and excitement which greeted the whole concept of a holy war. Other factors probably also influenced their decisions to leave for with the crusade army. The fact that certain celestial phenomenon such as aurora and comet sightings around the time that the First Crusade was being preached auspiciously coincided with the end of a long French drought in 1096 may have prompted some women to leave with the crusade army, although it is hard to know for certain.²⁹⁹ Moreover, there is also the possibility that, for those who wished to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the prospect of travelling with an armed force who could protect them all the way appealed to unarmed female (and male) pilgrims.³⁰⁰ One eyewitness to the preparations for the First Crusade, Bernold of Constance, even recorded that ‘innumerable’ numbers of women disguised themselves in men’s clothing,³⁰¹ possibly because they wished to actually take up arms against the enemy.³⁰² This suggestion is supported by the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which asserted that ‘women and children’ were amongst those who ‘wanted to war against heathen nations’.³⁰³ Furthermore, we cannot discount the spiritual incentive of simply going to the Holy Land, which undoubtedly would have also helped motivate the masses of men and women to leave on crusade.³⁰⁴

In some cases noblewomen also left on crusade, usually in the company of their husbands or other male relatives.³⁰⁵ Eleanor of Aquitaine, Marie of Champagne, Marguerite of Provence and Eleanor of Castile are all well-known examples of women who followed their husbands on crusade to the Holy Land.³⁰⁶ Once again though, the motivations for noblewomen who went on crusade are not easily ascertained, although the length of the crusade expeditions (which could last for years) probably had something to do with it, especially for couples who wanted to

²⁹⁸ Conor Kostick, ‘Women and the First Crusade: Prostitutes or Pilgrims?’, in *Studies on Medieval and Early Modern Women 4: Victims or Viragos?*, ed. Christine Meek and Catherine Lawless (Dublin: Four Courts, 2005), pp. 62-64; Porges, ‘Non-combatants on the First Crusade’, p. 13.

²⁹⁹ Riley-Smith, *First Crusade*, pp. 34-35.

³⁰⁰ Hodgson, *Women, Crusading and the Holy Land*, p. 41.

³⁰¹ Bernold of Constance, *Chronicon*, 1096, *Die Chroniken Bertholds von Reichenau und Bernolds von Konstanz 1054-1100*, ed. I.S. Robinson, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica SRG* (Hanover, 2003), p. 529, cited in Kostick, ‘Prostitutes or Pilgrims’, p. 67.

³⁰² Kostick, ‘Prostitutes or Pilgrims’, pp. 67-68.

³⁰³ ASC, E, 1095, p. 232.

³⁰⁴ Jonathan Riley-Smith, ‘The Motives of the Earliest Crusaders and the Settlement of Latin Palestine, 1095-1100’, *EHR* 98 (1983), pp. 721-23; Riley-Smith, *First Crusade*, p. 39.

³⁰⁵ Harari, ‘Strategy and Supply’, p. 302.

³⁰⁶ Hodgson, *Women, Crusading and the Holy Land*, pp. 39 n. 19, 118; Purcell, ‘Women Crusaders’, pp. 59, 60-61.

stay together.³⁰⁷ Other women appear to have acted fairly independently: around the time of the First Crusade, Emerias of Altejas took the cross by herself, but was persuaded by the bishop of Toulouse to endow a monastery instead of leaving for Jerusalem.³⁰⁸ Alice, countess of Brittany, took a crusade vow in the 1260s, and, after her husband died in 1279 without fulfilling his vows, left for the East – specifically the city of Acre – in the late 1280s.³⁰⁹ On a broader scale, Kedar has drawn attention to an extant passenger list of a crusader ship in the mid-thirteenth century that had 453 passengers on board, forty-two of which were women, and of these women twenty-two were travelling with no male companion.³¹⁰ Whatever their motivation, the fact that certain lords and their wives had to consider such decisions at all helped differentiate the crusades from other, more localised military escapades fought on a smaller scale that did not involve the same prospect of spiritual reward or the same possibility for material gain (at least early on) in the form of land.

Clearly, then, there were women from a range of different backgrounds present on crusade, for a variety of different reasons. The support which they rendered to the fighting men, however, was primarily indirect and auxiliary regardless of their social rank, and included such tasks as washing, cleaning clothes, cooking, gathering supplies – even picking lice and fleas off the men’s bodies.³¹¹ They might also provide comfort to the men (through prostitution), or when new territory was conquered they could assist with and become a part of settlement plans within that territory.³¹² In another sense, however, women could provide spiritual support for the men, encouraging them whilst they fought and praying for God’s favour. The medieval poet Baldric of Dol, for instance, in his account of the First Crusade, noted that women and other non-combatants were an integral part of the spiritual side of the crusade and prayed for the men whilst they were fighting.³¹³ Although this may not

³⁰⁷ Maier, ‘Roles of Women’, p. 72.

³⁰⁸ The evidence for her efforts to take the cross comes from a charter of 1098: see Giles Constable, ‘Medieval Charters as a Source for the History of the Crusades’, in *Crusade and Settlement: Papers read at the First Conference of the Society for the Study of the Crusades and the Latin East and presented to R.C. Smail*, ed. P.W. Edbury (Cardiff: University College Cardiff Press, 1985), p. 77. See also Hodgson, *Women, Crusading and the Holy Land*, p. 45; Riley-Smith, *First Crusade*, p. 35, and *The First Crusaders*, p. 108.

³⁰⁹ Hodgson, *Women, Crusading and the Holy Land*, p. 118; Purcell, ‘Women Crusaders’, p. 60.

³¹⁰ Benjamin Z. Kedar, ‘The Passenger List of a Crusader Ship, 1250: Towards the History of the Popular Element on the Seventh Crusade’, *Studi Medievali* (Series 3), 13 (1972), p. 272.

³¹¹ Nicholson, *Medieval Warfare*, p. 63.

³¹² Maier, ‘Roles of Women’, p. 72.

³¹³ See Baldric of Dol, *Historia Jerosolimitana* (Paris, 1841-1906: *Recueil des historiens des Croisades: Historiens Occidentaux*, iv), p. 17, cited in James A. Brundage, ‘Prostitution,

sound like a particularly useful form of ‘support’ to those living in the twenty-first century, spiritual supplication was still important since the crusades were a holy war and it was believed that God was on their side.³¹⁴ Prayer thus helped ensure God’s favour and consequently the likelihood of military success.

The provision of supplies to the fighting men, most notably water, was another basic but essential form of support women rendered to men on crusade. Describing the female presence at the battle of Dorylaeum, one anonymous chronicler at the scene notes how ‘[t]he women in our camp were a great help to us that day, for they brought up water for the fighting men to drink, and gallantly encouraged those who were fighting and defending them’.³¹⁵ Likewise Margaret of Beverly, whose brother recorded her experiences in the Holy Land around the time of the Third Crusade, recounted how she put a pot on her head for protection and brought water to the men on the walls during Saladin’s siege of Jerusalem, being injured in the process by an enemy projectile.³¹⁶ Oliver of Paderborn, whose account of the Fifth Crusade is one of the most detailed and important sources available,³¹⁷ also recalled a similar form of female support during the crusaders’ attack on Damietta in Egypt, when he mentions that ‘the women fearlessly brought water and stones, wine and bread to the warriors’.³¹⁸ Not long afterwards, during a skirmish between crusaders and Saracens at a castle south of Damietta, he mentions women carrying and distributing water to clerics and foot-soldiers.³¹⁹ The Fifth Crusade also offers examples of how women might assist an army with other supplies besides water. Powell has documented how women were said to have helped grind corn for the Christian army whilst it was besieging Damietta, how they were in charge of the markets selling fish and

Miscegenation and Sexual Purity in the First Crusade’, in *Crusade and Settlement: Papers read at the First Conference of the Society for the Study of the Crusades and the Latin East and presented to R.C. Smail*, ed. P.W. Edbury (Cardiff: University College Cardiff Press, 1985), p. 58.

³¹⁴ For the concept of Christian holy war see Norman Daniel, ‘The Legal and Political Theory of the Crusade’, in *A History of the Crusades: VI. The Impact of the Crusades on Europe*, eds. Norman P. Zacour and Harry W. Hazard, general ed. K.M. Setton (Madison, WI.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), pp. 3-38.

³¹⁵ *Gesta Francorum et Aliorum Hierosolimitanorum*, ed. and trans. Rosalind Hill (London: Thomas Nelson, 1962), p. 19.

³¹⁶ Finucane, *Soldiers of the Faith*, p. 178; Hodgson, *Women, Crusading and the Holy Land*, p. 48.

³¹⁷ See the introduction to Oliver of Paderborn, *The Capture of Damietta*, trans. John J. Gavigan (Philadelphia, PA.: University of Pennsylvania Press; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. v. Oliver’s account is particularly important as it is the only surviving account of an actual Fifth Crusade participant that was written whilst on crusade (Ibid, pp. 4-5).

³¹⁸ Ibid, p. 38. The siege of Damietta began in June 1218 and lasted for over a year. For a summary of its course see James M. Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade, 1213-1221* (Philadelphia, PA.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), pp. 142-63.

³¹⁹ Oliver of Paderborn, *Capture*, p. 73.

vegetables to the crusaders, and how they helped attend to the sick and needy. Most notably, Powell notes that women even acted as guards in the crusade camp and were assigned with weapons to prevent desertions and maintain order while the army prepared for a fresh attack against the city.³²⁰ Joinville too, in his chronicle of the Seventh Crusade, described women who ‘sold provisions’ raising a cry of alarm when the Count of Poitiers was captured at the battle of Mansourah (February 1250).³²¹ These examples suggest that women could be of definite help on a military expedition, and whilst we should not generalise and assume that women fulfilled the same logistical roles in every crusade or medieval military campaign, it is important to be aware of the different ways they might have rendered basic support and provisions to armies on campaign.

At the same time, however, women sometimes did become much more involved with military actions and appear to have actually used weapons themselves on the enemy, though not specifically in hand-to-hand combat. During the second siege of Toulouse in 1218, for instance, women from within the city supposedly operated the mangonel or *perrière* (a stone-throwing device)³²² that killed Simon de Montfort, leader of the Albigensian Crusade,³²³ just as a Frankish woman ‘shooting from the citadel’ with a mangonel was said to have destroyed the Muslims’ mangonel at Saladin’s siege of Burzay in 1188.³²⁴ Acting in a similarly defensive manner were the women who helped repel the French attack during the siege of Hennebont in 1342 by throwing stones and pots of chalk from the walls onto the enemy at the urging of Jeanne de Montfort.³²⁵ Likewise, in 1358 women also played an important role in defending the French township of Senlis from an attack by French nobles during the short-lived but violent peasant uprising known as the ‘Jacquerie’.³²⁶ In this case, the townsfolk were forewarned of the attack and had their women stationed at windows

³²⁰ James M. Powell, ‘The Role of Women on the Fifth Crusade’, in *The Horns of Hattin*, ed. B.Z. Kedar (London: Variorum; Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi and Israel Exploration Society, 1992), p. 300; *Anatomy*, pp. 142, 162.

³²¹ Joinville, ‘Life of Saint Louis’, p. 233.

³²² See Nicholson, *Medieval Warfare*, pp. 93-94 for a description of this machine.

³²³ William of Tuleda and an anonymous successor, *The Song of the Cathar Wars: A History of the Albigensian Crusade*, trans. Janet Shirley (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1996), p. 172; Nicholson, *Medieval Warfare*, pp. 63, 94; Marvin, *Occitan War*, p. 294.

³²⁴ Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kamil fi’l-tarikh*, ed. C.J. Tornberg (Leiden and Uppsala, 1851-76), in *Recueil des Historiens des Croisades: Historiens Orientaux*, I, p. 726, cited in Carole Hillenbrand, *The Crusades: Islamic Perspectives* (New York, NY.: Routledge, 2000), p. 349.

³²⁵ Froissart, *Chronicles*, p. 76.

³²⁶ For the reasons behind, and social composition of, the Jacquerie rebellion in 1358 see Rodney Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free: Medieval Peasant Movements and the English Rising of 1381* (New York, NY.: Routledge, 2003), pp. 116-17, 120, 127-29.

‘to pour great quantities of boiling water down upon the enemy’ while their men-folk fought off the attackers.³²⁷ Their actions, along with those of the other women cited, suggest that women could, when needed, provide additional manpower in a desperate defensive situation. It is, however, important to stress that their involvement stemmed only from the urgent need to help fend off the attacks, and was not indicative of any belief that women in general were somehow suited for fighting in war.

Occasionally women were also found helping men in preparation for an attack. Albert of Aachen, for example, describing the siege of Jerusalem in 1099, explains how the women and children were gathered together in one place and were employed in the production of materials designed to protect the siege towers and other machines from enemy fire.³²⁸ In this way even those pilgrims who had previously been of little direct use to the army could contribute to the siege in a useful way. Similarly interesting is an incident noted by both the anonymous author of the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum* and by Ambroise, the latter being an eyewitness to many events on the Third Crusade.³²⁹ They mention a woman killed at the siege of Acre (1189-1191) who was labouring to fill in the ditches dug around the city, in order that the siege machines might get closer and more quickly capture the city. When struck by an arrow and mortally wounded, she apparently begged her husband and those around her to use her body as a way of filling in the ditch. Both authors take care to stress the woman’s devotion to God in order to be able to use her death as an example of female piety, highlighting the religious motivations and spiritual ideals at the heart of the crusade movement.³³⁰ The woman’s efforts also suggest that women and other non-combatants helped the crusaders by gathering and helping transport materials

³²⁷ Venette, p. 78.

³²⁸ AA, pp. 408-09.

³²⁹ On the value of Ambroise’s text see the introduction to *The History of the Holy War: Ambroise’s Estoire de la Guerre Sainte*, 2 vols., ed. and trans. Marianne Ailes and Malcolm Barber (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2003), II, pp. 12-20.

³³⁰ Ambroise, *History*, II, p. 83; *Chronicle of the Third Crusade: A Translation of the Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi*, Helen J. Nicholson (Aldershot; Brookfield: Ashgate, 1997), p. 106. The authorship of this text is contested and has not as yet been fully resolved. It is known to be composed of two separate sets of manuscripts, referred to as IP1 and IP2, the first of which was probably composed between August 1191 and September 1192, and the second completed in the early 1220s. The author of IP2 is generally accepted to be Richard de Templo, an Augustinian prior from London, but the author of the original IP1 is unclear. For the debate see Nicholson’s introduction, pp. 6-11.

necessary for forging an assault or defending from attack,³³¹ even if their efforts did not actually involve *physically* fighting or preparing to fight the enemy hand-to-hand.

Nevertheless, there are accounts of women who dressed in armour and who *may* have physically fought the enemy. In studying the evidence available, though, we must be very careful in accounting for possible bias in the sources, particularly in accounts where the author's ulterior motive may have been to portray the enemy in an unfavourable light and especially when it comes to descriptions of actual female combatants. Hence we must treat as suspicious a passage by the Byzantine chronicler, Niketas Choniates, about mounted women bearing 'lances and weapons' and dressed in 'masculine garb...more mannish than the Amazons' on the Second Crusade.³³² According to the modern translator, this passage was assumed by Steven Runciman to refer to Eleanor of Aquitaine and her retinue, despite the fact that her name was not specifically mentioned.³³³ While Eleanor was indeed present on this crusade, the passage makes more sense, however, if it is understood as an attempt to criticise the Franks as uncivilised and even barbaric compared to the Greeks, because they allowed their women to don armour and unnaturally fight as warriors.³³⁴ In the same way, Muslim chroniclers' descriptions of Frankish women who supposedly dressed up and rode into battle at the siege of Acre 'as brave men though they were but tender women', and who were subsequently 'not recognised as women until they had been stripped of their arms' – as well as another Muslim account of a Frankish noblewoman who allegedly fought at Acre alongside 500 of her own knights – must be treated with caution.³³⁵ As Nicholson has noted, for both Christians and Muslims 'it was expected that good, virtuous women would not normally fight...in a civilised, godly society'.³³⁶ By depicting Frankish women as warriors, therefore, the Muslim chroniclers could illustrate the barbarous and heathen nature of Christian society and

³³¹ Nicholson, 'Third Crusade', pp. 336-37; Randall Rogers, *Latin Siege Warfare in the Twelfth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), p. 61.

³³² Niketas Choniates, *O City of Byzantium, Annals of Niketas Choniates*, trans. Harry J. Magoulias (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1984), p. 35.

³³³ Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, p. 376 n. 153. For the argument that Eleanor did not dress up as a warrior on this crusade see Curtis H. Walker, 'Eleanor of Aquitaine and the Disaster at Cadmos Mountain on the Second Crusade', *American Historical Review* 55 (1950), p. 860.

³³⁴ Michael R. Evans, "'Unfit to Bear Arms": The Gendering of Arms and Amour in Accounts of Women on Crusade', in *Gendering the Crusades*, eds. Edgington and Lambert, p. 52.

³³⁵ 'Imād al-Dīn in *Arab Historians of the Crusades*, selected and trans. from the Arabic sources by Francesco Gabrieli (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969), p. 207; Hillenbrand, *Islamic Perspectives*, pp. 348-49. On the reliability of these Muslim sources see H.A.R. Gibb, 'The Arabic Sources for the Life of Saladin', *Speculum* 25 (1950), pp. 58-72.

³³⁶ Nicholson, 'Third Crusade', p. 340. See also Hillenbrand, *Islamic Perspectives*, pp. 347-49.

contrast it with the properly ordered Muslim society where women knew their place. Thus, while we cannot rule out the possibility that some women at Acre may have actually dressed up and fought, the Muslim accounts are certainly questionable.

Likewise, other accounts of female combatants and women in armour that do not appear to be influenced directly by religious bias must still be carefully evaluated. In France, Orderic Vitalis recorded how Isabel of Conches rode ‘armed as a knight among the knights’ during a conflict in 1090 between her husband, Ralph of Conches, and Count William of Évreux.³³⁷ Although Orderic remarked on her courage among the knights, he says nothing about her subsequent actions, and thus we have no way of knowing if she actually fought.³³⁸ In a similar vein, the English chronicler Jordan Fantosme, writing primarily of the rebellion against Henry II by his son Henry ‘the Young King’ in 1173-1174, asserted that the earl of Leicester had his wife, Petronella, countess of Leicester, dressed up in armour and given a shield and lance before the battle of Fornham in October 1173.³³⁹ According to Fantosme, Petronella encouraged the earl to fight the English, but fled from the battle while it was in progress and then fell into a ditch where she nearly drowned.³⁴⁰ Fantosme, however, was the only chronicler to describe Petronella’s martial deeds, and Johns has argued that he was clearly trying to portray Petronella in an unsympathetic way in order to emphasise that women should not be involved in military affairs.³⁴¹ Fantosme wrote to entertain, but also to instruct moral lessons and highlight divine law; Petronella thus served as an example against women’s involvement in war and the follies of accepting female advice.³⁴² Nevertheless, Petronella must have been present or involved in some way since other sources do mention that she was captured after the battle along with the earl and that she was present with him on campaign in England.³⁴³

Further afield, in the Holy Land, William of Tyre contended that in the first crusade army’s excitement at the imminent capture of Jerusalem ‘even women, regardless of their sex and natural weakness, dared to assume arms and fought manfully far beyond their strength’.³⁴⁴ His account, however, cannot be verified as no

³³⁷ Orderic, IV, pp. 212-15.

³³⁸ Chibnall, ‘Women in Orderic Vitalis’, p. 116; Johns, *Noblewomen, Aristocracy and Power*, p. 14.

³³⁹ *Jordan Fantosme’s Chronicle*, ed. and trans. R.C. Johnston (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), pp. 74-75.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73, 78-79.

³⁴¹ Johns, *Noblewomen, Aristocracy and Power*, pp. 19-20. See also Peter R. Cross, *The Lady in Medieval England, 1000-1500* (Mechanicsburg, PA.: Stackpole, 2000), pp. 32-33.

³⁴² Johns, *Noblewomen, Aristocracy and Power*, p. 20.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

³⁴⁴ WT, I, p. 362.

eyewitness accounts of this siege actually describe women acting in such a manner.³⁴⁵ Likewise, although the memoirs of the twelfth century Muslim nobleman Usāmah Ibn-Munqidh mention several female combatants – a female Muslim slave who rushed into battle ‘sword in hand’; a Frankish woman who used a jar to try and help fend off an attack on Frankish pilgrims; a Muslim woman in Shayzar who captured and had killed three Frankish men – it is important to be aware that Usāmah was recalling these anecdotes sixty years after they supposedly took place.³⁴⁶ Furthermore, he used the anecdotes in the work as examples to instruct future generations.³⁴⁷ Thus it is entirely possible Usāmah may have forgotten or else embellished details in order to provide moral instruction, although it is possible there is some element of truth in the first two examples at least, since they describe women fighting in desperate defensive situations, presumably when more defenders were needed.

It is because of this need for more defenders that other accounts of female combatants may be considered more reliable. For, even though Muslim writers are our source for the story of a female archer at Acre who, in defending the city, ‘wounded many Muslims before she was overcome and killed’,³⁴⁸ it is quite possible that in the heat of battle, when manpower was necessary to fight off attackers, this woman was forced to draw a bow.³⁴⁹ Equally plausible are these same Muslim writers’ astonishment at finding women amongst the dead on the battlefield after a failed Christian attack on Saladin’s camp, though this revelation does not tell us that these women actually fought.³⁵⁰ Then there is the case of Christian women who executed the crew of a captured Turkish ship at Acre. According to the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum*, ‘the women’s physical weakness prolonged the pain of death, because they cut their heads off with knives instead of swords’.³⁵¹ Again, although the women were not actually fighting in battle, it is quite possible that this event did occur given

³⁴⁵ Hodgson, *Women, Crusading and the Holy Land*, p. 48.

³⁴⁶ Usāmah Ibn-Munqidh, *An Arab-Syrian Gentleman and Warrior in the Period of the Crusades. Memoirs of Usāmah Ibn-Munqidh*, trans. Philip K. Hitti (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 154, 158, 159.

³⁴⁷ Evans, ‘Unfit to Bear Arms’, pp. 47-48; Robert Irwin, ‘Usamah ibn Munqidh: An Arab-Syrian Gentleman at the Time of the Crusades Reconsidered’, in *The Crusades and Their Sources: Essays Presented to Bernard Hamilton*, eds. John France and William G. Zajac (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), pp. 71-87. For more on women in Usāmah’s work see Niall Christie, ‘Just a Bunch of Dirty Stories? Women in the “Memoirs” of Usamah Ibn Munqidh’, in *Eastward Bound: Travels and Travellers, 1050-1500*, ed. Rosamund Allen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), pp. 71-87.

³⁴⁸ Bahā’ ad-Din in *Arab Historians*, p. 218.

³⁴⁹ Nicholson, ‘Third Crusade’, pp. 348-49; Evans, ‘Unfit to Bear Arms’, p. 52.

³⁵⁰ Nicholson, ‘Third Crusade’, pp. 338, 349.

³⁵¹ *Itinerarium Peregrinorum*, p. 89. See also Ambroise, *History*, II, p. 79.

that the men had been defeated already and the women were perhaps motivated by thoughts of revenge. As Evans points out, the passage still displays ‘a gendered approach to weaponry’ in that the Muslims’ death at the hands of women is emphasised as ‘humiliating’ and reference made to women’s weakness – implying that the women were acting in an unnatural way.³⁵² Overall therefore, while women did assist the fighting men in numerous ways, we must take care in assessing descriptions of actual female combatants since their role may have been deliberately over-emphasised, although it does seem reasonable that when absolutely necessary women might have taken up arms.

Women on the ‘Home Front’

Much has been said already of the way in which women lent their support to aid directly the men who fought during the course of the High and Later Middle Ages. As with all wars however, a large number of people stayed behind to maintain affairs whilst the men were away fighting, including the vast majority of women. Their domestic role was important because many military campaigns of this period, especially crusades to the Holy Land, were lengthy expeditions fought far away from their participants’ homelands, and thus could not have been successful without the support and assistance of people who remained at home to keep society functioning and take on the responsibilities of men unable to resist the call to arms. Women in Western Europe formed an important part of this process, fulfilling many key domestic support roles in times of war. Indeed, Christoph Maier, reflecting on the crusades to the Holy Land, goes so far as to say that ‘the crusades were fought by men *and* women, not only because some women did participate in the military campaigns but because women’s involvement on the home front played a large part in making men’s crusades happen’.³⁵³ Thus it is important we understand how women were involved on the ‘home front’ and why their actions were important in a military sense.

War often necessitated the absence of men from their families and their homes.³⁵⁴ While we have already touched on the fact that women could exercise

³⁵² Evans, ‘Unfit to Bear Arms’, pp. 52-53.

³⁵³ Maier, ‘Roles of Women’, p. 81.

³⁵⁴ Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, p. 149.

military leadership during such an absence, the importance of their domestic role in the context of the husbands' or sons' military activities is worth considering, even if the women themselves were not all directly involved in military activity. For, in their men-folk's absence, women sometimes assumed full control over the governance of the household or estate, along with all the lands which came with it – a role which took on an added significance amongst marriages of the more powerful nobles of Western Europe whose landholdings often entailed extensive seigniorial rights.³⁵⁵ Stephen of Blois, for instance, alluded to the power that his wife Adela had whilst he was absent on the First Crusade when he wrote that 'I send [the wish] that you do well and dispose of *your* things superbly, and treat *your* sons and your men honorably, as befits you'.³⁵⁶ This statement reveals the lordly authority which Adela maintained as regent while Stephen was absent and which she was to retain after his early death in May 1102 – right up until she took the veil as a nun in 1120.³⁵⁷ The military authority she wielded as lord is demonstrated by the fact that she once sent a large number of knights to support her lord Louis VI (c.1081-1137) while he was fighting rebellious castellans north of Paris in 1101.³⁵⁸ But Adela was not the only women whose regency resulted from the call to crusade: when Louis IX went on crusade he entrusted the governance of the French kingdom to his mother, Blanche of Castile, who had proven herself a reliable and effective ruler during his minority.³⁵⁹ Eleanor of Aquitaine (1122-1204), queen of France and later England, similarly acted as regent in England for her son Richard I while he went on crusade, and was involved in mediating ecclesiastical disputes in his absence as well as in matters of governance.³⁶⁰ Likewise, Clementia of Burgundy, wife of Robert II of Flanders, held his county while he was left on the First Crusade,³⁶¹ much like Eremburge of Maine governed

³⁵⁵ Stoertz, 'Young Women', p. 23; Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, pp. 145-46; Williams and Echols, *Between Pit and Pedestal*, pp. 172-73. For examples of women exercising lordly powers in different ways see Amy Livingstone, 'Aristocratic Women in the Chartrain', in *Aristocratic Women in Medieval France*, ed. Evergates, pp. 65-67.

³⁵⁶ *Recueil des Historiens des Croisades, Historiens Orientaux*, 3.2, cited in Ferrante, *Glory of her Sex*, pp. 12-13 [Ferrante's italics].

³⁵⁷ LoPrete, *Adela of Blois*, pp. 4, 307, 310-11, 408.

³⁵⁸ This incident is described by Orderic, who says she ordered 100 knights to take the field with Louis (Orderic, VI, pp. 156, 158). For more details concerning Adela's involvement with Louis and how she herself never commanded troops in battle see LoPrete, *Adela of Blois*, pp. 206-08, p. 237 n. 26; and 'Familial Alliances', p. 27.

³⁵⁹ Williams and Echols, *Between Pit and Pedestal*, pp. 192-93; Hodgson, *Women, Crusading and the Holy Land*, pp. 178-80.

³⁶⁰ Hodgson, *Women, Crusading and the Holy Land*, pp. 206-07; Ferrante, *Glory of her Sex*, p. 12.

³⁶¹ Riley-Smith, *The First Crusaders*, p. 139.

the county of Anjou during her husband's absence on crusade in 1120.³⁶² In the Holy Land the wife of Joscelin the Younger, count of Edessa (d. 1159), governed the county ably after he had been taken prisoner in 1150 – 'far beyond the strength of a woman', according to William of Tyre.³⁶³ His remark hints at the way in which medieval women who did govern well were thought by their male contemporaries to have transcended the 'weakness' of their sex,³⁶⁴ much like other comments regarding militant women referred to their masculine qualities in order to explain their involvement.³⁶⁵ Regardless of how well they governed, though, the key point is that it was war that forced these women to assume governing roles at home in support of their husbands or sons.

Women were also sometimes entrusted with the administration and coordination of affairs in preparation for war. Thus in 1267 the earl of Pembroke wrote to his wife, who had command over the castle of Winchester, informing her that he had sent men to help her defend the castle from attack and instructing her that she had 'power over them all...to ordain and arrange in all things according to that which you shall see to be best to do'.³⁶⁶ More striking is a letter sent by Edward III in 1335 to three women: Margaret, widow of Edmund, earl of Kent; Marie, wife of Aymer de Valence, earl of Pembroke; and Joan, wife of one Thomas Botetourt. In this letter Edward, who was absent fighting in Scotland, commanded these women to gather trusted advisors together in London to 'treat and ordain on the safe custody and secure defence of our realm and people, and on resisting and driving out the foreigners' who Edward had heard were massing warships and men at sea. The women were then ordered to 'arm and array your people...to repel powerfully and courageously the

³⁶² Orderic, VI, p. 310.

³⁶³ WT, II, pp. 201-02.

³⁶⁴ For perceptions of female political authority in general see Georges Duby, 'Women and Power', in *Cultures of Power: Lordship, Status and Process in Twelfth-Century Europe*, ed. Thomas N. Bisson (Philadelphia, PA.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), pp. 69-85, and for a contrary view: LoPrete, 'Gendering Viragos', pp. 17-38. For an analysis of attitudes by contemporaries toward female rulers in the Latin Kingdom see Sarah Lambert, 'Queen or Consort: Rulership and Politics in the Latin East, 1118-1228', in *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe*, ed. Anne J. Duggan (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1997), pp. 153-69.

³⁶⁵ See, for instance, the comments by Rangerius of Lucca (above, pp. 30-31), and William of Tyre (above, p. 78).

³⁶⁶ *The Voice of the Middle Ages: in Personal Letters 1100-1500*, ed. and trans. Catherine Moriarty (New York, NY.: P. Bedrick, 1989), p. 138, cited in James E. Gilbert, 'A Medieval "Rosie the Riveter"? Women in France and Southern England during the Hundred Years War', in *The Hundred Years War: A Wider Focus*, eds. L.J. Andrew Villalon and Donald J. Kagay (Boston, MA.: Brill, 2005), p. 355.

presumptuous boldness and malice of our same enemies...if those enemies invade'.³⁶⁷ Although we do not know the extent to which these women were successful in carrying out the king's orders, Edward nevertheless showed remarkable faith in the capacity of these women to prepare for the defence of the realm in his absence – certainly no small task.

Another particularly important arena in which women could directly aid the military effort was through their efforts to help finance and raise money for wars within Western Europe and the Holy Land. Funding for military campaigns was raised in many different ways – taxation, general donations, mortgaging or selling property – and women formed an important part of this process, especially when it came to paying for costly crusades to the East. We have already seen how Pope Innocent III, at the turn of the thirteenth century, began to make greater allowances for women to accompany their husbands on crusade or take a crusade vow if they were able to take armed followers with them to the Holy Land, but what really freed up this process was the promulgation of Innocent III's decretal *Quia maior* in April 1213 (which pronounced the Fifth Crusade). *Quia maior* stipulated regular liturgical processions of men and women, during which the participants would hear sermons, receive some degree of remission of sins just for listening (according to an earlier letter of Innocent), and pray for God to deliver the Holy Land. Furthermore, it promoted greater financial participation by making it possible for women to finance male warriors to go in their place and also specified monthly Church collections to which men and women could contribute.³⁶⁸ Perhaps most importantly, *Quia maior* decreed that anyone of either sex who so chose could take a crusade vow and might redeem or commute it if necessary (in return for a monetary payment), thus widening the number of people who might contribute financially to the crusade movement.³⁶⁹ Later papal policy expanded this practise by enforcing the payment of vow redemptions if *crucesignati* (the legal term used to signify someone who had taken a

³⁶⁷ 'Letter sent by Edward III to Margaret, widow of Edmund earl of Kent, concerning the defence of the realm, 1335', in *Women of the English Nobility and Gentry, 1066-1500*, trans. and ed. Jennifer Ward (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 146-47. I have not discovered the actions of these women after receiving this letter.

³⁶⁸ Rousseau, 'Home Front', pp. 36-37. See also Simon Lloyd, 'The Crusading Movement, 1096-1274', in *The Oxford History of the Crusades*, ed. Jonathan Riley-Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 48.

³⁶⁹ On *Quia maior* see Rousseau, 'Home Front', p. 38. For details of vow redemptions see Christoph T. Maier, *Preaching the Crusades: Mendicant Friars and the Cross in the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 135-48. See also Brundage, *Canon Law*, pp. 68-111, 131-38.

vow) did not leave on crusade. As far as women are concerned there seems to be not enough evidence to gauge how much they actually contributed to the overall amount of money collected from redemptions, or even how much was collected in the first place.³⁷⁰ Nevertheless, Innocent's reforms certainly allowed women to take on a greater financial and spiritual role in supporting the crusades, even if their circumstances prevented them from going on crusade in person.³⁷¹

Vow redemptions were, however, only one means by which women could provide monetary assistance. Often more financially taxing were instances in which women were forced to sell their husbands' property or mortgage dower lands, which left some destitute and others fighting in the courts for their property rights, as Christopher Tyerman has explored in the case of English women.³⁷² At other times, women helped contribute funds collectively, especially in the case of poorer crusaders who had to rely more on donations from the whole family, in which case the selling and mortgaging of property was again the most common way of financing a family member for war.³⁷³ Similarly, women who had control over a significant source of income could play a key role in helping finance men on crusade: Hodgson, for instance, cites the examples of Marie of Champagne and Blanche of Castile, both of whom acted as regents and sent money to their sons while they were crusading in the Holy Land,³⁷⁴ but has also noted other women whose large dower was a key financial source for crusade expeditions.³⁷⁵ Another more indirect means by which women could assist the continuing military struggle in the Holy Land came from the revenues of female convents associated with the recently founded military orders, of which part went towards financing the latter's activities in the East (although these payments were not large and varied from one house to another depending on each convent's financial means).³⁷⁶ Finally, we cannot discount the role female taxpayers may have

³⁷⁰ Maier, *Preaching the Crusades*, pp. 124-25. For the evolution of the term *crucesgnati* and its female equivalent *crucesignata* see Michael Markowski, 'Crucesignatus: its origins and early usage', *JMH* 10 (1984), pp. 157-65, especially pp. 160-62; Maureen Purcell, *Papal Crusading Policy, 1244-1291* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), section B.

³⁷¹ Maier, 'Roles of Women', p. 73.

³⁷² Christopher Tyerman, *England and the Crusades, 1095-1588* (Chicago, IL.: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 209-10.

³⁷³ Riley-Smith, *The First Crusaders*, pp. 130-35; *First Crusade*, pp. 45-46. Riley-Smith has estimated that a poor crusader needed to raise about four times their annual income in order to actually go on crusade (*First Crusade*, p. 43).

³⁷⁴ Hodgson, *Women, Crusading and the Holy Land*, pp. 162-63, 178.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 207-11.

³⁷⁶ A.J. Forey, 'Women and the Military Orders in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries', *Studia Monastica* 29 (1987) p. 89; Truax, 'Anglo-Norman Women at War', p. 113. For the financial

had in helping pay for war, although again it is very difficult to discern how much women contributed in this regard, since the head of the household (the eldest male) was the one who paid taxes and who thus appeared in tax records.³⁷⁷ The only women to appear were those active in an independent trade of their own or who were widowed and lived in a house in which no male heirs were also residing, though such women only seem to have made up a small proportion of taxpayers.³⁷⁸ Thus, even if most or all tax revenue before the sixteenth century went towards financing war, as has been argued in the case of England,³⁷⁹ the percentage of the revenue that came directly from female taxpayers would have been much less than that of male taxpayers (though both sexes were adversely affected by the effects of high taxation in times of war).³⁸⁰ Considering all of the means by which women could contribute financially, therefore, it is reasonable to assume that Western European women were a substantial source of finances for military campaigns, especially for the crusades, although the precise extent to which this assistance actually contributed towards the success of these campaigns is hard to quantify.³⁸¹

Women's enthusiasm for war and their recruitment efforts formed another facet of their home front involvement. This is one area where women may not have always acted in support of their men, and instead actively tried to discourage their men from leaving, hence the actions of such women are worth exploring as they could have influenced the number of men who went to war. The chances of women successfully preventing men's involvement in warfare appear highest in the case of the crusades because, although wives' emotional responses to their husbands'

difficulties that continually plagued female convents see Forey, 'Women and the Military Orders', pp. 90-91; Eileen Power, *Medieval English Nunneries, c.1275 to 1535* (Cheshire, CT.: Biblo and Tannen, 1988), pp. 161-236. On the female monastic movement in general see Bruce L. Verner, *Women's Monasticism and Medieval Society: Nunneries in France and England, 890-1215* (Ithaca, NY.: Cornell University Press, 1999).

³⁷⁷ Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, p. 13; Diane Hutton, 'Women in Fourteenth Century Shrewsbury', in *Women and Work in Pre-Industrial England*, eds. Lindsey Charles and Lorna Duffin (London; Dover, NH.: Croom Helm, 1985), p. 84; Miriam Müller, 'A Divided Class? Peasants and Peasant Communities in Later Medieval England', *Past and Present* Supplement 2 (2007), p. 123.

³⁷⁸ Müller, 'A Divided Class?', pp. 123-24; Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, pp. 13, 191-93 notes that only four percent of the taxpayers in London in 1319 were women and also that single, married and widowed women are all recorded having paid the tallage in Paris for the years 1296, 1297 and 1313. For more on female taxpayers see Beattie, *Medieval Single Women*, pp. 62-95.

³⁷⁹ G.R. Elton, 'Taxation for War and Peace in Early-Tudor England', in *War and Economic Development: Essays in Memory of David Joslin*, ed. J.M. Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 33.

³⁸⁰ Prestwich, *The Three Edwards*, pp. 237-38, 243-44, 248. For war taxes viewed as excessive see Venette, pp. 44, 63, 179 n. 72.

³⁸¹ A topic that seems worthy of further research as I have found no study that deals specifically with women's role in financing wars of the High to Late Middle Ages.

departure could not prevent the latter from leaving, canon law stipulated both husband and wife required each other's consent before leaving to go on crusade.³⁸² Thus women were, for a period, legally able to veto their husbands' decision to participate. To what extent women were successful at doing so is not entirely clear – some of those who preached the crusade appear to have felt women were among the ones preventing the crusades from being successful,³⁸³ although after Pope Innocent III issued his decretal *Ex multa* in 1201, which removed the requirement for men to obtain their wives consent before leaving, they would have had little cause for further concern.³⁸⁴ These developments suggest that some women, at least up until 1201, were successful in stopping men from leaving, but it is hard to say for certain. Emotional distress at the departure of loved ones on crusade may have played a role though: Odo of Deuil noted that there were tears on the part of women when the Second Crusade departed, as did Ambroise before the Third Crusade.³⁸⁵ Some years earlier Fulcher of Chartres elaborated at greater length on the sorrow before the First Crusade: 'Oh what grief there was! What sighs, what weeping, what lamentation among friends when husband left his wife so dear to him, his children, his possessions however great...Then husband told wife the time he expected to return...He commended her to the Lord, kissed her lingeringly, and promised her as she wept that he would return.'³⁸⁶ Departure scenes such as this one, it has been argued, were deliberately used by chroniclers to portray the crusades as a male affair in which women were not expected to participate.³⁸⁷ Certainly, such an account does reinforce conventional gender stereotypes: the emotionally controlled, pious husband, and the overwhelmed, irrational wife unable to maintain her composure.³⁸⁸ Nevertheless, it is not unreasonable to assume that some women would have been reluctant for their men to depart and upset if the latter eventually did, although we cannot know the extent of their influence on limiting the numbers of men on crusade.

³⁸² Brundage, *Canon Law*, pp. 32, 44, 77; 'The Crusader's Wife', pp. 430-34.

³⁸³ Christoph T. Maier, *Crusade Propaganda and Ideology: Model Sermons for the Preaching of the Cross* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 65; *Preaching the Crusades*, p. 119.

³⁸⁴ Brundage, 'The Crusader's Wife', pp. 434-35; *Canon Law*, p. 77.

³⁸⁵ Odo of Deuil, *De profectioe Ludovici VII in orientem*, ed. and trans. Virginia Gingerick Berry (New York, NY.: Columbia University Press, 1948), p. 19; Ambroise, *History*, II, pp. 34-35.

³⁸⁶ FC, p. 74.

³⁸⁷ Sarah Lambert, 'Crusading or Spinning', in *Gendering the Crusades*, eds. Edgington and Lambert, pp. 3-5.

³⁸⁸ Riley-Smith, *The First Crusaders*, pp. 97-98. For recognition in fictional literature of the emotional impact of the crusades on women see Meg Bogin, *The Women Troubadours* (London; New York, NY.: Norton, 1980), p. 33.

At the same time, medieval women also seem to have encouraged and even recruited men for war. Thus the author of the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum* asserted that ‘Brides urged their husbands and mothers incited their sons to go, their only sorrow being that they were not able to set out with them because of the weakness of their sex’.³⁸⁹ Although gender stereotyping is again evident in the way women’s ‘weakness of sex’ is said to have prevented them from leaving, there are some actual examples of women who tried to persuade men to fight. Adela of Blois, for instance, is well-known for her efforts to persuade her husband Stephen to return to the Holy Land after he deserted and came home during the difficult siege of Antioch in 1098.³⁹⁰ Similarly, Alice de Montfort was active in recruiting men, notably her brother (the Constable of France) during the Albigensian crusade,³⁹¹ as was, supposedly, Eleanor of Aquitaine before the Second Crusade.³⁹² Riley-Smith, too, has also discussed women, notably the Montlhéry sisters in the Île-de-France, whom he feels ‘transmitted an enthusiasm for crusading to the families into which they married’ and which can help ‘account for the concentrations of crusaders in certain kindred’ during the early crusades.³⁹³ Of course, whilst the genealogical preponderance of crusaders in certain families does not prove for certain that women necessarily had anything to do with recruiting or persuading men to fight, the examples given above do suggest that we should not discount their possible influence.

Lastly, it is also worth considering the role which urban women active in certain trades had in supplying various resources used in military affairs. For although most women were active in the textile and cloth-making industries during the Middle Ages,³⁹⁴ there were apparently some who worked sharpening tools and making scabbards for swords and knives,³⁹⁵ and others who even trained in arms manufacture (making chain mail and fletching strings to bows) – definitely a trade that would have

³⁸⁹ *Itinerarium Peregrinorum*, p. 48.

³⁹⁰ Orderic, V, pp. 324-26. For Stephen of Blois’ crusading career see James A. Brundage, ‘An Errant Crusader: Stephen of Blois’, *Traditio* 16 (1960), pp. 380-95.

³⁹¹ Marvin, *Occitan War*, p. 280.

³⁹² Maier, ‘Roles of Women’, p. 75.

³⁹³ Riley-Smith, ‘Family Traditions and Participation’, p. 105; *The First Crusaders*, pp. 98-99, 171. For another example see Powell, ‘Role of Women’, p. 294.

³⁹⁴ Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, p. 191; Michael Kaufman, ‘Spare Ribs: The Conception of Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance’, *Soundings* 56 (1973), pp. 149-50.

³⁹⁵ Shahar, *The Fourth Estate*, pp. 191, 192.

thrived on war.³⁹⁶ Admittedly, the numbers of women engaged in such crafts were very few and their likely effect on military affairs slight. Accordingly, we should not make too much of their employment or we risk over-emphasising their contribution. All the same, they do at least serve to draw attention to other more indirect means by which women on the ‘home front’ may have supported the whole industry of war by supplying military goods and services.

Taking all of these examples into consideration, it is clear that both the direct support women rendered to men while present with armies, or indirectly from the ‘home front’, was not inconsequential or insignificant. It may have been, as Nicholson noted, that ‘male pride and social norms demanded that when men were present they should perform the active martial roles’,³⁹⁷ but clearly societal norms counted for little in the heat of battle when women’s very lives were at stake, or those of the men they accompanied. The crusades offer some of the best evidence to support this idea: it is not implausible that some women did in fact operate mangonels or wield bows when manpower was short yet urgently needed and the situation appropriately dire,³⁹⁸ or that they brought water, acted as guards, and gathered materials necessary for attack, and it goes without saying women performed many basic but important services such as cooking and gathering supplies. Yet it is crucial when discussing the more unusual claims of Christian women riding like knights into battle that we take careful account of the potential for bias which the Muslim and Greek authors had good reason to advance, or the possibility that chroniclers romanticised the supposed military feats of women either out of ignorance or for deliberate literary purposes. These distortions are reflective of that fact that war, specifically armed combat, was generally conceived of as a masculine activity; it was unnatural for women to fill the male role of combatant, which explains why chronicler’s ascribed male traits to those few women who were said to have fought in battle. The same gendered language is evident in departure scenes that emphasise the emotional and inhibiting role of women as opposed to the stoic, God-fearing nature of men, but these scenes are also more constructed than real.

³⁹⁶ Nicholson, *Medieval Warfare*, p. 185 n. 86; Heather Swanson, ‘The Illusion of Economic Structure: Craft Guilds in Late Medieval English Towns’, *Past and Present* 121 (1988), p. 39; Jennifer C. Ward, *Women in England in the Middle Ages* (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 92.

³⁹⁷ Nicholson, *Medieval Warfare*, p. 63.

³⁹⁸ Nicholson, ‘Third Crusade’, p. 349; Maier, ‘Roles of Women’, p. 69; and Solterer, ‘Figures’, p. 537 have all reached this same conclusion.

Yet the possible role women may have had in preventing men from leaving on crusade formed only one small aspect of women's involvement on the 'home front'. Administratively, women were integral to many men's crusading plans, assuming the lordship of their property while they were absent and ensuring control of it stayed within the family, but equally important was women's financial support of crusade expeditions, especially after the reforms of Innocent III made it possible for more women to contribute. Neither can we ignore the fact that women may well have encouraged men to fight or indirectly provided the materials necessary for fighting in war. Indeed, in assessing the evidence for women's support roles on the 'home front' and while present with armies, it is difficult to see how wars, especially the crusades, could ever have been fought successfully without female support. To be sure, men were the ones who fought and usually made the major decisions, but collectively the assistance of women in Western Europe and on crusade was invaluable. Their efforts to support war are made more remarkable by the fact that women in general were often among those victims who suffered most from war's brutality. It is to this darker side of war that we must now turn.

4. Violence, Death and Captivity: Women as Victims of War

It is no secret that war, more often than not, brings with it a large degree of suffering and destruction upon any populace in close proximity to the conflict. Writing of women in general, Jean Elshtain has asserted that ‘the story of women and war would seem to be a story of how women have either indirectly or directly been war’s victims despite their status as those who mourned or cheered or stalwartly persevered rather than those who fought’.³⁹⁹ For women in the High and Later Middle Ages, the dangers of war were only too real; most women, even those who supported the fighting men, were unarmed non-combatants who had never trained to fight in war and were, consequently, less able to defend themselves when left to the mercy of an enemy. Moreover, the obvious physical differences between the sexes often made the women of the enemy, in particular, an attractive economic (via slavery) and sexual target to victorious armies during war, quite apart from any active military support role the women may have performed. Understanding how war affected women, therefore, is an important task since it helps us form a more complete and more balanced picture of their place in medieval military history.

As this chapter will make clear, there were several different and often interconnected ways in which medieval women suffered as victims of war. In order to help make sense of how they functioned as victims several key questions must be asked: Why and under what circumstances did women suffer as a result of war? What form(s) did violence against women take? Did their treatment reflect how contemporaries believed female non-combatants in general should be treated? If not, can we trust our sources for what they tell us about women who suffered in war? What were the motivations, in other words, that may have prompted our sources to portray women as victims of war? In asking these questions this chapter aims to discern whether there were specific ways in which women suffered as a result of war, as opposed to the negative experiences of non-combatants in general. Three key consequences of war – death, captivity and sexual violence – form the basis of this chapter, a thematic approach which enables us to gain a broader understanding of how women, even as victims, were still an important part of medieval military strategy.

³⁹⁹ Jean Bethke Elshtain, ‘Women and War’, in *The Oxford History of Modern War*, ed. Charles Townshend (Oxford: Oxford University Press, New ed., 2005), p. 303.

War and the Killing of Women

Loss of life has always been a threat for non-combatants such as women in times of war. Yet, as noted in chapter one, ever since the Peace of God movement emerged in the late-tenth century there had been a growing sentiment that certain groups generally not involved in the fighting, amongst them women, should not be subject to the violence of war, that these groups should instead be left alone even if they were part of the enemy. The logic behind this belief may have been to protect those who were seen as the most defenceless, but reality, as always, was more complex than any ideal.

War was, and always has been, highly situational in who it affected and who was killed. Sometimes war affected women indirectly in that it caused their deaths even though they may not have died at the actual hands of the enemy. Thus did many Christian women accompanying the First Crusade army perish, first, from lack of water on the desert march across Anatolia (modern day Turkey) and later, in the famine caused by the devastating Muslim counter siege following the crusade army's capture of Antioch in 1098.⁴⁰⁰ At other times women were specifically targeted by enemy forces, as happened to a certain Florina, daughter of the duke of Burgundy, in the late-eleventh century. Whilst en route to the Holy Land with a Danish prince she wished to marry, she was shot with six arrows and eventually killed, following an attack by Turkish raiders.⁴⁰¹ War thus affected different medieval women in different ways, which can make it challenging to discover why and when medieval women were killed in war. Compounding the problem, the men who wrote of their deaths were also often influenced by their own ideological or religious perspectives and were not always fully informed about the particular events of which they spoke.

Since the deaths of individual women during actual battles or sieges were rarely mentioned, accounts of massacres offer some the best evidence as to why women were killed and also serve to illustrate the problems encountered in medieval depictions of violence. We might begin by considering the comparatively high number of massacres perpetrated by the army of the First Crusade, which has led to this crusade being perceived as a particularly notorious case of Christian brutality and

⁴⁰⁰ *Gesta Francorum*, p. 23; AA, pp. 138-41; WT, I, pp. 266-82; FC, p. 101.

⁴⁰¹ AA, pp. 224-25.

religious intolerance.⁴⁰² At first glance, much of the killing seems to have been very indiscriminate and ruthless in nature, affecting men and women alike. Upon the crusade army's capture of the Muslim city of Ma'arrat al-Nu'man in 1098, for instance, it was written that the Christians 'killed anyone, man or women, whom they met in any place whatsoever'.⁴⁰³ Again, after the capture of Albara that same year Gilo of Paris wrote that old women and young girls were among the 'thousand [who] were slain in a thousand different ways'.⁴⁰⁴ Although these accounts emphasise the slaughter, Hay has argued that chroniclers had reason to exaggerate the extent of the slaughters in order to present the crusaders as purifying and cleansing the Holy Land of the Muslim influence, and that they sometimes failed to distinguish in their narratives between the killing of adult men and non-combatants such as women, when in fact the latter were often held captive instead.⁴⁰⁵ The sources for the Jerusalem massacre of 1099, for instance, describe the brutal and indiscriminate slaughter of its inhabitants once the city was taken and emphasise the extreme nature of the slaughter.⁴⁰⁶ This massacre is not itself surprising given that it was standard medieval military practise to kill the inhabitants of any cities which fell by force after a siege.⁴⁰⁷ Where the confusion arises is Albert of Aachen's assertion that another massacre occurred three days later, in which prisoners who had been spared previously for the sake of money or pity, including women of all ages, were executed ruthlessly in order

⁴⁰² Matthew Strickland, 'Rules of War or War Without Rules? Some Reflections on Conduct and the Treatment of Non-Combatants in Medieval Transcultural Wars', in *Transcultural Wars from the Middle Ages to the 21st Century*, ed. Hans-Henning Kortüm (Berlin: Akademie, 2006), p. 130; Friedman, *Encounter Between Enemies*, pp. 19-20.

⁴⁰³ *Gesta Francorum*, pp. 80-81.

⁴⁰⁴ Gilo of Paris and a second, anonymous author, *The Historia Vie Hierosolimitane*, ed. and trans. C.W. Grocock and J.E. Siberry (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), pp. 200-03. Gilo wrote the initial part of this work, a Latin poem dated to around 1120, which was continued by an anonymous author known only as the 'Charleville poet', of whom little is known (pp. xiii-xxiv). For more on the incident at Albara see Steven Runciman, 'The First Crusade: Antioch to Ascalon', in *A History of the Crusades: I. The First Hundred Years*, ed. Marshall W. Baldwin, general ed. K.M. Setton (Madison, WI.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), p. 325.

⁴⁰⁵ David Hay, 'Gender Bias and Religious Intolerance in Accounts of the "Massacres" of the First Crusade', in *Tolerance and Intolerance: Social Conflict in the Age of the Crusades*, eds. Michael Gervers and James M. Powell (New York, NY.: Syracuse University Press, 2001), pp. 3-10.

⁴⁰⁶ See Raymond of Aguilers, *Historia Francorum qui ceperunt Jerusalem*, trans. from *Recueil des Historiens des Croisades, Historiens Orientaux*, 3, cited in *The First Crusade: The Accounts of Eye-witnesses and Participants*, ed. August C. Krey (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1921), pp. 260-61; Gilo of Paris, *Historia*, pp. 168-71; AA, pp. 428-33; *Gesta Francorum*, pp. 91-92; FC, p. 122. For a later Muslim account of the siege and the events immediately following the Frankish victory see Ibn al-Qalanisi, *The Damascus Chronicle of the Crusades*, trans. H.A.R. Gibb (London: Luzac and Company, 1967), pp. 47-49.

⁴⁰⁷ Russell, *Just War*, pp. 209, 256; Bradbury, *The Medieval Siege*, p. 296.

to prevent them rebelling if an external threat to the city emerged.⁴⁰⁸ Although Albert is the only source for this second massacre, his testimony nevertheless suggests that the first instinct of the crusaders may have been to spare the inhabitants rather than kill them outright, despite what the other sources say of the crusaders' zeal for blood; moreover, it is known that there actually were some captives ransomed at Jerusalem.⁴⁰⁹ Similarly at Albara and after the fall of Caesarea in 1101, Hay contends that while some sources ostensibly suggest a total slaughter, the language used by the chroniclers suggests that they were in fact referring only to adult men who were killed, and while some women probably did meet the same end, most of the women and other male non-combatants did not suffer the same fate.⁴¹⁰

Furthermore, Strickland has suggested that the First Crusade army must have been aware of the concept of non-combatant immunity that was taking hold in Western Europe at that time (as set forth in the Peace of God legislation), as well as chivalric conventions developed among the Franco-Norman warrior aristocracy which stressed, amongst other things, the taking of captives rather than the outright slaughter of defeated enemies.⁴¹¹ He does not, however, speculate on whether this had any moderating influence on the actions of the crusade army toward enemy women. In any case, while women undoubtedly made up some of those massacred on this crusade, it is worth keeping these factors in mind when considering the chroniclers' depictions of wholesale killing.⁴¹²

Nevertheless, even if massacres were sometimes exaggerated, there is no doubt religious differences were still used on occasion to justify the killing of women. Women in heretical movements, such as the Cathar movement that flourished in southern France, were among those massacred by the armies of the Albigensian Crusade after they captured the cities of Béziers in 1209 and Marmande in 1219,⁴¹³ as part of efforts to root out the Cathar heresy, although the number of people who died

⁴⁰⁸ AA, pp. 440-43.

⁴⁰⁹ Friedman, *Encounter Between Enemies*, p. 19; Hay, 'Gender Bias', pp. 6-7.

⁴¹⁰ Hay, 'Gender Bias', p. 4.

⁴¹¹ Strickland, 'Rules of War', p. 130. For more precise definitions of chivalry and its characteristics see Keen, *Chivalry*, pp. 2-5, 16-17; Matthew Strickland, *War and Chivalry: The Conduct and Perception of War in England and Normandy, 1066-1217* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 19-30, 330-40.

⁴¹² Hay, 'Gender Bias', pp. 8-9; Hodgson, *Women, Crusading and the Holy Land*, pp. 98-99.

⁴¹³ WP, Appendix A, p. 128; William of Tuleda, *Song of the Cathar Wars*, pp. 19-22, 188-89.

at either city, let alone the number of women, is unclear.⁴¹⁴ Marvin speculates that the number of people killed was in fact not as large as other historians have made out, though he concedes that hundreds, if not thousands, may still have died.⁴¹⁵ Again at Montségur in 1244, women were among the roughly 200 *perfecti* (the leaders of the Cathar hierarchy who were allowed to preach) massacred by yet another crusade army – gender again being no protection, since all who embraced Catharism were seen as heretics.⁴¹⁶ Perhaps the clearest statement of religious intolerance, however, can be found in the account, given by the *Rothelin* continuation of the chronicle of William of Tyre, of a French attack on the Muslim camp at Mansourah in 1250, during the Seventh Crusade:

Our men charged in through the Turks' quarters, killing all and sparing none; men, women and children, old and young, great and small, rich and poor, they slew and slashed and killed them all. If they found girls or old people it did them no good to shriek and cry and beg for mercy, they were all slaughtered...It was sad indeed to see so many dead bodies and so much blood spilt, except that they were the enemies of the Christian faith.⁴¹⁷

The author here stresses the brutality and indiscriminate nature of the killing and almost appears to sympathise with the victims due to the scale of the slaughter. Lest he feel any compassion though, the author reminds us of that the victims were not Christians, thereby justifying the slaughter of women as well as other non-combatants. This justification, which simultaneously excuses and explains the violent nature of the attack, suggests that in fact numerous women were killed, particularly as it provoked the Turks into an equally ruthless counter attack on those Franks involved in the massacre after they later became dispersed.⁴¹⁸ Religion thus appears to have offered one basis upon which the killing of heretical and non-Christian women could be rationalised whilst also avoiding any ecclesiastical censure for not protecting non-

⁴¹⁴ Marvin, *Occitan War*, pp. 43-45, 300; Michael Costen, *The Cathars and the Albigensian Crusade* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), pp. 123-25.

⁴¹⁵ Marvin, *Occitan War*, p. 44.

⁴¹⁶ WP, pp. 107-08; Costen, *Albigensian Crusade*, pp. 159-60.

⁴¹⁷ *Crusader Syria in the Thirteenth Century: The Rothelin Continuation of the History of William of Tyre with Part of the Eracles or Acre text*, trans. Janet Shirley (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), p. 95.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 96.

combatants from the violence of war (since the Peace of God legislation only applied to warfare between Christians).⁴¹⁹

Aside from religious intolerance, the desire for retaliation against perceived injustices seems to have been another reason why gender offered women no respite from the killing. Pope Urban II's inflammatory speech at Clermont in 1095, for instance, which sparked the First Crusade, included remarks designed specifically to arouse pity as well as anger for the suffering endured by Christians in the East at the hands of the Muslims,⁴²⁰ and can, as Asbridge has suggested, help account for the general brutality displayed by this crusade towards the enemy.⁴²¹ In a similar manner, the killings witnessed during peasant rebellions in the fourteenth century did not discriminate based on sex, and were also motivated by the desire to address perceived grievances. Following the Battle of Cassel in 1328, which marked the end point of the peasant rebellion in Flanders against French rule, French cavalry apparently put men, women and children to the sword on a wide scale as revenge for their disastrous defeat at the Battle of Courtrai in 1302.⁴²² Similarly bloody was the Jacquerie uprising in northern France (1358), vividly described by chroniclers who struggled to come to terms with the violence that was directed against the noble class. Jean Froissart, for instance, included horrific scenes of peasants capturing, killing and sometimes raping the wives and daughters of knights, simply because they were part of the noble class.⁴²³ Froissart clearly had little sympathy for the plight of peasants, and his account was undoubtedly coloured by his class bias, but there is little doubt it was a violent event. Even in the work of Jean de Venette, who came from a peasant background and generally displayed more sympathy towards the lower classes in his account,⁴²⁴ peasants are still described as having 'killed, slaughtered and massacred without mercy all the nobles whom they could find...and, what is still more lamentable, they delivered the noble ladies and their little children upon whom they came to an atrocious death'.⁴²⁵ Notwithstanding Venette's obvious disapproval of the

⁴¹⁹ Strickland, 'Rules of War', p. 123.

⁴²⁰ For the specific themes of Urban's speech see Dana Carleton Munro, 'The Speech of Pope Urban II at Clermont, 1095', *American Historical Review* 11 (1906), pp. 231-42.

⁴²¹ Asbridge, *The First Crusade*, p. 36.

⁴²² William H. TeBrake, *A Plague of Insurrection: Popular Politics and Peasant Revolt in Flanders, 1323-1328* (Philadelphia, PA.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), p. 123, and see pp. 33-34 for the defeat of French forces by Flemish militia at Courtrai.

⁴²³ Froissart, *Chronicles*, pp. 136-37.

⁴²⁴ Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free*, p. 127.

⁴²⁵ Venette, p. 76.

slaughter and the likely exaggeration in his descriptions, it is clear that noblewomen were specifically targeted by the rebellion just as much as noblemen.⁴²⁶

Finally, women were sometimes simply massacred as part of a broader military strategy of indiscriminate slaughter and general devastation of the land. Such actions were designed to cause economic damage and strike fear into the enemy populace. The Scottish raids on northern areas of England during the twelfth century fit this category; many men and women were killed as a result of these raids, although again in such cases it is hard to separate out the experience of women from that of men. What is evident, however, is the hysteria generated by English chroniclers who saw the Scots as merciless in their treatment of English women. Henry of Huntingdon, for instance, claimed that the Scots ‘ripped open pregnant women’ and killed their children by throwing them on lances.⁴²⁷ Similarly, Richard of Hexham, writing around the middle of the twelfth century, asserted that the Scots ‘murdered everywhere persons of both sexes, of every age and rank... [including] women pregnant and in childbed, infants in the womb, innocents at the breast, or on the mother’s knee with the mother’s themselves... [as well as] worn out old women’.⁴²⁸ Though certainly graphic, passages such as these must be treated with care, for many of the Anglo-Norman chroniclers who wrote of such events seem to have regarded the Scots as little more than excessively cruel and savage barbarians, barely above the level of beasts.⁴²⁹ This xenophobia undoubtedly influenced the sensationalised (and most likely exaggerated) descriptions of women shockingly mutilated along with their children. Nevertheless, there is probably some truth to reports of Scottish cruelty in war, for both Richard of Hexham and others such as Jordan Fantosme, who described a separate indiscriminate Scottish massacre in the village of Warkworth in 1174,⁴³⁰ receive confirmation from other sources.⁴³¹ Regardless of how many women were actually killed though, the point is that gender alone was no barrier to a broad strategy of slaughter, just as gender did not prevent women suffering from acts of revenge or religious intolerance.

⁴²⁶ Ibid, pp. 77-79; Froissart, *Chronicles*, p. 138.

⁴²⁷ HH, pp. 710-11.

⁴²⁸ Richard of Hexham, *De gestis regis Stephani et de bello Standardii*, ed. J. Raine, *The Priory of Hexham, its Chroniclers, Endowments and Annals*, 2 vols. (Surtees Society, xlv, Durham, 1868), I, pp. 78-79, cited in Strickland, *War and Chivalry*, p. 296.

⁴²⁹ Strickland, *War and Chivalry*, pp. 291-93, 299; *GS*, pp. 54-55; *Fantosme’s Chronicle*, pp. 48-49, 52-53, 88-89, 100-01.

⁴³⁰ *Fantosme’s Chronicle*, pp. 126-27.

⁴³¹ Strickland, *War and Chivalry*, pp. 300, 302.

Women and Captivity

Despite the accounts of women massacred, captivity remained a greater wartime danger for women, though this fact is not altogether surprising. Enemy women posed less of direct threat than men did to an army, at least in terms of armed resistance, thus there was not the same pressure to have them killed in the aftermath of a military engagement as they would be less likely to fight back. If women were not to be killed, therefore, captivity made sense as the next logical option, which either meant holding them for ransom, or else putting them to work as slaves for the victors.⁴³²

Within France and England during the High to Late Middle Ages, the Peace and Truce of God had slowly helped establish the idea that in wars between Christians women should not be captured or subject to military violence. In practise, however, captive women in these kingdoms were still sometimes enslaved, held for ransom and even tortured. Discussing the Scottish raids into England in 1136-1138, for instance, both Richard and John of Hexham expressly mention that women were captured, chained and sent back to Scotland after their men-folk had been slaughtered.⁴³³ In a similar fashion, Jordan Fantosme, recounting a raid by mercenary forces (collectively known as *routiers*) on the town of Belford in 1174, likewise wrote that women were taken prisoner at the same time as peasants were led away 'roped together like heathens'.⁴³⁴ The fate of these women is unknown, although it may well have been an unpleasant one, especially if we are to believe the earlier *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's* account of the women captured, imprisoned and subjected to 'unspeakable tortures' by mercenary castle garrisons intent on extracting ransoms during the Anarchy of King Stephen's reign.⁴³⁵

In any case, the capture of women was not simply limited to *routiers* or the Scots. Women who had control of property could be captured while their husbands were absent on crusade and forced into marriage. Tyerman cites the example of William Luvul, who in the early-thirteenth century married a certain Cecelia, even though he was married and her husband was alive in the Holy Land, and also that of Ralph of Hodeng, who upon his return from crusading learnt his daughter and heiress

⁴³² Hodgson, *Women, Crusading and the Holy Land*, pp. 42-43; Strickland, *War and Chivalry*, p. 305.

⁴³³ Strickland, *War and Chivalry*, pp. 305 n. 62, 314.

⁴³⁴ *Fantosme's Chronicle*, pp. 86-87.

⁴³⁵ ASC, E, 1137, p. 264.

had married without his knowledge to one of his villeins, though it is unknown whether the marriage was forced.⁴³⁶ In both cases, property seems to have been a driving motive behind the marriages, but the fact that their men-folk were absent due to war likely provided additional stimulus.

More commonly, however, war and captivity meant a loss of livelihood for women. The chronicler Jean de Venette, for instance, described numerous cases of women captured during the targeted raids or *chevauchées* employed by the English to burn and devastate the French countryside during the Hundred Years War in the fourteenth century.⁴³⁷ Thus at Caen in 1346, Epernay and Vailly-sur-Aisne in 1358, and Beauvais in 1359, to take but three examples, women were said by Venette to have been captured, robbed, and even killed by marauding English armies.⁴³⁸ Though not specifically referenced, there is little doubt women were also adversely affected by the army of Charles II le Mauvais, King of Navarre (1332-1387), another pretender to the French throne alternately allied with the English and the French.⁴³⁹ Charles' army 'rode about France, laying waste country and town, burning, plundering, and taking miserable captives... [thus] [e]very part of the countryside that lay outside of fortifications was totally devastated at this time, and the common people were plundered'.⁴⁴⁰ In such cases gender alone was no protection against the enemy; even amongst knights bound by codes of chivalry, women – especially those from the peasantry – were still subject to violence and pillage in times of war.⁴⁴¹

In contrast to women in Western Europe, captivity does appear to have been a more common fate for both Christian (and Muslim) women in the Holy Land.⁴⁴²

⁴³⁶ Tyerman, *England and the Crusades*, p. 211. See also Leyser, *Medieval Women*, pp. 117-18.

⁴³⁷ For the tactical uses of the *chevauchée* see Clifford J. Rogers, *War Cruel and Sharp: English Strategy under Edward III, 1327-1360* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2000), especially chapters 10-14; Nicholas Wright, *Knights and Peasants: The Hundred Years War in the French Countryside* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1998), pp. 68-69; Harari, 'Strategy and Supply', p. 300; and for its acknowledged effectiveness before the Hundred Years War see Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare*, pp. 198-206. For the origins and course of the Hundred Years War itself see Christopher Allmand, *The Hundred Years War: England and France at War, c.1300-c.1450* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, revised ed., 1988), pp. 6-36.

⁴³⁸ Venette, pp. 40-41, 85-86, 93. See also pp. 40-42, 57, 58, 67, 75-78, 82-83, 96-98, 100-02 for further descriptions of *chevauchées* in which women were killed.

⁴³⁹ For the role of Charles within the Hundred Years War see Jonathan Sumption, *The Hundred Years' War II: Trial by Fire* (Philadelphia, PA.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 102-42.

⁴⁴⁰ Venette, pp. 83, 75.

⁴⁴¹ For more on how the chivalric ethos among knights did not apply to the peasantry see Wright, *Knights and Peasants*, pp. 31-32; Strickland, *War and Chivalry*, pp. 289-90, 335-37; Richard W. Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 185.

⁴⁴² Yvonne Friedman, 'Captivity and Ransom: The Experience of Women', in *Gendering the Crusades*, eds. Edgington and Lambert, pp. 121-22; *Encounter Between Enemies*, p. 162.

Indeed, not only was it more common, but captivity for these women also often meant they were forced to perform hard labour. When the city of Caesarea was captured in 1101, for instance, Fulcher of Chartres wrote that although most of the male soldiers were killed, ‘a great many of the [Muslim] women were spared, since they could always be used to turn the hand mills’.⁴⁴³ Christian women are also mentioned as having been set to work in workshops in the Fatimid palace at Cairo.⁴⁴⁴ The only individual female experience of captivity recorded was that of Margaret of Beverly, a female participant in the Third Crusade. She was twice taken captive by the Muslims, and apparently put to work cutting wood and gathering stones, as well as regularly beaten by her captors,⁴⁴⁵ though it should be remembered that her brother (who recorded her travels in the Holy Land) was concerned with illustrating her piety and the suffering she went through for Christ, and so details of her suffering may have been embellished.⁴⁴⁶ Likewise, care should be taken when assessing the account of one Muslim chronicler who described Muslim captives at work within the Latin Kingdom: ‘Among the disasters witnessed in their territory (Frankish), is the sight of Muslim captives in shackles performing hard labour like slaves. Also the sight of Muslim female captives wearing iron anklets...Hearts would burst with pity for them, but this does not help’.⁴⁴⁷ It is interesting to note how the chronicler remarks upon the emotional impact that would come from seeing female captives shackled, quite possibly to engender pity in his audience for their plight. Yet, as Hillenbrand points out, this particular reference is isolated and should not be used as a generalisation for how all Muslims, male or female, were treated in captivity by Christians.⁴⁴⁸

Aside from hard labour, there are also a few accounts of captive Christian women who were forced to marry Muslim men,⁴⁴⁹ but miscegenation and marriages between people of different religions in the Holy Land did occur outside of captivity

⁴⁴³ FC, p. 154; WT, I, p. 437.

⁴⁴⁴ Yaacov Lev, ‘Prisoners of War During the Fatimid-Ayyubid Wars with the Crusaders’, in *Tolerance and Intolerance*, eds. Gervers and Powell, p. 17.

⁴⁴⁵ Hodgson, *Women, Crusading and the Holy Land*, p. 149.

⁴⁴⁶ Maier, ‘Roles of Women’, pp. 65-66.

⁴⁴⁷ Muhammad Ibn Jubayr, *Rihlat Ibn Jubayr* (Beirut: Dār al-Hilāl, 1981), pp. 252-53, cited in Hadia Dajani-Shakeel, ‘Some Aspects of Muslim-Frankish Christian Relations in the Shām Region in the Twelfth Century’, in *Christian-Muslim Encounters*, eds. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Wadi Zaidan Haddad (Gainesville, FL.: University Press of Florida, 1995), p. 205.

⁴⁴⁸ Hillenbrand, *Islamic Perspectives*, p. 550.

⁴⁴⁹ Usāmah Ibn-Munqidh, *Arab-Syrian Gentleman*, p. 159; AA, pp. 344-45.

as well.⁴⁵⁰ Whether or not these marriages resulted in anyone actually swapping faiths is unknown, but it is interesting to note that the practice of marrying Christian women to Muslim men (in the hope they could slowly convince their Muslim relatives to convert to Christianity) was later advocated by Pierre Dubois in 1306-1307 as one way by which the West might recover the Holy Land.⁴⁵¹

Captured women of strategic importance to the enemy were sometimes imprisoned and held as hostages. These women tended to be of noble descent and remained in captivity until such time as they could be exchanged in return for the release of an important prisoner from the enemy. At the Battle of Cassel in 1071, for instance, Richilde, Countess of Mons and Hainaut, supported her son Arnulf III against Robert I the Frisian for control of Flanders, but after the battle she was captured by Robert's men. Less than a month later she was freed in exchange for Robert, who had also been captured at Cassel.⁴⁵² In the Holy Land, Baldwin II offered his young daughter Yveta as a hostage in return for his freedom from Muslim captivity in 1125, later paying a ransom for her freedom.⁴⁵³ More well-known is the captivity of Eleanor of Aquitaine, imprisoned for sixteen years by her husband Henry II due to her support for the failed revolt of 1173-1174, led by Henry's eldest son Henry 'the Young King'.⁴⁵⁴ Eleanor was an important captive for Henry since she had been married previously to Louis VII, who himself participated in the revolt and whose daughter was married to Henry the Young King. By keeping her imprisoned the elder Henry could thus perhaps have used her as a way to enforce his sons' obedience to him after the revolt.⁴⁵⁵ Similarly, Elizabeth, wife of the Scottish king Robert Bruce, was imprisoned in successive English castles from 1307 to 1314 by Edward I (and later Edward II) after the English defeated the Scots at the Battle of Methven (1306) and captured the Scottish royal family. Edward also had Mary Bruce,

⁴⁵⁰ FC, p. 271. See also Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, p. 195 n. 79; Hillenbrand, *Islamic Perspectives*, pp. 350-51.

⁴⁵¹ Pierre Dubois, *The Recovery of the Holy Land*, trans. Walther I. Brandt (New York, NY.: Columbia University Press, 1956), pp. 118-19, 124.

⁴⁵² France, *Victory in the East*, pp. 55-56; McLaughlin, 'The Woman Warrior', pp. 194, 199.

⁴⁵³ Hodgson, *Women, Crusading and the Holy Land*, p. 95; Friedman, 'Captivity and Ransom', p. 135, and *Encounter Between Enemies*, pp. 77, 183.

⁴⁵⁴ Elizabeth Brown, 'Eleanor of Aquitaine Reconsidered: The Woman and her Seasons', in *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Lord and Lady*, eds. Bonnie Wheeler and John Carmi Parsons (New York, NY.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 13. For a discussion of the reasons behind Eleanor's estrangement from Henry after 1167 in the lead-up to the revolt, see Jane Martindale, 'Eleanor of Aquitaine', in *Richard Coeur de Lion in History and Myth*, ed. Janet Nelson (King's College, London: Centre for Late Antique and Medieval Studies, 1992), pp. 43-44.

⁴⁵⁵ Martindale, 'Eleanor of Aquitaine', pp. 33-34.

one of Bruce's sisters, and Isabella Macduff, countess of Buchan, imprisoned in small cages for several years on the walls of Roxburgh and Berwick castle respectively, due to their associations with Edward's enemies.⁴⁵⁶ Fortunately for Elizabeth and Mary, they were later freed in exchange for the English captives held by the Scots, although Isabella apparently died while still in captivity.⁴⁵⁷ Her fate mirrors that of Philippine, the daughter of Guy of Dampierre, count of Flanders, who was kept in strict confinement by the French king Philip IV until her death in 1306 in order to prevent the possibility of her betrothal to the young Edward II of England – an event which would have created a threatening alliance for the French.⁴⁵⁸ Although not perhaps technically a 'prisoner of war' as such, her imprisonment is still noteworthy since it directly minimised the political and military threat to Philip in the north of France.

Captivity, for women, also brought with it connotations of sexual defilement by the enemy. It was sometimes assumed, whether justly or not, that female prisoners were likely to have been sexually abused by their captors. Such an assumption was evident when King Baldwin I rejected his Armenian wife in 1108, on suspicion that the men who had taken her captive whilst she was travelling to Jerusalem had sexually assaulted her, even though they later released her.⁴⁵⁹ In this case, mere suspicion of marital infidelity was enough for Baldwin to part with his wife, irrespective of whether she had actually been raped. Likewise, William of Tyre described how the noble wife of Renier Brus, the lord of Bānyās, was returned to her husband after two years in captivity, and then restored to her position as his wife, only to be rejected later by Renier when it was discovered that she 'had not observed with enough caution, in the manner of noble matrons, the sanctity of the marriage bed'.⁴⁶⁰ William evidently approved of Renier's actions in distancing himself from his wife and insinuated that the fault lay in her hands.

⁴⁵⁶ Jan Bassett, Bobbie Oliver, and Reina Pennington, 'Women as Prisoners of War: A Bibliographic Survey', in *Amazons to Fighter Pilots: A Biographical Dictionary of Military Women*, 2 vols., eds. Reina Pennington and Robin Higham (Westport, CT.: Greenwood, 2003), I, p. 652. Ronald McNair Scott (*Robert the Bruce: King of Scots* [New York, NY.: Carroll & Graf, 1996], pp. 87-88) notes that Mary's husband was still at war with Edward and that Isabella was accused of being Robert Bruce's mistress.

⁴⁵⁷ Scott, *Robert the Bruce*, p. 164.

⁴⁵⁸ Michael Prestwich, *Edward I* (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 388. For the reasons why the count sought this alliance even though he was a French vassal see Fawtier, *Capetian Kings of France*, p. 117.

⁴⁵⁹ Guibert of Nogent, *The Deeds of God through the Franks*, trans. Robert Levine (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1997), p. 164.

⁴⁶⁰ William of Tyre, *Chronicon*, ed. Robert B.C. Huygens, 2 vols. (Turnhout, 1986), p. 656, cited in Hodgson, *Women, Crusading and the Holy Land*, p. 149. Ibn al-Qalasinī, *Chronicle*, p. 217 mentions the capture of female prisoners at Bānyās in 1132.

Accounts of women sexually assaulted while in captivity may also have served didactic purposes as well. Albert of Aachen related the story of a nun from Trier on the Peasants' Crusade who, after being captured and taken 'in a vile and detestable union' by the Turks, attempted to seek forgiveness from the leaders of the First Crusade when she was ransomed at Nicaea. Despite the nun having her penance reduced, she was persuaded by a messenger sent from her captor to return to him, surprising the crusade army who, according to Albert, could find no explanation for her behaviour except that 'her own lust was too much to bear'.⁴⁶¹ The inclusion of this story may well have been specifically targeted to emphasise the Turks' sexual perversion and engender outrage in Albert's audience against the Turks for raping virgins, such as nuns; moreover, Hodgson maintains the story could also have served as a warning that women who took the cross were likely to encounter difficulties and had to resist sexual temptations.⁴⁶² Certainly, however, Albert was not the only crusade chronicler to raise the issue of female sexual activities on crusade, activities which were sometimes used as a scapegoat for the military difficulties faced by crusade armies. Thus, to take just one example, when the First Crusade army captured Antioch in 1098, several crusade chroniclers maintained that the counter siege of the city led by the Turkish leader Kerbogha resulted from the crusaders' illicit relations with 'unlawful women'.⁴⁶³

Perhaps because of the threat of rape, death was sometimes portrayed by chroniclers as preferable to captivity. Thus Joinville, writing long after his return from the Seventh Crusade, was careful to explain how Queen Marguerite, while in Damietta, was so distraught upon learning her husband, Louis IX, had been captured that she secretly asked an old knight who guarded her to 'take off my head before they can also take me' if the Saracens took the city.⁴⁶⁴ In the event, although the knight agreed to do so, Marguerite survived and was not captured, however the implication of this scene is clearly that Marguerite would have preferred death to captivity, while the emphasis Joinville placed on the age of the knight may have served to deflect any

⁴⁶¹ AA, pp. 126-29.

⁴⁶² Hodgson, *Women, Crusading and the Holy Land*, pp. 96-97. See also Friedman, 'Captivity and Ransom', p. 134, and *Encounter Between Enemies*, p. 183.

⁴⁶³ FC, p. 101; *Gesta Francorum*, pp. 57-58; Raymond of Aguilers, *Historia Francorum*, in *The First Crusade*, ed. Krey, pp. 179-80. See also Elizabeth Siberry, *Criticism of Crusading 1095-1274* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), pp. 44-46, 90-91, 102-03; and Porges, 'Non-combatants on the First Crusade', pp. 13-15 for more on women as a source of perceived temptation and disruption while on crusade.

⁴⁶⁴ Joinville, 'Life of Saint Louis', pp. 262-63.

(sexual) suspicion about his close presence to the queen. This story has parallels with two incidents described by Usāmah Ibn-Munqidh. In the first he praised the honour of his mother for being prepared to throw his sister off the balcony when enemy forces were attacking their home, so that she could not be taken captive.⁴⁶⁵ A second anecdote described how a certain man, Abu'l-Jaysh, became so obsessed with the fact that the Franks had taken his daughter Rafful captive that he did not rest until he learnt that she had drowned herself to escape her captor.⁴⁶⁶ Whether or not these stories were true, they illustrate that death was seen as preferable to captivity for Muslim women as much as it was for Christian women like Marguerite.

Women and Sexual Violence

Another ever-present threat that women in the path of war faced was sexual violence, or rape. Sexual violence often went hand-in-hand with the other forms of suffering – such as death and captivity – endured by women as a result of war, because enemy women were often viewed as objects rather than as individuals who the victor had every right to abuse as a sign of their victory.⁴⁶⁷ Furthermore, descriptions of sexual violence were often used by chroniclers to cast the enemy in bad light and arouse pity in their audience for the suffering of their own women.⁴⁶⁸ Albert of Aachen, for instance, claimed that Christian women captured by Turkish forces after the battle of Mersivan during the Crusade of 1101 were ‘plundered...like dumb animals’ and sent into ‘perpetual exile’ or slavery. He continues:

Ah, how much grief, how many miseries could be seen there when such very delicate and noble women were seized as plunder and carried off by the wicked and dreadful men...Truly there was no small grief in that place, no little dread seized the delicate women...left...wretched and desolate in the hands of murderers...Some were violated in turn by unlawful and wicked coupling, and after great persecution were

⁴⁶⁵ Usāmah, *Arab-Syrian Gentleman*, p. 154.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 179.

⁴⁶⁷ Corinne Saunders, ‘Sexual Violence in Wars – The Middle Ages’, in *Transcultural Wars from the Middle Ages to the 21st Century*, ed. Kortüm, p. 151; Lev, ‘Prisoners of War’, p. 18.

⁴⁶⁸ Hodgson, *Women, Crusading and the Holy Land*, p. 96; Bradbury, *The Medieval Siege*, p. 322; Saunders, ‘Women and Warfare’, p. 193.

beheaded; others who pleased the Turks' eyes by their cheerful appearance and handsome looks were sent, as we have said, into barbarous lands.⁴⁶⁹

The emphasis Albert placed upon the 'wicked and dreadful' behaviour of the victorious Turkish army, whom he lambastes as 'murderers' for the way in which they raped and killed defenceless women, creates an image of the Turks as callous and barbaric in their treatment of captured women, made even worse by a description of the 'ugly and filthy' appearance of the Turks. Moreover, his assertion that the Turks only took captive good looking women (a claim he made elsewhere as well)⁴⁷⁰ suggests these women may have been used for sexual purposes while enslaved.⁴⁷¹ A similar story in Albert's narrative about a woman who was captured in a surprise Turkish attack while playing dice with a clergyman, then raped as a result of the Turks' 'excessive lust', before being finally killed,⁴⁷² again highlights the Muslims' overt focus on sexually assaulting Christian women, but can also be seen as a warning against women who consorted with clergy inappropriately while on pilgrimage to the Holy Land.⁴⁷³

Albert was not the only chronicler whose descriptions of sexual violence against women were influenced by certain ideals. Following the battle of Antioch in 1098, Fulcher of Chartres was careful to explain that even though the victorious Christian army found women in the abandoned camp of the Turkish army and subsequently had them killed by impaling lances into their bellies, the crusaders 'did them no evil'.⁴⁷⁴ Whether the reference to the crusaders impaling the women's bellies was meant to imply that the women were raped but not killed is debateable, but Fulcher's assertion that the crusaders did the women 'no evil', it has been argued, suggests he was actually trying to portray the crusaders as sexually pure by stressing that they killed the captured women without raping them first.⁴⁷⁵ In stark contrast, the Muslim historian and poet 'Imād al-Dīn, writing at the time of the Third Crusade,

⁴⁶⁹ AA, pp. 612-13.

⁴⁷⁰ 'Young girls and nuns' following Kilij's Arslan's defeat of the Peasant Crusade army in 1096 and the wife of Folbert of Bouillon, after he was killed in a Turkish raid, were both said to have been spared because of their looks (Ibid, pp. 42-43, 344-45).

⁴⁷¹ Hodgson, *Women, Crusading and the Holy Land*, p. 98.

⁴⁷² AA, pp. 208-11.

⁴⁷³ Brundage, 'Prostitution', p. 59; Hodgson, *Women, Crusading and the Holy Land*, p. 152.

⁴⁷⁴ FC, p. 106.

⁴⁷⁵ Friedman, 'Captivity and Ransom', p. 128, and *Encounter Between Enemies*, p. 171; Hodgson, *Women, Crusading and the Holy Land*, p. 139.

boasted in flowery rhetoric about the rape of captured Christian women after Saladin's recapture of Jerusalem in 1187:

How many well-guarded women were profaned, how many queens were ruled, and nubile girls married, and noble women given away, and miserly women forced to yield themselves, and women who had been kept hidden stripped of their modesty, and serious women made ridiculous, and women kept in private now set in public, and free women occupied, and precious ones used for hard work, and pretty things put to the test, and virgins dishonoured and proud women deflowered, and lovely women prostrated, and untamed ones tamed, and happy ones made to weep!⁴⁷⁶

In this case, 'Imād al-Dīn's light-hearted, if somewhat verbose, description of rape and the emphasis he placed on the fact that this happened to Christian women of all ages and all ranks in society, helped him illustrate the totality of the Muslim victory and the control which they now wielded over the Christians in the holy city. It is also possible that he used this rape scene as a way of contrasting the debasement of Christian women with the Muslim 'purification' of Jerusalem from the Christian architectural influences the city had accumulated since 1099 – imagery which many Muslim sources describing Jerusalem's recapture employed.⁴⁷⁷

Aside from religious differences, the depiction of sexual violence by chroniclers was also influenced by notions of chivalric behaviour. Such an influence is evident in the work of Jean Froissart, who wrote for an aristocratic audience and who has long been considered one of the greatest chroniclers of the Hundred Years War.⁴⁷⁸ When the English attacked the French at Caen in 1346 Froissart claimed that the English commander, Sir Thomas Holland, rode into the town before it was captured and 'saved the lives of ladies, damosels, and cloisterers [nuns] from defoiling, for the soldiers were without mercy'.⁴⁷⁹ Then, once the town was taken, another knight fighting for the English, Sir Godfrey of Harecourt, commanded his men not to kill anyone or 'violate any women'.⁴⁸⁰ In contrast, Froissart asserted that the foreign captains who were supposed to enforce the accord reached between the

⁴⁷⁶ 'Imād al-Dīn in *Arab Historians*, p. 163.

⁴⁷⁷ For the Muslim concept of purification in the recapture of Jerusalem see Hillenbrand, *Islamic Perspectives*, pp. 298-301.

⁴⁷⁸ Anatonía Gransden, *Historical Writing in England II: c. 1307 to the Early Sixteenth Century* (London; New York, NY.: Routledge, 1996), p. 89; Given-Wilson, *Chronicles*, pp. 99-100.

⁴⁷⁹ Froissart, *Chronicles*, p. 97.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 97.

English and French (in 1360) ‘defoiled many a damosel’,⁴⁸¹ and also that roving bands of mercenaries terrorised the French countryside ‘without any cause...and violated and defoiled women, old and young, without pity, and slew men, women and children without mercy’.⁴⁸² In these scenes Froissart was attempting to denigrate the morals of the French as well as the roving mercenaries by contrasting their violent behaviour with the honourable and chivalric behaviour of the English,⁴⁸³ even though in reality the English as well as the French were responsible for raping women during the course of the Hundred Years War.⁴⁸⁴ What his account and those of the crusade chroniclers examined above do suggest, however, is that rape was a violent and constant reality of war for medieval women.

Taken together, therefore, it is clear that gender was no protection for women against the hostility of an enemy in times of war. On the contrary, women were often deliberately targeted by the enemy even though, as discussed in chapter three, they usually played little role in physically fighting the enemy on the battlefield. Religious intolerance, the desire for revenge or, in the case of Anglo-Scottish and *chevauchée* warfare, a broader strategy of terror could all play a part in determining whether or not women were killed, enslaved, raped or left destitute on a broad scale. That enemy women were viewed in sexual terms, moreover, is clear from the descriptions of rape provided by chroniclers who either gloried in the power their side had over the enemy’s women, as in the case of ‘Imād al-Dīn, or who used rape scenes as a means to disparage the morality of the enemy. Consequently, because women were often portrayed as sexual objects, female captives were often viewed as victims of sexual assault and could be held accountable for it, even if rape were only suspected and in spite of the fact that some captive women were used for non-sexual purposes such as forced labour or as hostages. This fear of sexual incontinence explains why some authors depicted women in their narratives preferring death to captivity, since that helped to remove any suggestion that the women in question had been tainted or

⁴⁸¹ Ibid, p. 142.

⁴⁸² Ibid, p. 143. The English monk Henry Knighton recounted a similar example of unchivalric behaviour when French raiders at Winchelsea supposedly abducted nine women from the town ‘and violated them in a manner horrible to relate’: see Henry Knighton, *Knighton’s Chronicle, 1337-1396*, ed. and trans. G.H. Martin (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), p. 175.

⁴⁸³ Saunders, ‘Sexual Violence in Wars’, p. 153, and ‘Women and Warfare’, p. 192.

⁴⁸⁴ Gilbert, ‘Rosie the Riveter’, pp. 345-46. See Wright, *Knights and Peasants*, p. 73 for the regularity with which the rape of women during the Hundred Years War is mentioned by French archival sources.

tempted by unchaste sexual activity. Yet however much commentators may have decried the brutal treatment of women, or used reports of it to demonise the enemy, the very nature of medieval war itself demanded victory by any means, whether or not that meant using *chevauchées*, rape, slaughter, or taking hostages. Inevitably women were targeted in this pursuit of victory and thus their experiences as victims were as much a part of medieval military history as those of women who led or supported military activity.

Conclusion

Women's importance to wars during the High to Late Middle Ages was significant. Even a casual perusal of the many sources consulted by this work indicates that although the sphere of war at that time was clearly one dominated by men, women were involved in many conflicts throughout this period. Time and again, we find examples of women – noble and non-noble alike – engaged in or affected by military activities, whether willingly or not. What is particularly striking is the disparity that seems to have existed between theory and reality, between what legal, philosophical, and political tracts said of women's military potential and the *actual* role medieval women played in military affairs.

Yet considering the belief systems of the time this disparity is hardly surprising. Theories of human nature and societal order had their basis in classical and biblical thought that was highly resistant to the concept of female autonomy. The suspicions harboured by classical and Patristic authors regarding the need to exclude women from public roles in society were reflected in military treatises that rarely discussed the role women might play in warfare. While there were some writers – notably Christine de Pisan – who advanced arguments in support of women's military authority, most of the theorists who did engage the issue of female militancy predominantly – and predictably – took their cue from centuries of male-biased and generally misogynistic thought. Essentially, they concluded that women's emotional, spiritual, and mental frailty, not to mention their obvious physical weakness, precluded women from performing any active military role or from comprehending issues of military significance. Church-driven attempts to prevent women from the violence of war were likewise reflective of the idea that women should not be involved with military affairs. In short, the prevailing attitude towards women and their usefulness in times of war was predominantly one of suspicion and denial.

Careful evaluation of the roles and functions which women actually performed, however, has revealed that despite all the hostility displayed by contemporary male writers, women throughout England, France, and the Holy Land were frequently involved with military events in a range of different ways. Military command was one of the most immediately visible wartime roles performed by medieval noblewomen – some of whom, such as Matilda of Tuscany, Jeanne de

Montfort, and Nichola de la Haye, were highly effective as commanders. Their continued success disproved theoretical arguments, notably those expressed in the works of Giles of Rome and Ptolemy of Lucca, which denied that women could ever even learn about war or military affairs. Further discrediting such ideas of female incompetence is the fact that, in many defensive and diplomatic situations, men relied upon women to take command or relay information. In other words, abstract theories about women's inherent unsuitability for war did not prevent men from placing responsibility upon women in military situations.

Beyond the limited number of medieval female military leaders, of course, we have the countless thousands of other women from all levels of society who supported – and were in turn affected by – military activity, both on the 'home front' and while on campaign. Again, it is evident that in certain circumstances men recognised that women could make a useful contribution to the war effort. The necessity of financing and generating support for a new crusade, for instance, is what drove the reforms of Pope Innocent III which made it easier for women to participate in the crusade movement. Likewise, urgent demands for manpower sometimes forced women to take up arms and serve as armed guards, as happened at Damietta on the Fifth Crusade, or help physically fend off attackers, as happened at the sieges of Toulouse, Hennebont, and Acre. In such cases the more active military roles assumed by these women were not indicative of any growing belief that women should be involved in military affairs, but were rather situational responses to particularly desperate circumstances. Even then, the actions of women in war rarely warranted merit or praise in the chronicles of the day, and when they were commended, militant women were ascribed masculine qualities associated with military success. Fighting in battle was, after all, still an activity in which women were certainly not expected to participate. Thus, since accounts of female warriors could have been used to criticise an enemy, it is difficult to ascertain whether or not some women did actually dress in armour and fight in combat.

Similarly, the portrayal of women adversely affected by war was coloured by medieval writers' own religious and class biases, as is illustrated through the contrasts drawn by medieval writers between the noble actions of fighting men from their own societies toward women and the allegedly evil actions performed on women by the enemy. But even if descriptions of women suffering were embellished, there can be no doubt that women as a group were frequently victimised by men for different

reasons at different times in the course of war. And while in theory, according to the Church, women should have been protected from the violence of war, in reality they were often deliberately targeted and made to suffer, whether sexually, as prisoners, or with their lives and livelihood. Wars were not, of course, fought simply to victimise women (although it has been suggested that perhaps sexual violence fuelled killing in war),⁴⁸⁵ but the suffering women endured cannot be dissociated from the military narrative and the broader effects of military conflict on High and Late medieval society.

We might ask then, if women were so important to the whole process of war, why is it that modern historical scholarship has failed to acknowledge the full extent of women's military involvement in the High to Late Middle Ages? I would suggest the answer has to do with the way historians have understood women to be 'involved' in war at that time. In the past they appear to have limited their search to only the most obvious examples of female military activity, such as women who were physically involved in battle or women who took command as military leaders. Yet in bringing these women and their experiences to light, historians have missed the less visible but nonetheless important actions of women who supported the men in other ways both at home and on campaign. On the other hand, some of the histories outlined in the introduction have emphasised how women suffered as victims of war, but this emphasis hides the fact that women often had an active wartime function. In short, historians have not given sufficient study to the wider context of women's military experiences, and this oversight has prevented them from appreciating the full extent of women's involvement in, and importance to, the waging of war in this period.

What this thesis has done is redress the lack of a broader study about medieval women's involvement in warfare. It has shown that despite theories and laws which excluded women from war, women could and did make effective military leaders, fulfil important support roles, and become the victims of wartime aggression and violence. The importance of women's roles may have been noted rarely in contemporary writings and intellectual debates, but this lack of recognition does not take away from the fact that women in Western European society were integral to the planning, execution, and impact of war. To be sure, medieval women still played a

⁴⁸⁵ Saunders, 'Sexual Violence in Wars', p. 151.

subordinate role in military and public life when compared to men. We cannot, however, let this social circumstance or certain abstract theological and philosophical arguments (elements of which still inform the ongoing debate about women's integration into modern armies)⁴⁸⁶ blind us from recognising the many, varied, and sometimes subtle ways that women helped shape war in the High to Late Middle Ages. Historians need to adopt a wider understanding of women's place in the military history of this period and the dynamic ways in which women prepared, supported, fought, and were affected throughout the whole process of warfare.

One area that merits further research is women's financial contributions to medieval warfare, particularly in Western Europe proper. To date, there appear to be no studies which specifically address these contributions, but such a study could reveal much about the importance of the broader economic activity of women in making localised warfare in Western Europe proper a reality. As noted in the introduction, there is also scope to expand the boundaries of this thesis beyond England, France, and the Holy Land in order to consider the wartime roles of women from medieval Spain, Italy, and the Western Roman Empire. A more open approach to the study of women and their importance to military affairs in each of these regions may help us to understand the extent to which varying political and economic structures influenced the military role and function of women. Even without these further studies, however, it is certain that for women in medieval Western European society, war was never 'an entirely masculine activity' – on the contrary, women played a crucial role in shaping medieval military history both on and off the battlefield.

⁴⁸⁶ Martin Van Crevald, *Men, Women and War: Do Women Belong on the Front Line?* (London: Cassell & Co., 2001), pp. 152-54 for instance, points to studies that show 'only the upper five percent of women are as strong as the medial male' and that therefore women are physically unsuited for fighting in war and would be a disadvantage to men if they fought alongside them. Similarly, Jeff M. Tuten, 'The Argument against Female Combatants', in *Female Soldiers—Combatants or Noncombatants? Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Nancy L. Goldman (Westport, CT.: Greenwood, 1982), pp. 237-65 believes that throughout history women never had any active military role and were shown to be 'passive' in nature. Thus he feels women must continue to remain out of all combat roles and areas of conflict in general. Others, however, contend that women have repeatedly proven themselves capable of handling the physical, emotional, and mental requirements for fighting in war: see, for instance, the arguments in Goldstein, *War and Gender*, p. 127; and Lorry M. Fenner, 'Moving Targets: Women's Roles in the U.S. Military in the 21st Century', in *Women in Combat: Civic Duty or Military Liability?*, Lorry M. Fenner and Marie E. deYoung (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2001), pp. 3-105.

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