

“IN MULIERE EXHIBEAS VIRUM”:  
WOMEN, POWER AND AUTHORITY IN EARLY TWELFTH-CENTURY  
ANGLO-NORMAN CHRONICLES

A Master’s Thesis

by

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July 2007

*To my family*

“IN MULIERE EXHIBEAS VIRUM”:  
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ANGLO-NORMAN CHRONICLES

The Institute of Economics and Social Sciences  
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by

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In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
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in

THE DEPARTMENT OF  
HISTORY  
BİLKENT UNIVERSITY  
ANKARA

July 2007

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in History.

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## **ABSTRACT**

**“IN MULIERE EXHIBEAS VIRUM”:  
WOMEN, POWER AND AUTHORITY IN EARLY TWELFTH-CENTURY  
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This thesis analyses the relationship of women with power and authority within the context of the evidence provided by early twelfth-century Anglo-Norman chronicles between 1095 and 1154. It discusses the basic factors that affected the chroniclers' approaches to royal and noble women and examines the perception of female power and authority in Anglo-Norman society together with a close assessment of certain developments in society. In the framework of these, it also evaluates the case of Empress Matilda, the first woman to deserve the right to gain the throne in English history. This study presents us with the conclusion that, contrary to the contemporary assumptions that emphasize a change for the worse for the position of high-ranking women, the chroniclers of early twelfth-century did not mention about such a weakening or decrease in female power and authority. The evidence offered by the chronicle sources reveals that the chroniclers recognized the power and authority exercised by the high-ranking women in politics and government of Anglo-Norman realm. They also encouraged those women who took active roles in society by praising them in masculine terms.

**Keywords:** Anglo-Norman Women, Twelfth-century Chronicles, Female Power, Empress Matilda.

## ÖZET

“KADIN OLARAK İÇİNDEKİ ERKEĞİ ORTAYA ÇIKAR”:  
ERKEN ON İKİNCİ YÜZYIL ANGLO-NORMAN KRONİKLERİNDE

KADIN, GÜÇ VE OTORİTE

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Bu tez 1095 ve 1154 yılları arasında yazılmış erken on ikinci yüzyıl Anglo-Norman kroniklerinin sunduğu kanıtlar bağlamında kadının güç ve otorite ile ilişkisini analiz etmektedir. Kronik yazarlarının soylu kadınlara yaklaşımını etkileyen temel faktörleri tartışmakta ve Anglo-Norman toplumundaki bazı değişimler çerçevesinde kadının kamu alanındaki gücü ve otoritesinin algılanışını incelemektedir. Bu analizler çerçevesinde de İngiliz tarihinde tahta çıkma hakkına layık görülen ilk kadın olan İmparatoriçe Matilda’nın durumunu değerlendirmektedir. Bu çalışmanın bize sunduğu sonuç; erken on ikinci yüzyılda yüksek statülü kadınların durumunun daha kötüye gittiğini vurgulayan günümüz varsayımlarının aksine, erken on ikinci yüzyıl kronik yazarları kaynaklarında kadınların toplumdaki gücü ve otoritesiyle ilgili herhangi bir azalmadan bahsetmemiştir. Kroniklerin ortaya koyduğu kanıtlar göstermektedir ki kronik yazarları yüksek statülü kadınların Anglo-Norman politikası ve yönetiminde uyguladıkları güç ve otoriteyi takdir etmişlerdir. Üstelik bu yazarlar toplumda aktif rol alan kadınları erkeklere özgü terimlerle överek cesaretlendirmişlerdir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Anglo-Norman Kadınları, On İkinci Yüzyıl Kronikleri, Kadın Gücü, İmparatoriçe Matilda.

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## CHAPTER I

### The Chroniclers and Their Women

While exploring women in medieval sources, it is important to bear in mind that the images of women reflected through writings were largely produced by men and, amongst them, mostly by ecclesiastics. These men, to a great extent, decided what and who should be recorded and preserved. They wrote stories and stated opinions about women, made rules for how women should behave and decided what was to happen when a woman made a mistake. Therefore, in these sources, we are dealing, not with the real women, but the women as seen through the eyes of male clerics. As, in part, products of men's imagination the depictions of the women represent men's attitudes and beliefs.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, their profession as monks or priests to a certain extent affected the discourse of these writers towards women. Still, this does not mean that the portrayal of women in medieval sources was completely or even largely shaped by a simple, severe misogynistic attitude adopted by the ecclesiastical writers as is sometimes assumed.<sup>2</sup>

One type of medieval source that can be examined in the light of this argument is the chronicles — those written in the Anglo-Norman realm between 1095 and 1154. This period in England saw a great boom in the production of

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\* The quotation in the title of the thesis "In muliere exhibeas virum" was written by Bernard of Clairvaux in one of his letters (Ep. 354) to Queen Melisende. It means "show the man in the woman." Bernard gave this advice when Melisende took over the rule of Kingdom of Jerusalem.

<sup>1</sup> Louise Mirrer, "Women's Representation in Male-Authoring Works of the Middle Ages," in *Women in Medieval Western European Culture*, ed. by Linda Mitchell (London: Garland, 1999), pp. 316-317.

<sup>2</sup> Howard Bloch, "Medieval Misogyny," *Representations*, No. 20, Special Issue: Misogyny, Misandry and Misanthropy (1987): 1-2.

chronicles and histories. Although in literal terms “chronicle” refers to a chronological record of events, Latin chronicles of early twelfth-century England and Normandy did more than this. They observed chronology, but were not limited to it; on the contrary, they involved opinions and interpretations.<sup>3</sup> In that sense they are valuable in revealing the social, political and cultural context of the period they were written. Moreover, the analysis of women in these chronicles will be helpful in exploring the approach to women by the medieval male mentality — how it viewed women and how it interpreted their actions in society. Before such an analysis, it will be useful to give a brief introduction to these sources.

The first historian of this period is Eadmer, monk of Canterbury. He was an Englishman. It is not exactly known when he was born. However, it has been suggested that it was between 1063 and 1065.<sup>4</sup> In his chronicle *Historia Novorum in Anglia*, which was centred around the figure of his own master Anselm, Eadmer talked about Anselm’s life, of his conflicts with the successive kings, and his efforts for the liberty of the church.<sup>5</sup> Eadmer did not mention his own position, but it is most likely that he became Anselm’s chaplain and secretary when in 1093 Anselm became Archbishop of Canterbury in succession to Lanfranc. Thus from 1093 until Anselm’s death in 1109, Eadmer was always by the archbishop’s side. He travelled with him, visited the royal court with him and participated in papal councils. Thus, through Anselm, he saw everything and met everyone.<sup>6</sup> He wrote his chronicle between 1095 and 1123. Although his chronicle has a limited outlook, in that it turns around the activities of Anselm, it is still valuable in revealing the political atmosphere of the

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<sup>3</sup> Antonia Gransden, “The Chronicles of medieval England and Scotland: Part I,” *Journal of Medieval History*, Vol. 16, no. 2 (1990): 134-139.

<sup>4</sup> Eadmer, *History of Recent Events in England*, trans. by Geoffrey Bosanquet and intro. by R. W. Southern (London: Cresset Press, 1964), p. ix.

<sup>5</sup> Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England c. 500 to c. 1307* (London: Routledge, 1974), pp. 136-137.

<sup>6</sup> Eadmer, *History of Recent Events*, p. x.

period. For this reason, it was extensively used by later chroniclers such as those at Worcester and Durham, and by William of Malmesbury.<sup>7</sup>

Another chronicle, the *Chronicon ex Chronicis* is a world history extending from the beginning of mankind to 1140. Its focus from 450 onwards is on English history. It was compiled at Worcester and it was generally attributed to the monk Florence. But this does not reflect reality, because the chronicle extends to 1140, beyond the year of Florence's death in 1118 and there seems no discontinuation in style or approach after 1118.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Orderic Vitalis, on his visit to Worcester not later than 1124, described a chronicle clearly identical with the compilation we have, which a monk named John was writing. On his visit to Worcester, Orderic Vitalis said that John was continuing the world chronicle of Marianus Scotus on the orders of Bishop Wulfstan of Worcester, who died in 1095.<sup>9</sup> Thus the enterprise apparently started with Wulfstan's orders and its compilation seems to have extended from 1095 to 1143.

John of Worcester, like Eadmer at Canterbury, was of English parentage.<sup>10</sup> His chief sources up to the early twelfth century are the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and Bede, though there are other unidentified sources. In fact there are additional interpolations to his chronicle. Among them the only added one was a Gloucester chronicle. It added the annals in the Worcester chronicle from 1131 to 1140.<sup>11</sup> However for the early years the Gloucester chronicle is mostly repetitive of the Worcester chronicle. It added essential information particularly in 1138 and 1139.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, p. 142.

<sup>8</sup> *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, ed. by Darlington and McGurk and trans. by Bray and McGurk, vol. II (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), pp. xvii-xviii.

<sup>9</sup> *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, p. xviii.

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth van Houts, "Historical Writing," in *A Companion to the Anglo-Norman World*, ed. by Christopher Harper-Bill and E. Van Houts (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2003), p. 113.

<sup>11</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing*, p. 148.

<sup>12</sup> *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, ed. and trans. by McGurk, vol. III (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998) p. xlv.

The Gloucester writer not only supplemented passages about Gloucester, but also dealt with general political events and continued the chronicle at least to 1141 or possibly later.<sup>13</sup> Up to 1119, the chronicle of John of Worcester became the main source for Simeon of Durham's *Historia Regum*.<sup>14</sup>

One of the notable chroniclers of the period, William, a monk at the abbey of Malmesbury, set out to narrate the history of the English people and kingdom from a broader perspective and with a much greater historical knowledge than Eadmer's. William was born in the early 1090s "of mixed Norman and Anglo-Saxon parentage."<sup>15</sup> William realized that no proper history of his people had been written in the period between Bede and Eadmer. Thus he endeavoured to fill this gap using the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and a variety of other sources. Around the year 1125, he began to compose the *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, detailing events surrounding the succession of English kings from the Anglo-Saxon invasions until 1120. He conceived his chronicle at the request of Henry I's queen, Matilda, daughter of King Malcolm and Queen Margaret of Scotland. After Queen Matilda's death, the work was presented to her daughter, Empress Matilda. It was completed about 1135.

In the last years of his life, William set out to write the events of his own period — an account of the troubled succession to Henry I in *Historia Novella*. This work finishes abruptly at the end of the year 1142, presumably because William died or became too ill to continue. William of Malmesbury dedicated several parts of his works to Robert, earl of Gloucester, an illegitimate son of Henry I. He was "a distinguished nobleman" and "a promoter of learning" in that period.<sup>16</sup> In both of his works William insistently emphasizes the historian's duty to record the truth about

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<sup>13</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing*, p. 148.

<sup>14</sup> *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, vol. II, p. lxxi.

<sup>15</sup> Hugh Farmer, "William of Malmesbury's Life and Works," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 13 (1962): 39.

<sup>16</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, p. 183.

important events and people, to present it in an artistic way, to edify and to amuse his audience.<sup>17</sup> For instance in his prologue to Book II he explains that his aim is to admonish his readers to pursue good and reject evil through examples drawn from history.<sup>18</sup>

The *Historia Regum*, a history of England from the early seventh century until 1129, is generally attributed to Simeon of Durham. Still, there are questions about who wrote the *Historia*. It is a collection from various historical sources including Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum*, John of Worcester's *Chronicon ex Chronicis* and Eadmer's *Historia Novorum*. As until 1119 the Worcester chronicle is the *Historia Regum*'s main source, it can be said that the writing of *Historia Regum* could not have begun before 1095 which was the compilation date for the Worcester chronicle. In the *Historia Regum* only the information from 1119 to 1129 was thought to be original as it was recorded close to the events.<sup>19</sup> The abrupt end of the chronicle in 1129 shows that Simeon would have continued it, but could not, possibly because he died. In fact according to Gransden, the *Historia Regum* did not preserve its originality as Simeon left it, but was revised later between 1161 and 1175 by John at Hexham.<sup>20</sup>

Orderic Vitalis's *Historia Ecclesiastica* is one of the most valuable works of the twelfth century. It gives an insight into medieval society, providing vivid details and portraits of the lives and characters of men and women, from kings and queens, lords and bishops, to simple knights and soldiers.<sup>21</sup> Orderic was born in 1075. His father was a Norman and his mother was an Englishwoman. He became a monk of St

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<sup>17</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, p. 168.

<sup>18</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ed. and trans. by R. A. B. Mynors, vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998) p. 151.

<sup>19</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing*, p. 149.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, vol. I, pp. 1-2.

Evroulx, which was founded by two great families, the Giroie and the Grandmesnil. In his chronicle the wars and conflicts in which these two families were involved to their cost formed an important part of the background to his narrative. In general Orderic's work provided a record of events that was full of moral examples. He wrote not only for the monks but also for the laymen of his period. His work is composed of thirteen books, which were written between 1114 and 1141. However he did not write his books chronologically, but rather at various times covering various periods and subjects. In his first two books Orderic gives a chronological sketch, which extended from the birth of Christ to the lives of the Apostles and the sequence of popes. In others he dealt with the history of Normandy to the mid-eleventh century, the Conquest of England and the reigns of William the Conqueror, William Rufus and Henry I in England and Normandy.<sup>22</sup> While mentioning ecclesiastical and political affairs in Normandy and England, he also gives a fair amount of space to royal and noble women.

The *Gesta Stephani* is a contemporary history written during the lifetime of King Stephen who reigned in England between 1135 and 1154. It is one of the most comprehensive and detailed accounts of the period. The identity of the author of the *Gesta Stephani* is unclear. Davis suggests that he was Robert Bishop of Bath as all his qualities suit the author. He was a bishop, situated at Bath, and a close friend of Henry of Blois, and moreover changed sides at the same date as the author.<sup>23</sup> It is still debatable how convincing Davis's argument for this authorship is. According to Gransden it was probably written by a secular clerk, because it showed none of the characteristics of a monastic writer such as specific concern with his religious house or his order. However, Gransden argues that it is unlikely that the author was a close

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<sup>22</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, p. 152.

<sup>23</sup> R.H.C. Davis, "The Authorship of *Gesta Stephani*," *English Historical Review*, vol. 77, no. 303 (1962): 209-232.

friend of Stephen's brother, Henry of Blois, bishop of Winchester as he does "not praise Henry without reserve" and also it is unlikely that he was a clerk in Stephen's household, as he does not give certain details about Stephen such as his illness in 1142.<sup>24</sup>

This work was initially intended to glorify and promote the reign of Stephen. For him, King Stephen appears as the defender of the kingdom intent on reintroducing "peace and justice in place of lawlessness and disorder."<sup>25</sup> The author divided his work into two books: in Book I he tells how Stephen sinned against God and thus was punished by being defeated and captured at Lincoln in 1141; in Book II according to Potter he was to show repentance and its reward. However, the developments of that time did not allow this to happen and the author attempted to revise the work when the bitter outcome of the reign was known.<sup>26</sup> The edificatory tone was dominant also in the *Gesta Stephani*. References to the Bible frequently reinforce its moral purpose.

Another chronicler is Richard who was a canon and then prior of Hexham from 1141 to sometime between 1155 and 1167.<sup>27</sup> His history, *De Gestis Regis Stephani et De Bello Standardii* is divided into two parts: first there is a summary of Henry I's achievements, followed by an account of events in chronological order to 1135. The second section of the chronicle to 1139 was written fairly soon after the events described. Thus his chronicle covers the years from 1135 to 1139. His main concern was to deal with the sufferings of Hexham and of the Northumbrian people from the destruction caused by the Scots.<sup>28</sup> He is concerned with Anglo-Scottish relations — the relations between King Stephen and King David. He was not

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<sup>24</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, p. 189.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

<sup>26</sup> *Gesta Stephani*, ed. and trans. by K. R. Potter (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), p. xix.

<sup>27</sup> R.H.C. Davis, *King Stephen* (London: Longman, 1990), p. 148.

<sup>28</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, p. 217.

patronized by a layman or lay woman whom he wished to praise. His purpose was to edify and thus he gave quotations from the Bible. He regarded the Scots' defeat and massacre at the Battle of Standard as God's vengeance for their sins.<sup>29</sup>

Our last monastic chronicler is Aelred of Rievaulx who was born in 1110 during the reign of Henry I. In 1132 he entered the Cistercian monastery of Rievaulx. Aelred wrote some historical works, among them, the *Genealogia Regum Anglorum* (1153-54) and the *De Bello Standardii Tempore Stephani Regis* (1153-1154) are the most important ones. Both of these works are mainly concerned with the events in Scotland and the North of England. Aelred was influenced by the Bible, the Fathers of the Church, classical writers such as Cicero, and medieval historians such as Bede.<sup>30</sup> He wrote the *De Bello Standardii* to offer advice to King Stephen. It is full of praise for the Norman leaders fighting in 1138 for Stephen against the Scots who fought with David I in support of Matilda and in their own interests.

Although Aelred had close links to the Scottish court, his work contains many references which support Stephen's rightful kingship, while criticizing David's struggle for Matilda's cause. His *Genealogia Regum Anglorum* is concerned with the political world of Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman England. As during this time Stephen and Henry II reached an agreement about the succession, Aelred reshaped his political and historical interests in a new direction and he presented Henry II with "a series of royal models in the Anglo-Saxon line for emulation."<sup>31</sup> It aims to explore the past as a guide for the present and as an assurance for the future. Throughout the work, the main idea was that the reign of Henry II was seen as a continuation of the rule of kings in the West Saxon line rather than as a break with the past. Thus he

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx, *Aelred of Rievaulx: The Historical Works*, trans. by J. P. Freeland and ed. with an introduction by Marsha Dutton (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2005), pp. 8-9.

<sup>31</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx, *Aelred of Rievaulx: The Historical Works*, p. 16.



creates “a new myth of royal descent that integrates the Angevin princes into Anglo-Saxon history.”<sup>32</sup>

In this period history writing was not restricted to monks; secular clerks too began to write histories. One of these is Geoffrey of Monmouth. Around 1136-1139, Geoffrey, a clerk and later bishop of St Asaph, composed the *Historia Regum Britanniae*. In this work the country’s historical tradition is traced back even further than it had been by William of Malmesbury and other chroniclers, and placed in an altogether different context. It was intended to be a history of the rulers of Britain from the foundation of the British race by Brutus to Cadwallader in the seventh century A.D. when the sovereignty of the Britons was eclipsed.<sup>33</sup>

The *Historia Regum Britanniae* became very popular largely because Geoffrey supplied his readers with something entirely new, a more or less credible continuous history of early Britain, of which before him there had been only fragments. At the beginning of his book, he acknowledged his debt to Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford, who had provided him with a very ancient book written in the British language which related the actions of the British kings. Since no evidence for the existence of Walter’s old book has come to light, one may credit Geoffrey’s colourful *Historia* to a rich imagination supplemented by genealogical material, Welsh legends, Latin literature and accounts by earlier writers like Gildas, Bede and the author of the pseudo-Nennian *Historia Brittonum*.<sup>34</sup> Geoffrey transformed all these into a unified and seemingly authoritative history of the British people from their origins to the seventh century A.D.

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>33</sup> J.S.P. Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain* (New York: Gordian Press, 1974), p. 439.

<sup>34</sup> *The Historia Regum Britanniae of Geoffrey of Monmouth I: Bern MS 568*, ed. Neil Wright (Cambridge: D. S Brewer, 1985), p. 18.

During this period, there was an increasing influence of romance literature and with Geoffrey's work it gained more popularity.<sup>35</sup> Although Geoffrey's work was in Latin, romance was influential in the tone of it. There were dramatic descriptions of battle scenes, miracles, legends and amazing anecdotes, adding an amusing aspect to his history.<sup>36</sup> He seems to have used fun, fiction and fact not only for the sake of literary effect but also to fulfil the expectations and demands of his contemporary audience. Geoffrey dedicated his work to various people, including Robert, earl of Gloucester, who was also to be, again as already mentioned, the dedicatee of William of Malmesbury's *Historia Novella*. Earl Robert's political position may have affected to a certain extent Geoffrey's chronicle.

Apart from Earl Robert, Geoffrey was also patronized by Alexander, bishop of Lincoln. Alexander's political position is somewhat complicated. Like his uncle Roger, bishop of Salisbury, Alexander was a supporter of King Stephen between 1135 and 1139; however in 1139 he was arrested for no stated reason and was deprived of his wealth. From this time onwards he became a partisan of Matilda. In fact it is not clear when Geoffrey dedicated his work to Alexander. It has been argued that another dedicatee of the *Historia Regum Britanniae* was probably King Stephen.<sup>37</sup> Brooke suggests that early copies of the work were dedicated to him.<sup>38</sup> As mentioned above, Geoffrey composed his work around 1136 and 1139.<sup>39</sup> Thus it is likely that the dedication to Stephen was early in his reign, when he was a powerful king. However around 1139 when Matilda and Earl Robert gained strength Geoffrey changed sides and dedicated his work to them. It is evident that Geoffrey wanted his

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<sup>35</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, p. 187.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Christopher Brooke, "Geoffrey of Monmouth as a Historian," in *The Church and Government in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Brooke, Luscombe and Owen (New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 85.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

work to circulate widely among patrons of varying political standpoints in the disputes of Stephen's reign soon to turn into civil war.

Another secular chronicler is Henry of Huntingdon who is supposed to be born in 1088. He came from a mixed Anglo-Norman background: his father Nicholas was a member of Glanville family from Normandy, whereas his mother was English.<sup>40</sup> According to Van Houts, as with other historians of dual nationality, William of Malmesbury and Orderic Vitalis, it is likely that he received from his mother "some of the earliest impressions of knowledge of the past."<sup>41</sup> Just like Geoffrey, he was a secular clerk, and he was married. He became archdeacon of Huntingdon in 1110. Like Geoffrey, he was commissioned by Alexander bishop of Lincoln to "narrate the history of this kingdom and the origins of our people."<sup>42</sup> Henry continuously revised, altered and changed his text. By 1130 he had finished the greater part of the *Historia Anglorum*, consisting of seven books. During 1140s he wrote about the period after 1135 and he completed his work in 1154 when Henry II came to the throne.<sup>43</sup>

In his chronicle, Henry heavily made use of biblical sources such as the Old Testament, especially the books of Genesis, Exodus and the four books of Kings, but he also gave quotations from classical authors and poets. Apart from these he made use of Bede and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* as well as a variety of other sources. Henry was certainly inspired by the romantic tone of Geoffrey of Monmouth and, although being more concerned with political issues than with fantasy and romance, he had still some tendency to romanticize. Like its predecessors, Henry's narrative

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<sup>40</sup> Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, ed. and trans. by Diana Greenway (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), p. xxxiii.

<sup>41</sup> Elizabeth van Houts, "Historical Writing," p. 114.

<sup>42</sup> Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, p. lvii.

<sup>43</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, pp. 199-200.

was intended to instruct the reader in “the transience of worldly fortune” which was a topos common to both Christian and ancient literature.<sup>44</sup>

After this introduction to the sources, it is better to analyse the basic factors that influenced over the chroniclers while portraying their women. Actually, the images of women in the early twelfth-century chronicles say as much about the chroniclers who shaped them as the women whom they portrayed, because they included the personal biases of the writer, his prejudices, fears, wishes or fantasies. As Gold suggests, an image is an “interpretation achieved through a selective emphasis on particular aspects of lived experience.”<sup>45</sup> In that sense, such an approach focuses on a particular aspect and reshapes it; thus, to a certain extent it distorts reality.

As the writers of our chronicles were monks or priests, Christianity certainly influenced the attitudes of these men towards women. Christian teaching provided these writers, it has been argued, with mainly two models of women: Eve the temptress and Mary the mother of God.<sup>46</sup> However these two examples were far from the only ones. The Old Testament provides a wealth of female models, some good and some bad. There are also other historical female models, neither Jewish nor Christian, that entered the western Middle Ages through the writings of classical and early medieval Christian writers.

These stereotypes to some extent coloured the images of women in the sources, but it is hard to suggest that they were dominant in shaping these images; there were many other factors that affected the creation and shaping of the texts of the male authors. The more one reads the chronicles, the less uniformity and more

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<sup>44</sup> Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, p. lxvi.

<sup>45</sup> Penny Schine Gold, *The Lady & The Virgin: Image, Attitude and Experience in Twelfth-Century France* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. xviii.

<sup>46</sup> Carole Levin, ed., *Ambiguous Realities: Women in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1987), pp. 14-21.

ambiguity one finds about what male clerics actually thought about women. The images they created reflect not one attitude but many; therefore, they are too complex to be evaluated under the simple dichotomy between Eve and Mary or in Eileen Power's words "between pit and pedestal."<sup>47</sup> On the contrary, a more complex set of attitudes is involved.

Before talking about these various other factors, it is better to talk about the influence of the female models on the Anglo-Norman chroniclers in portraying their women. The chroniclers made use of female models from the Bible and ancient history to some extent in constructing the images of their women. However the important point here is the way in which the models were used. According to Caroline Bynum, in the twelfth century writers put emphasis on "conforming behaviour to types or models."<sup>48</sup> Thus she suggests that the images of powerful women were made to conform to the models in order to provide moral lessons. In fact this assumption does not apply a great deal to the twelfth-century chronicles. This can be explained through a close analysis of both the female figures and the models they are associated with.

To begin with the models, Esther was one of the most commonly used. She was given as an example of a woman who courageously exerted power over her husband and thus saved her people. In the Old Testament, Esther was the wife and queen of Ahasuerus. When the king gave great power and authority to his counsellor Haman, the latter forced all the people to bow to him. However Mordecai, Esther's adoptive father, rejected this and said he would only bow to God. Thus Haman, enraged, had the king sign an edict calling for the extermination of all Jews. When

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<sup>47</sup> Eileen Power, *Medieval Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989) p. 34.

<sup>48</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, "Did the Twelfth Century Discover the Individual?" In *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), pp. 95-97.

Esther learned this, she exceedingly grieved. Her adoptive father Mordecai asked for her help and she thus courageously risked her life for Mordecai and the Jewish people. Although the king had a law forbidding anyone, whether man or woman, to come into his inner court unless called, Esther disobeyed this command of the king and went to see him. Ahasuerus, rather than condemning Esther for disobedience, accepted her and offered to do whatever she wanted. When Esther told him how she and her people were condemned to destruction, the king believed that Haman was trying to abuse Esther and sentenced him to death.<sup>49</sup> Thus Esther appears as a woman of courage and faith who devoted herself to the service of God to prevent the destruction of the Jewish people and to provide them protection and peace.

The “Esther” model appears in the *Genealogia Regum Anglorum* of Aelred of Rievaulx who referred to Matilda, wife of Henry I, as “another Esther for us in our times.”<sup>50</sup> In the context of the twelfth century, Aelred saw Matilda as the mediator between the English and the Normans, because she carried the bloodline of the old kings of Wessex, thus ending the hostility between the Normans and the English. Here by describing Matilda as another Esther, Aelred in fact did not make Matilda conform to the Esther model. On the contrary, he established a resemblance between Matilda and Esther in terms of their actual intercessory roles between two peoples. He was trying to praise Matilda by associating her with a ‘good’ and at least arguably appropriate biblical figure. Moreover, as Aelred was dealing with a contemporary woman — Matilda — both the chronicler and, more significantly his readers knew a relatively large amount about Queen Matilda. In that sense, to force Matilda to

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<sup>49</sup> *Esther*, 2-8.

<sup>50</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx, “Genealogia Regum Anglorum,” in *Patrologiae Cursus Completus Series Secunda*, ed. by J. P. Migne, Vol. CLXXXV (Paris, 1850-1855), p. 736; “De cujus admirabili gloria animique virtute, in tanta insuper potestate quam humilis, qui scribere voluerit, alteram nobis Esther nostris temporibus declarabit.”

conform to biblical models would have been unrealistic; instead, Aelred simply uses the image of Esther as a historical simile for Matilda.

Judith was another active woman of the Old Testament who saved the Jewish people from massacre. When the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar requested the aid from neighbouring nations including the Jews, they ignored him. Therefore he sent his general Holofernes to take vengeance on those who had withheld support from his rule. Holofernes besieged Bethulia, Judith's town. Judith was a beautiful, devout Jewish widow who was wealthy and a careful manager of her property. She went to Holofernes's camp and seduced him with her beauty. When he became drunk, she beheaded him and thus saved the Jews. Here the emphasis is on her acting ability and bravery in carrying out her plan; through these capabilities she won the battle and saved her people.<sup>51</sup>

It is possible that Judith inspired the twelfth-century chroniclers in describing Aethelflaed, who was the widow of Aethelred, ealdorman of Mercia, the daughter of Alfred the Great of Wessex and sister of Edward the Elder, king of Wessex. Just like Judith, Aethelflaed was also described as a brave widow who ruled over her property carefully, that is, the kingdom of Mercia for eight years, and throughout her reign saved her people from the attacks of the Danes. Although Judith was not explicitly presented as a direct model for Aethelflaed by the Anglo-Norman chroniclers, her example seems to influence their approach to Aethelflaed considerably. As they are dealing with a woman of distant past, it is possible that these chroniclers partly create the image of Aethelflaed from the Judith model, which means they might attribute virtues to her that actually had no historical basis. However still, it is hard to assume that the life of Aethelflaed was adapted from the Judith's. On the contrary, it is rather

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<sup>51</sup> *Judith*, 2-15.

her resemblance to Judith that just helped shape the way the chroniclers praised Aethelflaed.

Besides using good biblical models who exerted power for a good cause, chroniclers also presented bad models whose behaviour ought to be avoided. Jezebel and Herodias were infamous women of the Bible. Jezebel was the queen of ancient Israel. Her wickedness was largely because she dissuaded her husband, King Ahab, from worshipping the God of the Jews and made him believe in her god, Baal. Through her influence over her husband, she exercised tyranny over the Jews and opened temples of Baal. She killed the prophets of the Jews and when the prophet Elijah came against her, she threatened to kill him. After her husband's death, she continued to exercise power through her sons. However, in the end she was killed by Jehu.<sup>52</sup> Herodias, on the other hand, was a Jewish princess who married her own uncle, Herod Philip, but left her husband and began an adulterous relationship with another uncle, Herod Antipas. When John the Baptist reprimanded Herod Antipas for this relationship he won the hatred of Herodias and through her influence over her husband, she engineered John's execution.<sup>53</sup>

In the Anglo-Norman chronicles we see that Aelred of Rievaulx made use of these models to describe King Edwin and his lover Aethelgive. Edwin, son of King Edmund, appeared as "a new Herod" who gave himself to the adulterous union with Aethelgive, "a Herodias" who was highly irreverent towards God, against the laws and gave wicked counsels to Edwin. When St. Dunstan criticized Edwin for his relationship with Aethelgive, Edwin, through the influence of his lover, attempted to kill St. Dunstan and he plundered his monastery. Aelred identified Aethelgive with "Jezebel who plotted against the destruction of Elijah." He suggested that as St.

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<sup>52</sup> *1 Kings*, 16-22.

<sup>53</sup> *Matthew*, 14: 3-12; *Mark*, 6:17-29.



Dunstan was warned by the Holy Spirit, he fled from his country. And since the king, “deceived by her wicked counsel, had reigned neither justly nor prudently, he was stripped of a great part of his kingdom, which was soon transferred to his brother.”<sup>54</sup> In the example of Aethelgive, it is more difficult to distinguish in which way the writer used the model — Herodias. As Aelred described Aethelgive, a woman of the distant past and of whom he actually knew rather little, it is possible that he was inclined to be more imaginative and completely made Aethelgive’s story conform to Herodias’s. On the other hand, it is also possible too that Aelred might know of certain actual actions of Aethelgive, but fill in the blanks from the simile — Herodias. In fact both are possible and it can be suggested that the portrayal of Aethelgive might be a mixture of these two attitudes.

In addition to biblical examples, the Anglo-Norman chroniclers also made use of the Amazons as models for women who fought and governed courageously. For instance William of Malmesbury identified Matilda of Tuscany, wife of Godfrey IV, duke of Lower Lorraine, with the Amazons in terms of bravery. She was praised as she fought bravely against the Emperor Henry IV not only to protect her own lands but also to promote papal claims. William described her as “a worthy rival of the Amazons of old” emphasizing her active role in governing her march and bravely fighting for it.<sup>55</sup> Orderic Vitalis also used the example of the Amazons in describing Isabel of Tosny, wife of Count Ralph of Tosny. When a conflict emerged between Ralph of Tosny and Count William of Evreux, she armed herself as a knight and led the troops against her husband’s enemy. Orderic says that she “showed no less courage among the knights in hauberks and sergeants-at-arms” and thus,

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<sup>54</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx, *The Genealogy of the Kings of the English*, pp. 94-95.

<sup>55</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, p. 522; “Matildis marcisae, quae oblita sexus nec dispar antiquis Amazonibus ferrata virorum agmina in bellum agebat femina.”

She deserved comparison with Lampeto and Marpesia, Hippolyta and Penthesilea and the other warlike Amazons queens, whose battles, in which they held in check the kings of Asia and subdued the Asian peoples by force of arms for fifteen years, are described by Pompeius Trogus and Virgil and other writers of histories.<sup>56</sup>

It is worth noting here that both William of Malmesbury and Orderic Vitalis praised their female figures as they were as strong and brave as the Amazons, but while doing this, they do not make them conform to the Amazons and they are not saying that these female figures are actually Amazon queens. Rather again, they simply draw historical parallels between these women and the Amazons.

In the light of all these examples it is possible to suggest that if a royal and noble woman used her power for ends of which the writer approved, then she was associated with Esther, Judith or an Amazon; however if she used her power for ends for which the writer had no sympathy, she was linked to Jezebel or Herodias. However while Anglo-Norman chroniclers identified their female figures with female models from the Bible and ancient legends, they mostly used them as similes chosen from a wide range of models to conform to the actual behaviour of the women, whether accepted or rejected for political or other reasons. In that sense, it is hard to suggest that the biblical models or Amazon model did much to shape the image of female figures in the chronicles. This means that Bynum's argument on modelling in the twelfth-century writers is not a realistic reflection of the attitude of the chronicle writers.

The representations of Anglo-Norman women were mainly shaped by the political, social and cultural context of the period rather than by biblical or legendary

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<sup>56</sup> Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, ed. and trans. by Marjorie Chibnall, vol. IV (Oxford: Clarendon, 2002), pp. 213-215; "...et loricatis equitibus ac spiculatis satellitibus non minori prestatat audacia. Emulabatur Lampedionem et Marseppiam, Ippolitem et Penteseileam, aliasque reginas Amazonum bellatrices quarum certamina Pompeius Trogus et Maro Virgilius referunt aliique historiarum scriptores, quibus attinuerunt Asiae reges, et per XV annos armis edomuerunt Asiaticas gentes."

models. The system of patronage was one of the factors that influenced the portrayal of women by the chroniclers in this period. In fact, patronage was one of medieval women's "modes of self-empowerment."<sup>57</sup> Through patronage royal women could manipulate clerical attitudes towards them. For instance, a wealthy woman could be described favourably when she acted as benefactress of churches and monasteries. The idea was that as such women played a crucial role in the advancement of Christianity and acted well by the standards of these churchmen and also by the standards of the society, an acceptable image of their behaviour was essential.

According to Sharon Farmer in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, monks and churchmen created a new image of wives. In their contact with noble patrons, monks encountered women "who were favourably inclined towards religious institutions and who developed ways of exercising economic influence on behalf of those institutions."<sup>58</sup> They encouraged these women to use their economic power for promoting Christianity and supporting the Church. Moreover, they put emphasis on the good influence of wives over their husbands and encouraged them to influence their husbands. As a response to such forms of behaviour on the part of women, these chroniclers developed an image of "the good and pious wife" who patronized religious institutions as well as encouraged their husbands to support religion.

In their chronicles, they record the gifts to their monasteries given by wives and widows and in this way they honour the female patrons of their houses. For example, William the Conqueror's wife, Matilda of Flanders frequently appeared as a founder or benefactor of monasteries, and in her epitaph Orderic Vitalis records this about her generosity: "Comforter of the needy, duty's friend, her wealth enriched

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<sup>57</sup> June Hall McCash, ed., "The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women: An Overview," in *The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 11.

<sup>58</sup> Sharon Farmer, "Persuasive Voices: Clerical Images of Medieval Wives," *Speculum*, vol. 61, no. 3 (Jul., 1986): 521.

the poor...left her in need.”<sup>59</sup> Adela of Blois, the daughter of William the Conqueror, was also praised for this. She persuaded her husband to join the First Crusade and during his absence, she became a pious, independent benefactor. Moreover she presided at the seigneurial court of Blois and through her decisions there she emerged as an important protector of the abbey of Marmoutier.<sup>60</sup> William of Malmesbury also suggests in his *Gesta Regum* that Adela was a “powerful woman with a reputation for her worldly influence.”<sup>61</sup>

Margaret of Scotland achieved prominence in this role as well. John of Worcester wrote: “...she endowed churches and monasteries; loved and revered the servants and handmaids of God; broke bread for the hungry; dressed the naked; gave shelter, food and clothing to all the pilgrims who came to her door...”<sup>62</sup> On the advice of Anselm, Queen Matilda, wife of Henry I, established a house of Augustinian canons at Holy Trinity, Aldgate. She also patronized Merton Priory, established at least two hospitals for lepers and made numerous smaller gifts to monasteries throughout the kingdom.<sup>63</sup> It is clear that twelfth-century chroniclers seem to have fully recognized the importance of wealthy female patrons who supported churches and monasteries financially through their influence over their husbands or from their own lands; thus, this recognition to a great extent became influential in shaping the images of women in their chronicles. However the benefactions were real enough, not invented in the cause of producing a new image

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<sup>59</sup> Orderic Vitalis, *Ecclesiastical History*, IV: 45-47.

<sup>60</sup> Sharon Farmer, “Persuasive Voices: Clerical Images of Medieval Wives,” p. 524.

<sup>61</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, p. 505; “Adala, Stephani Blesensis comitis uxor, laudatae in seculo potentiae uirago.”

<sup>62</sup> *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, ed. and trans. by McGurk, vol. III (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), p. 67.

<sup>63</sup> Lois Huneycutt, “Images of Queenship in the High Middle Ages,” *Haskins Society Journal*, vol. 1 (1989): 68.

of the “good and pious wife”, albeit the favourable recording of such behaviour was clearly intended to encourage others.

The relationship between high-ranking women and religious men was not purely financial. Royal and noble women also supported monastic and secular authors to produce literary and artistic works. They commissioned literary works, lives and histories; and this noticeably influenced the images of women in these texts. McCash argues that relations between royal and noble women and ecclesiastics were one way that women could act out strategies to achieve their own objectives.<sup>64</sup> For instance, in the histories which women commissioned or which were dedicated to them by men, there is a strong emphasis on women active in public life, women with wealth and power; and wisdom and education, who ruled countries, defeated enemies and furthered culture and religion.<sup>65</sup> Their positive qualities and achievements are emphasized. As the patrons themselves were active women, both in the public sphere and in the patronage of letters, the commissioned works implicitly or explicitly supported their positions.

As mentioned above, during this period Queen Matilda, wife of Henry I, commissioned William of Malmesbury’s *Gesta Regum Anglorum*. It was intended to be Matilda’s ancestral history. In the political context of the twelfth century, William’s chronicle worked as a means of propaganda which not only emphasized the importance of Matilda’s lineage, but also provided a major claim to her daughter Empress Matilda’s legitimacy in the succession debate of the period. William, who presented his history also to Empress Matilda, was closely concerned with the debate of her succession to the throne. He gave many examples of powerful women in the *Gesta Regum* so that Empress Matilda could follow in the footsteps of her illustrious

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<sup>64</sup> McCash, “The Cultural Patronage,” p. 2.

<sup>65</sup> Joan Ferrante, *To the glory of her sex: women’s roles in the composition of medieval texts* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997), p. 106.

ancestors. In another work, the *Historia Novella* William told the story of the Empress's struggle for the crown and supported her claim to the throne with eagerness.

Another chronicle written with this aim seems to have been Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*. Compared to other chroniclers of the period, he produced an original piece of work which dealt with the very distant past of the British. In his chronicle Geoffrey gives place to images of many active female figures — female consorts or rulers. It is clear that his attitude towards women in his chronicle was largely affected by the question of female rule in his period. Actually, this is not peculiar to Geoffrey of Monmouth; other Anglo-Norman chroniclers were also intensely concerned with the political developments of their period and this was reflected in their works in the formation of the images of women in them. Responding to the power of women in Anglo-Norman society, these chroniclers created images of women who had active participation in the political sphere. They gave examples of women who exercised power and authority in the political realm as queens, regents and co-rulers. Moreover, they praised women who acted as peacemakers, benefactresses and intercessors.

It is clear that there are many factors that should be taken into consideration while evaluating the attitude of the chroniclers towards women. Not only is the relationship of writer and subject critical, but also the relationship of patron and client. Moreover, when contemporary politics entered into the agenda of these chroniclers, it led to apparently contradictory assessments of the same female figure. For instance, the chronicles of this period say many different things about the Empress Matilda; thus, it is hard to reach a concrete portrayal of Matilda by analysing only one or two of the chroniclers. The *Gesta Stephani* and the *Historia*

*Novella* both tell the story of this period, the former largely from King Stephen's point of view, the latter from the Empress Matilda's. Neither author can be accused of deliberate falsehood — indeed both make efforts to be fair, or at least to be seen to be fair — but they give us entirely contradictory opinions about the conflict between Matilda and Stephen.<sup>66</sup> William of Malmesbury in the *Historia Novella* wrote to some extent as a partisan of the Empress and supported her claim by praising her; the author of the *Gesta Stephani* wrote about her in a denigrating way as an enemy. It is clear that politics to a certain extent coloured the images of Matilda, but in fact this makes it more possible to reach a rounded picture of Matilda than otherwise would be the case.

From all of this it is possible to reach some conclusions about the portrayal of women in the Anglo-Norman chronicles. First of all, the images of women shaped by ecclesiastical writers were not stuck in the simple dichotomy between Eve and Mary. Misogynistic views of women, mainly inherited from antiquity and furthered by patristic writings, certainly influenced the discourse of these writers. However such views are not very helpful in revealing the complicated portrayal of women in the chronicles. As our focus is on the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman chronicles, it becomes clear that there are many more interlocking factors, including wealth, patronage and political context, influential in the formation of these images. Women in this period were significant sources of political, economic and cultural patronage. These patronage networks provided them with an adequate influence over ecclesiastics to shape the images of women in the works. As these women commissioned the works of the writers, and patronized their religious houses or the Church more generally, the works set out to glorify the benefactors. If the writings

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<sup>66</sup> J.J. Bagley, *Historical Interpretation: Sources of English Medieval History, 1066-1540* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), pp. 46-47.

stressed the women's good works, their piety, their ecclesiastical benefactions, this reflects the setting of the writings' production. Moreover complex interactions of the political context affected the female images of these chroniclers. The succession debate of the period produced many chronicles which were to some extent written for propagandistic purposes. Thus these purposes in several cases complicate the images of women. In that sense, the portrayal of powerful twelfth-century women was multifaceted and reflects more than simple authorial or cultural bias.

After this analysis of chroniclers and their portrayal of women, we shall pass, in chapter two, to the examination of the perception by our chroniclers of female power and authority in Anglo-Norman society, together with a close inspection of certain significant developments in that society. In the third chapter, the particular case of the portrayals of Empress Matilda will be discussed. Her being the first woman to deserve the right to gain the throne certainly influenced the way female power was perceived by many of the chroniclers. From the evidence in the chronicles, the chroniclers' approach to female succession and the idea of a female ruler will be investigated in detail.



## CHAPTER II

### Women and Political Power

The study of the relationship of medieval women to political power requires in the first place a careful analysis of the concept of power itself. Many medievalists, like Duby, have tended to define *potestas* as “the power to command and punish and the duty of preserving peace and justice which required the use of the sword”.<sup>67</sup> According to them, as it was against woman’s nature to take the sword in hand, it was unlikely for her to be able to exercise public power. Moreover, even if she possessed the right to exercise power by lineage, it fell to her husband to exercise it for her. Thus it was he who wielded the power on his wife’s behalf, not she herself. The structure of medieval society certainly required military strength for the government to establish its supremacy. In that sense it is not surprising that physical strength was seen as constituting a necessary part of power.

This physical notion of power is completely gendered in the sense that it associates power with masculine traits and thus excludes women from public authority. Due to their physical nature, the nature of their body and the sex which defines them, women can therefore be regarded as incapable of wielding the power of command, *potestas*. This notion can be to a certain extent acceptable but this does not mean that it totally reflects the reality because there were also medieval kings who did not have the physical form of a warrior. In that sense, even if military success was certainly important to rulers and the comradeship of a young king with

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<sup>67</sup> Georges Duby, “Women and Power,” in *Cultures of Power: lordship, status and process in twelfth century Europe*, ed. by Thomas Bisson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), p. 73.

his fellow warriors had a political importance; it is too simple to put all the emphasis on the king's "strong sword arm."

The emphasis on the necessity of physical power for rulers to fight for and defend their political position certainly placed a female ruler in an ambiguous situation. In order to exercise *potestas*, she had to have masculine traits so that she could overcome her nature and become like a man. However, although twelfth-century chroniclers, under the influence of this physical notion of power, approached female power in a gendered way, they did not regard the female exercise of power as illegitimate or abnormal. On the contrary, they praised those women who took active roles in the public sphere. This was certainly because these chroniclers recognized that the necessity of personal military strength was only one aspect of power and it was not indispensable.

They were aware that the social system provided other channels through which to exercise power which did not necessarily require personal physical strength. One of these was the method of influence which refers to a more subtle exercise of power. Women could exercise power indirectly by influencing the male use of power in its more physical aspect. As women established an intimate relationship with the public authority of a husband, she could wield manipulative influence to a great effect. In fact, this aspect of power, whether exercised by men or women, was problematic, as it was more easily subject to accusations of abuse. Besides influence, there was also the aspect of legitimacy. It is the legitimacy that allows power to be characterised as authority. These aspects of power had their own language which was not entirely gender specific. Medieval women acquired both of these aspects of power in various ways.

As for the legitimacy aspect of power, women could acquire this through their familial roles. It is possible to conceive of two different ways in which women exercised authority in the public sphere. First of all, royal and noble women derived some accepted authority from the role of wife and mother by acting as regents in the absence of their husbands and in the minority of their sons. The second way was through authority that passed to them through inheritance. Women could exercise authority in their own right by virtue of their economic and social position and, by the early twelfth century, for the first time, the emergence of female succession to the throne demonstrated that women could possess the authority to rule over kingdoms in their own right.

With these aspects of power, the discussion of the relationship of women to political power moves beyond simple polarities and dichotomies into a more realistic and complex analysis of the power relations between men and women. It is a bit of an oversimplification to analyse power relations by only categorizing them as passive and active or dependent and independent. Women may have not appeared as active in most forms of social activity, but this does not mean that they were always passive. They had some possibility of roles that could give some scope for power, if not personal *potestas*.

For most historians, like Duby, the traditional approach — the public/private dichotomy — has been regarded as a useful device for understanding the relationship between medieval women and power. However, this theory, developed most fully by anthropologists, has been used to explain why women had little access to public power and why women took different paths from men to gain influence or power.<sup>68</sup> In this model the public sphere is the domain of men and it covers politics, legal

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<sup>68</sup> Mary Erler and Mariyenne Kowaleski, ed., *Women and Power in the Middle Ages* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), pp. 2-3.

rights and obligations, and is thus the sphere of real power and authority. On the other hand, the private or domestic sphere is the place of women by virtue of their role as wives and mothers and includes the family and the household.<sup>69</sup>

This tradition of separating public and private spheres dates back to Ancient Greek times. Aristotle characterizes women as “creatures whose souls are appropriate only to be ruled by the head of a household on the basis of his marital or paternal authority.” On the other hand, men are supposed to “be equipped for citizenship and public affairs, which require the art of statesmanship.”<sup>70</sup> Historically, the Greek *oikos* and the Roman *familias* both rested on a division of labour between men and women, which was rooted in the difference between the women’s domestic functions and the political life of her male partner. However, in Rome this division of private and public spheres was dominant only during Republican times, and less so towards the end of the Republic. In Republican Rome a woman was subject to *patria potestas* (under the legal authority of her father). If her father died, she was given under the control of a male guardian and when she married, she was delivered to her husband’s *manus* (power and legal authority) equivalent to *patria potestas*.<sup>71</sup> Thus it was only through men that women could exert any influence in public sphere. However, under the Roman Empire, the boundaries between public and private spheres became more permeable as the entire basis of male politics changed under

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<sup>69</sup> Mary Erler and Mariyenne Kowaleski, ed., *Women and Power*, p. 3.

<sup>70</sup> Cary Nederman and Elaine Lawson, “Frivolities of Courtiers Follow the Footprints of Women,” in *Ambiguous realities: Women in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. by Carole Levin (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), pp. 83-84.

<sup>71</sup> Marilyn Arthur, “From Medusa to Cleopatra: Women in the Ancient World,” in *Becoming Visible: women in European history*, ed. by Bridenthall, Koonz and Stuard (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), pp. 98-99.

one-man rule, “monarchy”, when the head of state was chosen from a single family. The power was no longer located “in the agora or forum” but “in the royal home.”<sup>72</sup>

When the family acquired a new status, women, as a part of it, shared in that status to the full. She gained importance in terms of transmitting life and power from one generation to the next. Through time, as she acted with the king, sat alongside him and sometimes acted for him, she acquired regular functions and her position became like her husband’s, to a certain extent institutionalized. Thus through her familial roles she exerted power and authority in the public sphere.<sup>73</sup> In the Middle Ages, especially in the early period, the distinction between public and private continued to be imprecise and thus women maintained their power and authority in the public sphere. Thus, it was no longer possible to use women’s domesticity as the basis for their exclusion from the political arena.

It is clear that as the line between public and private spheres was indistinct, the private realm of family and kinship networks could favour women in the public sphere. However, McNamara and Wemple have argued that women exercised power and authority through the family only from the sixth to twelfth centuries when central authority was weak and the family was the centre of politics and government.<sup>74</sup> In her study of medieval queenship in Capetian France from 987 to 1237, Marion Facinger has also found that during the tenth and eleventh centuries, the intimacy of court life made it possible for the queen to play a major role in government.<sup>75</sup> She suggests that the court was small and itinerant, and the physical centre of

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<sup>72</sup> Janet Nelson, “Medieval Queenship,” in *Women in Medieval Western European Culture*, ed. by Linda Mitchell (London: Garland, 1999), p. 182.

<sup>73</sup> Jo Ann McNamara, “Matres Patriae/Matres Ecclesiae: Women of the Roman Empire,” in *Becoming Visible: women in European history*, ed. by Bridenthall, Koonz and Stuard (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), pp. 108-125.

<sup>74</sup> Jo Ann McNamara and Suzanne Wemple, “The Power of Women Through the Family in Medieval Europe, 500-1100,” in *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Erler and Kowaleski (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988).

<sup>75</sup> Marion Facinger, “A Study of Medieval Queenship: Capetian France 987-1237,” *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, Vol. V (1968): 3-47.

administration was the hall or common room. Under these circumstances the queen could share every aspect of her husband's authority except the military campaigns. However, for both Facinger and McNamara such were the conditions only until the first quarter of the twelfth century.

During the early medieval period, the conditions of society placed public power in private hands and thus provided also queens and noblewomen, as the wives and widows of kings and powerful lords, with considerable public authority which involved control over important resources and institutions. Moreover, as women's ability to acquire property through marriage or inheritance developed in the early Middle Ages, their economic and political position within the family increased. Women possessed greater opportunities to gain access to political power by virtue of their family ties when political office and economic wealth could be inherited.<sup>76</sup>

The marriage practices and flexible successions of early medieval monarchs also gave a better status to women who emerged successfully from ambitious power struggles within royal families. As serial polygamy was a common practice during this period, the king had many wives and many wives meant many mothers. For ex-wives, there was always the risk of being unable to protect the claims of their children against the most recent wife and her children. As each mother wanted her own son to succeed to the throne, she was anxious to advance her own son at the expense of his half-brothers. When the queen achieved her son's accession, she herself gained remarkable power to exercise in the political realm especially in the early years of her son's reign. In the chronicle sources, intrigues and power struggles in the palace, which became inevitable due to succession rules and marriage

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<sup>76</sup> Jo Ann McNamara and Suzanne Wemple, "The Power of Women," pp. 83-97.

practices, seem to appear as a highly coloured picture of early medieval politics.<sup>77</sup> For instance, Ælfthryth is one of these women famed for, or rather infamous for, her palace intrigues. She was the mother of Æthelred the Unready. In her anxiety that her son should enjoy the title of king, she laid plots against her stepson's life. In the end by murdering Edward the Martyr, Ælfthryth secured the crown for her son.<sup>78</sup> This event shows that the conditions in the early medieval period provided the queen with enough power and influence to play a decisive role in the future of the kingdom.

However, it is suggested that Church reforms, beginning from the early eleventh century, began to close down this way of advancement to power for queens by imposing monogamy and strengthening the indissolubility of marriage. Moreover, the rise of centralized monarchy led to the loss of women's economic and political power as it brought with itself new bureaucratic machinery. As a new class of professional administrators arose, the political power of the queen waned. She was removed more to the private sphere, and her governmental functions became mainly symbolic. While the king and queen still shared the royal power theoretically, the active role of the queen was exposed to change. Thus, McNamara and Wemple have concluded that from the mid eleventh century to the close of the medieval era, "queens and empresses, as well as ladies on a somewhat more modest level, were excluded from public life."<sup>79</sup>

McNamara and Wemple's re-evaluation of historical periods and their efforts to underline changes in women's power and authority reflect current debates on the status of women during the High Middle Ages. In these discussions, McNamara,

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<sup>77</sup> Pauline Stafford, "Sons and Mothers: Family Politics in the Early Middle Ages," in *Medieval Women*, ed. by Derek Baker (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), p. 100.

<sup>78</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, p. 265.

<sup>79</sup> McNamara and Wemple, "The Power of Women," p. 95.

along with others, argues for what can be termed “change for the worse”.<sup>80</sup> They emphasize the eleventh and twelfth centuries as the period when women’s positions of power and authority in monasteries as well as royal courts declined. On the other hand, some other scholars have put more emphasis on specific events as reason for the decline in the status of women. For instance, for some historians the Norman Conquest was a watershed in England not only in terms of the opportunities women encountered, but also in terms of the opinions suggested on what women could accomplish. According to Doris Stenton, the evidence from Anglo-Saxon sources demonstrates that “women were then almost the equal companions of their husbands and brothers” compared to the following periods. However, this “rough and ready partnership” in the higher ranks of the society was ended by the Norman Conquest of 1066, which introduced into England new laws, customs and social organizations reducing women to an unimportant position.<sup>81</sup> The social and cultural changes produced by Norman rule had profound effects on women’s lives. In a way it ended a sort of “Golden Age” for women.

In fact all these assumptions that have concluded that there was an exclusion of queens and noblewomen from authority and power during the eleventh and twelfth centuries are very questionable. Although they have led many historians of the high medieval period to disregard the continuing importance of high-ranking women within the kingdom, the sources demonstrate that royal women and noblewomen remained both politically and culturally highly visible figures in the recently more centralized monarchies. Monks and churchmen of the High Middle Ages clearly acknowledged the importance of royal ladies and noblewomen rather than ignoring them. In this respect, the chronicles of the Anglo-Norman period are valuable

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<sup>80</sup> Erler and Kowaleski, “Introduction: A New Economy of Power Relations,” in *Gendering the Master Narrative* (New York: Cornell UP, 2003), p. 8.

<sup>81</sup> Doris Stenton, *The English Women in History* (New York: Schocken Books, 1977), pp. 1-28.



sources in providing a colourful and detailed picture of medieval women and their scope of power and authority.

Contrary to the all the arguments emphasizing the weakening position of high-ranking women in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the analysis of the Anglo-Norman chronicles demonstrates many noblewomen and queens exercising political and economic power and authority at different times and on different levels. They could be involved in the governments of their husbands as royal and noble consorts; they had the right to be involved in ecclesiastical appointments and negotiations for imperial succession; they had the right to rule the lands they inherited, and they had the right to act as regents for male relatives.<sup>82</sup> In fact, there were fairly frequent occasions on which queens governed kingdoms temporarily as regents for their minor sons or absent husbands and these provide examples of effective government by women in the public sphere. In this respect the arguments put forward by McNamara and others do not seem to reflect the real picture, or at least do not reflect reality as perceived by the Anglo-Norman chroniclers.

Orderic Vitalis presented several colourful examples of female participants active in government and politics in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*. In his chronicle, queens and countesses are portrayed more often as the companions and helpmates of their husbands rather than passive figures. They appear helping in government in any time of crisis and ruling the realm in the absence of their husbands. For instance, William the Conqueror entrusted the duchy of Normandy to his wife Matilda of Flanders and his young son Robert in 1066 when he went to conquer England. After the Conquest in 1068, Matilda went to England to join William and she was anointed *ad consortium regis* there. This refers in a way to a status complementary to that of

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<sup>82</sup> Joan Ferrante, *To the glory of her sex*, p. 14.

king. It signifies that the queen was a sharer in royal government and responsible with the king for good rule. In 1069 Matilda returned to Normandy again to act as regent with her son Robert.<sup>83</sup>

Moreover, Orderic described Matilda as “a powerful ruler with vast resources at her command.”<sup>84</sup> This is obvious from the fact that, when there arose a conflict between King William and her son Robert, Queen Matilda, “feeling a mother’s affection for her son, often used to send his son large sums of silver and gold and other valuables without the king’s knowledge”. When William learned about it, he became very angry and warned Matilda not to do it again. However, when she repeated her offence, the king exclaimed in anger, “the wife whom I have set over my whole kingdom and entrusted with all authority and riches, this wife, I say, supports the enemies, who plot against my life, enriches them with money.”<sup>85</sup> It is clear from the Matilda example that queens in this period were still endowed with the power to take independent action and to intervene forcefully in the political events of their time. Moreover they seem to be treated as sharers in royal government who had wealth and resources at their command and who had the authority to control them on their own with some independence.

Another example of active women given by Orderic Vitalis is the Countess Adela of Blois. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, she was the daughter of William the Conqueror and Matilda of Flanders. She married Stephen, count of Blois and became countess of Blois. She was a devout woman, as during Pope

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<sup>83</sup> Orderic Vitalis, II: 209-215.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, II: 284; “Reginae Matildi potenter regnaret, et innumeris opibus abundaret.”

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, III: 102-103; “Mathildis regina filio maternal compatiens ex pietate, ingentes sumptus auri et argenti aliarumque rerum preciosarum ei sepe mittebat rege nesciente. Quod ubi ipse comperuit, ei ne ulterius iteraret terribiliter prohibuit. Illa iterum eadem procaciter repetente; iratus rex dixit:....En collateralis mea quam velut animam meam diligo, quam omnibus gazis et potestatibus in toto prefeci regno meo; inimicos meos insidiantes vitae meae sustentat, opibus meis summopere ditat, et contra salutem meam studiose armat, consolatur ac roborat.”

Paschal's visit to France, she gave generous sums for the Pope's needs and "earned the eternal blessing of the apostolic see for herself and her house."<sup>86</sup> William of Malmesbury suggests in his *Gesta Regum* that Adela was a "*virago* with a reputation for her worldly influence".<sup>87</sup> Here *virago* refers to the masculine traits of the virtuous and powerful Adela. In fact to praise women by identifying them with manly virtues was a common attitude in the twelfth century. As suggested before, Adela was influential over her husband in persuading him to join the First Crusade. During his absence, she governed her husband's county and carefully brought up her young sons.<sup>88</sup> However, Stephen of Blois, fled secretly from the siege of Antioch before its surrender to the crusaders. In fact this was a great reproach for him. After a while, as a result of the forceful insistence of Adela, Stephen decided "to mend the disgrace of his former departure by some fresh act of deliberate valour" and this return brought him a heroic death.<sup>89</sup>

Eadmer also gives an example about Adela's intercessory role in the politics of her time. Emphasizing the close relationship between Adela and Archbishop Anselm in his *Historia Novorum*, Eadmer suggests that Adela supported Anselm in many ways, especially in his previous exile, with remarkable generosity. Moreover recognizing his holiness and piety, she had chosen him "as after God the director and guardian of her life."<sup>90</sup> During one of her conversations with Anselm, Adela learned that he would go to England to excommunicate Henry, king of England. She was

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<sup>86</sup> Orderic Vitalis, VI: 42; "Adela quoque comitissa largas ad ministerium papae impensas contulit, et benedictionem sibi domuique suae in aeternum a sede apostolica promeruit."

<sup>87</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, p. 505; "Adala, Stephani Blesensis comitis uxor, laudatae in seculo potentiae uirago."

<sup>88</sup> Orderic Vitalis, VI: 42; "Laudabilis era post peregrinationem mariti consulatum illius honorifice gubernauit, tenerosque pueros ad tutamen ecclesiae sanctae solleter educauit."

<sup>89</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, p. 682; "...antiquae discessionis improprium noua et excogitata uirtute sarcire cupientes."

<sup>90</sup> Eadmer, *History of Recent Events*, p. 175. Eadmer, *Eadmeri Historia Novorum in Anglia*, ed. by Martin Rule (London: Longman, 1884), p. 164; "Ipsa siquidem comitissa in pluribus ei tam in hoc quam et in alio exilio ejus magnifica liberalitate ministraverat, eumque sicut virum sanctum ac religiosum vitae suae post Deum institutorem elegerat atque tutorem."

deeply upset that her brother should be so condemned and thus decided to do everything to reconcile Henry with Anselm. She organized a meeting at Chartres and succeeded in persuading Anselm to accompany her to Chartres. There Henry I and Archbishop Anselm came together, and with the effort of Adela they reconciled.<sup>91</sup> This is important, not only in showing the importance of women as peacemakers, but also revealing the extent of the influence of women over men in solving conflicts.

Apart from Matilda of Flanders and Adela of Blois, there are many other royal and noblewomen who took active roles and exercised power and authority in the public sphere. The Countess Matilda of Tuscany, wife of Godfrey IV, already mentioned in the first chapter, is one of them. The early death of her father, the count of Reggio, Modena and Mantua, and marquis of Tuscany, and then the death of her sister and brother left Matilda as the only heir to the family lands.<sup>92</sup> She administered them first with her mother. Then she married Godfrey of Lorraine, son of her stepfather. However, this marriage proved to be unsuccessful and in 1071 she separated from Godfrey. From this time onwards she governed her lands on her own. She became a major force in the imperial-papal disputes of her time and always a supporter of papal policy. In 1089 she made her second marriage with Welf of Bavaria, but this marriage was also short-lived as Welf changed sides and began to support the imperial cause against the papacy during the conflict between Henry IV and Pope Urban II. It can be said that neither of her marriages seem to have hindered Matilda from exercising authority in the public sphere. As she had no child from her marriages, she donated her entire inheritance to the apostolic see, “though reserving

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<sup>91</sup> Eadmer, *History of Recent Events*, pp. 175-176. Eadmer, *Eadmeri Historia Novorum in Anglia*, p. 165; “Quod illa audiens, fraternae damnationi vehementer indoluit, ac ut potius illum pontifici concordaret operam dare disposuit.”

<sup>92</sup> Antonia Fraser, *Boadicea's Chariot: the warrior queens* (London: Weidenfeld, 1988), pp. 132-133.

the rights of disposal during her lifetime and that of Henry V.”<sup>93</sup> This would play a part in imperial-papal conflicts for centuries. William of Malmesbury in his chronicle calls Matilda marchioness as she inherited this title from her father, the marquis of Tuscany. As pointed out in the previous chapter, she was praised for her struggle against the German emperor Henry IV to protect her lands as well as to protect the cause of Pope Urban II. It is suggested that in armour she led her troops bravely to battle and thus William describes her as a woman “unmindful of her sex and a worthy rival of the ancient Amazons.”<sup>94</sup> In the end, with her support, Pope Urban kept his throne secure for eleven years.

In Orderic’s chronicle there are also colourful examples of female figures from Normandy exercising power and authority during the absence of their husbands. One of them is Beatrice, wife of Geoffrey, count of Mortagne. When Geoffrey fell mortally sick in 1100, he gave instructions to his wife Beatrice and his magnates “to keep the peace and maintain order honourably, and protect his land and castles for his only son, Rotrou, who had gone on pilgrimage to Jerusalem.”<sup>95</sup> Isabel of Tosny and Sibyl, wife of Robert Bordet of Cullei, are other examples of women who exercised power wisely in the absence of their husbands. In addition to being wives, these women are characterized as female knights. As suggested in the first chapter, when the rivalry between Helwise, countess of Evreux, and Isabel of Conches, the wife of Ralph of Tosny, led to a war between their husbands, Isabel dressed as a knight and led troops in battle. In this case, the chronicler even seems to have approved of Isabel’s actions, for he described her as “generous, daring and gay,

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<sup>93</sup> Joan Ferrante, *To the glory of her sex*, p. 235.

<sup>94</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, p. 523; “Matildis marisae, quae oblita sexus nec dispar antiquis Amazonibus ferrata virorum agmina in bellum agebat femina.”

<sup>95</sup> Orderic Vitalis, VI: 394; “Beatricem nempe coniugem suam, et optimates suos prudenter instruens rogavit, ut pacis quietem et securitatem sine fraude tenerent, suamque terram cum municipiis suis Rotroni filio suo unigenito qui in Ierusalem peregre perrexerat fideliter conseruarent.”

and therefore lovable and estimable to those around her” and compared her with the legendary Amazon queens.<sup>96</sup> In the case of Sibyl, when her husband, Robert Bordet, a Norman knight went to Rome, she protected the Spanish town Tarragona with a sleepless watch and Orderic adds that:

Every night she put on hauberk like a soldier and carrying a rod in her hand, mounted on to the battlements, patrolled the circuit of walls, kept the guards on the alert, and encouraged everyone with good counsel to be on the alert for the enemy’s stratagems. How greatly the young countess deserves praise for serving her husband with such loyalty and unfaltering love and watching dutifully over God’s people with such sleepless care.<sup>97</sup>

The chroniclers of this period put great emphasis on the lineage of the queens. As monarchy became more and more dynastic and legitimate birth became a necessity in the transmission of the right to rule, royal women — as daughters, wives and mothers played a central role in the creation and protection of the legitimacy upon which male rulers depended for the transmission of the throne to their lawful offspring.<sup>98</sup> Since the idea of legitimacy was achieved through monogamy and regulations over marriage enforced by the Church, it is hard to consider these reforms as excluding royal women from power and authority. On the contrary, they gave a prestigious status to them. For instance, Orderic Vitalis suggests that Matilda, wife of William the Conqueror, was “a kinswoman of Philip king of France, and she sprang from the stock of the kings of Gaul and emperors of Germany” and was

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<sup>96</sup> Orderic Vitalis, IV: 213-215; “Isabel vero dapsilis et audax atque iocosa, ideoque coessentibus amabilis et grata.”

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, VI: 405; “singulis noctibus lorica ut miles induerat, virgam manu gestans murum ascendebat, urbem circumibat, vigiles excitabat, cunctos ut hostium insidias caute precauerent prudenter admonebat. Laudabilis est iuuenis era, quae marito sic famulabatur fide et dilectione sedula, populumque Dei pie regebat perugili sollertia.”

<sup>98</sup> Anne Duggan, ed., *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1997), p. xviii.

renowned equally for nobility of blood and character.<sup>99</sup> It is clear that she was being praised for her Carolingian roots.

Margaret of Scotland and Matilda, wife of Henry I, were also praised by the chroniclers for their blood ties. About Margaret's lineage Orderic Vitalis says that she was a daughter of Edward, king of the Magyars, who was the son of King Edward the Confessor's half-brother Edmund Ironside and when in exile had married the daughter of Solomon king of the Magyars, receiving the kingdom with her. Moreover, he suggests that "this noble lady, descended from a long line of kings, was eminent for her high birth, but even more renowned for her virtue and holy life."<sup>100</sup> Simeon of Durham, on the other hand, puts emphasis on the civilising influence of Margaret over King Malcolm III. According to him, Margaret was a woman "noble by royal descent, but much more noble by her wisdom and piety; through her care and labour the king himself, laying aside the barbarity of his manners, became more gentle and civilised."<sup>101</sup>

Eadmer also praises Matilda, the daughter of Malcolm, King of the Scots and of Margaret, for her lineage as she was known to be descended from the old kings of the English. In fact the significance of this is that as Margaret herself was a daughter of Edward, "son of King Edmund, who was a son of King Ethelred, son of that glorious King Edgar," it was noted that in such a case Matilda's children would carry the bloodlines of both the old English kings and the line of Norman conquerors.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Orderic Vitalis, II: 222-224; "Haec consanguinea Philippi Francorum regis erat, et ex regibus Galliae ac imperatoribus Germaniae originem ducebat, eximiaque tam generis quam morum nobilitate cluebat."

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, IV: 272; "Generosa quipped mulier de sanguine regum a proavis orta pollebat, sed morum bonitate uitaeque sanctitate magis precluebat."

<sup>101</sup> Simeon of Durham, "History of the Kings," in *The Church Historians of England*, ed. by Joseph Stevenson (London: Seeleys, 1856), p. 554. Symeonis Monachi, "Historia Regum," in *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia*, ed. by Thomas Arnold, vol. III (London: Longman, 1882-85), p. 282; "...feminam regali prosapia nobilem, sed prudentia et religione multo nobiliorem. Cujus studio et industria rex ipse, deposita morum barbarie, factus est honestior atque civilior."

<sup>102</sup> Eadmer, *History of Recent Events*, p. 121.

Moreover, as discussed in the previous chapter, Aelred of Rievaulx referred to her as “another Esther for us in our times” because by carrying the bloodline of the old kings of Wessex, she ended the bitterness between the Normans and the English and, in addition to this, ensured peace between England and Scotland.<sup>103</sup> Orderic Vitalis suggests that Henry I, king of England wisely, “appreciating the high birth of the maiden whose perfection of character he had long adored, chose her as his bride and raised her to the throne beside himself.”<sup>104</sup> In fact Orderic, having an English mother, had a personal sympathy to English descent.

In the Anglo-Norman chronicles the basic comments about Henry I’s queen, Matilda, turn around not only her lineage but also her eventful marriage. Her marriage created a lot of dispute in the realm, because she was brought up from early childhood in a convent of nuns and this emerged as a barrier for her marriage. Many believed that she had been dedicated by her parents to God’s service, because she had been seen walking around wearing the veil like the nuns whom she was living with. Therefore many thought that she could not marry because she had taken vows to be a nun. Thus, Archbishop Anselm called an episcopal council to solve the matter and there Matilda addressed the bishops directly explaining that she wore the veil “due to the pressure of her aunt Christina to preserve her from the lust of the Normans which was rampant and at that time ready to assault any woman’s honour.” In the end, it was agreed that Matilda could marry Henry. St. Anselm married Henry and Matilda with his blessing and also consecrated her as queen.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx, “Genealogia Regum Anglorum,” p. 736.

<sup>104</sup> Orderic Vitalis, V: 301; “Sapiens ergo Henricus generositatem virginis agnoscens, multimodamque morum eius honestatem iamdudum concupiscens, huiusmodi sociam in Christo sibi elegit, et in regno secum Gerardo Herfordensi episcopo consecrante sullimavit.”

<sup>105</sup> Eadmer, *History of Recent Events*, pp. 126-28. Eadmer, *Eadmeri Historia Novorum in Anglia*, p. 122; “ ‘me velum portasse non abnego. Nam cum adolescentula essem, et sub amitae meae Cristinae quam tu bene novisti virga paverem, illa, servandi corporis mei causa contra furem et cuiusque pudori ea tempestate insidiantem Normannorum libidinem, nigrum panniculum capiti meo



It is clear that throughout the twelfth century a queen with a strong personality and a desire to exercise influence over the public sphere of the kingdom continued to find the ways to do so. Queen Matilda proved to be one of those strong-willed women. She took an active role in political affairs. She participated in Henry's council and on several occasions served as head of his vice-regal council. She was also a frequent witness of his charters.<sup>106</sup> She appointed an abbot to Malmesbury, and acted as regent in England when Henry was in Normandy. Moreover, lands were assigned to her and she disposed of her lands in her own right and was known as a patron of the Church and arts.<sup>107</sup> It seems that Matilda dealt with many things which only the king or someone invested with regal authority could have handled. About Matilda, Henry Huntingdon says this:

Successes did not make her happy, nor did troubles make her sad: troubles brought a smile to her, successes fear. Beauty did not produce weakness in her, nor power pride: she alone was both powerful and humble, both beautiful and chaste.<sup>108</sup>

One of the works commissioned by Matilda was her mother's biography *The Life of St Margaret*. It is an important source in terms of revealing the boundaries of power and authority for queens in the Anglo-Norman period. In this work Margaret is depicted as the ideal wife and mother, as well as a politically active woman who presides over Church councils, orders the palace, regulates unjust laws, works to promote commerce and above all promotes Christian charity and church reform.<sup>109</sup> In other words, Margaret's chaplain Turgot portrays her as "busy among the tumult of

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superponere, et me illum abjicientem acris verberibus et nimium obscenis verborum convitiis saepe cruciare simul et dehonestare solebat.' "

<sup>106</sup> Lois Huneycutt, "Images of Queenship in the High Middle Ages," p. 65.

<sup>107</sup> Lois Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland: A Study in Medieval Queenship* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2003), pp. 75-102.

<sup>108</sup> Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, p. 462; "Prospera non letam fecere, nec aspera tristem; aspera risus ei, prospera terror errant. Non decor effecit fragilem, non sceptrum superbam, sola potens humilis, sola pudica decens. Maii prima dies, nostrarum nocte dierum, raptam perpetua fecit inesse die."

<sup>109</sup> Lois Huneycutt, "Intercession and High-Medieval Queen: The Esther Topos," in *The Power of the Weak*, ed. by Carpenter and MacLean (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), p. 134.

lawsuits and the manifold cares of the kingdom.”<sup>110</sup> It is questionable whether this work really aims to give a factual account of Margaret’s life or just to draw up a model for Margaret’s daughter Matilda about the qualities of an ideal queen. In any case, it is clear that the idea of a queen playing an active role in the public sphere did not seem to be unusual to Matilda, as she herself was also very politically active.

Another important work commissioned by Matilda was *Gesta Regum Anglorum* written by William of Malmesbury. As suggested before, it was the history of her family and, after her death, it was presented to the sole heir of her line: her daughter, Empress Matilda. As this chronicle was written for a female patron, it is perhaps natural that it is filled with active women who could serve as models for queens, some of them to be imitated and some to be avoided. In the beginning of his chronicle William praises Queen Matilda saying:

The queenly piety and the religious life born of true piety, that marked your most revered mother Queen Matilda....And rightly so; while she herself during her lifetime was the support of almost our whole world, because by royal gift she possessed our church, we enjoyed her compassion more fully than other men. Under her rule the light of religion shone abundantly in the place where her charity in its fullness was pre-eminent.<sup>111</sup>

It is clear that monastic authors and royal women often shared literary and artistic interests. During Henry I’s reign the Anglo-Norman court became a focus for cultural activities, but it was Henry’s queen Matilda rather than Henry himself who was the patron of these activities.

After Matilda’s death, Henry remarried, this time to Adeliza, daughter of the duke of Louvain, who therefore became queen. Adeliza of Louvain was not

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<sup>110</sup> Lois Huneycutt, “The Idea of the Perfect Princess: The Life of St Margaret in the reign of Matilda II,” *Anglo-Norman Studies*, no. 12 (1989): 89.

<sup>111</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, pp. 6-8; “Regalis pietas et uerae pietatis sancta religio reuerentissimae matris uestrae Mathildis reginae....Et iuste quidem. Cum enim ipsa uiuens toti pene nostro seculo subueniret et in eius pietate fere omnium penderet solatium nostramque regali dote possideret ecclesiam, uberius nos eius misericordia fouebamur. Quippe ipsius regimine ibi habundanter fulgebat religio ubi totius caritatis preminebat plenitudo.”

mentioned a lot in the chronicles, due to the small role she played in royal government as compared to the other Anglo-Norman queens. This was possibly because, as a second wife who could not produce children, she did not attract the interest of contemporary chroniclers much. Especially compared to the image of Queen Matilda, who dealt with political activity and literary and monastic patronage, the image of Adeliza reveals that queenship in Anglo-Norman period was in fact a personal and flexible position, in which not only circumstances, but also the capabilities of the queen were influential.

For instance, while Matilda acted as regent on several occasions in England when Henry was in Normandy, Adeliza was never left as regent and this role was taken over by Roger, bishop of Salisbury.<sup>112</sup> This could be explained through the McNamara-Wemple arguments that as a result of institutionalization of administration, the queen excluded from power and authority by a burgeoning bureaucracy. However the chronicles reveal that King Stephen's queen, Matilda of Boulogne, and Empress Matilda proved to be very powerful figures in politics and government. In that sense, it is hard to assume that the bureaucratization of administration was a barrier to the queen's exercise of power and authority in the public sphere.

The only comment made about Adeliza in the chronicles is that she was a maiden of great beauty and modesty.<sup>113</sup> For instance, Henry of Huntingdon writes this poem about her beauty:

O queen of the English, Adela, the very muse who prepares to call to mind  
your graces is frozen in wonder. What to you, most beautiful one is a crown?  
What to you are jewels? A jewel grows pale on you, and a crown does not  
shine. Put adornment aside, for nature provides your adornment, and a

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<sup>112</sup> Laura Wertheimer, "Adeliza of Louvain and Anglo-Norman Queenship," *Haskins Society Journal*, vol. 7 (1995): 104.

<sup>113</sup> *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, vol. III, p. 149; "...puellam virginem decore modesti vultus decenter insignitam."

fortunate beauty cannot be improved. Beware ornaments, for you take no light from them; they shine brightly only through your light. I was not ashamed to give my modest praise to great qualities, so be not ashamed, I pray, to be my lady.<sup>114</sup>

Adeliza of Louvain reappeared in the chronicles again when she received Empress Matilda and Robert of Gloucester at Arundel in 1139. In fact the honour of Arundel had been given to her as dower land during the lifetime of Henry I. Simeon of Durham records that in 1127, the nobles swore to Adeliza that whatever the king bestowed on her they would preserve constant and unchanged.<sup>115</sup> After the death of Henry I, in 1138 Adeliza, queen dowager, married William d'Albini Pincerna, son of the butler of Henry I and later Stephen. It is questionable to what extent Adeliza played an important role in the reception of the Empress and Earl Robert at Arundel. All the chroniclers say different things about it.

William of Malmesbury claims that Adeliza had invited them to England only to abandon them when Stephen arrived, saying that Adeliza, "with a woman's fickleness, broke the faith she had so often pledged even by sending envoys to Normandy."<sup>116</sup> On the other hand, Henry of Huntingdon and the author of the *Gesta Stephani* do not suggest that Empress Matilda and Earl Robert were invited by Adeliza. The chronicle of John of Worcester states that Adeliza, fearing that she would lose the dignity that she held in England, claimed that she had simply offered hospitality to her former dependants, but had not invited them.<sup>117</sup> On the other hand,

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<sup>114</sup> Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, p. 468; "Anglorum regina tuos Adelida decore ipsa referre parans musa stupore riget. Quid diadema tibi, pulcherrima? Quid tibi gemme? Pallet gemma tibi, nec diadema nitet. Deme tibi cultus, cultum natura ministrat, nec meliorari forma beata potest. Ornamenta caue, nec quicquam luminis inde, accipis; illa micant lumine clara tuo. Non puduit modicas de magnis dicere laudes, nec pudeat dominam te, precor, esse meam."

<sup>115</sup> Simeon of Durham, "History of the Kings," p. 616.

<sup>116</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Historia Novella*, ed. by E. King and trans. by K. R. Potter (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), p. 61.

<sup>117</sup> *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, vol. III, p. 268; "At illa regiam maiestatem uerita, et timens ne dignitatem quam per Angliam habuerat perderet, iureiurando iurat neminem inimicorum suorum per se Angliam petisse, sed, salua dignitate sua, uiris auctoritatis utpote sibi quondam familiaribus hospitium annuisse."

Robert of Torigny reports that William d'Albini invited the empress and her brother to Arundel.<sup>118</sup> However, Chibnall suggests that William was made earl of Lincoln by Stephen shortly before the landing of the Empress.<sup>119</sup> Thus it is hard to consider that William was supporting the Empress. Whatever the case, the reception of the Empress at Arundel was the last and only political activity Adeliza was involved in, though her role in this activity is still debatable. From Adeliza's example it can be inferred that the exercise of power and authority by queens depended not only on conditions, but also on personality.

Matilda of Boulogne, King Stephen's queen, was another queen who played an important role in the politics of her time. Firstly, as an heiress in her own right she brought to her husband the title of count of Boulogne and all the claims concentrated in her from her lineage. From her father, Count Eustace III of Boulogne, Matilda inherited the French counties of Boulogne and Lens which became the main source of her income. Stephen also relied on her during his reign to manage both the continental county and the English honour of Boulogne. After she became queen of England, like her other predecessors, William I's queen Matilda and Henry I's queen Matilda, Matilda of Boulogne participated in government business, witnessed royal acts, judged cases, interceded for others and patronized monasteries. However to such customary activities there was an additional contingent element for Matilda: the civil war during much of Stephen's reign required her to participate actively in diplomacy and to take on a role as a military commander.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Robert de Torigni, "Chronica Roberti De Torigneio," in *The Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I*, ed. by Richard Howlett, vol. IV (London, 1889), p. 137.

<sup>119</sup> Marjorie Chibnall, *Empress Matilda* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 93.

<sup>120</sup> Heather J. Tanner, "Queenship: Office, Custom, or Ad Hoc? The Case of Queen Matilda III of England (1135-1152)," in *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Lord and Lady*, ed. by Bonnie Wheeler and J. C. Parsons (New York: Houndmills, 2002), p. 138.

During the civil war between Empress Matilda and Matilda's husband Stephen, the queen struggled vigorously to further Stephen's cause against the Angevin threat. She commanded part of Stephen's military forces. According to Orderic Vitalis, while Stephen was occupied at Hereford in 1138, she besieged Dover with a strong force on the land side and called on her friends to blockade the enemy by sea. The people of Boulogne obeyed her and "gladly carried out their lady's commands with a great fleet of ships, closed the narrow strait to prevent the garrison receiving any supplies."<sup>121</sup> Although it was unusual for a woman to direct battle at that time, this reflects the partnership of Queen Matilda and Stephen. After her husband was captured in the battle of Lincoln in 1141, the queen became "the centre of resistance to the Angevins."<sup>122</sup> She took control of Stephen's army and government.<sup>123</sup>

It is clear that almost all the queens of the Anglo-Norman period fulfilled a variety of functions as *curialis*, diplomat, judge, intercessor and regent. Thus they played an active role in the public sphere. However some queens, like Queen Matilda of Boulogne did more than this. She surpassed these customary queenly roles and exerted extensive authority in the governance of the realm.<sup>124</sup> In this not only political conditions, but also her personality, was influential.

The last female character who played an active role in the politics of the period is Empress Matilda. Although she will be examined in detail in the following chapter, it is worth mentioning here that she was the first woman in English history

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<sup>121</sup> Orderic Vitalis, VI: 520; "Regina uero Doueram cum ualida manu per terram obsedit, et Boloniensibus amicis ac parentibus suis atque alumnis ut per mare hostes cohiberent mandauit. Porro Bolonienses dominae suae iussa libenter amplectentes famulatum suum ei exhibent, nauiumque multitudine operiunt illud fretum quod strictum est ne castrenses sibi aliquatenus procurarent."

<sup>122</sup> Marjorie Chibnall, "Women in Orderic Vitalis," in *Piety, Power and History in Medieval England and Normandy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), p. 113.

<sup>123</sup> Heather Tanner, "Queenship: Office, Custom, or Ad Hoc?" pp. 139-140.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

set to inherit the throne in her own right. Although Henry designated her as his heir for the throne, she could not succeed because Henry's nephew Stephen was crowned as king. Still, Matilda did not give up her claim for the throne and struggled against Stephen. In 1141 after Stephen had been captured, the Empress was received as the "Lady of the England and Normandy" but did not manage to be consecrated as queen in the end. From this time onwards, her greatest rival was Queen Matilda, who was fighting for her husband's claim. It can be said that the struggle between the two Matildas (Empress Matilda and Queen Matilda of Boulogne) constitutes a good example in demonstrating both the possibilities and the boundaries of power and authority for women in this period.

Wealth, through inheritance or through marriage, was a crucial component of power and an important tool of rulership for both men and women. Royal women of the Anglo-Norman period usually enjoyed resources sufficient to allow them an effective share in governance. This fact inevitably brings up the arguments related to the Norman Conquest and its negative effects upon women. In the medieval period the ability of woman to exercise political power and authority within society arose from two sources: the traditional roles of woman in the family and her landholding. There were two ways for women to acquire land: the provision of land in the form of marriage portions and dower, and the cases where women inherited land. To deal with the Norman Conquest debate it is necessary to consider the rules or perhaps customs of inheritance as they affected high-ranking women.

According to some historians, in Anglo-Saxon society where inheritance rules were not set by primogeniture, the need for a direct male heir did not become an obsession. Moreover, this was the period in which wealthy men and women could leave landed property by will. In the wills of the later Anglo-Saxon period there was

not any exclusive preference given to men as heirs. Many men left property to their female kin: their mothers, sisters, daughters, as well as to their wives. Likewise, many Anglo-Saxon women appeared to have full control over their property and they could seemingly leave their land to whomever they chose.<sup>125</sup> However, following the Conquest, it has been argued, due to primogeniture and the narrowing of inheritance to direct heirs, which were imposed by the Normans, women no longer held land on such terms as they did in Anglo-Saxon period.

It can certainly be argued that from the early to the High Middle Ages there emerged a shift from kin-based families to dynastic families “which traced descent and affiliation in the masculine line only.”<sup>126</sup> This change from clan to lineage certainly had an impact on inheritance methods. As mentioned above, while the kin-based relations of the Anglo-Saxon period included women in the sharing of property, the move towards a more restricted sharing of property, that is, the endowment of only the eldest son with property with the purpose of the consolidation of family property, damaged the expectations of younger sons and other male relatives as well as those of daughters.

According to historians like Doris Stenton, this system of primogeniture, imported from Normandy and established in England after the Norman Conquest, demonstrated a huge shift in the balance of power between Anglo-Saxon women and women after the Conquest.<sup>127</sup> Thus, the argument concludes with the assumption that for the deteriorating status of English women, the Normans and their traditions were responsible, which in a way implies the idea that in Normandy during this period,

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<sup>125</sup> Christine Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England* (London: Colonnade Books, 1984), pp. 75-76.

<sup>126</sup> Jane Martindale, “Succession and Politics in the Romance-speaking World, c. 1000-1140,” in *England and Her Neighbours*, ed. by M. Jones and M. Vale (London: Hambledon, 1989), p. 20.

<sup>127</sup> Henrietta Leyser, *Medieval Women: A Social History of Women in England 450-1500* (London: Phoenix Press, 1996), p. 86.



women were excluded from power and authority. However, it is hard to reach such a generalization about Norman women when we look at the examples from chronicles.

For instance, the example of Mabel of Belleme from Normandy given by Orderic Vitalis raises questions about this assumption that the position of Norman women was worse than English women. Mabel of Belleme, daughter of Talvas, was the heiress to Belleme in eleventh-century Normandy. After the death of her brother Arnold of Belleme, Mabel and her half-brother Oliver were the likely heirs to the Belleme lands. It is not explicit why Oliver, if a legitimate son, was excluded from inheritance, because, according to Orderic Vitalis, he became a monk of Bec only in his old age.<sup>128</sup> Whatever the case, finally Mabel and her husband Roger of Montgomery acquired the inheritance left to Mabel. Although in the chronicle of Orderic Vitalis, Mabel does not appear likeable or inspire sympathy, it is impossible to disregard the authority she exercised in society. While she was fulfilling her duty as a mother of nine children, this role did not prevent her from actively defending her inheritance. She generally travelled with a retinue of one hundred men and forcibly disinherited many lords.

Orderic Vitalis describes her as “a forceful and worldly woman, cunning, garrulous and extremely cruel.” His antipathy towards her was largely due to Mabel’s attitude towards monasteries and monks: “She hated the founders of monastery and devised nefarious ways of injuring monks.”<sup>129</sup> Moreover, he criticizes her for violent actions suggesting that she shed the blood of many and forcibly disinherited many lords and compelled them to go to foreign lands.<sup>130</sup> Concerning Mabel, Chibnall concludes that there must have been “something particularly

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<sup>128</sup> Orderic Vitalis, II: 54; Appendix I, “The Descent of the Lands of the Lords of Belleme,” pp. 362-365.

<sup>129</sup> Orderic Vitalis, II: 49-55.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, III: 135-137.

aggressive and brutal about her for four of her vassals to ride at night into her castle and cut off her head as she lay in bed.”<sup>131</sup> Orderic does not hide his joy at her passing and says that “when the murder of this terrible lady had been accomplished, many rejoiced at her fate.”<sup>132</sup> It is clear that the reason for the intense negative feeling on Orderic’s part towards Mabel is because of her insensitivity toward the Church and her use of extreme violence. This brought her end, as she was murdered on behalf of a man whom she had unjustly deprived of land.<sup>133</sup>

Despite the antipathetic image drawn for Mabel by Orderic, one thing draws attention to itself: the extensive power and authority Mabel exerted for her own ends. It can be suggested that it is Mabel’s status and wealth that provided her with such great authority and power. On the other hand, as it is hard to know the real situation of Norman women with regard to inheritance before 1066 due to the lack of sources, it can be misleading to reach generalizations from Mabel’s case about the whole of Norman womanhood. Her case might be exceptional. The Belleme lands on the borders of Normandy and Maine had a strategical position and were thus important for William I. Thus it is most likely that William intervened in the succession and manipulated it for the benefit of his friend Roger of Montgomery, Mabel’s husband. But still Mabel’s active rule over her lands certainly shows the imperious side of Norman women, whatever the inheritance rights and possibilities.

Another point that demonstrates the weakness of the assumption of the deteriorating position of English women with the arrival of the Normans is that, in Henry I’s reign, for the first time a king tried to pass the throne to his daughter, although he had many illegitimate sons. This was important in indicating that even after 1066 — which is suggested to be the end of the Golden Age for women — a

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<sup>131</sup> Chibnall, “Women in Orderic,” pp. 107-108.

<sup>132</sup> Orderic Vitalis, III: 137.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, III: 135-37.

king attempted to arrange the succession for his daughter in the absence of legitimate and direct male heirs. This evidence, as Stafford points out, also is not consistent with the argument that the coming of Normans brought a decline in women's status.<sup>134</sup>

The move towards the system of primogeniture did not mean that women were completely excluded from inheriting. On the contrary, the absence of any male heirs in the same generation and the restriction on the claims of collateral heirs increased the likelihood of female heirs to large shares of the property or even the whole of it.<sup>135</sup> Compared to the Anglo-Saxon period, fewer women inherited, but when they did they acquired vast lands and became attractive heiresses. However, the more land a woman was expected to hold, the more likely the succession to her inheritance would be manipulated by her lord or the king. Obviously, Henry's Charter of Liberties in 1100 was a reaction to this manipulation of successions. It acknowledges primogeniture with regard to inheritance, but also recognizes that daughters could inherit in the absence of sons. When no sons had been born to a family, it was accepted that estates could pass to the daughter, because she was the only means of maintaining the lineage, the only legitimate person to convey her father's blood to the next generation. The early twelfth century saw many examples of this practice. Thus, it was, in Gillingham's words, a "century of heiresses."<sup>136</sup>

These changes over inheritance laws also affected the question of female succession to the crown. Although in the Anglo-Saxon period we have heiresses, we

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<sup>134</sup> Pauline Stafford, "Women and the Norman Conquest," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser., no. 4 (1994): 227.

<sup>135</sup> J.C.Holt, "Feudal Society and the Family in Early Medieval England, IV: The Heiress and the Alien," in *Colonial England, 1066-1215* (London: Hambledon, 1997), p. 247.

<sup>136</sup> John Gillingham, "Love, Marriage and Politics in the Twelfth Century," in *Richard Coeur de Lion* (London: Hambledon, 1994), p. 248.

do not have any example of female succession,<sup>137</sup> because there were many male claimants — royal uncles, brothers and cousins — to the throne. However, the emphasis in inheritance on dynasty and more direct descent invalidated their claims. Therefore, in the Norman period for the first time it is possible to come across real instances of female succession to the throne in default of a male heir. For instance, in the early twelfth century Empress Matilda, daughter of Henry I claimed to inherit a kingdom.

In fact this situation was not peculiar to England; royal successions in Castile and Jerusalem suggest that there were no insuperable theoretical obstacles to the female inheritance of royal authority. Both Urraca of Leon-Castile and Melisende of Jerusalem acquired the throne through inheritance rather than marriage and either ruled or participated in the ruling of their kingdom. In fact as a result of the inheritance of the throne by an heiress, two well established principles of the system of primogeniture now collided: “inheritance by blood-right and divinely approved male authority/patriarchy.”<sup>138</sup> However, through marriage the heiress-queen was provided with a ruling king and the production of sons eventually resolved the problem in the next generation. Still, this does not mean that the heiresses were completely excluded from power and authority. They became joint-rulers with the kings and after their husbands’ death they ruled until their sons came of age and sometimes even after.

The kingdom of Leon-Castile was not only inherited, but also ruled by a woman. Urraca was the daughter of King Alfonso VI. She was first married to Raymond of Burgundy who died in 1107. From this marriage she had two sons:

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<sup>137</sup> The only exception to this can be Aethelflaed. In fact she was a special case as she took the rule of the kingdom after the death of her husband as a regent for her daughter. The case of Aethelflaed will be discussed below in detail.

<sup>138</sup> Janet Nelson, “Medieval Queenship,” p. 190.

Alfonso and Sancha. Meanwhile, as her only brother was killed in a battle in 1108, she became the heir to her father. As a widow she was ruler of Galicia and now she became heiress to Castile. Her father Alfonso VI quickly arranged for her a new husband — Alfonso I of Aragon — probably so as to guarantee the provision of male leadership. In fact Urraca and Alfonso I did not get along well and thus separated by 1111. The failure to produce an heir was also a factor in their separation. After her marriage ended, Urraca retained for herself the political leadership of the realm through her son from her previous marriage Alfonso VII, who was crowned as eventual successor to Urraca. It is clear that for a woman to exercise formal authority in the public sphere, there needed to be a man — either a husband or a son. However this reality did not prevent Urraca playing an active role in the government. Until her death in 1126, she ruled over her father's kingdom together with her son.<sup>139</sup>

Queen Melisende (1131-61) was the heir to Jerusalem through her father Baldwin II and acquired the throne through inheritance. Before her succession, she married count Fulk V of Anjou. According to Hamilton the accounts of William of Tyre demonstrate that Baldwin associated both Fulk and Melisende with him, which implies that from the time of the marriage he treated them as joint-heirs of the kingdom.<sup>140</sup> In fact, the arrangement worked well as William said Fulk ruled entirely according to Melisende's wishes, and in all the royal charters Melisende's and Fulk's name appeared together.<sup>141</sup> When Fulk was killed while hunting, Melisende took over the government. As her son Baldwin was only thirteen, Melisende ruled over the realm on her own. According to William of Tyre, "the rule of the kingdom

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<sup>139</sup> Bernard F. Reilly, *The Kingdom of Leon-Castilla under Queen Urraca, 1109-1126* (Princeton, 1982), The Library of Iberian Resources Online, <http://libro.uca.edu/urraca/urraca.htm>.

<sup>140</sup> Bernard Hamilton, "Women in the Crusader States: The Queens of Jerusalem (1100-1190)," in *Medieval Women*, ed. by Derek Baker (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), p. 149.

<sup>141</sup> Sarah Lambert, "Queen or Consort: Rulership and Politics in the Latin East, 1118-1228," in *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Anne Duggan (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1997), p. 155.

remained in the hands of lady Melisende, a queen worthy to be loved by God, to whom it was fitting by hereditary right.”<sup>142</sup> It is obvious that she was regarded not only as a regent but as a reigning queen in her own right. Melisende was crowned together with her son Baldwin III in 1143, but she kept all the authority in her hands until Baldwin came of age and even after that. It is suggested that she ruled so wisely that there was no complaint made about her government. She was so dominant that even when her son came of age, she insisted on maintaining her authority. Just like Melisende, Empress Matilda tried hard to acquire what she felt she deserved. However, she never achieved a coronation as queen.

These developments in the Anglo-Norman period certainly influenced the attitude of the chroniclers toward women and their relationship with power and authority. For instance, William of Malmesbury in his chronicle, the *Gesta Regum*, gives examples of other women in power from the past, accepting them as a normal part of history. William mentions a number of women who participated directly in their husband’s or even brother’s governments and some who ruled on their own. Seaxburh was one of them. She was a female ruler who took over the throne from her husband and ruled it on her own. In fact, Cenwealh, king of the West Saxons, her husband, on his death bed thought fit to leave royal power to his wife. This example thus justifies the possibility of female rulership. William of Malmesbury says that:

Nor did she, though a woman, lack the energy to face the duties of the throne. She personally raised fresh troops and kept the old in their allegiance; she ruled her subjects mercifully and showed a threatening front to her enemies; did everything in short, in such a way that there was no difference to be seen, except her sex.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Guillelmus Tyrensis, “Historia rerum gestarum in partibus transmarinis,” ed. by J. P. Migne, vol. CCI, lib. XV, cap. XXVII, in the Patrologia Latina Database; “reseditque regni potestas penes dominam Milisendem, Deo amabilem reginam, cui jure hereditario competebat.” My translation. <http://colet.lib.uchicago.edu/cgibin/navigate?/projects/artflb/databases/efts/PLD/IMAGE1/.5452>

<sup>143</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, p. 46; “Nec deerat mulieri spiritus ad obeunda rengi munia. Ipsa novos exercitus moliri, ueteres tenere in offitio, ipsa subiectos clementer moderari, hostibus minaciter infremere, prorsus omnia facere ut nichil preter sexum discerneres.”

Aethelflaed is another powerful female ruler who is praised not only by William of Malmesbury, but also by other chroniclers. She was the widow of Aethelred, ealdorman of Mercia, the daughter of Alfred the Great of Wessex and sister of Edward the Elder, king of Wessex. According to Malmesbury, Aethelred's widow Aethelflaed was popular with the citizens and a terror to the enemy. Just as he did for Empress Matilda, William calls her "virago potentissima." She was so remarkable for her governance and her spirited support of her brother's military campaigns that William says "it would be hard to say whether it was luck or character that made a woman such a tower of strength for the men of her side and such a terror to the rest."<sup>144</sup>

John of Worcester suggests that when Aethelred, ealdorman and a man of outstanding goodness, died after performing many good deeds, his wife Aethelflaed held the kingdom of the Mercians and became the "lady of the Mercians." According to him, Aethelflaed, "distinguished by her prudence and justice, a woman of outstanding virtue" ruled on her own the kingdom of Mercia "with vigorous and just government."<sup>145</sup> She left her daughter Aelfwynn as "heiress to her kingdom."<sup>146</sup> However her brother King Edward deprived Aelfwynn of the kingdom of Mercia and ordered her to be taken to Wessex. Here, it is clear that Aethelflaed willed her inheritance, that is, the kingdom, to her daughter. But after her death her brother contravened her will and took over the rule. It seems that even if in the Anglo-Saxon period women could will their property to whomever they wanted, there were occasions in which these wills could not work in practice and that while one female

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<sup>144</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, p. 199; "Virago potentissima mutuum fratrem consiliis iuuare, in urbibus extruendis non minus ualere; non discernas potiore fortuna uel uirtute ut mulier viros domesticos protegeret, alienos terreret."

<sup>145</sup> *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, vol. II, p. 381; "Insignis prudentia et iustitie, virtutisque eximie femina.... sola regnum Merciorum strenuo iustoque rexit moderamine."

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 380; "heredem regni."

ruler might be accepted another might not. Another chronicler who praises Aethelflaed is Aelred of Rievaulx, a Cistercian monk and abbot of Rievaulx. In his work *Genealogia Regum Anglorum* he describes her as “in sex she was indeed a woman, but in spirit and strength more a man.”<sup>147</sup> He mentions that Aethelflaed constructed many cities and she herself fought the Welsh and defeated them and she also besieged Derby and took it. On account of all this, Aelred suggests that Aethelflaed “displayed such courage that many called her king.”<sup>148</sup>

In contrast to the monastic chroniclers who mentioned Aethelflaed as ruler taking the throne after the death of her husband Aethelred, Henry of Huntingdon, a secular priest, introduces her mistakenly as the daughter and heir of Aethelred, who had been ill and had given his land to his daughter because he had no son. It is hard to know whether Henry just made a mistake unknowingly or did it deliberately in view of the contemporary case of Empress Matilda. Through such a mistake he might imply that as in the twelfth century, in the Anglo-Saxon period, daughters could acquire the throne in their own right, and suggesting that female succession had a long tradition behind it. Henry records that this lady is said to have been so powerful that in praise of her wonderful gifts, some call her “not only lady or queen but even king.”<sup>149</sup> He suggests “if fate had not snatched her away so swiftly, she would have surpassed all men in valour.”<sup>150</sup> Moreover, in her memory Henry of Huntingdon wrote in poetic vein:

O mighty, Ethelfled! O virgin, the dread of men, conqueror of nature, worthy of a man's name! Nature made you a girl, so you would be more illustrious; your prowess made you acquire the name of man. For you alone it is right to

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<sup>147</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx, *Aelred of Rievaulx: The Historical Works*, p. 87. Aelred of Rievaulx, “*Genealogia Regum Anglorum*,” p. 723; “sexu quidem femina, sed animo ac virtute plus viro.”

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87. Aelred of Rievaulx, “*Genealogia Regum Anglorum*,” p. 723; “tantaque fortitudine emicuit, ut a pluribus rex diceretur.”

<sup>149</sup> Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, p. 307; “Hec igitur domina tante potentie fertur fuisse, ut a quibusdam non solum domina uel regina, sed etiam rex vocaretur.”

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 308; “Nisi fati uelocitate prerepta fuisset, uiros uirtute transisset uniuersos.”



change the name of your sex: you were a mighty queen and a king who won victories. Even Caesar's triumphs did not bring such great rewards. Virgin heroine, more illustrious than Caesar, farewell.<sup>151</sup>

Through this poem Henry praises Aethelflead for her campaigns against the invading Danes, Irish and Norwegians and for defending her frontiers. Henry introduces Aelfwynn as Aethelflaed's sister rather than her daughter, necessarily in view of his virgin queen motif. This error here is clearly dependent on his earlier one. He suggests that King Edward "acting with regard to expediency rather than to justice, disinherited Aelfwynn," who had succeeded Aethelflaed, of the lordship of Mercia.<sup>152</sup>

The close interest shown in Aethelflaed by the chroniclers of the Anglo-Norman period largely reflects their attitude towards women and power. They do not seem to find her authority unusual, because in their own period there were female figures who acted like their Aethelflaed. The monastic chroniclers' embellishment of the story of Aethelflaed reflects their understanding of women's role in society and their relationship with power and authority in the twelfth century. For them, Aethelflaed was remarkable for her rule, for her support of her brother Edward's military campaigns and her brave struggles to defend her frontiers. From this it can be inferred that the ideal female ruler in the mind of Anglo-Norman chroniclers suggests her to be a *virago*, and for them, the word *virago* has none of the negative connotations it has today. As suggested before, it is used by the twelfth century chroniclers as a compliment for women who were powerful and brave.

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<sup>151</sup> Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, p. 308; "O Eilfleda potens, O terror virgo virorum, victrix nature, nomine digna uiri. Te, quo splendidior fieres, natura puellam, te probitas fecit nomen habere uiri. Te mutare decet, sed solam, nomina sexus, tu regina potens rexque trophea parans. Iam nec Cesarei tantum meruere triumphi, Cesare splendidior, uirgo uirago uale."

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 310; "Edwardus rex exhereditauit ex dominio totius Merce Alfwen sororem Athelfled, que postea regnum illud tenuit, magis curans an utiliter uel inutiliter ageret, quam an iuste uel iniuste."

The examples of female rulers in the chronicles are not restricted to the Anglo-Saxon period. Henry of Huntingdon and Geoffrey of Monmouth, both secular clerks, give also examples from a more distant past. Although these chroniclers varied in terms of their religious profession as secular clerics from the monastic writers, it is hard to talk about a difference among these writers in terms of their outlook about women and their relationship with power or authority. Just like monastic chronicles, the chronicles written by secular clerks are very rich in terms of female rulers. Besides Seaxburh and Aethelflaed, Henry of Huntingdon gives examples from the queens of Old Israel and Rome. For Henry, Deborah, the prophetess of the tribe of Ephraim ruled the Hebrews for forty years “with spirit and manly skill.”<sup>153</sup> In Egypt when Ptolemy was defeated by the Romans, Caesar gave the kingdom to Cleopatra who ruled twenty-two years.<sup>154</sup> Henry also gives examples from the old Britain. When Lucrinus, son of Brutus, deceived his wife with another woman, his wife Gondolovea (Gwendolen) killed him with an arrow in battle and punished her husband’s offence of adultery. She was therefore elevated as queen and had reigned for fifteen years.<sup>155</sup>

Geoffrey of Monmouth in the *Historia Regum Britanniae* also praises women rulers by giving examples of successful queens such as Gwendolen and Marcia from the distant British past. Like Henry of Huntingdon, Geoffrey talks about Gwendolen, who had married Brutus’s eldest son Locrinus but was deserted by him for another woman, Estrildis. As a result, Gwendolen made war on him, a war in which he was killed and, thus, she reigned alone for fifteen years. Then she gave the throne to her

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<sup>153</sup> Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, p. 509; “animo et exercitio virili.”

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 529.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 561-63; Although it is not mentioned explicitly, it is possible that Henry took this example from Geoffrey of Monmouth’s chronicle *Historia Regum Britanniae*.

son and retired to reign over Cornwall.<sup>156</sup> Another ruler, Marcia, was the mother of an heir to the kingdom, who was under age. She ruled as a powerful widow on behalf of her son until she died, and then her son took over the throne. Thus she was situated within a family context, ruling for her son.<sup>157</sup> She was presented as one of the most distinguished and praiseworthy of women in early British history. She was described as an educated woman of accomplishment “skilled in all the arts, exerted power with intelligence and sense, and among the many extraordinary things she used her talent to invent a law she devised which was called the *Lex Martiana* by the Britons,” which Geoffrey notes King Alfred translated into Old English as the Mercian Law.<sup>158</sup> These qualities in a way explain as well as justify her becoming the monarch of England upon her husband’s death, since her son Sisilius was only seven. By allowing Marcia to stand in the succession as a praiseworthy and accomplished ruler, it is implied that women also could be good rulers.

The interesting difference of Geoffrey of Monmouth from other chroniclers is that apart from examples of female rulers who acted as powerful consorts in the realm or who took the throne after their husbands’ death, he also gives examples of female rulers who inherited the throne directly in their own right. The previous examples of female rulers derived their authority from their marriage, as the wives of kings. Their husbands or sons nominally had the authority and they held authority on behalf of them while their husbands were away or while their sons were too young to exercise it.<sup>159</sup> On the other hand, in Geoffrey’s chronicle there are examples of

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<sup>156</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. by Thorpe (London: Penguin, 1988), 76-77

<sup>157</sup> Susan Johns, *Noblewomen, Aristocracy and Power in the Twelfth-Century Anglo-Norman Realm* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2003), p. 41.

<sup>158</sup> *The Historia Regum Britanniae of Geoffrey of Monmouth I: Bern MS 568*, p. 31; Marcia was described as “omnibus erudite artibus”, “consilio et sensu pollebat”, and “inter multa et inaudita quae proprio ingenio repererat invenit legem quam Brittones Marcianam appellaverunt”

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

female rulers who derived their right to rule from birth. Although Gransden describes Geoffrey as “a romance writer masquerading as a historian,” he talks about women exercising power and authority in their own right at a time when political disputes had arisen about a woman’s succession.<sup>160</sup> In fact, Geoffrey’s positive images of female rulership were constructed at precisely the time when such images were required for the rule of Empress Matilda.

For instance, he discusses Cordelia. According to his account, King Leir had no son but three daughters. When Leir became old, he decided to divide the kingdom among his daughters and to marry them to husbands whom he considered to be suited to them and capable of ruling the kingdom along with them. In an attempt to discover, which of the three was most worthy of inheriting the larger part of his realm, he tested them by asking which of them loved him most. Two of his daughters told him that they loved him more than anyone. But Cordelia said her father was worth just as much as he possessed and that was the measure of her own love for him. This answer made Leir angry and he deprived her of the kingdom and he shared his kingdom between his two eldest daughters. Some time after, when King Leir began to grow old, his daughters with their husbands rebelled against him. And soon they deprived him of his glory. So he asked for Cordelia’s help. Cordelia and her husband defeated her sisters and restored Leir to his throne. After his death Cordelia inherited the government of the kingdom of Britain.<sup>161</sup>

Besides Cordelia, Helena, daughter of Coel, was also designated to succeed to the throne when her father died without legitimate male offspring. She was instructed by her father in the liberal arts so that she could govern the kingdom.<sup>162</sup> Even so, Helena was also endowed with outstanding beauty and thus she fulfilled her

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<sup>160</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing*, p. 202.

<sup>161</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. by L. Thorpe, pp. 81-87.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

function by marrying and producing a male heir to the kingdom. Although trained to rule, Geoffrey notes that she did not rule over the kingdom. The possible aim for Geoffrey to give the Helena example is to show the possibility for women to be trained to rule.

On the other hand, Leir's heir, Cordelia continued his lineage by ruling over his kingdom. It is possible to establish close relations between Cordelia's example and the case of Empress Matilda. Like Cordelia, Empress Matilda inherited the throne to maintain her father's lineage. Through this example Geoffrey in a way suggests that the succession of a woman to the crown by hereditary right was a custom established early in the history of Britain. And as examples show, a woman either as a wife or as a female heir would convey or alone hold sovereignty if there was no available son. This, in a way, implies the inheritance methods applied during Geoffrey's time. All these women in the *Historia Regum Britanniae* were praised for their brilliance as queens, for their wisdom, justice and loyalty. Each of them became rulers or regents in Britain and they were famous for their success as ruling monarchs.

On the whole, the examples of female rulers and female succession in the chronicles of the Anglo-Norman period are of great importance in terms of reflecting the reality of the twelfth-century England and male attitudes to that reality. It is clear that all these chroniclers, both secular and monastic, give examples of women who held the throne for their husbands or sons and exercised power and authority in politics and government. Although these secular and monastic chroniclers are not radically different in terms of their attitudes towards the idea of female rule, the way secular clerks dealt with the issue is slightly different from the monastic writers. For instance, neither Geoffrey of Monmouth nor Henry of Huntingdon limits themselves

to examples of a past that could be substantiated. On the contrary, they provided or more explicitly made up examples from the distant past in order to support their case. Moreover, Henry of Huntingdon's use of biblical examples, though not fictional in a twelfth-century sense, gives richness to his chronicle in terms of establishing his claim through a wide range of sources. All this can suggest that secular clerks show a greater freedom in the search for examples.

Although their examples are from the distant and unknowable past and although some of the characters are fictional, they are still important in terms of revealing the outlook of these chroniclers about women and their relationship with power and authority. In fact these examples should be considered with regard to the real examples of politically active women of the Anglo-Norman period, as well as to the contemporary debate about the Empress Matilda's right to rule. Their examples provide a kind of legitimization for the rule of Matilda. By presenting female succession and female rule as a natural process in the absence of male heirs, they provide the aristocracy of their own time with a history that shows legitimate succession, not only of eldest sons, but also of women in the absence of male heirs. Moreover the similarities between the female characters from the past and the contemporary ones in terms of power and authority underline a sort of argued continuity in women's status.

Another important point that is to be mentioned about these chroniclers is the way they approach female power. According to Betty Bandel, Anglo-Norman chroniclers described powerful women of the distant past who took part in politics and government of the realm, such as Aethelflaed, as manlike because there were no such active women in their period due to "the actual shrinking of opportunities for

women.”<sup>163</sup> As this situation was astonishing for these chroniclers, they described Aethelflaed’s power and authority as something unusual and manly. This argument of Bandel clearly shows that she has a similar attitude to that of McNamara and Wemple concerning the power and authority of Anglo-Norman women. However, as the examples derived from the chronicles throughout this chapter demonstrate, it is hard to assume that the power of royal and noble women lessened during the Anglo-Norman period. On the contrary, the chroniclers recognized and accepted that the political and social conditions of their day certainly meant that women, acting to secure familial claims, would exercise public authority. Therefore they not only agreed that women had a significant role in public sphere but also encouraged them to fulfil their role actively.

In the depiction of these roles chroniclers took manliness as a positive affirmation for women who exercised power and authority. This attitude of the chroniclers in describing women in male-gendered terms brings to mind Duby and Stafford’s argument that “the exercise of power could de- or re-gender individuals.”<sup>164</sup> The twelfth-century chroniclers’ accounts include numerous examples of women ruling on behalf of their husbands, defending besieged castles and even leading troops in battle. The depiction of female figures in Orderic Vitalis such as Queen Matilda, Adela of Blois, Mabel of Belleme and Isabel of Tosny, or William of Malmesbury’s and other chroniclers’ description of Anglo-Norman queens and Empress Matilda, indicates their gendered, though flexible attitude towards female power and authority.

All these women were described as powerful political figures acting like men. It is most likely that the examples of such forceful and competent women in their

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<sup>163</sup> Betty Bandel, “The English Chroniclers’ Attitude Toward Women,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 16, no. 1 (1955): 114.

<sup>164</sup> Susan Johns, *Noblewomen, Aristocracy and Power*, p. 21.

world made the chroniclers consider the women who lived long before their time in a similar way. For instance William of Malmesbury's depiction of Seaxburh or Aethelflaed parallels his depiction of Empress Matilda. All these women were described as *virago*, which denotes a compliment to the women. They were treated as figures who exceeded their sex and became 'masculinized'. In fact during the civil war, both Matildas were described in masculine terms by different chroniclers. While the author of the *Gesta Stephani*, who was sympathetic to Stephen, describes his queen as "a woman of subtlety and a man's resolution," William of Malmesbury in the *Historia Novella* described the Empress Matilda as "a powerful lady."<sup>165</sup>

It appears that twelfth-century writers interpreted the exercise of secular power as an activity calling for what they saw as active, vigorous, and masculine virtues. In fact it is not surprising in the sense that, as the vast majority of rulers had been male the art of ruling was defined in masculine terms. In order to be a ruler, a woman had to overcome the handicaps of her female sex and acquire the masculine virtues of strength, steadfastness and wisdom. In St. Bernard of Clairvaux's words "show the man in the woman."<sup>166</sup> She had to be capable of transcending the weakness of her sex by acting manfully, though this did not necessitate her being a good warrior.

It is clear that in the chronicles the highest praise that could be paid to women in power and authority was that they indeed acted like men. According to Ferrante, these women were praised as "the glory of their sex."<sup>167</sup> In a way, women who exercised secular power could rise above their sex by virtue of their official roles. For instance, St Bernard of Clairvaux advised Queen Melisende of Jerusalem after

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<sup>165</sup> *Gesta Stephani*, pp. 122-23; "astuti pectoris virilisque constantiae femina." William of Malmesbury, *Historia Novella*, p. 99; "virago."

<sup>166</sup> Duby, "Women and Power," p. 78; "in muliere exhibeas virum."

<sup>167</sup> Joan Ferrante, *To the glory of her sex*, p. 15.



the death of her husband that she should “show the man in the woman; order all things...so that those who see you will judge your works to be those of a king rather than a queen.”<sup>168</sup> As mentioned before, Melisende was a truly remarkable woman, who for over thirty years exercised considerable power in the kingdom of Jerusalem where there was no previous tradition of any woman holding public office. In William of Tyre’s comment she was:

She was the most prudent woman, having full experience in almost all secular businesses and excelling completely the condition of female sex, thus, she could release her hand to forceful action. She strived to imitate the greatness of the bravest leaders and to follow their eagerness with no inferior pace.<sup>169</sup>

From such descriptions of virtuous rule in male terms, it is possible to argue that the construction of gender and attention to role definition is an increasingly marked feature of the writing of Anglo-Norman chroniclers.

Certain conclusions can be drawn in terms of female power and authority as well as its portrayal by Anglo-Norman chroniclers. First of all, from these chronicles, the general image that can be derived about women is that they exercised power and authority in the political sphere as queens, regents and co-rulers. Moreover, as peacemakers, benefactresses and intercessors they played an active role in the public sphere. Although it is hard to know to what extent these images created by contemporary churchmen reflected the reality, it is obvious that these religious men recognized that the high medieval queen, in a position to influence and sometimes directing royal policy, continued to be an influential political force whose personality and ability could set the tone for the entire court. Through their patronage of both lay

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<sup>168</sup> Joan Ferrante, *To the glory of her sex*, p. 14.

<sup>169</sup> Guillelmus Tyrensis, “*Historia rerum gestarum in partibus transmarinis*,” lib. XVI, cap. III; “mulier prudentissima, plenam pene in omnibus saecularibus negotiis habens experientiam, sexus feminei plane vincens conditionem, ita ut ut manum mitteret ad fortia; et optimorum principum magnificentiam niteretur aemulari, et eorum studia passu non inferiore sectari.” My translation.

and ecclesiastical magnates, as well as of writers, queens actively worked to strengthen this recognition.

In that sense, the arguments of McNamara and Facingier, that the early twelfth century sees the end of the power of queens, do not seem to reflect the real picture. At least the chronicle sources tell us otherwise. Actually, their arguments have some justification in a series of developments occurring between the tenth and twelfth centuries that helped to remove or change the conditions within which earlier queens had achieved their power. For instance, a series of changes in the succession methods and treatments of the royal inheritance had significant effects. There was a shift from the division of kingdoms toward the passing on of a unified inheritance in all medieval Europe. As there did not remain sufficient separate kingdoms to endow all sons and also the struggles over the succession intensified, the practice of the division of kingdoms among all sons was abandoned. Kings confined the succession to the eldest son, establishing primogeniture to exclude younger sons. However this system of primogeniture and a new emphasis on legitimacy brought a prestigious status to wives, especially royal wives. Moreover primogeniture opened a way for women to the succession to the throne. For the first time in this period we come across female successions in various parts of Europe, including England.

Secondly, it has been suggested that the eleventh century and especially the twelfth century saw a shift away from household politics toward a greater bureaucratization in Western Europe. It has been argued that this shift removed some of the queen's powers by keeping her away from the king and so from politics, due to the development of a formal court. There may be some truth here, though it is better to stay away from generalizations as they may result in oversimplification. Even if bureaucratic administration was adopted at the court, it is clear that, apart from

Adeliza of Louvain, almost all Anglo-Norman queens took both politically and socially very active roles. Moreover, as government in the medieval period was essentially personal rule, the influence of queens over the king remained always at the centre of medieval politics. In that sense it is possible to suggest that in this period there was still no clear-cut division between public and private spheres. Therefore, women had as full a role to play in society as men, however but the way their power was defined in society was different from that of men because gender roles affected their position and power.

Lastly, although many historians have thought of the Norman Conquest of England as the reason for women's exclusion from power and authority, the chroniclers of the Anglo-Norman period do not make any comment on this. In fact their attitude reflects mostly their concerns about contemporary developments rather than the impact of the Conquest on women. Moreover, through their examples of politically active female figures, they suggest rather a continuation of earlier patterns in the position of women from the Anglo-Saxon period to the Anglo-Norman period. They imply that the High Middle Ages did not see an abrupt increase or expansion in the rights, position and activities of noblewomen, but saw rather a continuation of an earlier pattern and practice. In order to establish this, some chroniclers even made up examples. It might be true that the changes in inheritance and property holding, and ideology influenced the position of queens. However it is misleading to consider this influence as a weakening of the position of queens and noblewomen of the Anglo-Norman period. The chronicle sources of the period are one of the valuable sources that refute the argument that the position of royal and noble women deteriorated.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **The Impact of the Empress Matilda**

The analysis of the attitudes of early twelfth-century chroniclers towards royal and noble women, as we have already discussed in the previous chapter, shows that these historians realized and accepted the power and authority of women in the public sphere. They recognized that the political and social realities of their day inevitably included women in political affairs and while showing this in their chronicles, they not only emphasized that women had a valuable role to play within the public sphere, but also praised them when they took on strong and active roles. As emphasized in the previous chapters, one of the most important developments in this period that certainly influenced the approach of these men towards women was the designation of a female as an heir to the throne. In the early twelfth century for the first time in England a king, Henry I, tried hard and arranged the succession to the throne in favour of his daughter, Matilda. However, after Henry's death, Matilda could not gain the throne, and until the early modern period — the reign of Mary Tudor — no queen became ruler in her own right in England.

Many modern historians have interpreted the failure of Matilda to come to the throne as predictable because she was female, and because before her there had never been a female ruler in her own right in either England or Normandy. In fact in this assumption, the attitude of sixteenth-century writers towards the rule of Mary Tudor seems to be influential, because when Mary Tudor looked set to succeed in the

absence of male descendants of Henry VIII after Edward VI's death, the writers of the sixteenth century produced a lot of arguments against female rule. The main focus of their arguments was that, in the hierarchy of creation established by God and particularly as described in Genesis, woman was created and designated as subordinate to man and for this reason she should have an inferior position in human society.<sup>170</sup> Thus a woman ruler exercising authority over men obviously violated this divinely instituted condition of subordination. For sixteenth-century writers a woman could be admitted as a ruler only in two ways: either she was to be given the superior place in society "by an exceptional grace", or she had to deserve it "by virtue of her superior abilities".<sup>171</sup>

Since the early modern period, there has been a tendency among the historians to explain Matilda's failure with similar kinds of misogynistic attitude. Moreover, these historians have also suggested that the realities of feudal life required the ruler to have the power to command and punish. This power called for the taking up of arms — in other words physical strength which women did not have. In that sense it was believed to be against woman's nature to become a ruler. Thus taking all this into account, historians have posited Matilda's sex as the reason for her failure.<sup>172</sup> However, when we look at the chronicles of the period, it is clear that the chroniclers of the early twelfth century were not worried about the same issues as their successors. Gender did not seem to appear in the twelfth-century succession debate and Matilda's sex was never once given as a direct reason for her exclusion

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<sup>170</sup> Constance Jordan, "Woman's Rule in the Sixteenth-Century British Political Thought," *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 40, no. 3 (1987): 420.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 421-22.

<sup>172</sup> The supporters of this view are Jim Bradbury, *Stephen and Matilda: The Civil War of 1139-53* (Stroud: Allan Sutton, 1996); R.H.C. Davis, *King Stephen*; Keith Stringer, *The Reign of Stephen* (London: Routledge, 1993); Marjorie Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*; Lois Huneycutt, "Female Succession and the Language of Power in the writings of Twelfth-Century Churchmen," in *Medieval Queenship*, ed. by John Carmi Parsons (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991)

from the throne. This fact inevitably forces us to reconsider and re-evaluate the failure of Matilda in the light of the information provided by the chronicles of her period.

Such a study requires a careful analysis of the chronicles as each of them has its own standpoint. Each chronicle describes Empress Matilda<sup>173</sup> from a different perspective; thus, it can be hard to reach a concrete and consistent portrayal of her by analysing one or two of them. It is necessary to read as many as possible in order to construct the best mosaic. Only in that way will it be possible to understand the main reason for Matilda's failure. Moreover, such an analysis will be helpful in exploring the basic factors in the chroniclers' formation of the image of Empress Matilda and, in a general sense, in identifying their perception of women's complex relationship with power and authority in the social, political and cultural context of twelfth-century England.

While analysing the chronicles it is important to make a categorization in terms of their date of composition. Among the early twelfth-century chroniclers, William of Malmesbury, Orderic Vitalis, John of Worcester, Simeon of Durham, Richard of Hexham and Geoffrey of Monmouth all wrote or at least finished their chronicle in the thick of the civil conflict when the outcome was still uncertain. Almost all these chroniclers described Matilda at a difficult and relatively early stage of her struggle. On the other hand, other chroniclers, the author of the *Gesta Stephani*, Henry of Huntingdon, Robert of Torigny, John of Hexham and John of Salisbury wrote or revised their chronicles at a later time, during the reign of Henry II, son of Empress Matilda, or at least when Henry II's accession seemed to be agreed, and this certainly affected how King Stephen's reign and Matilda's challenge

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<sup>173</sup> Matilda took the title of empress after her marriage with German Emperor Henry V. In fact she continued to use this title even after leaving Germany. Whatever her official status, she was widely recognized as the empress until her death.

was seen. Thus, it is hard to expect the same reactions to Matilda when talking about these chroniclers who were writing when victory for one side was assured.<sup>174</sup>

When the Angevins began to gain strength, these chroniclers began to criticize the disorder under Stephen and regarded Henry II as the lawful heir. In fact, the decision of the Church and papacy in rejecting Stephen's son Eustace and supporting Henry II as the rightful heir was certainly influential in the attitude of these chroniclers. Both the papacy and the archbishop of Canterbury turned against King Stephen to some extent, largely over the contentious and drawn-out York election after 1140, but especially after 1143.<sup>175</sup> When the Papacy and the archbishop of Canterbury refused to crown Stephen's son, Eustace, as he wished, it became clear that they began to see Henry Plantagenet as Stephen's successor.<sup>176</sup> This was not just over dissatisfaction with Stephen, but also a search for a solution to the conflict. The loss of faith in Stephen's dynastic prospects must have progressively influenced authors. Therefore, one way or another, these chroniclers were written from a particular viewpoint. In that sense, it is important to make a classification of these chronicles by dividing them into two periods: the chronicles written before around 1143 and the chronicles written or revised from 1154 onwards.

Among the chronicles of earlier period, the *Historia Regum* written by Simeon of Durham is the first one in the chronological order of completion. As mentioned in the first chapter, only the last section — the annals from 1119 to 1129 — is original as it is thought to have been recorded fairly close to the events. Thus it can be said that the events that took place in this period in fact involve Simeon's own comments and interpretations. As his chronicle ends in 1129, he only deals with the

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<sup>174</sup> Pauline Stafford, "The Portrayal of Royal Women in England, Mid-Tenth to Mid-Twelfth Centuries," in *Medieval Queenship* ed. by John Carmi Parsons (New York: St Martin's Press, 1998), p. 159.

<sup>175</sup> David Crouch, *The Reign of King Stephen, 1135-1154* (Harlow: Longman, 2000), pp. 246-247

<sup>176</sup> Crouch, *Reign of King Stephen*, pp. 246-247; R.H.C. Davis, *King Stephen*, pp. 99-103.

earlier career of Matilda; but still it is important in terms of providing interesting details especially about the succession debate.

Another chronicle that must be mentioned is the *Historia Regum Britanniae* written by Geoffrey of Monmouth. As suggested earlier, it was one of the most important and popular medieval Latin chronicles though it is very different from the contemporary chronicles in terms of its style and content. Although it dealt with a distant past, the *Historia* gave a significant place to women, especially powerful women, who took active roles in governing the kingdom. When the mostly fictitious content of the *Historia* is considered, it can be said that Geoffrey's view of women actually gives an insight into his view of the ideal roles of women in the contemporary society. Why Geoffrey adopted such an attitude is open to discussion. He might really want to emphasize women's importance in medieval politics or he might have completely different purposes.

If we consider the *Historia Regum Britanniae* in the political context of the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman realm, it can be suggested that the portrayal of powerful women could be propagandist in purpose, because there was, at the time Geoffrey was writing, a dispute, at first implicitly and then from 1135 openly, over Matilda's succession and therefore over the question of woman's exercising political power. As Johns suggested, "historical writing in any period is a political act."<sup>177</sup> Therefore, it is likely that Geoffrey conceived his *Historia* in part at least as political propaganda for the rule of Matilda. Moreover, behind his propagandist attitude, the influence of one of his patrons is undeniable. As indicated before, one of the dedicatees to whom Geoffrey wrote his *Historia* was Robert earl of Gloucester, who was Matilda's half-brother and the greatest supporter of Matilda in her claim to

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<sup>177</sup> Susan Johns, *Noblewomen, Aristocracy and Power*, p. 25.



throne.<sup>178</sup> Thus, it can be said that in praising the rule of women, Geoffrey might have a very practical aim: he might just be taking his political cue from his patron, intending to please him and gain his favour.

The chronicle of John of Worcester is another chronicle which covers only the opening years of the period, 1118-40. The attitude of John towards the conflict between Matilda and Stephen was ambivalent. Stephen's first appearance in the chronicle is as a perjurer as he was first among those who betrayed the oath sworn to Matilda. However in the following pages John gives a place to Stephen's good qualities as a "rex pietatis et pacis".<sup>179</sup> On the other hand, the Gloucester chronicle, added to the Worcester chronicle, derived its information from Miles of Gloucester, who was a supporter of Matilda. Thus, it seems to have a favourable attitude towards Matilda.<sup>180</sup> It can be suggested that John is in favour of Stephen, while the Gloucester chronicler is sympathetic to Matilda, but still both are critical about the sides they support. While John criticizes some of Stephen's actions, the author of Gloucester chronicle is critical about Matilda's attitudes after the battle of Lincoln.

Orderic Vitalis gives a contemporary account of the reign down to June 1141, with special emphasis on Normandy towards the end of his *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Orderic was an admirer of Waleran of Meulan who until 1141 was a devoted supporter of Stephen.<sup>181</sup> In his *History*, Orderic seems to be a bit selective in the interest of King Stephen and against Matilda and Geoffrey in Normandy. However, after the Battle of Lincoln in 1141 when Stephen was captured, Waleran of Meulan changed sides and began to support the Angevins. Once Waleran was accepted at the court of Geoffrey of Anjou; his lands in England and Normandy were confirmed to

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<sup>178</sup> Michael Curley, *Geoffrey of Monmouth*, p. 23.

<sup>179</sup> *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, vol. III, p. xxxiv.

<sup>180</sup> R.H.C. Davis, *King Stephen*, p. 148.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

him. In fact Waleran's support of the Angevins was mostly a matter of protecting his lands in Normandy, where most of them lay. Many in 1141 behaved like Waleran in order not to lose their lands; this would perhaps have an impact on Orderic as at the end of his history he accepted that Stephen's failure was inevitable.<sup>182</sup>

Another chronicler of this period is Richard of Hexham. As mentioned before, Richard of Hexham wrote a comprehensive account of the events from 1135 to 1139 with a specific emphasis on relations with the Scots.<sup>183</sup> Moreover, Richard's chronicle, *De Gestis Regis Stephani et de Bello Standardi*, is important in the sense that it includes the only known text of the bull by which Pope Innocent II recognized Stephen's kingship.

The *Historia Novella*, written by William of Malmesbury, extends to the end of 1142. It starts with Matilda's return from Germany to England after her husband's death in 1126 and continued up to the description of the empress's escape from Oxford in 1142. In *Historia Novella* William of Malmesbury largely dealt with the succession debate. He dedicated his work to Robert earl of Gloucester, half-brother of Empress Matilda, and thus wrote his history from Matilda's side. But this, according to Davis, "increases rather than decreases its value."<sup>184</sup> According to Gransden the other reason for William to support Matilda was that King Stephen's supporter Roger, bishop of Salisbury created political strife and separation between the monks of Malmesbury and the secular clergy. Moreover, Roger was not liked by the monks because he "usurped the abbey's liberties from 1118 until his death in 1139."<sup>185</sup> Thus William took the opposite side to Roger in politics and favoured the Empress. However it is important to note that Roger of Salisbury lost favour with

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<sup>182</sup> Orderic Vitalis, vol. VI, pp. xxvi-xxvii.

<sup>183</sup> R.H.C. Davis, *King Stephen*, p. 148.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>185</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, p. 180.

King Stephen in 1139 and thus was deprived of all his wealth by Stephen, and died in 1139. In that sense it is arguable to what extent William's antipathy towards Roger of Salisbury was influential over his support of Matilda. In fact the partiality of William in favour of Matilda does not make him appear as a hostile enemy towards Stephen. In certain cases William does not hesitate to treat King Stephen justly in terms of his virtues — his good nature and courtesy.

Among the latter group of chronicles which were written or revised from 1154 onwards, there is the *Gesta Stephani*. It is clear that the *Gesta Stephani* was begun as a panegyric to King Stephen. The anonymous author of the *Gesta* praises Stephen as a rightful and legitimate king while he criticizes Matilda for ruling tyrannically, disregarding all her counsellors. In fact the *Gesta* was written in two stages: first in about 1148, an account of Stephen's reign until 1147 was written and the second part of the work was written after 1153.<sup>186</sup> In the first part of his work, the author often emphasizes that Stephen tried hard to maintain peace, law and order; however, in the second part he changed his tone and began to criticize the disorder under Stephen and regarded Henry of Anjou as "the lawful heir".<sup>187</sup> In this, the recognition of Henry II as the rightful heir by the Church and papacy was certainly influential.

Another chronicle written in the latter period was Henry of Huntingdon's *Historia Anglorum*. As mentioned in the first chapter, Henry dedicated his *Historia* to Alexander Bishop of Lincoln, and presumably reflected his outlook. Alexander was the nephew of Roger, Bishop of Salisbury who had been a supporter of Stephen and even his chief minister. However, as previously mentioned, in 1139 he was arrested along with Alexander and Nigel, Bishop of Ely due to Stephen's

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<sup>186</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing*, p. 190.

<sup>187</sup> *Gesta Stephani*, pp. xix-xxxv.

unreliability towards them.<sup>188</sup> This event possibly influenced Henry, as he seems to react against Stephen in certain cases. An at least equally important factor might be that he completed his *Historia* after the accession of Henry II. From that point of view, it was natural for him to be critical towards Stephen and his reign.

The *Historia Pontificalis* by John of Salisbury is a valuable source, although it covers four years only, 1148 to 1152. John of Salisbury composed his *Historia* between 1153 and 1164. His history is mainly memoirs of his visit to the papal court and only of secondary interest for English affairs. However, John of Salisbury was able to give an account of Matilda's appeal against Stephen's claim to the throne, which was heard by Innocent II in 1139 and states fully the arguments used in her support by Ulger, bishop of Angers.<sup>189</sup>

John of Hexham, prior of Hexham about 1160, also wrote under Henry II. It is suggested that John wrote his chronicle as a continuation of the *Historia Regum* attributed to Simeon of Durham.<sup>190</sup> His chronicle covers the years from 1130 to 1154. He borrowed the account of the events until 1138 from Richard of Hexham, Henry of Huntingdon and John of Worcester.<sup>191</sup> He seems to have written his work around 1162-70.<sup>192</sup> Like Richard of Hexham, he also mainly focused on the Anglo-Scottish relations in his chronicle.

The chronicle of Robert of Torigny also provides interesting details about the period. Robert became a monk of Bec probably in 1128. In 1154 he was elected abbot of Mont Saint-Michel which he ruled until his death in 1186. Robert had begun writing his chronicle by 1139. He used Henry of Huntingdon's *Historia Anglorum*

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<sup>188</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing*, pp. 192-194.

<sup>189</sup> John of Salisbury, *Historia Pontificalis*, ed. and trans. by M. Chibnall (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), pp. xxxi-xl; Davis, *King Stephen*, p. 148.

<sup>190</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing*, p. 261.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>192</sup> Davis, *King Stephen*, p. 147.

for English affairs until 1147 but after from 1147 onwards the information in his chronicle was original in the sense that it was recorded contemporaneously by Robert.<sup>193</sup> It is suggested that he worked on his chronicle until his death in 1186.<sup>194</sup> Still, Robert's chronicle is an invaluable source, especially for some interesting details about the Empress Matilda. Robert of Torigny favoured Matilda more than Stephen. It can be suggested that in this sympathy, Geoffrey count of Anjou's progressively increasing control of Normandy after 1141, completed by 1144, Matilda's donations to Bec, as well as her support in Robert's becoming abbot of Mont Saint-Michel were influential.<sup>195</sup>

In the light of these chronicles and their standpoints, we can try to evaluate the case of Empress Matilda, but at the outset, it is better to have a look at the developments that carried Matilda on to the Anglo-Norman political stage. Discussions about the succession emerged after Henry I's only legitimate son, William, who had been recognized as heir to England and Normandy, and who had just married the young daughter of the count of Anjou, was drowned in the White Ship in 1120.<sup>196</sup> In fact, in this period there was still no settled law of succession to the English throne. Although there was a tendency towards primogeniture — inheritance by the eldest son — it was not still completely established during the reign of Henry I.<sup>197</sup> The result was naturally a series of struggles over the succession after the death of kings.

Since the reign of William the Conqueror, the crown had not passed smoothly from father to eldest son. It became instead a matter of political conflicts between

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<sup>193</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing*, p. 200.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>195</sup> Chibnall, *Empress Matilda*, p. 158; Chibnall, "The Empress Matilda and Bec-Hellouin," in *Piety, Power and History in Medieval England and Normandy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), p. 43.

<sup>196</sup> Chibnall, *Empress Matilda*, p. 38.

<sup>197</sup> Jane Martindale, "Succession and Politics in the Romance-speaking World, c. 1000-1140," p. 20.

brothers. For instance, William the Conqueror, though not legitimate by birth, took over the kingdom of England by claiming designation. After his death, his lands and titles had been divided between his sons. The second son William Rufus took over the rule of England and the elder son Robert Curthose took the duchy of Normandy. However, after William Rufus was killed in a hunting accident and, while Robert was still returning from the First Crusade, the youngest brother Henry seized the kingdom of England and subsequently conquered the duchy of Normandy from his elder brother, capturing him and imprisoning him for the rest of his life. Thus from 1106 to 1135, the year of his death, Henry I ruled both England and Normandy.<sup>198</sup>

During the reign of Henry I there seemed to be the possibility of a smooth succession to the throne as Henry had declared that William, his only legitimate son, would be the sole heir to both England and Normandy and this had been recognized by everyone. However, William's unexpected death created a threatening situation for Henry, because his nephew William Clito, the son of Robert Curthose, emerged as "his heir presumptive."<sup>199</sup> William Clito thought that he should be the heir to both of the lands Henry had stolen from his father. He had already acquired some sympathy among the Norman nobles and, at least in terms of Normandy, was favoured by the king of France.<sup>200</sup>

King Louis VI of France supported Clito's claim to the duchy because it was in the French king's interest to break the union between England and Normandy.<sup>201</sup> However, Henry was not willing to allow William Clito to succeed either in England or Normandy. In order to get rid of this threat, he decided to marry again as his

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<sup>198</sup> Chibnall, *Empress Matilda*, pp. 6-7; Davis, *King Stephen*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>199</sup> Davis, *King Stephen*, p. 6.

<sup>200</sup> Chibnall, *Empress Matilda*, p. 38; Simeon of Durham, "History of the Kings," p. 616. According to Simeon of Durham, the king of the French took up the cause of Clito and contracted an alliance with him, by giving him in marriage his queen's sister.

<sup>201</sup> Davis, *King Stephen*, p. 6.

queen, Matilda, had already died in 1118. He married Adeliza, daughter of duke Godfrey of Louvain in 1121, with the hope of producing a new male heir. However, Henry seems to have given up hope of this by 1125, at the time of the death of his daughter Matilda's husband, the Emperor Henry V. Matilda was Henry I's only surviving legitimate child, though female of course, and he lost no time in bringing her back to England from Germany.

In fact if Matilda's husband had not died, there seems to have been no question of making Matilda Henry's heir. However, the death of the emperor Henry V raised for Henry I the possibility of being able to marry Matilda again, and this made her attractive as an heir and as an alternative to William Clito. The other alternative was Stephen, his nephew, and much in favour, who might have been a possible choice. At this point, it is open to question why Henry did not choose one of his illegitimate sons as heir to the throne and particularly why Robert earl of Gloucester did not develop a claim to the throne, considering what had happened before in the case of William the Conqueror. The most likely explanation is that legitimacy had become more important as an obstacle to succession by Henry I's time, though it is also the case that William the Conqueror's father had had no legitimate children, male or female.

As a result, Matilda, as the only legitimate heir, was set to inherit the throne. This demonstrates that there was no fixed barrier against a woman inheriting the throne. However, it is clear that inheritance in the female line was determined by certain circumstances. A woman inherited "not because of any title, not because of the survival of more ancient legal arrangements which might allow her a determinate share of her father's lands," but because in the absence of male heirs in the same generation, she was the only means of continuing the lineage, the only legitimate

way to transmit her father's blood.<sup>202</sup> That was certainly the idea that Henry I of England had in his mind when he designated his daughter to succeed him.

In 1127 Henry I attempted to secure Matilda's acceptance as heir by the magnates. He obtained oaths of allegiance to his daughter from all the bishops and magnates present. All the chroniclers give place to this oath-taking in their chronicles, though with some different details. For instance, William of Malmesbury's *Historia Novella* suggests that Henry made the nobles of England swear an oath that "if he himself died without a male heir they would immediately and without hesitation accept his daughter Matilda as their lady."<sup>203</sup> The *Historia Novella* also suggests that as his son William "who would have claimed the kingdom as of right" died, his daughter Matilda remained "in whom alone lay the legitimate succession".<sup>204</sup> Although at that time Matilda had not yet given birth to Henry II and she had not yet even married Geoffrey of Anjou, Henry I was aware that Matilda was a young woman with many years of potential child-bearing ahead. In that sense, while he was referring to Matilda as the person in whom alone lay the lawful succession, he certainly meant her to be the transmitter of his lineage to the next generation.

William of Malmesbury, by putting emphasis on Matilda's lineage, accepted her as the most suitable heir for the throne. According to him, "since her grandfather, uncle and father had been kings, while on her mother's side the royal lineage went back for many centuries...the line of that same royal blood never failed or suffered

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<sup>202</sup> J.C.Holt, "Feudal Society and the Family in Early Medieval England, IV: The Heiress and the Alien," p. 247.

<sup>203</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Historia Novella*, pp. 6-7; "si ipse sine herede masculo decederet, Mathildam filiam suam quondam imperatricem incunctanter et sine ulla retractatione dominam recipient."

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7; "prefatus quanto dampno patriae fortuna Willelmum filium sibi surripuisset, cui iure regnum competeret.....superesse filiam, cui soli legitima debeatur successio."



impediment in succession to monarchy.”<sup>205</sup> This implies that the union between Queen Matilda, whose ties stretched back to the Old English kings, and Henry I, a Norman king, was very important in the sense that Matilda as the child of such a union had a particularly strong hereditary claim to the English throne. In fact, it is not surprising that William, as a supporter of Empress Matilda, put forward such an argument in order to strengthen Matilda’s claim. Also, by emphasizing this fact he, as a man of mixed blood, seems to have had a very practical aim — to tie the Norman past firmly to the English past.

Just like William of Malmesbury, John of Worcester and Simeon of Durham also record that in 1127 the archbishop, all the other bishops and the chief men of England swore fealty to the king’s daughter to defend her loyally against all others if she outlived her father and he left no legitimate son.<sup>206</sup> A short time after these oaths, Henry I began the negotiations for Matilda’s second marriage and Matilda was formally betrothed to Geoffrey of Anjou in 1127. It seems that John of Worcester wanted to emphasize the issue of the husband because of later events; therefore, at this stage added another statement that all agreed to the king’s wish that “his daughter should receive the English kingdom with her lawful husband if she had one, and all were to swear an oath so that this plan should be firmly implemented.”<sup>207</sup> In 1128 Henry I gave Matilda in marriage to Geoffrey, count of Anjou. Such a marriage would prevent the Angevins from supporting Henry I’s rival William Clito.

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<sup>205</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Historia Novella*, p. 7; “ab auo, auunculo, et patre regibus; a materno genere, multis retro seculis...nec umquam eiusdem regalis sanguinis linea defecit, nec in successione regni claudicauit.”

<sup>206</sup> *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, vol. III, p. 167; Simeon of Durham, “History of the Kings,” 616.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 177-179; “Tandem ad uelle regis consentiunt omnes, ut illius filia, Romannorum imperatoris Heinrici relicta, cum legitimo suo si habuerit sponso, in Christi brachio regnum Anglie sustineat; et ut huiusmodi consilium stabile permaneat, ab omnibus fit iuramentum.”

However, this motive disappeared with the death of William Clito at the same year. Thus there remained no real claimant to Robert Curthose's rights.

In his chronicle, William of Malmesbury also records that the marriage of Matilda and Geoffrey led to conflicts about the oaths sworn to Matilda. William suggests that "when this had been done all men began to assert, as though by some prophetic spirit, that after the death of Henry I, they would fail to keep their oath."<sup>208</sup> Moreover it is suggested that Roger, bishop of Salisbury claimed to have been released from the oath he had taken to the empress, because he had sworn only on condition that "the king should not give his daughter in marriage to anyone outside the kingdom without consulting himself and the other chief men."<sup>209</sup> It seems that the rejection of Matilda was in fact a rejection of her husband, rather than of her as a female, because Geoffrey of Anjou was not favoured by the Normans. The distaste towards Geoffrey of Anjou dated back to the times before Norman Conquest when both the Normans and Anjou were fighting for Maine.

For Henry I to marry his daughter to Geoffrey was a bold attempt to settle a long rivalry: the marriage of Matilda and Geoffrey of Anjou would ensure that Anjou and the king of France would not ally again against Normandy, as they had in 1050s.<sup>210</sup> Thus through giving his daughter in marriage to Geoffrey of Anjou, Henry intended to eliminate the Angevin threat in Normandy. However, on the other hand, it also implied that an Angevin would succeed Matilda, if Adeliza, wife of Henry I, could not somehow produce a son. This is what made it a more drastic solution than the marriage of William to the Angevin daughter.

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<sup>208</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Historia Novella*, p. 11; "Quo facto, quodam uaticinio omnes predicabant ut post mortem eius a sacramento desciscerent."

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11; "Ne rex preter consilium suum et ceterorum procerum filiam cuiquam nuptum daret extra regnum."

<sup>210</sup> Chibnall, *Empress Matilda*, p. 55; Davis, *King Stephen*, p. 6.

While William of Malmesbury implies a kind of distaste among the chief men of England towards Geoffrey, Simeon of Durham states in his chronicle that it was agreed that Geoffrey of Anjou should succeed to the kingdom if Henry died without a male heir born in lawful marriage.<sup>211</sup> The *Historia Novella* mentions another set of oaths taken in 1131, when Matilda returned to England from Normandy with her father Henry, “the Empress received an oath of fealty from those who had not given one before and a renewal of the oaths from those who had.”<sup>212</sup> It is clear that there were two sets of oaths: the first oaths did not include Geoffrey as the marriage had not taken place; in the second set of oaths, each chronicler of the earlier period, though he gives the details of it in different ways, accepts that Matilda and her husband Geoffrey possessed the most legitimate hereditary claim to the throne.

The death of Clito in 1128, and the birth of Henry, Geoffrey’s and Matilda’s son and Henry I’s grandson, in 1133, raised hopes for a unified succession. However the death of Henry I in 1135 complicated everything. As it was not publicly declared whom Henry I chose to succeed him before he died, each chronicler gives the accounts of Henry I’s last moments in a different way which reflects his outlook. For instance, according to William of Malmesbury, on his death-bed when Henry I was asked about his successor, “he assigned all his lands on both sides of the sea to his daughter in lawful and lasting succession, being somewhat angry with her husband because he had vexed the king by not a few threats and insults.”<sup>213</sup> According to Chibnall, this statement implies that Henry previously intended Matilda to rule

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<sup>211</sup> Simeon of Durham, “History of the Kings,” p. 616; Symeonis Monachi, “Historia Regum,” p. 282; “ut regi, de legitima conjuge haeredem non habenti, mortuo gener illius in regnum succederet.”

<sup>212</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Historia Novella*, pp. 19-21; “Imperatrix, priscam fidem apud eos qui dederant nouauit, ab his qui non dederant accepit.”

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25; “Filiae omnem terram suam citra et ultra mare legitima et perhenni successione adiudicauit, marito eius subiratus, quod eum et minis et iniuriis aliquantis irritauerant.”

jointly with her husband but on his death-bed he changed his mind and wanted to exclude her husband.<sup>214</sup>

Both Orderic Vitalis and Robert of Torigny also demonstrate that this quarrel between Henry and Geoffrey was related to the succession. According to Orderic Vitalis, Geoffrey of Anjou “demanded castles in Normandy, asserting that the king had covenanted with him to hand them over when he married his daughter.”<sup>215</sup> However Henry refused this because he was not willing “to set anyone above himself as long as he lived, or even to suffer any equal in his house or in his kingdom, for he never forgot the maxim of divine wisdom that no man can serve two masters.”<sup>216</sup> Robert of Torigny also states this as the cause of disagreement: “the king (Henry I) did not want to do homage to his daughter and her husband as they had demanded concerning the fortresses in Normandy and England.”<sup>217</sup> These statements indicate that the dispute between Henry I and Geoffrey was over a supposedly promised *maritagium* but they also imply that this dispute might lead to a conflict between Geoffrey and Henry concerning the previously arranged succession.

Whatever Henry I’s intentions for the succession, it was Matilda’s cousin Stephen of Blois who seized the moment, crossing the channel with the claim that he was the rightful ruler of both England and Normandy. Stephen, nephew of Henry I and grandson of William I, was married to Matilda, the only daughter and heiress of Eustace III, count of Boulogne who, apart from his continental possessions, was one of the richest landowners of England.<sup>218</sup> Thus through his marriage, Stephen became

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<sup>214</sup> Chibnall, *Empress Matilda*, p. 65.

<sup>215</sup> Orderic Vitalis, VI: 444-5; “Iosfredus Andegauensis castella Normanniae poscebat; asserens quod sibi sic ab eodam rege pactum fuerat, quando filiam eius in cniugem acceperat.”

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*; “Animosus autem sceptriger neminem sibi dum uitales carperet auras uoluit preficere, vel eciam in domo sua seu regno sibi coaequare; diligenter reuoluens diuinae dictum sophyae, quod nemo potest dūobus dominis seruire.”

<sup>217</sup> Robert de Torigni, “Chronica Roberti De Torigneio,” p. 128; “rex nolebat facere fidelitatem filiae suae et marito ejus idem requirenti, de omnibus firmitatibus Normanniae et Angliae.” My translation.

<sup>218</sup> Davis, *King Stephen*, p. 7.

a powerful and popular figure in the Anglo-Norman world by taking over the control of vast English estates and became count of Boulogne. These estates had been supplemented considerably by Henry I. In fact Stephen's trade relations with the Londoners also helped him to win the support of the Londoners.<sup>219</sup> In 1135 he was already recognized by the Londoners as king. However, it was not so easy for him to secure the throne.

One of the strongest supporters of Stephen was Bishop Henry of Winchester, his brother. In return for an oath made to the Church — a kind of charter of liberties issued before the coronation — that promised to restore and maintain the freedom of the Church, Bishop Henry supported Stephen in securing the throne.<sup>220</sup> Moreover, Bishop Henry was influential in winning over the archbishop of Canterbury, William de Corbeil, as the archbishop had some doubts about setting aside the oath he had sworn to Matilda. This conflict seems to have been solved with this argument given in the *Gesta Stephani*: “Henry I rather compelled than directed the leading men of the whole kingdom to swear to accept Matilda as his heir” and on his death-bed he “very plainly showed repentance for the forcible imposition of the oath on his barons.”<sup>221</sup> This account of the *Gesta* is important in the sense that it focuses on the oath of 1127 as the main obstacle in accepting Stephen. As an oath made under duress was not valid in canon law, Stephen used this argument later as justification for his conduct. Moreover, Stephen subsequently claimed that before he died, Henry

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<sup>219</sup> Chibnall, *Empress Matilda*, p. 65.

<sup>220</sup> Davis, *King Stephen*, p. 17.

<sup>221</sup> *Gesta Stephani*, pp. 11-13; “Ad ipsam quoque heredandam imperioso illo, cui nullus obsistebat, oris tonitruo summos totius regni iurare compulit potius quam praecepit. De iureiurando uiolenter baronibus suis iniuncto apertissime paenituit.”

I had changed his mind and designated him as heir and Hugh Bigod, who later became earl of Norfolk, took an oath to vow for its truth.<sup>222</sup>

Stephen also applied to the papacy. Papal support was necessary for him because of the oaths that he and other magnates had sworn to Matilda. As he had plainly violated his oath and as oaths were a matter for Church courts, only the Pope ultimately could declare the oath invalid and confirm Stephen's elevation to the throne.<sup>223</sup> By 1136 Stephen was able to gain the support of Pope Innocent II and the confirmation of his title. Richard of Hexham provides a copy of the papal bull which confirms Stephen's kingship. According to it, the Pope Innocent says to Stephen,

Since you are known to be descended almost in a direct line from the royal lineage of the aforesaid kingdom, we, satisfied with what has been done in your case, receive you with fatherly affection, as a favoured son of the holy Roman church and heartily desire to retain you in the same privilege regard and intimacy by which your predecessor of illustrious memory was by us distinguished.<sup>224</sup>

It is clear that the Pope recognized Stephen's right to rule on the grounds of his royal ancestry. However, John of Salisbury suggests that Innocent II accepted King Stephen's gifts and "in friendly letters confirmed his occupation of the kingdom of England and the Duchy of Normandy" which implies that adequate financial support probably persuaded the papacy to recognize Stephen.<sup>225</sup> Thus, Stephen overcame all the obstacles to becoming king and the *Gesta Stephani* states that "almost all the chief men of the kingdom accepted him gladly and respectfully

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<sup>222</sup> John of Salisbury, *Historia Pontificalis*, p. 85. This argument was also used against Matilda in the papal court which will be discussed in detail below.

<sup>223</sup> Chibnall, *Empress Matilda*, p. 69.

<sup>224</sup> Richard of Hexham, "The Acts of King Stephen, and the Battle of the Standard," in *the Church Historians of England*, ed. by Joseph Stevenson, vol. IV (London: Seeleys, 1856), pp. 40-41. Ricardi Haugustaldensis, "De Gestis Regis Stephani et de Bello Standardii," in *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia*, ed. by Thomas Arnold, vol. III (London: Longman, 1882-85), pp. 147-148; "Quia de praefati regis prosapia prope posito gradu originem traxisse dinosceris, quod de te factum est gratum habentes, te in specialem beati Petri et sanctae Romanae ecclesiae filium affectione paterna recipimus, et in eadem honoris et familiaritatis praerogativa, qua praedecessor tuus egregiae recordationis Henricus a nobis coronabatur, te propensius volumus retinere."

<sup>225</sup> John of Salisbury, *Historia Pontificalis*, p. 85; "Dominus Innocentius, receptis muneribus regis Stephani, ei familiaribus litteris regnum Anglie confirmavit et ducatum Normannie."

and having received very many gifts from him and likewise enlargement of their lands they devoted themselves wholly to his service by a voluntary oath after paying homage.”<sup>226</sup>

The attitudes of the other chroniclers towards Stephen’s succession, however, are different from those of the author of the *Gesta Stephani*. Even those with some enmity towards the Empress seem not to approve of what Stephen did. All agreed that Stephen was a usurper who violated the oath he had sworn to Matilda. William of Malmesbury suggests that after Stephen came to the throne he changed everything for the worse. He adds, “if Stephen had acquired the kingdom in a lawful way, and in administering it had not lent trusting ears to the whispers of those who wished him ill, then undoubtedly he would have lacked little that adorns the royal character.”<sup>227</sup> In fact as a supporter of Matilda it was natural for William to make such a comment.

It is interesting that John of Worcester, generally sympathetic to Stephen, was also not pleased with Stephen’s action. He calls Stephen a perjurer as he betrayed the promise to support Matilda’s succession. This is obvious when he mentions the oaths sworn to the Empress in 1128 as he begins the passage with this sentence: “Concerning the oath already changed into perjury, to the peril of many.”<sup>228</sup> As Gransden suggests, it is clear that this sentence was added later into the chronicle — most probably after the death of Henry I and the coronation of Stephen as king.<sup>229</sup> By interpreting what Stephen did as perjury and a danger for many, John shows his discontent with the way Stephen came to throne.

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<sup>226</sup> *Gesta Stephani*, pp. 13-15; “Omnes fere primi totius regni laete eum et ueneranter recepere, plurimisque ab eo muneribus donati, sed et terris amplificati, liberali cum iureiurando, praemisso hominio, eius sese seruitio ex toto manciparunt.”

<sup>227</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Historia Novella*, p. 37; “Si legitime regnum ingressus fuisset, et in eo amministrando credulas aures maliuolorum susurris non exhibuisset, parum ei profecto ad regiae persoane decorem defuisset.”

<sup>228</sup> *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, vol. III, p. 176; “De iuramento iam mutato in periurium, in multorum periculum.”

<sup>229</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing*, p. 146.

Another chronicle of earlier period is Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*. Although Geoffrey deals with a more distant past in his chronicle, by implication he reveals what he thinks about the succession debate of his period. As discussed before, Geoffrey of Monmouth, in his chronicle, gave an extensive place to female rulers playing active roles in the politics of Britain. In fact as these examples of female rulers are mentioned at a time when there were discussions about Matilda's succession, it is possible to suggest that they were deliberately used for Matilda's cause. Especially the example of Cordelia carries remarkable similarities with Matilda. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Cordelia succeeded to the throne when her father died without legitimate male offspring. She took over the throne with her husband, Aganippus, king of the Franks and Geoffrey portrayed her succession as a natural process presenting Cordelia's right to rule as legitimate. In the *Historia*, it is told that after Cordelia ruled peacefully for five years, her nephews rebelled against her and dethroned her.<sup>230</sup> Like Cordelia, Matilda was married by her father to a Frenchman and her rival to the throne was a close male relative. As already mentioned, King Stephen was one of the dedicatees of Geoffrey's chronicle which means that at some point most probably around 1136 Geoffrey was supporting his side. However, despite this fact, he seems to criticize Stephen implicitly and regarded Stephen's seizure of the throne as an unfair act against Matilda's legitimate hereditary claim. In fact he might have done this simply to gain the favour of Robert, earl of Gloucester.

Henry of Huntingdon also seems to have a reactionary attitude towards Stephen's succession. He suggests that although Stephen had joined in the English realm's oath of fealty to the daughter of King Henry, he challenged God by seizing

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<sup>230</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain* trans. Thorpe, pp. 86-87.



the crown of the kingdom. As Henry completed his chronicle in 1154 when Henry II came to throne, it is natural that his interpretation of the events reflects the outlook of Henry II and is in favour of Matilda. He criticizes not only Stephen's usurpation, but also all those who had sworn oath to Matilda and then gave approval to Stephen's succession. For him, "it was a bad sign that all England was subjected to him so speedily without hindrance and difficulty, as 'in the twinkling of an eye'"<sup>231</sup>

Other chronicles written during the reign of Henry II, *Historia Pontificalis* by John of Salisbury and the chronicle of Robert Torigny also regarded Stephen as a usurper. John of Salisbury's views on the English succession are quite clear. According to John, everyone knew that Stephen had usurped the kingdom regardless of his oath to King Henry I. Indeed he had sworn fealty to the Empress to help her to secure and hold England and Normandy against all men after her father's death.<sup>232</sup> Robert of Torigny also shared the same ideas with John of Salisbury about Stephen's succession.<sup>233</sup> Although in his chronicle the information about Stephen's usurpation was directly copied from Henry of Huntingdon's chronicle, his selection shows his standpoint in this issue.

Obviously, almost all the chronicles of both earlier and latter periods recognized Matilda's hereditary claim to the throne and regarded Stephen as a usurper. However the chronicles of latter period, written during the reign of Henry II, certainly reflected the viewpoint of Henry II and in their reaction against Stephen's usurpation it is possible that they saw Henry II rather than Matilda as the injured side. Even so, from the attitude of the earlier ones it is clear that there was no

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<sup>231</sup> Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, pp. 701-703; "Hoc uero signum malum fuit quod tam repente omnis Anglia, sine mora, sine labore, quasi 'in ictu oculi', ei subiecta est."

<sup>232</sup> John of Salisbury, *Historia Pontificalis*, p. 83.

<sup>233</sup> Robert de Torigni, "Chronica Roberti De Torigneio," pp. 127-128.

resistance to the idea of female succession in this period, as almost all recognized that Matilda had the most legitimate hereditary claim to the throne.

At this point it is important to mention the viewpoint of Orderic Vitalis in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* as he is the only chronicler who interpreted the events from a different perspective. Unlike all the other historians, Orderic Vitalis was silent about the succession debate. He avoided expressing any views on the possibility of female succession, and once Stephen was crowned, Orderic accepted Stephen as king of England and Normandy and never questioned his right to rule. In fact Orderic seems to have taken the claims of Count Theobald of Blois far more seriously, as he suggests that the Normans wished to have Theobald as their ruler because he was the elder. However, when it was heard that Stephen had been accepted by the English as king, Orderic suggests that all the barons decided to accept Stephen as they wanted to “serve under one lord on account of the honors which they held in both provinces”.<sup>234</sup> Indeed, Robert of Torigny also mentions such an offer made by the barons of Normandy to Theobald of Blois. He suggests, “in the following day, while they and Earl Robert of Gloucester were discussing, a messenger came from England and said that Theobald’s brother Stephen already became the king.”<sup>235</sup> The accounts of both Orderic Vitalis and Robert of Torigny demonstrate that after the death of Henry I, the barons of Normandy came together and decided to reject Matilda and Geoffrey in favour of Theobald of Blois. In fact due to the coronation of Stephen in England, Theobald agreed to give up his claim to the duchy of Normandy. The interesting point here is that among those Norman barons there was also Earl Robert of Gloucester who was thought to be a strong supporter of the Empress. It is clear

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<sup>234</sup> Orderic Vitalis, VI: 454-55; “Mox omnes annuente Tedbaldo decreuerunt uni domino militare, propter honores quos in utraque barones possidebant regione.”

<sup>235</sup> Robert de Torigni, “Chronica Roberti De Torigneio,” pp. 128-129; “in crastino, dum colloqueretur ipse et comes Glocestriae Robertus, venit nuncius de Anglia, dicens Stephanum fratrem suum jam esse regem.” My translation.

that Earl Robert was not supporting Matilda when Henry I died; on the contrary, he seemed to be a leading supporter of Count Theobald of Blois.

This evidence actually contrasts with the attitude of William of Malmesbury in the *Historia Novella*. William suggests that Earl Robert was hesitant about supporting Stephen's kingship in 1135 and inclined to Matilda because of the solemnity of the oath sworn to her, but as the king was so rich and generous, all the chief men of England had willingly gone over to his side; thus there was no chance of resistance for Robert.<sup>236</sup> For this reason, William suggests that Robert concealed his purpose by pretending to support Stephen until the circumstances allowed him to realize his own intentions. In fact Robert's position is somewhat ambiguous. After all, he accepted Stephen as king and even campaigned with Stephen in Normandy against the Angevins. What exactly it was that triggered his decision to rebel against Stephen and to support his sister remains a mystery. One suggestion might be that as both Robert and Stephen had been the two greatest landholders in England perhaps a sort of rivalry between them led to such a contention. Whatever the case it is clear that only in 1138 could Earl Robert explicitly take action on behalf of Matilda.

It is interesting that until this year Matilda made no attempt to come to England and made no overt claim to the throne. This could be explained by the fact that unless Stephen provoked strong opposition, Matilda was aware that she could not have coped with Stephen on her own. As Bradbury suggests, it was only when Robert of Gloucester brought his considerable power into her camp in 1138, that Matilda could realistically consider a war for her succession in England.<sup>237</sup> It is noteworthy that during this period Matilda's husband Geoffrey did not provide her even with a small army. He was prepared to fight for Normandy, but not for England.

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<sup>236</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Historia Novella*, p. 33.

<sup>237</sup> Jim Bradbury, *Stephen and Matilda*, p. 25.

The failure of Stephen to restore peace in the realm was another factor for Matilda to consider her claims again. As soon as Stephen came to throne, warfare broke out in the realm. Geoffrey of Anjou invaded Normandy and took many fortresses while King David of Scotland invaded Northumbria. It is suggested one reason for King David's invasion was the oath which at King Henry's command he had sworn to his niece.<sup>238</sup> According to the *Gesta Stephani*, the Empress sent King David a letter, stating that "she had been deprived of the kingdom promised to her on oath" and thus she sadly asked him to aid her as a relation. King David "groaned deeply, and inflamed by zeal of justice because he owed the woman the fealty he had promised, he determined to set the kingdom of England in confusion."<sup>239</sup> Thus, King David seems to have taken action for the rights of his niece. Obviously, while defending Matilda's claim, he also furthered his own cause in the north.

1139 was the year for Matilda and Earl Robert to raise arms against Stephen and to carry their claim into England.<sup>240</sup> In fact there are various arguments about her coming to England. John of Worcester suggests that some magnates (the earl of Gloucester and the constable, Miles of Gloucester) invited Matilda, promising her that "within five months she would be in control of the kingdom, in accordance with the oath sworn to her."<sup>241</sup> On the other hand, William of Malmesbury argues that Henry of Winchester, hiding the fact that he had already come to an agreement with the earl of Gloucester, advised the king to allow the Empress go to Bristol, and

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<sup>238</sup> Richard of Hexham, "The Acts of King Stephen, and the Battle of the Standard," p. 39; Orderic Vitalis, VI: 519. This is Orderic's only reference about the oaths sworn to Matilda by the leading barons of England and Normandy which inhabits a significant place in the other chronicles.

<sup>239</sup> *Gesta Stephani*, p. 55; "...se patrio testamento alienatam, regno sibi sponso et iurato priuatam...rex alte ingemuit, zeloque iustitiae succensus, tum pro communis sanguinis cognatione, tum pro fide mulieri repromissa et debita, regnum Angliae turbare disposuit."

<sup>240</sup> *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, vol. III, p. 269.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253; "Infra quinque mensium spatium regnum esset possessura paratum, sicut ei uiuente patre fuerat iuratum."

achieved her safe travel to Bristol under his escort.<sup>242</sup> What William of Malmesbury claims here, in fact, implies an earlier settlement between Empress Matilda and Robert, and Henry of Winchester who acted as the papal legate from 1139 to 1143. Following this argument, it is possible to suggest that Robert and the Empress had been invited by the legate, Henry of Winchester, to England. Whatever the case, Matilda in the end safely reached Bristol. As soon as she arrived, all those who had formerly served the king, transferred their allegiance to Matilda. The author of the *Gesta Stephani* suggests “insincerely and with treacherous intent many barons broke the compact of oath and homage that they had pledged to Stephen and turned to the Empress, and all together with a common purpose to resist the king, assailed him on every side.”<sup>243</sup>

Besides her military struggle, Matilda also appealed to the papal court early in 1139 to challenge Stephen’s usurpation of the throne, and she laid claim to succeed as her father’s heir on the grounds of hereditary right and the oaths sworn to her by the chief men of the kingdom. However, she was a bit late, as Stephen had already secured a letter of support from Pope Innocent II. John of Salisbury records in *Historia Pontificalis* the arguments produced by both sides for their interests. Ulger bishop of Angers presented the Empress’s case against Stephen “charging the king with perjury and unjust seizure of the kingdom.”<sup>244</sup> Arnulf, archdeacon of Lisieux was putting the case for the king: he did not deny the oath but maintained that it had been extorted by force and was conditional only. Moreover, he argued that the empress should not have been allowed to succeed, “because she was the daughter

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<sup>242</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Historia Novella*, p. 62.

<sup>243</sup> *Gesta Stephani*, p. 91; “fictē tamen et dolose, deseruiebant, rupto iuramenti et hominī foedere, quod ei pepigerant, ad illos conuertebantur, coniunctique una et conspiratione ad obsistendum regi animati, uehementissime in eum ubique irruebant.”

<sup>244</sup> John of Salisbury, *Historia Pontificalis*, p. 83; “...arguens regem periurii et illicite presumptionis regni.”

of an incestuous union.”<sup>245</sup> Here there was no problem with the idea that Matilda was the daughter of Henry I and of his queen Matilda, but it was argued that, in 1100, when they were married, Matilda had been a nun and thus the marriage of Henry I and Queen Matilda was invalid. However John of Salisbury suggests that this charge was particularly ill-founded, because Anselm had heard the case of Matilda’s mother, and declared her free to marry and confirmed her marriage.<sup>246</sup>

Another argument put forward by Arnulf was that Henry I had changed his mind and on his death-bed had designated Stephen as his heir. Arnulf also declared that this had been proved publicly before the archbishop of Canterbury and the legate of the Holy See, by the oath of Hugh Bigod and on hearing the proof the archbishop had recognised Stephen’s claim to the crown. The reply of Ulger to this claim was that as neither Arnulf nor Hugh was present at the king’s death, they could not possibly know his last requests.<sup>247</sup> In the end, John of Salisbury suggests that despite all these fierce arguments, Pope Innocent did not pay much attention to them as he had already confirmed Stephen as the king of England. In fact, the vital point here is that throughout this rhetorical battle, Matilda’s sex was never presented as a weakness preventing her from ruling, and none of the arguments were proposed as an attack on Matilda’s abilities to rule based on her sex.

In 1141 at the battle of Lincoln Stephen was defeated and taken as prisoner to Bristol. The capture of Stephen strengthened Empress Matilda’s struggle for the succession. Firstly, in order to legitimize her position she looked for the support of the legate — Henry of Winchester. She urged him that she should be received without hesitation by the Church and the state. Making an agreement with Henry of

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<sup>245</sup> John of Salisbury, *Historia Pontificalis*, p. 83; “.. eo quod de incestis nupciis procreata et filia fuerit monialis, quam rex Henricus de monasterio Romeseiensi extraxerat eique uelum abstulerat.”

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

Winchester similar to the one that Stephen had made with the Church earlier, she swore and gave security that she would consult him on all major business in England, particularly on the gift of bishoprics and abbeys.<sup>248</sup> In return for this he would preserve his fealty to her. As long as the Empress kept the agreement, the legate would “receive her as lady of England.”<sup>249</sup> It is significant that Matilda was received as lady but not queen.

Other chroniclers also call her lady of England and none of them say anything about her consecration as queen. For instance, the Gloucester chronicler suggests that Matilda, lady of England, was met at Winchester “in great state and pomp”, and the crown of the English kingdom was handed over to her and given to her rule by the legate Henry of Winchester and in the presence of other bishops.<sup>250</sup> Orderic Vitalis says, though in reproach, that many who had previously resisted the Angevins had now given way to them and recognized the lordship of Count Geoffrey and Matilda.<sup>251</sup> Henry of Huntingdon suggests that Matilda was received as lady first by Henry of Winchester and then by the entire English nation except Kent where Queen Matilda of Boulogne, wife of Stephen opposed her.<sup>252</sup> It is clear that almost all chroniclers confirmed Matilda’s reception by the people without hesitation and difficulty.

On the other hand the author of the *Gesta Stephani* criticizes Matilda saying that when many adherents of Stephen transferred their allegiance to the countess she “at once put on an extremely arrogant demeanour, began to walk and speak more haughtily, to such a point that soon, in the capital of the land subject to her, she

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<sup>248</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Historia Novella*, p. 87.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89; “nec dubitavit episcopus imperatricem in dominam Angliae recipere.”

<sup>250</sup> *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, Vol. III, pp. 293-295.

<sup>251</sup> Orderic Vitalis, VI: 549-51.

<sup>252</sup> Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, pp. 739-41.

actually made herself queen of all England and gloried in being so called”.<sup>253</sup> Although Matilda was in fact not received as queen, with this expression the author intends to emphasize her arrogance. It is interesting that Matilda was accepted as “lady of England and Normandy”, which refers to an ambiguous status, rather than as queen although her right to rule was recognized by all in the realm, and the treasure and royal crown were handed over to her. This is largely because Stephen was still king, already crowned and recognised by both the English Church and the Papacy. There was not much precedent for abdication or deposition and killing was not acceptable to the twelfth-century polity.<sup>254</sup> For Stephen’s case, difficult conditions in prison might have solved the problem in time, but events did not provide that. Thus, Matilda could not get the title of queen which refers to a formal recognition of her authority. Thus, her title as “lady” was used to acknowledge her right to the throne and her ‘lordship’ but did not establish her regal status.

In the charters Matilda calls herself simply “daughter of King Henry and Lady of the English” but not queen. However there are two exceptions to this. One of them was the charter of Glastonbury Abbey. With this charter, Henry of Winchester secured a general confirmation of the abbey’s possessions as held in 1135, including Uffculme. In this charter Matilda declared herself as “empress daughter of King Henry and queen of the English” although she had not been accepted as queen.<sup>255</sup> As implied in the text, it was written about the time of the Empress’s reception at Winchester. There was only Henry of Winchester, Bernard of St David, Nigel of Ely and Gilbert, abbot of Gloucester present. It can be argued that Matilda was sure to be

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<sup>253</sup> *Gesta Stephani*, p. 118; “illa statim elatissimum summi fastus induere supercilium...solito et arrogantius procedere et loqui...adeo ut in ipso mox dominii sui capite reginam se totius Angliae fecerit, et gloriata fuerit appellari.”

<sup>254</sup> Stringer, *The Reign of Stephen*, pp. 42-43.

<sup>255</sup> H. A. Cronne and R.H.C. Davis, ed., *Regesta: Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum*, vol. III (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), no. 343; “imperatrix Henrici regis filia Anglorum regina.”



formally consecrated soon. Therefore she did not hesitate to call herself queen of England and the witnesses did not hesitate to accept her as their queen, though she was not crowned yet. However, this argument needs to be treated cautiously.

Another charter in which Matilda declared herself “queen of the English” was the charter of Reading Abbey. According to Davis and Cronne, this charter is irregular because of both its appearance and content.<sup>256</sup> On the other hand, Chibnall suggests that there are some features of this charter that implies that the substance was taken from a genuine charter, especially the witness-list. However Chibnall adds that Henry, bishop of Winchester was one of the witnesses of this charter and it is improbable that the legate would have sanctioned the title *regina* before Matilda had been crowned.<sup>257</sup> Following this argument it can be claimed that the charter of Glastonbury Abbey was also irregular as Henry was given as witness there too. Apart from these two charters, Matilda was never called queen of England, but lady of England.

In Matilda’s reception as lady of England and Normandy, the role of Henry of Winchester was certainly undeniable. After the capture of Stephen, Henry, who had played a major role in securing the throne for Stephen, became closer to the Empress. This quick shift to his brother’s rival seems to be interesting. It is hard to interpret the motives of Henry of Winchester for his support of Matilda because the chronicles of the period provide conflicting arguments about it according to their standpoints. For instance, William of Malmesbury suggests that Henry transferred his allegiance to the Empress because he had not been very pleased with Stephen’s treatment of the Church. Moreover he thought the disorder and chaos in the realm increased under the

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<sup>256</sup> Cronne and Davis, *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum*, vol. III, no. 699.

<sup>257</sup> Chibnall, “Charters of the Empress Matilda,” in *Piety, Power and History in Medieval England and Normandy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 278-279.

rule of Stephen. In the *Historia Novella* William records a speech made by Bishop Henry of Winchester to the clergy of England. He says,

Because it seemed tedious to wait for the lady, who made delays in coming to England since her residence was in Normandy, provision was made for the peace of the country and my brother was allowed to reign. However no justice was enforced upon transgressors, peace was ended; bishops were arrested and compelled to surrender their property; abbacies were sold and churches were despoiled of their treasure. Therefore, as is fitting, we choose as lady of England and Normandy the daughter of a king who was a peacemaker, a glorious king, a wealthy king, a good king, without peer in our time, and we promise her faith and support.<sup>258</sup>

Orderic Vitalis seems to be critical towards Henry of Winchester for his attitude. He suggests that after the king was taken captive, Henry immediately went over to the Angevins and after welcoming the countess, utterly deserted his brother the king and all his supporters.<sup>259</sup> On the other hand, the author of the *Gesta Stephani* presents Bishop Henry at this point like William of Malmesbury did when he was defending Earl Robert at the beginning of Stephen's reign. He suggests that Henry of Winchester made peace for the time being so that later "he might rise more briskly and with less hindrance to assist his brother if a chance were offered."<sup>260</sup> It is difficult to reach a concrete answer about Henry's motives but, as Chibnall also suggests, one sensible argument might be that in his support of the Empress, Henry's motive was certainly to look for peace and honour.<sup>261</sup> As he was the papal legate, he believed that his duty was to work for the peace of the realm and for the honour to protect the Church's interests as well as his own as legate. In addition to this, he

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<sup>258</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Historia Novella*, p. 92; "Quia longum videbatur dominam expectare, quae moras ad ueniendum in Angliam nectebat, in Normannia quippe residebat, prouisum est paci patriae, et regnare permissus frater meus. Enimuero, in presumptores nulla iustitia exercitata, pax omnis statim ipso pene anno abolita, episcopi capti, et ad redditionem possessionum suarum coacti, abbatiae uenditae, ecclesiae thesauris depilatae...itaque, ut par est, filiam pacifici regis in Angliae Normanniaeque dominam eligimus, et ei fidem et manuteneamentum promittimus."

<sup>259</sup> Orderic Vitalis, VI: 547.

<sup>260</sup> *Gesta Stephani*, p. 119; "Et quo se regnum uel quomodo uergeret, tacitus obseruaret, et ad subueniendum fratri, si oportunitas daretur, promptius et liberius assurgeret."

<sup>261</sup> Chibnall, *Empress Matilda*, p. 91-92.

wanted to protect his family's lands. For those reasons, he was prepared to surrender his brother's right to rule.

As the year 1141 progressed the Empress became so unbearable that she gradually lost her supporters and Henry of Winchester was among the first to withdraw his assistance from the Empress. However her most devoted adherents continued to support Matilda emphasizing not "her personal merits" but "her ancestry", and usually citing only the oath that they had taken to King Henry I.<sup>262</sup> One of the devoted supporters of Matilda who adopted this attitude was Brian Fitz-Count. He was the son of Count Alan Fergant who had won the favour of Henry I by his faithful service. Brian also worked in the service of Henry I and in 1127 was given Wallingford by Henry I. It is clear that he was already a man of wealth and position before he joined the empress.<sup>263</sup> From 1139 onwards he transferred his allegiance to the Angevins and maintained his commitment till the end.

Brian Fitz-Count and Henry of Winchester exchanged letters at a time just after the separation of Bishop Henry from the side of the Empress. The dating of letters is assumed to be between 1142 and 1144.<sup>264</sup> In this correspondence Brian's letter requires particular attention. In his letter, while the general image was that during the civil war between Matilda and Stephen many changed sides for material advantage, the image of Brian was one who risked his all for the sake of obedience and personal loyalty. Brian held Bishop Henry in contempt because he, after declaring for Matilda, had re-transferred his allegiance to Stephen within a short time. He says that Henry himself as the legate ordered him to support the Empress and help her to acquire the right which had been taken from her by force and that is

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<sup>262</sup> Davis, *King Stephen*, p. 64.

<sup>263</sup> H.W.C Davis, "Henry of Blois and Brian Fitz-Count," *English Historical Review*, vol. 25, no. 98 (1910): 298-299.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 300.

why he changed from his initial support of Stephen.<sup>265</sup> However, Brian claims, because he did what was ordered by the legate, he was deprived of the land King Henry had given him. Despite this, he says, he continued to support the Empress due to his high regard for the oath he had sworn to Henry I. At the end of his letter, Brian tells Henry, “You know that neither I nor my men do this for money, or fee or land, promised or given to us, but only for your order and the law-worthiness of me and my men.”<sup>266</sup> Clearly, Brian here shows that he was not sorry for his loss; for him the most important thing was to act lawfully. Meanwhile, Brian also criticizes Bishop Henry, though implicitly, in that Henry himself broke the promise he had ordered to other people and disregarded the oaths sworn to Henry I.

Another piece of correspondence that could be mentioned here is Gilbert Foliot’s letter to Brian Fitz-Count on the right of the Empress Matilda to the English throne. This letter was also written around 1142-3. It is important in terms of understanding not only the intricate problem of the succession to English throne, but also the attitudes of Gilbert and of other leading churchmen during this conflict. Gilbert, then abbot of Gloucester, wrote this letter at the request of Brian and in his letter Gilbert had proposed that “everything that had belonged to King Henry was by right owed to his daughter begotten in lawful matrimony.”<sup>267</sup> Gilbert claimed that Matilda deserved the throne and he argued this through divine, natural and human law. He suggested that the evidence from divine law was to be found in the last chapter of the Book of Numbers: “Zelophehad was a Jew of the tribe of Manasseh,

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<sup>265</sup> H.W.C Davis, “Henry of Blois and Brian Fitz-Count,” p. 301; “nam et uosmet, qui estis prelates Sanctae Ecclesie, precepistis mihi filie Regis Henrici auunculi uestri adherere et eam auxiliari rectum suum acquirere, quod ui aufertur ei, et hoc quod modo habet retinere.” My translation.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 302; “sciatis quod nec ego nec homines hoc facimus pro pecunia uel feudo uel terra promissis nobis uel datis, sed tantum pro uestro precepto meaque legalitate et meorum hominum.” My translation.

<sup>267</sup> Dom Adrian Morey and C.N.L. Brooke, ed., *Gilbert Foliot and his letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1965), pp. 112-113.

who had daughters but no son, and it was ordained that everything which the father possessed should go to the daughters.”<sup>268</sup> The basic point is that Scripture provided justification for female inheritance and this was enough for Gilbert as well as other supporters of Matilda. Gilbert later on passes from divine law to natural law. For natural law, he suggested that “like in animals, in man there is closer love for a daughter than for a nephew.”<sup>269</sup> Lastly, Gilbert explained his argument by giving example from human law. According to Gilbert, “human law consists of *ius civile*, the law of individual states, and *ius gentium*, the common law of the nations; both deny a man the right to disinherit either son or daughter except for certain specific reasons such as rebellion.”<sup>270</sup>

It is clear that Gilbert’s arguments mainly focused on inheritance rights and demonstrate that there was no barrier for women to inherit in divine, human and natural law. Actually at that time there was no barrier to female inheritance as women routinely inherited lands. However, inheritance to rulership and kingdom was something rather special and in England new. Gilbert in a way tries to provide a legitimization for female rule through showing examples from general inheritance law. One would like to know why Gilbert supported Matilda’s cause. First of all, he wrote this on the request of Brian Fitz-Count, one of Matilda’s most devoted supporters. Moreover as an abbot of Gloucester, which monastery was under Angevin control and influence for most of the time, it is not surprising that he wrote in favour of the Empress. Both Gilbert’s letter and Brian’s letter are important in demonstrating how Matilda’s case appeared to her supporters. It is important that both of these letters were written at the time when Matilda began to lose her power and the support of her adherents. Thus it can be suggested that by emphasizing the

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<sup>268</sup> Morey and Brooke, *Gilbert Foliot*, p. 113; Chibnall, *Empress Matilda*, pp. 84-86.

<sup>269</sup> Chibnall, *Empress Matilda*, p. 86.

<sup>270</sup> Morey and Brooke, *Gilbert Foliot*, p. 114.

binding aspect of the oaths and inheritance rights they intended to re-strengthen Matilda's claim.

Empress Matilda, though just a step away from the throne if Stephen's royalty could somehow be removed, could not achieve it and she was unable to achieve consecration as queen. Indeed, it is apparent from the above discussion that her failure had nothing to do with her sex. The evidence from the chronicles demonstrates that the personal demeanour of the Empress made her continued rule and perhaps future coronation impossible. The author of the *Gesta Stephani* suggests that after Matilda was raised to an important position, she began to be "arbitrary, or rather headstrong."<sup>271</sup> She treated her adherents ungraciously, took away the possessions and lands of some, confiscated the lands of Stephen's supporters and arbitrarily gave grants to her followers. He also emphasizes that Matilda did all this without consulting her close supporters whom she treated with haughtiness and insolence. When they came before her to make some request, she sent them away with disdain, "rebuffing them by an arrogant answer and refusing to hearken to their words and arranged everything according to her own arbitrary will."<sup>272</sup> In other words, she acted as a bad, tyrannical ruler.

Henry of Huntingdon also criticizes the Empress's attitude towards her associates: she was "lifted up to an insufferable arrogance and she alienated the hearts of almost everyone."<sup>273</sup> Similarly, John of Hexham suggests that Matilda, far from following King David's counsel, "elated by woman's levity, assumed a majestic haughtiness of demeanour, and so she provoked the nobles by arrogant

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<sup>271</sup> *Gesta Stephani*, p. 121.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>273</sup> Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, pp. 739-41; "Erecta est autem in superbiam intolerabilem, et omnium fere corda a se alienavit."

denunciations.”<sup>274</sup> Although here John of Hexham associated Matilda’s failure with her sex, this could be hardly taken as reference to her lack of right to rule. It is clear that in court politics arrogance and arbitrariness were acceptable neither for man nor for woman. Matilda’s attitude towards her associates is indicated by the chroniclers as one of the elements in her failure, even by chroniclers in favour of her cause.

Matilda’s attitude towards the Londoners can be regarded as another influential factor in her failure. From the beginning it seems that the Londoners were not so sympathetic to Matilda. This was largely because they had had close relations with Stephen. As mentioned above the Londoners had played an important role in the accession of Stephen to throne. In return for this, Stephen had given special privileges to them. Moreover, the Londoners were genuinely attached to the Boulogne alliance for trade reasons. Thus, as William of Malmesbury suggests they had always been “under suspicion and in a state of indignation” towards Matilda.<sup>275</sup> On the other hand, Matilda, instead of gaining the confidence of the Londoners, contributed to this suspicion and fury of them by treating them severely and grossly.

According to the chronicle of John of Worcester, they asked her for the laws of King Edward rather than the oppressive ones of her father, Henry I. However, she did not listen to them “but harshly rejected their petition.”<sup>276</sup> Moreover, she demanded from the Londoners a large sum of money when they asked for their financial burdens to be reduced. When the citizens said they could not pay:

She, with a grim look, her forehead wrinkled into a frown, every trace of a woman’s gentleness removed from her face, blazed into unbearable fury,

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<sup>274</sup> John of Hexham, “The History of the Church of Hexham,” in *the Church Historians of England*, ed. and trans. by Joseph Stevenson, vol. IV (London: Seeleys, 1856), pp. 18-19. Johannis Hagustaldensis, “Symeonis Historia Regum Continuata per Joh. Hagustaldensem,” in *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia*, ed. by Thomas Arnold, vol. II (London: Longman, 1882-85), p. 309; “Illa vero nequaquam secuta consilium regis, feminea levitate erecta in quoddam regii animi fastidium, contumacibus cominationibus principes contristavit.”

<sup>275</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Historia Novella*, p. 99.

<sup>276</sup> *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, vol. III, p. 297.

saying that many times the people of London had made large contributions to the king, that they had lavished their wealth on strengthening him and weakening her.<sup>277</sup>

Here again the chronicler gives reference to Matilda's sex, not as an obstacle to her ruling, but in terms of making unacceptable behaviour even more unacceptable. It is clear that the Londoners resented Matilda's arrogance, her pride and her heavy tax levies so much that they decided to make a pact with Queen Matilda, wife of King Stephen to restore the king to throne. Thus, her attitudes led her to lose the support of the Londoners.

The third factor in Matilda's failure was certainly her attitude towards her namesake, Queen Matilda, Stephen's wife. Queen Matilda appears in the chronicles as an active woman exercising authority on behalf of Stephen while he was in prison. She sent envoys to the Empress to demand the release of her husband, Stephen and that her son, Eustace, be granted the honor of Boulogne which was his hereditary right.<sup>278</sup> However, the empress refused them in "harsh and insulting language."<sup>279</sup> This would be later on criticized by some of her supporters as not being an appropriate behaviour for a ruler. While the Empress Matilda was losing her popularity, Queen Matilda was being praised for "her resolution and modesty".<sup>280</sup> The queen rallied her captive husband's cause with determination and she acted more strategically than the Empress. Without alienating the magnates loyal to her cause, she started a successful propaganda war with the Angevins, "playing on her son's rights, her husband's problematical status as a king in chains, and the discomfort of

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<sup>277</sup> *Gesta Stephani*, p. 123; "Illa, torua oculos, crispate in rugam frontem, totam muliebris mansuetudinis eversa faciem, in intolerabilem indignationem exarsit, regi inquiring Londonienses plurima et saepe impendisse; diuitias suas ad eum roborandum, se autem imbecillandam, largissime prorogasse."

<sup>278</sup> *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, vol. III, p. 297.

<sup>279</sup> *Gesta Stephani*, p. 123.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*; "astuti pectoris uirilisque constantiae femina."



the English bishops with their position.”<sup>281</sup> Her active political image can give us an idea about the general expectations of the chroniclers from women who exercised authority in public sphere.

Taking the support of the Londoners, Queen Matilda waged war against the Empress. In return for this, the Empress looked for the support of Henry of Winchester. However, the legate also urged the Empress to bestow the honor of Boulogne on Stephen’s son, as Henry wanted to keep peace and order.<sup>282</sup> The Empress refused his request. According to William of Malmesbury, she had already promised it to others.<sup>283</sup> This attitude enraged Henry of Winchester and he began negotiations with Queen Matilda. All chroniclers agree that in her time of victory the Empress displayed an unbearable pride and defiance, refusing to take advice even from her chief supporters. She not only had lost the support of the Londoners but also many bishops especially Henry of Winchester. Moreover Stephen could not be persuaded to leave the crown. Thus Matilda could not achieve the throne as she could not succeed in negotiating with the forces that would ensure her accession to the throne.

During the war with the Queen, Earl Robert, the Empress’s devoted supporter and military commander was captured and imprisoned. This brought a new aspect to the conflict between the two Matildas. For the exchange of the captives, negotiations were conducted by Queen Matilda, the Empress and Mabel, the countess of Gloucester and wife of Earl Robert. In his chronicle, William of Malmesbury emphasizes the role of the wives in supporting their husbands by demonstrating that after Earl Robert was captured, he relied on his wife Countess Mabel to support his

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<sup>281</sup> David Crouch, *The Normans: the History of a Dynasty* (London: Hambledon, 2002), p. 263.

<sup>282</sup> Chibnall, *Empress Matilda*, p. 107.

<sup>283</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Historia Novella*, p. 99.

political strategy.<sup>284</sup> Mabel played a key role in continuing the political strategy of the Angevin cause while Robert was imprisoned. Moreover she had a central role in securing the release of Earl Robert on equal terms with the king. John of Worcester also portrays both Countess Mabel and Stephen's queen Matilda as actively involved in the negotiating process: "it was finally agreed on both sides that the king should be restored to the royal dignity and the earl should be raised to the government of England."<sup>285</sup> Thus, in early November, Stephen and Robert were freed.

Meanwhile Henry of Winchester took a completely opposite action towards the Empress. In the *Historia Novella* it is suggested that the legate charged the Empress with breaking her pledges relating to the freedom of the churches. Moreover, he claimed that she and her men had plotted not only against his position but against his life.<sup>286</sup> The aim of these charges for Henry was in a way to justify his double change of allegiance and to assure those who were hesitant about the oaths they had taken to Matilda that they were not bound by the oaths.<sup>287</sup> The Empress decided to ask her husband, Geoffrey, the count of Anjou for military aid. It is clear that she still did not give up her claim and tried every way to struggle. However, when Earl Robert went to Normandy to ask the support of Geoffrey, Stephen laid siege to Matilda at Oxford. William of Malmesbury regards the Empress's escape as "a manifest miracle of God as she made one of the most daring escapes of her career."<sup>288</sup> Matilda left England in 1148 and both during this period and later on she was not mentioned so much in the chronicles.

From the end of 1141 onwards, Stephen began to rule the realm again. Although the Empress no longer posed such a serious threat to Stephen, in 1152 the

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<sup>284</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Historia Novella*, p. 117.

<sup>285</sup> *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, vol. III, p. 305.

<sup>286</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Historia Novella*, pp. 109-111.

<sup>287</sup> Chibnall, *Empress Matilda*, pp. 115-116.

<sup>288</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Historia Novella*, p. 133.

Pope specifically forbade the anointing of Stephen's eldest son, Eustace, on the grounds that his father Stephen had obtained the throne by perjury.<sup>289</sup> This implicitly recognized the strength of Matilda's son Henry's hereditary title. The following year, Eustace died and Henry II subsequently achieved recognition as Stephen's heir, with the support of the Church, in place of Stephen's other son.<sup>290</sup> On Stephen's death in 1154, Henry II was crowned.<sup>291</sup>

In conclusion, in the early twelfth century for the first time the Anglo-Normans experienced the designation of a woman as heir to the throne. Although Matilda did not succeed to the throne, it is hardly to be explained as a rejection of female succession. The problem was that the rules organizing the succession to the throne were not still precise. One who was strong enough and quick enough, and in some sense king-worthy, that is, Stephen, could take and hold the kingdom rather than another, Matilda, who had the best hereditary claim. It is clear that neither William II nor Henry I had adhered strictly to the hereditary principle in regard to the inheritance of the crown. Like his predecessors, Stephen in 1135 won the throne only because he acted with speed and by force and was of royal blood. Thus the civil war between Matilda and Stephen can be interpreted in fact as an attempt to establish the principle that the crown should be more strictly dynastic. Matilda struggled for the throne as she and many others believed that she was the one with the best hereditary and legal claim. However she could not achieve it; rather the succession of her son Henry II proved to be a triumph in terms of emphasizing the establishment of the dynastic, hereditary principle in succession.

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<sup>289</sup> Davis, *King Stephen*, p. 114.

<sup>290</sup> *Gesta Stephani*, p. 241.

<sup>291</sup> Chibnall, *Empress Matilda*, p. 158.

It has been suggested by several writers that the Empress Matilda could not succeed simply because she was a woman. Their argument is that in an age when women were supposed to be passive and subordinate, for a woman to become a ruler was beyond social acceptance and boundaries. However a close analysis of chronicles can demonstrate that gender roles in the twelfth century did not exclude women from the exercise of power and royal authority. More specifically, the evidence in the early twelfth-century chronicles does not verify the general assumption that Matilda's failure to retain the loyalty of the Anglo-Normans after Henry I's death derived from the fact that she was not liked for her sex.<sup>292</sup> On the contrary, almost all these sources agree that Matilda possessed the most legitimate claim to the throne and if she had not alienated a number of clerics, many nobles and almost all the citizens of London with her demeanour, she might have been successful. All these chroniclers emphasize that she behaved against the conventions of acceptable royal behaviour. Some of them associated this with her sex. However these chroniclers did not raise this issue to the point where her sex was the obstacle that prevented her from succession to throne. Her sex was used just to emphasize and perhaps explain her improper behaviour. Her attitude especially towards Queen Matilda and her son and her treatment of the Church was not approved of. This was the misjudgement that was to lose her the throne. In this sense, her attitude and behaviour, rather than her sex, was the most important factor in her failure.

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<sup>292</sup> Among the present historians only David Crouch in his book, *The Normans*, argues that Matilda's sex was not a bar for her ruling as medieval expectations were not so crude. He suggests that the way the sources treat the empress's rival, the other Matilda can be a good evidence that refutes this argument.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **CONCLUSION**

The close analysis of early twelfth-century Anglo-Norman chronicles provides us with new viewpoints about female power and the perception of it by the chroniclers. The first chapter discusses some of the existing theoretical approaches to how royal and noble women were perceived by male religious, and whether these approaches are applicable to twelfth-century Anglo-Norman chroniclers. It also looks at the basic dynamics of chronicle production as it affected the chroniclers in their portrayal of high-ranking women, and at the identities of the chroniclers and chronicles themselves. These examinations lead to some notable conclusions.

First of all, the study of the chronicles demonstrates that the representation of high-ranking women moves beyond black and white stereotypes into a more complex and sometimes contradictory portrayal of women influenced by a whole range of interconnected factors that affected the chroniclers and their work, in particular the relationships — spiritual, economic, political and even, at some level, personal — between the women and the monks and clerics. This close interaction made these chroniclers draw, in general, favourable images of royal and noble women. Through benefactions to churches and monasteries, and through literary patronage, high-ranking women had significant means of shaping their own images and furthering their own claims. By commissioning histories, royal and noble women were able to incorporate themselves into the political discourse of the day and defend and execute

their political roles. Another factor influential on the chroniclers in their portrayal of women was the political context of the period. For the first time, during this period, there arose the possibility that a woman would come to the throne and rule. This development certainly influenced the attitude of the chroniclers. All these factors shaping the texts of these chronicles demonstrate that the portrayal of twelfth-century high-ranking women was more than a product of a generalized authorial bias. Thus these chronicles provide us with more complex and complicated portrayals of royal and noble women than simple stereotypes.

The second chapter takes as its particular focus the relationship of twelfth-century women to political power and presents us with certain conclusions about the perception of female power. The most basic of these is that, contrary to the assumptions that emphasize a “change for the worse” in women’s power in the twelfth century, we see that women’s power in the public sphere is not diminished, even if there is some transformation of it. The evidence from the chronicle sources suggests that nearly every important political event had political consequences for women and that in many of the activities performed by women they emerge not as victims but as active participants. The argument that the growth of bureaucracy in royal and noble courts moved the queen and noble women from a position of influence and power is not reflected in reality as perceived by the chroniclers; high-ranking women actively exercising power and authority in the public sphere are plentiful in the chronicles and are not seen as an anomaly. These examples would suggest that the boundaries between the public and private spheres were still very blurred in the first half of the twelfth century and indeed show few signs of becoming less blurred.

The argument that the Norman Conquest had profound and adverse effects on women's lives is not reflected in the chronicles; rather the chroniclers tended to project their contemporary situation back beyond the Norman Conquest and even into distant history. Moreover, that contemporary position of royal and noble women does not appear to have been weakened by the increasing shift towards the system of primogeniture and the emphasis on legitimacy. These important cultural shifts, far from disempowering high-ranking women, confirmed their importance within society as transmitters of property rights and even the crown. In that sense, the assumption that the public power of high-ranking women decreased significantly after certain economic and political changes in the eleventh and twelfth centuries does not fit the evidence the chronicles provide.

Although the chroniclers accept that women had as vital a role to play in society as men, gender roles do have an effect. The way the chroniclers structure female power in society was different from the way they structured that of men. Because the social characterization of the sexes was constructed and analysed primarily by male writers, the generalized potentialities of the sexes are assumed to be different. Still, this was no insuperable barrier. Women could always improve by taking on characteristics associated with manliness, becoming a "virago", while their weaknesses were to an extent excused by the nature of their sex. This attitude influenced the perception of female power. The chroniclers recognized that women could exercise power and authority in the political realm, but they defined this exercise of power and authority in masculine terms. Because these women are exhibited through male eyes, the women, in their official functions, were treated like men: they were expected "to show the man in the woman". It is clear that once women enter the political narrative, roles are presented in a gendered way.

The third chapter deals specifically with the case of Empress Matilda and re-evaluates the underlying factors in her failure to succeed to the throne. Contrary to the common assumption, this examination shows that the failure of Matilda was not due to any resistance to female succession. A close analysis of the chronicles suggests that almost all the chroniclers, even those with some distaste towards the Empress, recognized that she had the most legitimate hereditary claim. Most of the chronicles acted as a legitimating discourse for female succession. They provided a wide range of examples of female rulers from the past, even the distant past and from the Old Testament in order to affirm the normality of female succession in the absence of direct male heirs. Only in one, very indirect sense is Matilda's gender made an issue by the chroniclers, and that lay in the specific identity of her husband, Geoffrey count of Anjou. However, one should add perhaps that the considerable efforts made by the chroniclers to legitimize female succession and female rulership are there for a reason; they may have been intended to convince a less educated readership of the acceptability of a female ruler. By attempting to locate misogyny in the religious and clerical, historians may have been addressing the wrong target.

It can also be suggested that in the failure of Empress Matilda, a gendered *potestas* —force— did play a part. As the rules arranging succession practices were still not settled, the one who had the power, in the sense of the “strong sword arm”, took the throne and held the kingdom. It might be said that Stephen established his authority by force and thereby acquired the throne. However, in Stephen's case, it was speed of action — not so clearly gendered — rather than force itself that enabled him to acquire the throne. In any case, it is clear that our twelfth-century chroniclers and at least part of twelfth-century society put more emphasis on hereditary right than force. Many sided with Matilda in her claim and supported her struggle. Thus



she achieved at least recognition as “the lady of England and Normandy” — a title similar to the one attributed to Aethelflead “Lady of the Mercians”. The ultimate reasons for her failure were her personal and political flaws, flaws that are not clearly gendered by the chroniclers. Her treatment of the people around her aroused distaste and opposition and so deprived her of the prospect of the throne. Although some chroniclers link her demeanour to her sex, they do not go on to raise her sex as a bar to her ruling. What becomes evident from all this is that there was no question of opposition to the female exercise of power and authority in contemporary politics and in the public sphere. At least, our chroniclers tried hard to draw such a picture.

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