A Blood Stained Brush:

Societal Reaction to Female Military Command in Medieval Europe

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I. Introduction

The First Wound

The arrow skidded through a gap in her armor and cut into her body between shoulder and clavicle. She retired to have the wound dressed, and her men, wearied by a day of hard fighting, began to fall back. After seeing the wound cleaned, she ran back to the battle while grabbing her banner, and the exhausted French soldiers ran with her to storm the last barricade of the English position.[1] The English commander, to whom she had promised death if he did not surrender in a public letter read throughout France, fell with his men as the drawbridge they were on collapsed amidst the fighting. English resistance collapsed as well, and the last of his forces were quickly killed or captured The next day the remaining English forces lifted the siege of Orleans, and began their long retreat north. Joan of Arc was seventeen years old, victorious in her first and greatest battle, the savior of Orleans and France.[2] As she bent her knees to pray and give thanks to God for victory, the more faithful among her followers knelt with her, as the more cynical sought food, wine, women. We must imagine that the most inquisitive cast their heads at her and wondered if the voices that led her here, saints and archangels, whispered of further death and glory.

Joan, Matilda, Maud, and Purpose

Along with Agincourt, Joan of Arc's victory at Orleans was and remains the most celebrated event of the Hundred Years War, one of the few events that the non-historian would recognize of the entire 116-year affair. Yet there remains a broad perception that during the time period warfare was a solely masculine endeavor, or that Joan was alone in violating the gender

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[1] Larissa Taylor, *The Virgin Warrior: The Life and Death of Joan of Arc*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 71.
[2] Kelly DeVries. *Joan of Arc : A Military Leader*. (Stroud: Sutton, 1999), 95-96.

norms of her time. This paper seeks to redress that unbalanced view of Central and Late Medieval Europe by exploring the military activities of three distinct figures, Joan of Arc, Matilda of Tuscany, and Empress Matilda.[3] These women engaged in battles at the highest levels of dynastic fortunes and the fates of nations, commanded soldiers in the thousands, and exerted a level of agency equal to or exceeding their male contemporaries. Each fought for radically different causes. Joan came from peasant stock and rose during the Hundred Years War to be at the forefront of a military campaign that changed the declining fortunes of the French Armagnac faction and saw their Dauphin crowned Charles VII.[4] Matilda of Tuscany inherited the extensive lands of House Canossa from her sonless father, and immediately put the entirety of her military force behind the Papacy during its struggle with Holy Roman Emperor Heinrich IV over *sacerdotium* and *regnum*. This was a struggle that conveniently overlapped with her secular disputes with the Emperor as he sought to expand his command over the Northern Italian territory Matilda saw as her rightful sphere of influence.[5] Lastly, this paper will examine Empress Matilda, an English princess married off to another Holy Roman Emperor as a child and widowed by 23. The course of her life changed forever following the death of her brother and the heir apparent, when her father recalled her to England and forced his court to swear to uphold her succession. Those broken promises led to a decade of bitter kin-war following her father's death and her cousin's usurpation of the throne that had been promised her.[6]

This tripartite analysis allows a greater range of analysis than possible through a singular case study by means of contrast. To wit, for most significant markers of identity there is overlap

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[3] Given the dire risk of confusion between the Matildas, throughout this paper the Empress Matilda will always be referred to with either that specific title, or as Maude, the vernacular anglicization of her Latinized 'Matilda'.

[4] Stephen W Richey, *Joan of Arc : The Warrior Saint*, (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2003), 25-27.

[5] Valerie Eads. *Mighty in War: The Role of Matilda of Tuscany in the War between Pope Gregory VII and Emperor Henry IV*, (City University of New York, 2000), 7-10.

[6] Nesta Pain. *Empress Matilda : Uncrowned Queen of England*. (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1978), 31-35.

between two of the figures and the third is unique, allowing for both a paradigm and a counter-thesis. As an example, Matilda and Maud were both noblewomen who owed their leadership positions to the high nature of their birth and to fathers who (in the absence of sons) groomed and set the groundwork for them to succeed to political and military leadership positions. By contrast, Joan was born a peasant who found herself by the side of a king and arguing strategy with the highest commanders of France by sheer will and force of personality, while her family contributed no material advantage to her success (beyond simply loving her). Similarly, Joan and Matilda fought their wars primarily on behalf of a male patron, Joan, Charles VII, and Matilda, Gregory VII and Urban II. By contrast, the Empress Matilda fought for herself, and for the crown she saw as her birthright following the death of her brother, William Adelin. As a last example, when in the field, Matilda and Maud operated strictly as commanders, safely ensconced in the rear of the action, surveying the battlefield and making decisions from a classical position of cautious, considered command. Joan by contrast threw herself into the heaviest site of combat again and again in the vein of a Classical hero. She saw her tactical role as leader and inspiration at the point of assault and would not ask of her men what she would not do. As a result she alone of the three took battlefield wounds.

In this manner the most illuminating analysis of the reaction to these figures will be enabled by a work focused on identifying similarities and differences in the societal reception each woman received. While no composite study can match the depth possible in a singular case study, this means of analysis will provide a broader view, and will minimize the possibility of drawing extreme conclusions from the sample size of a single individual.

This kind of analysis is possible because scholars in recent decades have spent ever more time detailing the exact shape of the military campaigns undertaken by these women. To pursue

further scholarship there risks repetition. Therefore while an outline of their lives and warring will provide context for this paper, the bulk of the essay will analyze the societal reaction to these figures who so defied the gender roles of their societies. I will see how writers, popes, bishops, nobles, military commanders, commoners, and kings reacted to these women engaging in warfare, a practice traditionally seen as the most masculine of pursuits. And hopefully we will come to understand how the extant patriarchal structures incorporated these anomalies into their fabrics without threatening the fundamental assumptions of their dominion.

On Sources

The sources for this multi-figure study falls into three distinct categories, dealing with each individual separately. The most famous and well-documented, Joan of Arc, has a singularly illuminating text in the composite work known as *The Trial of Joan of Arc*. This work was undertaken on the orders of Bishop Pierre Cauchon, the chief judge in Joan's heresy trial, in the apparent belief that it would be a vindication of his guilty verdict. It includes the edited minutes of the trial, undertaken by dual notaries Guillaume Manchon and Guillaume Colles. Supplemental material was gathered by Manchon after the trial, such as Joan's letters, who also edited in introductions and conclusions to each day's events, and provided a list of the notables present.[7] The final output was drastically abnormal for an ecclesiastical court, and it is considered the single most well-documented trial in the medieval period.[8] The question of bias is powerful given that Joan and Bishop Cauchon were on opposite sides of the war, but for his part notary Marchon claimed he refused all political pressure to alter the text, and eyewitness observers largely concurred that Marchon's Latin translation faithfully represented what they had seen occur.[9] Perhaps most significantly, at Joan's rehabilitation trial the basic facts of her life

[7] Daniel Hobbins, *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2005), 2-6.
[8] Hobbins. *The Trial of Joan of Arc,* 8.
[9] Hobbins. *The Trial of Joan of Arc,* 15-16.

were confirmed by eyewitnesses to every stage of her life. It has been proven a more reliable source than might be anticipated given its genesis.[10]

Further primary sources dealing with Joan include the aforementioned rehabilitation trial, which included some 115 witnesses, including Joan's family, members of her childhood village, soldiers who served with her, and nobles who had personally known her; all of whom largely confirmed the facts of Joan's life as she had related during her heresy trial.[11] The first biography of Joan was not produced until around 1500, or 70 years after her death, but the two trial manuscripts function as the nearest thing, and are all the more useful to the historian as the largest collection of Joan's words ever collated.[12] For an illiterate peasant who dictated all her letters, it represents a staggering, unprecedented self-narrative that was not reproduced in the medieval era.[13] Pierre Cauchon may have been a wicked man motivated by political ends, he may have even been guilty of heresy as Joan's rehabilitation trial suggested, but he did her legacy a great and lasting favor by producing the text through which succeeding generations would best get to know Joan of Arc.

Matilda of Tuscany likewise has a series of wonderful primary sources detailing her life. The foremost among them comes from the Benedictine monk Donizone, a chronicler of the entirety of Matilda's reign, the history of the House of Canossa preceding her, and the investiture crisis in general.[14] A great ally of the Roman Catholic Church, Matilda saw further chronicling of her campaign by Bonizo of Sutri, another proponent of the papal cause in the Investiture Crisis,

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[10] Hobbins. *The Trial of Joan of Arc,* 17.
[11] Régine and Joan Pernoud. *The Retrial of Joan of Arc; the Evidence at the Trial for Her Rehabilitation, 1450-1456*, (London: Methuen, 1955) 10.
[12] Hobbins. *The Trial of Joan of Arc,* 14.
[13] Joan did however learn to sign her name, only ever utilizing "Jehanne", or the feminine version of Johannes, appearing to call herself neither the "Joan" the modern Anglosphere knows her as, nor the "Jeanne" of the modern Francophonie.
[14] Amusingly his primary work on Matilda, *Vita Mathildis*, was completed shortly after her death and Donizone promptly rededicated the work to another of our subjects in the Empress Matilda. Apparently, he as I saw the natural link between these individuals.

and therefore a great admirer of Matilda. As with Donizone, Bonizo places Matilda mostly in relation to Gregory VII and his struggles with the Holy Roman Emperor, thereby providing the most invaluable contemporary works on her military campaigns on behalf of the former against the latter. Bias is, of course, an ever-present concern, as Matilda personally housed and protected both men (including once when Bonizo escaped from Henry IV having been captured and made prisoner of his antipope). Thankfully the Investiture Controversy was so prominent a dispute, and Henry IV so prominent a leader, that it attracted the attention of Imperial scholars with a decidedly anti-papist bent. While it was in their self-interest to downplay Matilda's warmaking (bad enough that their king should lose but shameful that he should lose to a *virago*) they can at least pushback against the sometimes cloying celebration of Matilda by her monks.

The Empress Matilda is given comparatively short shift. Of the three she is the only one without fawning contemporary admirers, and lacks the firsthand account Joan was able to deliver. Many of the primary documents we have concerning her life come by way of her oppositional relationship with Stephen, such as the *Gesta Regis Stephani*, an anonymous twelfth century work dealing with the entirety of the civil war between the cousins.[15] As might be betrayed by the title this was not a work written by those sympathetic to the Empress's claim. Other foundational works of English history covering this period, such as *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and *Historia Novella: The Contemporary History*, are fundamentally partisan works written by supporters of King Stephen. Fortunately, Matilda was readily literate, and engaged in correspondence with a number of the more renowned churchmen of her time, including Hildebert and Thomas Becket, along with several letters written by her and released to the English public

[15] Potter, K. R. (Kenneth Reginald), and R. H. C. (Ralph Henry Carless) Davis. *Gesta Stephani*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976.

during the war.[16] As with Joan this gives us a vantage into her personal life, her relationship with England's ecclesiastical establishment, and, to an extent, her political and military aims as she sought to win the English public to her side. Ultimately Empress Matilda has by far the least contemporary literary sources detailing her life beyond its relation to Stephen, as there was a vested interest in the English political class to write her out of history beyond being a foil to Stephen. Such reception there is is largely partisan, which may well explain its far colder tenor relative to her peers in this paper.

Historiography

To a degree what historiography exists on these figures consisted of an old order wherein feminist historians, who perhaps would have been the natural scholars to examine these individuals, tended to neglect women on campaign. They often saw organized violence as overrepresented in historical research and portrayed it as symptomatic of patriarchal rule and therefore inherently unfeminine.[17] Conversely, many conservative military historians (including perhaps the most popular military historian of the age in John Keegan) took positions aggressively, and ignorantly, deemphasizing female war-making. Keegan writes, "Women look to men to protect them from danger… women, however, do not fight… (Warfare) is an entirely masculine activity."[18] This binary paradigm has left those women who have waged war in the cold in regard to historical scholarship, they are to a degree citizens without a country, having traditionally been neglected by both the progressively feminine and the regressively masculine. Thankfully, the historical tide has been turning in the past two decades, as interest in

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[16] Crawford, Anne. *The Letters of the Queens of England, 1066-1547*. (Stroud, Gloucestershire ;: A. Sutton, 1994).

[17] Nicholson, Helen. "Women on the Third Crusade." *Journal of medieval history* 23, no. 4 (1997): 335–349.

[18] Quoted in Hay, David John. "The Campaigns of Countess Matilda of Canossa (1046-1115) : an Analysis of the History and Social Significance of a Woman's Military Leadership". (Ph. D.) diss,-- (University of Toronto, 2000), 5.

convention-defying women has risen, and the capacity for female violence has grown markedly more recognized societally (action stars and combat athletes as well as soldiers). This paper seeks to be part of a growing body of scholarship rejecting both these historical approaches, discarding entirely the purblind position that warfare is solely masculine, while seeking to broaden the feminist lens to include women such as these, who shed blood, sometimes eagerly, sometimes selfishly.

As we will endeavor to do throughout this paper we must be careful of overemphasis and the lack of recognizing deviation. Joan of Arc is perhaps the single most famous figure of the medieval period, and every aspect of her life has been picked apart and analyzed ad nauseam, and this includes, uniquely for the literature, her military campaigns. There is certainly no other woman whose military exploits have been written about to the extent Joan's have, and indeed the scholarship on them exceeds that of many men who had far lengthier military careers. One of the perks of celebrity, Joan's life has been examined from every conceivable angle, and in particular the scholarship of Kelly DeVries, Larissa Taylor, and Craig Taylor situates Joan as we must imagine she would have preferred, as a soldier.[19] These works place Joan's campaigning at the forefront of her story and explore with meticulous detail every aspect related to the life she chose, from how she learned to ride a horse to the tactical maneuvering she engaged in at Orleans.

Moving to Tuscany, there have been two wonderful dissertations in recent years (one later developed into a book) by David John Hay and Valerie Eads, works focusing on and analyzing the entirety of Matilda's military career for the first time in English. While there are some conflicting thoughts on Matilda's exact agency and some of the potentially apocryphal tales

[19] DeVries, Kelly. *Joan of Arc : A Military Leader*. Stroud: Sutton, 1999; Taylor, Larissa. *The Virgin Warrior: the Life and Death of Joan of Arc.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009; Taylor, Craig. *Joan of Arc: La Pucelle*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006.

regarding her upbringing, both works place her front and center as a military commander. Without these works such scaffolded scholarship as this essay, placing her violence within the frame of its reception, would not be possible.

The last and least of our subjects, insofar as historiography is concerned, is the *Domina Anglorum,* Empress Matilda. While the succession of English Civil Wars known to us as *The Anarchy* have received a deal of scholarly attention, and several biographies of Empress Matilda herself have appeared, the active role she took in her military campaigns has received relatively minimal attention. As we will see in the section detailing her warring to come the reasons for this are manifold. In sum, Matilda's life left her uniquely positioned between the two traditional camps, feminist historians interested in her had a broad and stimulating life to research, of which her warring compromised only a fraction, and meatheaded masculinity was able to focus on the men in her life, brother Robert of Gloucester, husband Geoffrey V of Anjou, David I of Scotland, and lastly her son, Henry II, as the true powers behind her warmaking. Perhaps more than the other analyzed figures, in simply presenting Empress Matilda's military achievements this paper will serve as some small proof of their existence. As will later be argued, the fact that the men in her life actively and aggressively commanded military forces on her behalf is indicative only of her ability to inspire loyalty and to lead those around her, rather than some congenital inability to wage war. This without mentioning the great irony that perhaps the single most decisive battle won by her rival, Stephen, was won while he was imprisoned, with his wife commanding his armies against the forces of the Empress and her brother, Robert.[20]

Where this paper hopes to further the excellent recent scholarship is to focus not just on individual military campaigns in isolation, but to view them within relation to one another, and to

[20] William, John Sharpe, J. A. (John Allen) Giles, and William. *William of Malmesbury's Chronicle of the Kings of England: From the Earliest Period to the Reign of King Stephen*. (London [England: Henry G. Bohn, 1847) 102.

analyze the differing societal reactions each woman received, using them to illustrate the diversity of thought extant through medieval society. As far as the author is aware no such composite work exists, and insofar as this work has scholarly merit it is only by standing on the shoulders of those who have come before.

Ptolemy + Giles

Some of the most interesting extant historiography on these women was performed by their contemporaries, particularly scholastics who wrestled with the notion of female military figures. Two of the most prominent were Ptolemy of Lucca and Giles of Rome, scholastics born out of Renaissance Humanism. Intellectuals concerned with the gender of their time, these men had to come to terms with the fact of female warriors in their society, and the theoretical justification of such by Plato, one of their lodestones from Antiquity. Plato particularly had argued that women could serve as the military Guardian class in *The Republic,* seemingly giving his blessing to the concept of female warriors.[21] In a sense when the men engaged in scholastic debate on the issue they were recreating a debate of Antiquity, as Aristotle had vehemently come out against the idea.

Of the two men Ptolemy is the one to write more fully about it. As a proper scholastic he argues both sides (with far greater sincerity than Giles' desultory attempt), and gives Plato's argument weight by listing a number of animals where the female of the species is the more ferocious and more common fighter.[22] More significantly for us, Ptolemy gives his strongest argument by detailing a list of female warriors of Antiquity, placing special emphasis on

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[21] Blythe, James M. "Women in the military: Scholastic arguments and Medieval Images of Female Warriors.." *History of Political Thought* 22, no. 2 (2001): 242–69. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26219763.
[22] Ptolemy of Lucca, and James M. Blythe. *On the Government of Rulers : De Regimine Principum*. (Philadelphia, Penn. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 45.

Tomyris, queen of Scythia.[23] Despite his own evidence Ptolemy eventually falls back on the widespread medieval ideas that women were mentally unsuited to higher intellectual activites, as they were "incomplete or stunted men," and that female soldiers would exert a corrupting influence upon male soldiers.[24] Notably his arguments against the practice do not rely upon the evidence of history at all, and place the well-being of male soldiers at the forefront of a discussion about the capacity of female soldiers.

Ultimately though both men fell victim to the limited gender conceptualizations of their times, the simple existence of their scholastic debates indicate the presence of the issue in their societies. That is to say, if there were no female soldiers, if they were not widely known, we suspect neither Ptolemy nor Giles nor many like them would have felt the need to invalidate the concept of the woman soldier. This essay, in a way, seeks to continue the dialogue formally engaged in and popularized by these men.

Thesis and Structure

This paper will be structured into two distinct sections. The first will provide the necessary contextual background of each woman's campaigning to ground the reader in exactly what was accomplished, exactly what was being reacted to, and the general tenor of reaction. We will explore the conditions that enabled the abnormal existence of their command, such as Joan's religiosity, the Matildas born to men without living sons, etc. Additionally, we will analyze the exact nature of their commands, Joan fighting on the frontlines after being wounded, Matilda of Tuscany operating armies during extended, years-long campaigns while serving as a diplomatic lotus point form anti-Imperial opposition, and lastly Empress Matilda as the strategic leader of her faction.

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[23] Ptolemy, *De Regimine Principum,* 51.
[24] Blythe, *Women in the military,* 266.

The next section of the paper will focus on different sectors of society reacting to these women at war. Particularly, this section will focus on how society integrated the examples of each figure without fundamentally altering, or allowing them to undermine, the extant gender paradigm. We will argue that that paradigm was less of a strict binary than is commonly perceived, and this fluidity enabled a tolerance, even a celebration, of deviance so long as it was accompanied with specific tolerated markers (id est the concept of Matilda of Tuscany as leader and warrior being legitimized both by her regnant nobility and by the fact most of her warring occurred on behalf of the Papacy during a near-heretical dispute with schismatics). This section will be organized into a partition of societal spheres, exempli gratia, reactions by contemporary religious figures, artistic types in poets, writers, philosophers, and the militaries themselves, as they incorporated unusual figures into their midst.[25]

Ultimately, we will find that while the extant superstructure was always sufficient to incorporate and subsume the aberrant behavior of female military figures in the Mediterranean medieval world, it was only able to do so because that superstructure was more hospitable to exceptionalism than is commonly thought. The reactions incurred by these women cover the gamut of human emotion, from suspicion and hostility and disgust to celebration and glorification and emulation. This paper finds the prejudices of this world oft masked its diversity.

[25] Christine de Pizan will receive a place of prominence in the artists/thinkers section as she bears the unique status of being the only woman to react in the world of letters to these women.

II. At War

La Pucelle - Joan of Arc

Joan of Arc was a great outlier even among the general outliers that comprise female commanders in medieval Europe. She was perhaps the only non-noblewoman to wield a significant command, certainly the only one in this argument, and so was not born to the birthright of command in these deeply hierarchical societies. That birthright would form much of the basis for both Matilda's military activities. Further, Joan emphasized her femininity constantly, as her legitimacy rested upon a sanctified asexuality that provided weight for her holy claims. She was the only one among these women to implicitly argue that her legitimacy rested upon her gender, rather than in spite of it.

Joan of Arc (*Jehanne d'Arc,* 1412-1431) was born in the small village of Domrémy in North-Eastern France to middle-class peasant farmers, alongside four siblings.[26] Her upbringing was unremarkable, but the political situation in which she was born was not. England and France were drowning in the dynastic struggle over who would rule the Kingdom of France, a struggle begun 75 years earlier. French fortunes were at the nadir of the conflict, as the flower of their nobility had been annihilated at Agincourt in 1415. Further, the powerful Duke of Burgundy plunged France into civil war, as he assassinated the Duke of Orleans, captured Paris in 1418, and signed a treaty with the English supporting their claimant to the French throne.[27]

Amidst the movement of kings, a small English force raided Domrémy when Joan was 13 years old, stealing some cattle. As Joan related, this war scare was when the voices first came to her, exhorting her to behave in a Christian manner, and promising her that the English would be expelled from France.[28] This series of events repeated itself, as Burgundians raided Domrémy

[26] Hobbins, *The Trial of Joan of Arc,* 50.
[27] DeVries, *A Military Leader*,15-16.
[28] Hobbins, *The Trial of Joan of Arc,* 54.

when Joan was 17, setting fire to the crops and town, and forcing Joan and her family to flee. The voices returned, stronger than ever, manifesting as Saint Margaret, Saint Catherine, and the Archangel Michael, all of whom implored her to crown the Dauphin Charles, and go to war to destroy the English.[29] Whether or not she was quite aware of it, Joan's saints were shrewdly chosen, as they were both martyrs who chose death rather than giving themselves to pagans in marriage. Thus even from the beginning Joan was reinforcing an aspect of her gender, her virginity, that would prove of such great utility in legitimizing her claims.

For the average peasant girl fighting in a war remained out of comprehensible reach, and Joan, keenly realizing she would need patronage, went to the local garrison commander, Robert de Baudricourt. An unusually determined figure, she asked for an armed escort to the Royal Court at Chinon, first in May 1428, again in January 1429, and, finally, in February 1429, by which point Joan had won over multiple soldiers under Baudricourt's command, and finally, Baudricourt himself. He provided her not only with an escort but also a sword from the armory, almost assuredly the first instrument of warfare Joan ever held, with the words, "Go, go, and come what may."[30] By her own words, this was the point at which she began cross-dressing, as well as cutting her hair short in a boyish crop.[31] This is the first instance where Joan successfully integrated herself into otherwise all-male military structures. This occurred with these poor illiterate militia, as it would with the greatest captains of France later, as the true believers in Joan's orbit were invariably won over to her cause by the fervency of her beliefs.

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[29] Hobbins, *The Trial of Joan of Arc,* 55.
[30] Taylor. *The Virgin Warrior,* 33.
[31] While there is great discussion around the nature of Joan's cross-dressing the simplest answer is perhaps likeliest: Joan went to war and wore what those at war wore. As Natalie Devries writes, "Joan of Arc was a soldier, plain and simple." While crossdressing and its violation of Deuteronomy would provide the justification for her death it is hard to imagine she crossdressed to undermine the sartorial roles assigned by gender, or in conscious violation of Scripture. She crossdressed because she was a soldier, and soldiers wore mail, hauberk, helm, etc. See, Devries, *A Military Leader*, 4-5.

Joan met not-yet-Charles VII in March of that year. She was 17 and he 26, and though the young Dauphine was tentative about meeting Joan, Baudricourt had sent advance word she was coming. When she entered the King's room Joan distinguished him immediately from the others beside him and bowed before him.[32] The king was charmed, significant members of the Court won over, and an examination by the clergy of Poitiers quickly followed to ensure Joan was not in fact a heretic, and was in fact a virgin. Successful in all tracks, Joan was returned to Charles who promptly commissioned a suit of plate armor for her, had his craftsmen construct the banner she had personally designed, and gave her the men she had requested. Joan was off to war.[33]

As mentioned, the war in question had been a succession of catastrophes for France. Charles had lost his capital, the Burgundian lands were in open rebellion and allied with the English, and Orleans, one of the second cities of France, was under siege.[34] At Joan's insistence It was decided that she be sent to Orleans with supplies and a few hundred men as reinforcements. They arrived without issue and Joan subsequently spread a letter she had dictated to the citizens of the city and to the English, declaring "King of England… wherever I find your people I will make them leave whether they want to or not. And if they do not obey, I will have them killed."[35]Along with the unusually bellicose tone the letter carried the heading of all her letters, JESUS MARIA (all caps Joan's). The letter displayed the potent mix of simultaneous appeals to religiosity and nationalism that Joan utilized to so successfully win over so much of the French people, nobility and commoners alike.[36]

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[32] Taylor. *The Virgin Warrior,* 44.
[33] Charles made the most of the propaganda efforts herein, instructing his court to compose a new prophecy that would announce Joan and her mission to destroy the English to the world. See, Taylor. *The Virgin Warrior,* 51.
[34] Stephen, *The Warrior Saint*, 34.
[35] Hobbins. *The Trial of Joan of Arc,* 134.
[36] Here we also see Joan utilizing for the first time the "*la Pucelle*" naming convention, which will be explored in depth later.

Upon Joan's arrival in Orleans she immediately began a total upheaval of the tactical situation. While she had no formal military command, and Charles likely intended her to be a mere figurehead, her feverish religiosity, self-assured comportment, and seemingly divine appearance, won over much of the common soldierly and citizens of Orleans to her side. Indeed, despite, "coming to a contradictory conclusion on everything, against all the opinions of the military leaders who were present", the noble military command structure began to be won over to her side as well, particularly the commanding general and the dauphin's illegitimate cousin, Jean de Dunois, better known as the Bastard of Orleans.[37] Joan's influence is best seen in the tactical change among French forces at Orleans, from a defensive posture wherein they waited for English action, to an offensive one where the French commanders, seemingly influenced by Joan's unwavering aggression, planned a series of tactical assaults to lift the English blockade of the city.[38]

The assaults began on May 4th, five days after Joan's arrival. Amusingly, the French commanders launched it while they believed Joan was taking a nap as they were afraid she would endanger herself if she had foreknowledge of it.[39] This view proved prescient as immediately after being alerted of the fighting, she grabbed her banner and rode into the heaviest part of the action with her squire and comrades in arms. Her appearance bolstered a flagging French assault, and they quickly took the targeted fortress, in the first tactical victory for the French in months.[40] Emboldened by success, the French launched an attack on les Augustins, an English fortress built around a monastery and the last obstacle to the main English stronghold of les Tourelles. It, too, quickly fell in an assault led by Joan, at which point the vast majority of the

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[37] Taylor. *The Virgin Warrior,* 65.
[38] It has been written of Joan, "Every single battle Joan fought was an attack of some kind." See, Devries, *A Military Leader,* 9.
[39] Taylor, *The Virgin Warrior,* 62-63.
[40] Taylor, *The Virgin Warrior, 62.*

French leadership and the governor of Orleans implored Joan to stop personally leading her comrades-in-arms into combat, which both imperiled her and resulted in much of the soldiery around them following suit.[41] Joan, predictably, scorned their desire to wait for more reinforcements and demanded an immediate assault on les Tourelles, eventually winning over the Bastard to her side, and her first major battle wound, related in the opening anecdote, quickly followed.[42]

As les Tourelles fell Joan cried to the English captain she had once threatened to kill, "Glasdale! Glasdale! Give yourself up to the King of Heaven. You have called me a whore, but I have great pity on your soul."[43] The foul-mouthed Glasdale either did not hear Joan, or was encumbered with the fear overwhelming his men. He fled with them, to a watery death as the bridge could not bear the weight of hundreds of retreating English soldiers and gave way.[44] The surviving English, realizing their position was untenable, retreated north deep into occupied French territory.[45] And so the Siege of Orleans, which had ground on for 8 months and seen one French setback after another, ended within 10 days of Joan's arrival, after only 4 days of offensive action.

Following the salvation of Orleans, amidst the city's joyous and garish celebrations, Joan and the Bastard went back to Charles, and begged for enough men to continue the campaign. Joan outlined a strategic vision in which the entire Loire Valley would be liberated, and Charles

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[41] Taylor, *The Virgin Warrior,* 65-67,

[42] During her career Joan was wounded in the shoulder by arrow fire at Orleans, by a stone thrown with enough force to crack her helmet and knock her off a siege ladder at Jargeau, and by a crossbow bolt to the thigh at Paris; three wounds that could have resulted in death coupled with eventual capture by the Burgundians in only two campaigning seasons. Given her unrelenting aggression and habit of throwing herself into the teeth of the fighting it seems unlikely in the extreme Joan was ever destined to see old age, and the tragedy of her death is not that it came so early but rather that it came abused and unarmored, surrounded by a mob, rather than dying on the battlefield in the arms of her beloved soldiers for sake of France.

[43] Stephen, *The Warrior Saint*, 46.

[44] Taylor, *The Virgin Warrior,* 72-73,

[45] Taylor, *The Virgin Warrior,* 72-73,

would be crowned king at the city of Reims, deep in English-held territory.[46] After contentious deliberating with his advisors it was decided Joan would be allowed to join the Duke of Alençon's army, and Reims (and a coronation) indeed became the operational target of the coming campaign.[47]

The Loire Campaign saw an unbroken period of French success, as the army led by Joan and Alençon advanced aggressively against one English position after another. At Jargeau, at Meung-sur-Loire, at Beaugency, the script remained static; the demoralized English forces would decline to offer battle on an open field and withdraw to prepared fortifications, which would immediately be attacked and overwhelmed by Joan's standard siege assault tactics.[48] As always, she placed herself in the thick of the fighting, and as a result suffered a potentially serious head-wound from a dropped stone when scaling a siege ladder at Jargeau. As usual she took a minimal recovery period before throwing herself back into the fighting.[49] The campaign eventuated at the Battle of Patay, where the main English force in country attempted to retreat to Paris in fear of the French advance. It resulted in devastating defeat for the English army as their main army in Central France was overwhelmed and annihilated by only the mounted French vanguard, outnumbered some 3:1. Indeed the battle was over so quickly and decisively that neither Joan nor Alençon played any part in it, as they arrived with the main body of the army too late to do any fighting.[50] Perhaps the greatest of Joan's military achievements is that the army she led had so absorbed her high-morale and high-aggression fighting style it no longer needed her directly at the front to fight in such a manner. The successful campaign enabled Charles VII's coronation at Reims, the dream of the young girl at Domrémy achieved.

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[46] Reims was the site of coronation for the French monarchy, dating to Clovis, King of the Franks, in 498.
[47] Stephen, *The Warrior Saint*, 48.
[48] Hobbins. *The Trial of Joan of Arc,* 144.
[49] DeVries. *A Military Leader*, 130.
[50] Taylor, *Joan of Arc: La Pucelle*, 87.

Following this high-point Joan's military career ended as a result of political fallout rather than battlefield incompetence. As DeVries relates, following the spectacular French victories, Joan suffered, "declining favor with the king and the members of his court, chiefly Regnault of Chartres and Georges de la Tremoille."[51] While conjecture about the psychology of these men is beyond the scope of this paper, due to insecurity, hesitancy, jealousy, realpolitik, whatever the causes, the new King of France and his advisors no longer favored Joan's aggression and instead sought ceasefires and temporary treaties with the Burgundians, leaving Joan to continue warring with reduced military support. Perhaps worse, the king ordered the dissolution of France's most successful military partnership in a generation, that of Joan and Jean II d'Alençon, forbidding them from cooperating militarily again.[52] Bereft of the support of the king she had made, Joan's military career ended with twin defeats against overwhelming forces. She first failed to take Paris from the English, then experienced the final fateful skirmish with the Burgundians, and sent to her eventual fate.[53]

A Pope in Need is a Pope Indeed - Matilda of Tuscany

One of the most famed tableaux of the Middle Ages was Emperor Heinrich IV, barefoot in the Emilian snows of Northern Italy, kneeling before Pope Gregory VII in absolute submission, his humiliation writ in the indentations of his knees. The titular Road to Canossa (though the author prefers its Italian title, L'umiliazione di Canossa) was made possible because the ruler of Canossa, the most powerful figure in Northern Italy, was currently safeguarding the Pope as her guest and barred the gates to Henry IV at his approach. Her name was Matilda of

[51] DeVries. *A Military Leader*,141
[52] DeVries. *A Military Leader*, 132.
[53] Hobbins. *The Trial of Joan of Arc,* 41.

Tuscany, and as Henry's submission would prove short-lived, her alliance with the papacy would result in her becoming the most blooded female commander of the Middle Ages.

Matilda of Tuscany presents in many ways the most complicated reaction for medieval commentators and chroniclers. She was the most warlike of the women analyzed, participating in more campaigns than both other women combined. Further, she was the most successful of them, ending her life with all her ambitions realized, her enemies defeated, and advanced to the highest position of her career. Medieval writers often struggled exactly what to make of her, a woman who did not succeed in any of the traditional feminine roles assigned to her, but did in all the masculine ones she assigned herself. And while the ambitions of the latter may have otherwise provided rich fodder for criticism, it was undertaken on behalf of the most moral of causes to our religious commentators, that of the papacy.

The investiture controversy struggle against Matilda's liege, Heinrich IV, on behalf of her religious leader, Gregory VII, consumed the politics of Matilda's adult life, and resulted in a succession of pro-Gregorian and anti-Imperial campaigns from 1076-1098.[54] While her piety is beyond dispute, and analysis of her motivations is speculative at best, it ought be noted that like many subjects in the Holy Roman Empire, Matilda's secular interests lay in building and aggrandizing Tuscany, and diminishing the authority of the German Emperor. As is often the case in history, self-interest aligned with personal beliefs forge immutable alliances, and so it would prove with Matilda and Gregory.

Unlike Joan, Matilda was born into her authority. As she was the sole surviving child of her parents, her mother's second husband sought an alliance between their houses, and he

[54] Hay, David J, *The Military Leadership of Matilda of Canossa, 1046-1115*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 23.

promptly married Matilda to his son, her stepbrother.[55] Matilda, by all accounts despising her husband, quickly abandoned him in Lorraine and returned to rule Tuscany with her mother in tow. She would be freed of even the legalities of a brother-husband upon his untimely assassination (for which rumors of her involvement both now and then remain, but no concrete incriminating evidence exists).[56] Thirty years old, without child or husband, Matilda found herself the sole ruler of Tuscany, about to be thrown into one of the period's defining conflicts in the Investiture Contest.

The Investiture Contest was a fiercely fought jurisdictional dispute over whether, among other things, the ability to choose and invest bishops lay with monarchs or with the papacy itself. As kneeling in the snow was more of a symbolic gesture than a long-term solution for peace, by 1080 this dispute came to a head in armed conflict fought between Pope Gregory VII and Emperor Heinrich IV.[57] Following a prolonged campaign for reconciliation between the parties, Matilda herself shattered the peace as she launched a preemptive strike against schismatic bishops in Lombardy. This aggressive action ended in Matilda's decisive defeat by one of Henry's illegitimate sons, and a cold war turned hot.[58] A rather inauspicious start to what would prove an auspicious military career, this early defeat (and perhaps the concomitant prejudice carried against Matilda given her status as the only woman leading a state/military force in the conflict), saw many of her own vassals defected to the Imperial side in open revolt against her rule. Defeated, outnumbered, and increasingly surrounded, Matilda fled with her army to the Apennine Mountains where she employed a Fabian strategy in an effort to bleed the Imperial

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[55] Hay, *The Military Leadership of Matilda of Canossa*, 5.
[56] Spike, Michèle K. *Tuscan Countess : The Life and Extraordinary Times of Matilda of Canossa*, (Vendome Press, 2004) 21.
[57] Duff, Nora, Augusto C. Ferrari, Vittorio Alinari, and Rosolino Bellodi. *Matilda of Tuscany: La Gran Donna D'Italia*, (Methuen & Co., 1909), 12.
[58] Hay, *The Military Leadership of Matilda of Canossa*, 32.

forces for three long years of grinding attrition.[59] As Donizone wrote, Matilda maintained an active defense, and her style as a military commander was established as an eager opportunist. Whenever the Imperial Army ventured to other regions, she would sortie out and raze the castles of her rebellious vassals, using fire to "separate the evil from the obedient."[60] As a result of this initial skirmishing the Benedictine historian Hugh of Flavigny paid Matilda what he would perceive as the greatest possible compliment of the era by calling her intellect "masculine", and describing her as a *virago*.[61] Apparently incensed by his inability to quell her continued defiance, Henrich IV promptly declared her guilty of high treason, her lands and life forfeit, and all her vassals absolved of all obligation to her.[62]

This period was the nadir of the Gregorian movement as Imperial forces occupied Rome twice, Gregory VII died as a refugee after fleeing to Salerno, and the Lombard contingent of the Imperial Army moved on Matilda's land to punish her support of the recently deceased pope. Here, at the Battle of Sorbara, Matilda scored one of her legacy-defining victories. The enemy force decamped to besiege the minor castle of Sorbara in what should have proved a routine engagement. Sensing opportunity, (as an army deployed to besiege a fortified settlement is usually in a poor tactical position to fight a field battle), Matilda responded by raising a small force, stealthily moving them the 20 miles from Canossa to Sorbara, and routing the surprised enemy force in a crushing victory. As Donizo relates, speaking of the broken Imperial Army

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[59] Quintus Fabius Maximus was a Roman consul in the wars against Carthage, and following a succession of Roman defeats famously avoided fighting Hannibal Barca in open battle, instead focusing on small, harassing actions that sought to wear down Hannibal over time through a focus on attacking his logistics and communication. Matilda would execute this strategy during these initial three years of warfare, not willing to risk another defeat as at Volta which almost surely would have ended her rule. See, Goldsworthy, Adrian Keith. *The Fall of Carthage: The Punic Wars 265-146 BC*, London: Cassell, 2000.
[60] Donizone, *Vita Mathildis*, 141.
[61] Healy, Patrick, *The Chronicle of Hugh of Flavigny : Reform and the Investiture Contest in the Late Eleventh Century*. (Ashgate, 2006), 181.
[62] Donizone, *Vita Mathildis*, 160.

fleeing in panic, "that famous Matilda, was a terror to them all."[63] The victory bolstered papal confidence of eventual victory, and enabled Matilda to turn around the strategic situation in Northern Italy, as she immediately went over to the offensive. Perhaps most interesting to us, Donizone's reaction spoke to how even when celebrating female achievement the language used to degrade an enemy reinforced the period's linguistic misogyny. Alongside Hugh's gendered positivity, in the passage immediately following the celebration of Matilda's ability to frighten, Donizone mocked the Imperial commander as feminine, noted his voice was like that of a woman's, and when he gave the order to retreat he sounded like a grandmother.[64]

Despite victory the war ground on, for whatever else he may have been Emperor Heinrich IV was a skilled and determined military leader. He responded to the setback at Sorbara by redoubling his efforts in Tuscany, personally leading another, far larger invasion. This invasion went considerably more successfully than the first two; Henry promptly captured the cities of Mantua, Ferrara, and Manerba, as well as many of Matilda's castles, forcing the countess into another extended Fabian defensive posture.[65] At the nadir of her personal fortunes an Imperial delegation came to her, offering to restore all her lands if only she would bend the knee, and accept Henry's antipope as her spiritual leader. Despite the urging of many of her remaining supporters Matilda decided to keep fighting, and was quickly rewarded with the crowning victory of her career.

Following the death of another bastard son in battle, Henrich IV feinted a full retreat with his army towards Romagna, before pivoting to strike at Canossa itself, hoping to capture Matilda and decapitate the Tuscan resistance in one unexpected swoop.[66] Donizone himself was stationed

[63] Donizone, *Vita Mathildis*, 175.
[64] Donizone, *Vita Mathildis*, 181.
[65] Hay, *The Campaigns of Countess Matilda,* 58.
[66] Hay, *The Campaigns of Countess Matilda,* 61.

at Canossa and so this is perhaps the one battle of which he wrote that he observed firsthand. He relates to us an unusual, yet highly effective military strategy; Matilda split her forces in two, leaving with a smaller one to a fortress ten miles north to threaten Henrich's supply lines. Henrich responded by rashly assaulting Canossa itself, and was badly repulsed, as, unknown to him, a large contingent of the the forces Matilda took north had returned to Canossa in secret without alerting the Imperial army.[67] Whether Matilda intended to provoke a hasty assault or simply did not want to get pinned down in Canossa herself is unknown, but Henrich was now faced with the unenviable position of laying a protracted siege against an unexpectedly strong Canossa while a small mobile strike force remained in his rear, with no certainty with which force Matilda remained. As her person rather than any one castle, even Canossa, was the central target, this resulted in operational paralysis. Coupled with a coming winter, a dead son, and the humiliating loss of a heraldic banner, the Emperor retreated from Tuscany in humiliation, having been decisively outmaneuvered by Matilda's much smaller forces.[68] One last belated attempt by Henrich IV to exercise his power in Tuscany, the Siege of Nogara, ended in even further degradation of his prestige as he fled from the half-hearted siege at the approach of Matilda's army.[69] Though fighting and the Investiture Contest would continue, Emperor Henrich IV soon left Italy, and never again ordered his forces against Matilda. She had defied perhaps the most powerful man in Europe, and she had won.

No account of Matilda's warring would be complete without noting the deft strategic diplomacy that aided her military objectives. Following Pope Gregory VII's death Matilda was instrumental in calling for a new papal election and successfully installing his successor Victor

[67] Spike, *Tuscan Countess,* 101.
[68] Hay, *The Military Leadership of Matilda of Canossa,* 47.
[69] Eads, *Mighty in War*, 42.

III (a candidate who notoriously did all he could to evade the appointment, prudently if not bravely given the fate of his predecessor).[70] Moreover, she cemented a diplomatic alliance with another powerful vassal of the Emperor in Welf of Bavaria by marrying his son, a teenager some twenty years younger than she.[71] This marriage proved as unhappy as her first, but it cemented the coalescence of the anti-Imperial faction around Matilda. Following her great victory at Canossa she further enticed the cities of Milan, Cremona, and Lodi to her coalition, effectively cutting Henrich IV off from his power base in Germany.[72] Most impressively, Matilda won over Henrich's ambitious eldest son Conrad, who led an internal imperial rebellion that doomed whatever pretensions Henrich IV may have still had on Italian land. Thereafter the man was consumed with maintaining both his crown and a fracturing empire.[73] With Northern and Central Italy united against him, Bavaria in open rebellion, and his eldest son attempting a usurpation, Henrich IV did not have particularly pleasant final years before being deposed by another rebelling son. Matilda proved the focal point upon which discontent in the Empire coalesced. While her battlefield achievements were undoubtedly impressive, the legitimacy with which contemporary Europe treated her need be seen only by the eagerness of male leaders to rally to her faction, seeing her as the best available counterbalance to the Emperor.[74] Following the ascension of Heinrich V she was confirmed in all her land, and named Imperial Vicar and Vice Queen Italy. [75]

Matilda's military campaigns continued, though following a rapprochement with the new Holy Roman Emperor, Henrich V, she no longer waged war on behalf of the Papal States, but

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[70] Duff, *Matilda of Tuscany,* 32.
[71] Duff, *Matilda of Tuscany,* 51.
[72] Eads, *Mighty in War*, 53.
[73] Hay, *The Military Leadership of Matilda of Canossa,* 52.
[74] Hay, *The Campaigns of Countess Matilda,* 66..
[75] Duff, *Matilda of Tuscany,* 211.

rather maintained her expanded realm, crushing rebellions in Ferrara, Mantua, and Pisa.[76] She died at peace in 1115, and was later honored as among the greatest of women in Catholicism by being the first woman ever entombed in Saint Peter's Basilica.[77]

The Anarchy of Matilda and Richard: Empress Matilda

Empress Matilda (1102-1167) was 18 years old when word came from England that her brother, and the heir to the country she had left behind, was dead. William Adelin, 17, was returning to England from Normandy. He and his companions celebrated a great victory his father, King Henry I, had won over the French, thereby securing the duchy's union with England (these nations first joined together by his grandfather William the Conqueror). The exact cause of what occurred next is unclear, but the ill-fated White Ship upon which he sailed struck a rock and all hands aboard went down, most never to be found again.[78] England's heir was dead, its king given over entirely to his grief. As the contemporary Benedictine monk Orderic Vitalis coldly relates, "He whom a king begot became food for the fishes."[79] Hungrier fishes were to come for England's throne, now promised to no one.

Unlike Matilda of Tuscany or Joan of Arc, Empress Matilda lost. Her claim to the throne, spawned from her brother's death, went unrealized, and her cousin Stephen I assumed the throne.[80] Maud is often the single outlier in this composite study, the face of failure, as well the only woman who ambitioned directly to fulfill her own desires rather than on behalf of a male

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[76] Of great note is that when war broke out again over Investiture, this time Henrich V pitted against Pope Paschal II, Matilda remained neutral. It is a question that has long puzzled historians of the time, but perhaps a now-elderly Matilda, in poor health, had simply tired of decades of war.
[77] Duff, *Matilda of Tuscany,* 280.
[78] Only a single butcher survived.
[79] Ordericus Vitalis. *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitali*s. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 80.
[80] As mentioned in the historiography, near all chroniclers of the civil war known as The Anarchy would be sympathetic to, if not partisans of, King Stephen's cause, and this bias can never be disentangled from the recorded tenor of her reception.

patron.[81] Unlike Joan, her sex was never recognized in a positive, legitimizing, manner, and unlike Matilda of Tuscany any deviation from traditional female gender roles was met only with scorn and accusations of unnatural behavior. She was neither *pucelle* nor *virago*, but something her society had a far more negative timbre classifying.

At the time of her brother's death, Matilda of England was still married to Heinrich V, usurper of his father's throne, and incidentally the same Holy Roman Emperor who confirmed Matilda of Tuscany in her position of Vice Queen. In this capacity Maud would receive her empress moniker, and gain her first experience with direct rulership as Heinrich V appointed her regent of all Italy before his untimely death in 1125.[82] This unexpected loss left Matilda a 23 year old widow with little future in the Holy Roman Empire.

Henry I held greater plans for his only surviving child. Following her return to the Norman Court, Matilda's father compelled the barons, ecclesiastics, and royal officials of his lands to swear to uphold Matilda's succession, with oaths documented in 1127, 1128,, and 1131.[83] It was at this time he also arranged for her marriage to Geoffrey of Anjou, a charming youth nicknamed *pulcher* (literally, Latin for beautiful, metaphorically, noble).[84] Despite Geoffrey's beauty, Henry made it clear Geoffrey was always to be the junior partner in the marriage, never to rule England as a co-monarch after the succession, and this is a position Matilda continued throughout their marriage. Notably, this period also saw the first time Matilda took command of a military force, as she and her husband jointly campaigned as a minor border war between Anjou and Normandie broke out.[85]

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[81] Charles VII for Joan, Gregory VII (and the broader pro-papal movement) for Matilda of Tuscany.
[82] Bradbury, Jim. *Stephen and Matilda: The Civil War of 1139-53.* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Pub., 1998), 5.
[83] Bradbury. *Stephen and Matilda: The Civil War of 1139-53*, 12.
[84] Chibnall, Marjorie. *The Empress Matilda: Queen Consort, Queen Mother, and Lady of the English.* (Oxford, UK ; Blackwell, 1993), 44.
[85] Chibnall. *The Empress Matilda: Queen Consort, Queen Mother, and Lady of the English,* 62.

She was on this campaign when her father died unexpectedly in 1135. The succession was instantly disputed, as few in the realm took their oaths to uphold Matilda's rights seriously. as Piers of Langtoft put it simply:

> On Bier lay King Henry,
>
> on bier beyond the sea,
>
> And no man might rightly know
>
> Who his heir should be[86]

Matilda was far away, and Matilda was a woman, and so the barons of England looked to two of the king's nephews in Theobald and Stephen as succession favorites.[87] Stephen proved the more decisive of the two, winning over London with the promise of making the city a commune.[88] To legitimize the usurpation Stephen needed the Archbishop of Canterbury to formally crown him king as his father and grandfather had been crowned. The Archbishop, a man of some principle, was reluctant to go against Matilda's claim until a baron and several knights swore to him that they heard Henry I renouncing Matilda's claim upon his deathbed.[89] That none of the three men were present at Henry's death was not considered relevant. Following the coronation there was a period of relative peace in the English heartland as the country gradually grew comfortable with its new monarch. The peripheries of the kingdom were not so settled as a seething Matilda and Geoffrey vented their ire with raids into Normandy.[90] The greatest show of force for Matilda's claim in this period of relative calm was undertaken by her uncle, King David of Scotland. David amassed a large army and raided in force into Northumbria, and refused pointblank to pay

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[86] Quoted in Fraser, Antonia. *The Warrior Queens*, (New York: Knopf, 1989), 152.
[87] Pain, Nesta. *Empress Matilda: Uncrowned Queen of England*. (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1978), 14.
[88] Pain, *Empress Matilda : Uncrowned Queen of England*, 18.
[89] Pain, *Empress Matilda : Uncrowned Queen of England*, 20.
[90] Bradbury. *Stephen and Matilda: The Civil War of 1139-53*, 74.

homage to King Stephen under any circumstances.[91] While it cannot be said with any great certainty, and thrones had been stolen in England before during succession struggles, the paucity of support Matilda initially enjoyed was very likely tied to her gender. In truth the barons of England did not even consider her a viable option despite the many oaths sworn, and it is hard to imagine an eldest prince would have been so easily ignored.

The static situation changed when Matilda's half-brother, Robert of Gloucester, unilaterally declared for her and shattered the precarious peace between the cousins in 1138. Robert publicly renounced formal allegiance to Stephen, declaring, "the king had both unlawfully claimed the throne and disregarded, not to say betrayed, all the faith that he had sworn to him."[92] What precisely prompted Robert to plunge the realm into war remains unclear, though he and Stephen were known rivals and their acceptance of each other's political stature always conditional. Whatever the reasons, he would serve as Matilda's greatest supporter throughout The Anarchy, and England was at war.

A broad, 15-year conflict, this paper will limit itself to Matilda's military actions. The first of these was collecting her supporters, largely family members and those disillusioned with Stephen's reign, into a working coalition. With Robert came his brother Reginald, and thus most of Gloucester, "the whole district around Gloucester as far as the depth of Wales, partly under compulsion, and partly from goodwill, gradually went over to the lady Empress."[93] With most of Southwestern England defected to her cause, Matilda had gained the foothold and local support necessary to launch her invasion, and crossed the channel in August of 1139.[94] Notably, Matilda left her ambitious husband behind in Anjou to secure the Angevin position in France. This was

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[91] Bradbury. *Stephen and Matilda: The Civil War of 1139-53*, 78.
[92] Bradbury, *Stephen and Matilda,* 51.
[93] Bradbury. *Stephen and Matilda,* 53.
[94] William, *William of Malmesbury's Chronicle,* 110.

despite his desire to go to England, and his longstanding ambitions to rule England in fact as co-monarch. Matilda's demand that he remain on the continent demonstrated how she had taken strategic control of her coalition, specifically in delegating theaters of war to her supporters. This kind of strategic decision-making was far beyond anything Joan was allowed in her position as a tactical commander and operational advisor. Indeed, it was even beyond Matilda of Tuscany's influence, where while she controlled the entirety of the Tuscan theater of war, had relatively little control of her allies like Prince Conrad and Welf of Bavaria. Empress Matilda commanded at the highest level of strategic command, and was an outlier among these women in being both the face and the cause of her coalition.

Unlike an outlier, the Empress's first direct taste of battle ended in defeat just as Matilda of Tuscany's did. Following her crossing the Channel Stephen immediately marched a royal army down to Arundel, surprising Matilda, and besieging her inside the castle with a small complement of knights. What occurred next is partially lost to history, but apparently Stephen's brother convinced him to allow Matilda to leave the castle and reunite with Robert.[95] It was a decision that has often baffled historians, and Stephen would soon suffer for this egregious strategic mistake.

The king himself was shortly thereafter captured at the Battle of Lincoln, at the hands of Robert of Gloucester and Ranulf II of Chester. Ranulf was one of those disaffected barons who rallied to Matilda's cause out of dislike for Stephen, his lands having been granted to Scotland to buy peace, and was representative of the part of Matilda's force who did not favor her so much as they disfavored Stephen.[96] With Stephen safely ensconced as a prisoner, Matilda immediately began devising plans for taking London and crowning herself queen at last. She also quickly

[95] Bradbury. *Stephen and Matilda,* 61.
[96] Chibnall. *The Empress Matilda,* 100.

ordered her husband Geoffrey to invade Normandy yet again as she and Robert marched on London. It was here Matilda's dream would die, as negative popular reaction won out over her seemingly dominant military position.

The Archbishop Theobald of Canterbury, once hesitant to crown Stephen, refused to recognize Matilda's claims until he had spoken with Stephen himself and held a church council to debate the situation.[97] This hesitancy was indicative of the general ecclesiastical reaction to Matilda, aloof, uncertain, and fundamentally self-interested. She won their nominal support to her cause only by promising drastic, humiliating concessions over secular authority to the church in England (ones she likely could not have kept if she ever intended to). These bought allies would prove of little merit and return to Stephen with alarming alacrity following her failure. This period is also when Matilda assumed the title of *Domina Anglorum*, in preparation to being crowned Queen of England.

Matilda's great defeat came when she entered London with the war seemingly won, and resulted from political incompetence rather than strategic failure. Her first act of entering the city, even prior to her coronation, was to extoll a great tax from the citizens; "she sent for the richest men and demanded from them a huge sum of money, not with unassuming gentleness, but with a voice of authority…, every trace of a woman's gentleness removed from her face, blazed into intemperate fury."[98] While the demand itself was pigheaded, of note is that its reception is dictated as much by her gender as by the nature of it. Accusations of tyranny against kingly taxes were common in England, yet neither Henry I nor Stephen would ever have been expected to deliver royal commands in a tone of "unassuming gentleness."

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[97] Chibnall. *The Empress Matilda*,102

[98] Quoted in Bradbury, *Stephen and Matilda: The Civil War of 1139-53*, 112.

This demand, and the nature of the one demanding, led London into general revolt as the populace took up arms and drove Matilda and her supporters out of the city. The remaining great partisan of Stephen's cause, his Queen Matilda (to beguile the historian with yet further naming confusion), immediately advanced on her husband's fleeing enemies and won a crushing victory at the Rout of Winchester. Empress Matilda's greatest ally in Robert was taken prisoner, and she escaped with her uncle David, King of Scots, by the slimmest of margins.[99]

Following this battle Matilda's ambitions were functionally dead and the high drama of the civil war petered off into stalemate. An exchange of prisoners would be made, Stephen for Robert, and the war continued for years in the most desultory fashion, with neither side again risking a major battle. Robert would die in 1147, many participants on both sides would leave for the Second Crusade in 1145, and Matilda herself would eventually return to Normandy in 1148.[100] From thereon her eldest son Henry would take up the royal cause of his family, but fight to establish himself king rather than his mother as queen. Following the death of Stephen's eldest son Eustace, and under intense pressure from both the realm's barons and bishops to finally end the fighting, he formally accepted Matilda and Geoffrey's eldest son as his heir, the future Henry II.[101] After 15 years of fighting, the Anarchy was over largely where it had begun, Stephen as king of England, Matilda ruling over Angevin domains in France.

And so the soon to be Henry II would reign, husband and eventual rival to the crusader Elanor of Aquitaine.[102] He was crowned in 1154, using the imperial crown Matilda had brought back with her from the Holy Roman Empire.[103] His claim came solely from his still living mother, confirming that the English dynastic line could pass maternally, yet the ambitions of a

[99] Hanley, Catherine. *Matilda: Empress, Queen, Warrio*r. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), 109.
[100] Chibnall. *The Empress Matilda*,151.
[101] Chibnall. *The Empress Matilda*,155.
[102] A woman whose own military activities during the Second Crusade and a rebellion against her husband on her sons' behalf would merit inclusion in a larger work of this nature.
[103] Hanley. *Matilda*, 199.

queen regnant would remain unfulfilled for many centuries, until another brother's death.[104] The Empress Matilda remained administrator of Normandy on her son's behalf until her death. The society which had rejected her proved little kinder to her in retirement, and noted that even in old age she remained, "of the stock of tyrants."[105] She alone of our three figures had dared to fight for her own ambitions, she alone had failed, and she alone would be remembered by her contemporaries not as a saint or a virtuous margravine but as an unnatural woman and as a despot.

III. Societal Reaction

Integration into Male Military Structures

Perhaps the immediate practical concern with women in command positions of medieval militaries was their integration into military structures themselves. Given the concern of operating within otherwise all-male military structures, their military leadership, in all three instances, took the form of cooperative decision making.. Each woman would find a male counterpart of kindred spirit, who would provide both shining signals of acceptance other soldiers would emulate, and their professional expertise as career soldiers. Along with the initial decision to send her to Orleans, the most fortuitous decision Charles made regarding Joan was assigning her to the army of such a man, Alençon. Jean II, Duke of Alençon, prince of the blood, became Joan's most significant supporter and provided the most visible acceptance of Joan by the French military structure. Alençon's father had been killed at Agincourt, and he was one member of the French nobility filled with the fiery offensive nature so present in Joan herself.[106]

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[104] Mary I, or Mary Tudor, would be the first woman to ascend to the English throne in 1553, following the death of her 15 year old brother Edward VI and after promptly executing those who sought to deny her the throne.
[105] Chibnall. *The Empress Matilda*, 204.
[106] Stephen, *The Warrior Saint*, 52-53.

He provided her the legitimacy of command, and she provided him the passionate support of the soldiery. Moreover their strategic and tactical visions were almost always aligned. They were individuals fundamentally and irrevocably wedded to the offensive, in a French army that had largely been demoralized and had come to accept cautious approaches and a defensive strategic outlook. Alençon's admiration of Joan's military abilities was evident throughout their campaigning together. He later wrote, "All were full of admiration that she could comport herself so skillfully and prudently in military activities, as if she had been a war captain for twenty or thirty years."[107] Joan achieved her most consistent level of success when fighting beside Alençon, and following their separation (forced by an increasingly cautious Charles VII), Joan was never again in a command position of so many men.[108]

While Joan's exceptional nature cannot be overstated, men like Alençon were exceptional in their own way. Joan had no formal position in the French military and her influence was always unregulated, largely dependent on the open-mindedness of male nobles in positions of formal power. Some, like the Bastard of Orleans, only turned to Joan in desperation. Others, like Charles VII's advisors, sought to marginalize her when her star burned a little too brightly. But Alençon, unique among the senior French military structure, not only liked Joan and found her military mindset compatible, but he also respected her.[109] He invited Joan to all of his war councils (for he was the titular leader of the armies in which she fought during the Loire Campaign), allowed her to speak freely at them in violation of protocol, and, far more often than not, agreed with what she proposed and developed his campaigns with her jointly.[110] Joan was a woman, a teenager, and a peasant, with no military background. Her achievements within these

[107] Quoted in Taylor, *The Virgin Warrior,* 44.
[108] Quoted in Stephen, *The Warrior Saint*, 84.
[109] Stephen, *The Warrior Saint*, 111.
[110] DeVries. *A Military Leader*,134.

constraints were exceptional, and so too was Alençon, able to see beyond these raiments of her identity, to the sharp mind and warrior soul beneath that was so aligned with his own.

Much as Alençon was the central military figure in Joan's career, Matilda of Tuscany's featured one Arduino della Palude. Arduino, styled Matilda's "grand captain" by some of her biographers, served as her most important sub-commander during the entirety of the Investiture Contest.[111] He commanded forces for her both in her absence and directly underneath her in engagements in which they were both present, though contemporary sources are too thin to establish a complete timeline of his activities during the wars.[112] Several prominent Matildine historians assert Arduino also taught Matilda the basics of military training, such as how to ride with a lance and wield a sword.[113] This however is a matter of some dispute as there is no consensus on his date of birth, leaving the simple fact of whether he would have been old enough to train a young Matilda unknown.[114] Regardless, as with Joan and Alençon we are reminded military activity is a fundamentally collaborative effort (for every Napoleon a Davout and a Lannes and a Murat, for every Genghis Khan a Subutai), and this maxim was certainly no different for these women who found themselves in unusual circumstance. Alençon, Arduino, Robert of Gloucester, each of our figures found themselves in intimate collaboration with male commanders who proved their most devoted and effective supporters.

As we will also see with the Empress Maud, once Matilda's military forces were aligned with her she suffered surprisingly little defections or even dissent. When she did suffer abandonment, such as the defection of vassals or the rebellions of cities, it was usually outside

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[111] Ghirardini, Lino Lionello. *Storia critica di Matilde di Canossa : problemi (e misteri) della più grande donna della storia d'Italia*. (Modena: Aedes muratoriana, 1989), 58-59.
[112] Ghirardini. *Storia critica,* 39.
[113] Eads, *Mighty in War,* 14
[114] Eads, *Mighty in War,* 14

her Tuscan-Emiglian powerbase and usually orchestrated by political leaders who fundamentally favored loyalty to Heinrich over loyalty to her. Both Matildas were granted the legitimacy of nobility, the congenital right to command their societal lessers. However both their primary rivals, Heinrich and Stephen, carried this same authority and yet both suffered markedly more defections during the civil conflicts. That is to say the military forces loyal to the Matildas were, on average, more loyal than those that opposed them. This observation should be tempered with the understanding that the polities of the male figures were larger and so the opportunity for dissent commensurately greater. But insofar as societal reaction is concerned, the militaries under these womens' command often offered the least conditional positive reception they would experience. Church figures would be deeply polarized and at the whim of their secular self-interest, linguistics would remain rooted in the misogyny of the time, but the militaries they commanded would only ever prove loci of loyalty.

The Empress Matilda's command is unusual relative to her peers in that her military forces came primarily from familial support. Unlike Joan she did not integrate into a military structure that had been at war for 80 years, and unlike Matilda of Tuscany she did not possess domains ruled solely in her own name. Her husband ruled in Anjou and her father believed she would inherit the royal demesne upon his death.[115] As such she was bereft of the ability to easily raise an independent force due to the inherent lack of fiefs owned by her and vassals sworn to her. This is perhaps most readily seen in that when war came to England it was not through Matilda's own behavior, her having been relegated to raising a papal complaint and raiding into Normandy with her husband's forces. Rather war exploded when her more landed brother Robert was able to raise Gloucester and the surrounding districts for her. Ever the greatest of her allies,

[115] Bradbury, *Stephen and Matilda: The Civil War of 1139-53*, 16.

it is important to note that Robert himself, though bastard born, was briefly considered a claimant for his father's throne. As the *Gesta Stephani* relates,

> Among others came Robert, Earl of Gloucester, son of King Henry, but a bastard, a man of proved talent and admirable wisdom. When he was advised to claim the throne on his father's death, deterred by sounder advice he by no means assented, saying it was fairer to yield it to his sister's son, than presumptuously to arrogate it to himself.[116]

Despite the mention of the future Henry II, when Robert did rebel it was on behalf of his sister's claim first, his nephew's second. This dynamic was repeated in her uncle David's insistence on her right to the throne, even after Stephen attempted to buy him off with the lands of Northern England.[117] As a primarily strategic decision maker, Matilda was the individual in least consistent close contact with her own military forces, and, in this feudal system, without land of her own, her forces largely owed their direct allegiance to her familial supporters rather than to herself. Yet in spite of this, even after disaster and stalemate, these supporters remained steadfast in their support of her cause. Maud may have lost the war in the streets of London, or by underestimating Queen Matilda, but she never lost it because her military forces failed to heed her commands or abandoned their loyalty.

Whatever her faults of imperious command and unfeminine traits, it is clear the Empress Matilda commanded the loyalty of those who served her, even when the possibility of a male heir was present. This reinforces our findings with Joan and Matilda of Tuscany, confirming that while their political support could ebb and wane, and while the ecclesiastical reaction was deeply polarizing depending on one's politics, not one of these three figures faced significant disruption

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[116] Potter, *Gesta Stephani,* 78.
[117] Potter, *Gesta Stephani,* 91.

from the military forces they deployed. This may be due to the ingrained habits of discipline and obedience instilled in feudal militaries of the time, but whatever the reason, where these women lead their men followed.

Exceptionalism on Exceptionalism

For all Joan's celebrated fame there is thought to have been only a single academic work written about her published during her lifetime, The Song of Joan of Arc (*Le Ditié de Jehanne d'Arc*).[118] Written by the first professional female writer of the French Court, renowned humanist, and an accomplished poet who chronicled much of the Hundred Years War in her work, Christine de Pizan.[119] Following Joan's victory at the Siege of Orleans, de Pizan wrote a 61-stanza poem celebrating La Pucelle and her achievements in a heavily religious tone. Pizan structured her work in octosyllabic lines, eight lines per stanza, and ababbcbc rhyme scheme (making for a most awkward translation).[120] In it we see much of the discourse that dominated Joan's reception in French society, the inextricable linking of Joan with French nationalism, the heavy emphasis on her soldiering with comparisons to Classical warriors in a manner almost never rendered to female figures:

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[118] Bonnie Wheeler, and Charles T. Wood,. *Fresh Verdicts on Joan of Arc.* (New York: Garland Pub., 1996), 133-134.

[119] Christine de Pizan was a figure of exceptional achievement in her own right, the professional writer of Charles VI's Court for several decades; she was raised with a Humanist education due to the high-mindedness of her physician father (over the objections of her traditionalist mother). Faced with financial ruin following her widowhood at only 25 years of age, she turned to that education and began publishing Italian-style ballads, which caught the attention of nobles at court. She was quickly appointed the royal biographer and worked for nearly 30 years in the world of letters, publishing poems, histories, romances, tracts on warfare, and proto-feminist essays attacking the misogyny of her time (as Simone de Beavoir wrote many centuries later, de Pizan was, "the first… woman to take up her pen in defense of her sex"). Her career came to an abrupt end as she retired to monastic life in 1420 and would never write professionally again, with the singular exception of her poem celebrating Joan's appearance and victory at Orleans in 1429. See, Desmond, Marilynn. "*Christine de Pizan and the Categories of Difference*." Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998.

[120] Taylor, *Joan of Arc La Pucelle*, 98-108.

XXXVI

She frees France from its enemies,
Recovering citadels and castles.
No army ever did so much,
Not even a hundred thousand vassals!
And of our brave and able folk,
She is the chief and first commander.
God makes it so; not even Hector
Nor Achilles could withstand her.

XXXIV

Aha!! What honor for the female
Sex! God shows how he loves it,
When the nobles—great, but wretched
Who earlier the realm had quit,
By one woman were fortified,
No men could do this deed, but more:
The traitors were repaid in kind!
No one would credit this before.[121]

Even in Pizan's panegyric, though she was naturally predisposed to Joan's accomplishments in a way most contemporary male writers were not, we see elements of the extant patriarchal structure at play. Joan's sex is reinforced, emphasized time and again: there was no muddying of the binary gender paradigm through her cross-dressing when she was being accepted by the establishment. Further, her legitimacy derived from the traditional twofold factors, her religiosity, and her success. Like prior figures, from Radegund to the Empress Irene to our own Matilda of Tuscany, the display of intense religiosity allowed some medieval women to escape the confines of traditional gender roles in a manner rarely available elsewhere. It even enabled a conditional celebration of such deviation from the female code. Yet, uniquely, for Christine de Pizan it was not simply a matter of exceptional religiosity enabling the celebration of abnormal behavior. In her most famed work, *Le Livre de la Cité des Dame,* Pizan imagines a city constructed entirely by, and of, women, with historical figures each contributing their unique strengths to its model administration.[122] While Joan was not yet born at the time of the book's

[121] Taylor, *La Pucelle,* 98-99.
[122] Christine, and Rosalind. Brown-Grant. *The Book of the City of Ladies*.

publication, she would undoubtedly have had a place in Pizan's utopia, as its warrior, its protector, its guardian. For Pizan, Joan was not only an exceptional force of spirituality, or the embodiment of popular nationalism, but the fulfillment of a proto-feminist ideal regarding the inherent capabilities latent in medieval women. Of all our commentators she is unique in this assessment, and coincidentally also unique in being our only female commentator.

The second common aspect of legitimization was success. It is hard to countenance Joan would have been accepted or appreciated by her contemporaries had her initial foray at Orleans ended in failure. There was in effect a higher standard for public legitimization of women who defied the gender norms of the time, and even conditional acceptance was always contingent upon their continued success. This interpretation is reinforced by the fact that Joan's star in Charles VII's Court waned following her failure to take Paris, and perhaps most gratuitously in the reaction to Empress Maud's efforts given, unlike Joan or Matilda of Tuscany, her warring ended in failure and defeat.[123] Medieval Europe of this time entertained women leading men into battle so long as the woman was virtuous, exceptionally Christian, and the battles successful. What it would never tolerate was female failure.

Aside from Pizan, Joan's battlefield glory saw further poetic celebration from Martin le Franc in his *Le Champion des dames*, a poetic debate likewise weighing in favor of the potential of women in the medieval period, citing Joan as the primary example for prospective martial glory. As le Franc writes, "May it please God that you barons, you princes, you lords of France, in whom we still place hope of seeing our deliverance, have the courage and the endurance of this one woman, in order to overcome and destroy your enemies quickly".[124] Le Franc wrote his

[123] Marjorie Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda: Queen Consort, Queen Mother, and Lady of the English*, (Oxford, UK ; Blackwell, 1993) 4-5.
[124] Quoted in Taylor, *Joan of Arc: La Pucelle*, 245.

poem as the Hundred Years' War raged on, and it was one of the first artistic works to begin the secular canonization of Joan as one of the great heroes of French history. Indeed what is most striking is the potency of the myth-making from the very beginning of Joan's legend. He implores the men of France, still engaged in the war for which Joan had died, to be more like her should they want to win. It is not truly a celebration of female virtue, Joan is again only great because she has the virtues of a man, but it nonetheless a semi-transgressive argument by claiming Joan was the figure with the *vir* traits needing emulation, rather than a more conventional male figure.

Ecclesiastic Reactions

Given that Joan of Arc's life ended on a blazing stake after condemnation for heresy, the reaction of clerics to her campaigning is perhaps the most complicated of our studied figures. Her campaigning was the direct cause of her death, in both that her wearing male military raiment provided the rationale for the sustained heresy charge, and in that her success against Anglo-Burgundian ambitions sparked a deep desire in those political powers to see her discredited and dead. Yet even prior to her rehabilitation trial, in which an Armagnac-aligned ecclesiastic court found the original trial unjust and deceitful, and concluded that if anyone present at her initial trial had been guilty of heresy it was Pierre Cauchon, Joan's reception was deeply contentious.[125] Some, such as Jean Juneval (later one of the three judges at Joan's rehabilitation trial), simply excised her from the record books, noting to Charles VII, "Know too how the… siege of Orleans was lifted, and marvelous things that were done before the almost miraculous consecration of King Charles at Reims, the capture of towns and cities on this

[125] Pernoud, Regine. *The Retrial of Joan of Arc : The Evidence for Her Vindication.* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2007), 9-15.

campaign."[126] To Juneval it was as though Orleans and the Loire Valley were liberated by divine, inscrutable means. Others, such as the German theologian Johannes Nider, condemned Joan as a witch, a sorceress, as malefica, "... she had a familiar angel of God, which was an evil spirit according to many interpretations and proofs. Because she was made a sorceress by this spirit…"[127] Ultimately Joan received an overwhelmingly positive response from the Catholic Church once the English position in France collapsed and her politic were not the dominant ones in the Kingdom of France.[128] This is naturally most clearly seen in the Bull issued by Pope Calixtus III, following the petition of Joan's parents to see their daughter receive long-delayed justice. Calixtus writes, "Joan… had detested all heresy during her life, and did not hold any belief, or make any affirmation, that was contrary to the catholic faith and to the traditions of the Holy Roman Church."[129] While there is an implicit statement that Joan's military activities and the statements therein did not constitute any activity against the Catholic Church's teachings, of note is that the violence (as with Juneval) latent in Joan's story had been completely detached from her, robbing her journey of its most fundamental contextualization, and the individual of her most integral personal identity. The Church came to condemn those who had condemned Joan, it even came to celebrate her as a martyr of the faith, but it would never come to celebrate the life she had led.

Given the nature of Matilda's warring it is perhaps of no surprise that she received the most full-throated endorsement as a leader of men in battle by the Catholic church. She enjoyed a rich correspondence with Pope Gregory VII, and perhaps the letter most indicative of her status

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[126] Taylor, *Joan of Arc: La Pucelle*, 243.
[127] Taylor, *Joan of Arc: La Pucelle*, 245.
[128] A process that would culminate in her canonization in 1920.
[129] Taylor, *Joan of Arc: La Pucelle*, 263. Her rehabilitation trial was at least partially an attempt by Charles VII to relegitimize Joan and therefore further legitimize the crown he owed her. Certainly he exerted more effort pursuing these face-saving legalities than he did to save the life of the living girl.

as a fully approved warrior was the one in which he asked for Matilda to not only send her soldiers to the Middle East to engage in a crusade, but the expectation, even eagerness she herself would lead them herself;

> "How serious my intention and how great my desire to go overseas and with Christ's help carry succor to the Christians who are being slaughtered… And I, provided with such sisters, would most gladly cross the sea and place my life, if need be, at the service of Christ."[130]

Whatever the failures of the contemporary Catholic Church, Gregory was actively, overtly countenancing Matilda warring in the Holy Land and placing himself beside her during the prospective military campaign. Insofar as the debate between Ptolemy of Lucca and Giles of Rome may be seen as emblematic of the open question of women waging war in the medieval period, it is clear that Matilda of Tuscany received an unusual amount of determinations in the positive for her activities from the highest imaginable religious authority.

Popes aside, Matilda's unique status among the high ecclesiastics was confirmed among other prominent clergy. Anselm of Canterbury, theologian, archbishop, saint, enjoyed Matilda's protection and patronage, and later, friendship. In a gracious letter to her he claims to know her heart, stating she would love to give up a life of power and privilege for monastic retreat, and that she sacrifices by instead continuing to lead:

> "I always preserve in my heart the memory of your holy desire through which your heart yearns to hold the world in contempt; but the holy and unwavering love which you have

[130] Duff, Nora, Augusto C. Ferrari, Vittorio Alinari, and Rosolino Bellodi. *Matilda of Tuscany: La Gran Donna D'Italia*. 289-290.

for mother Church lovingly holds you back… you should patiently bear the burden which you are carrying in tribulation with good hope."[131]

In essence both Matilda's political influence and her material armies were of greater utility for the church than her private spirituality. Thus leading church figures were effusive in their praise of her sacrificing spiritual purity for the sake of maintaining her status as a worldly secular leader, and lending her strength of arms to the church. This is the line where politics and religiosity blurred heavily. Matilda of Tuscany, by all accounts, was profoundly religious, bequeathed her property to the church, and put herself at personal risk by allying with the Papal States against her liege lord, the Holy Roman Emperor. Yet one is left wondering if that political decision to support the church was the more fundamental rationale for their unalloyed praise. Was their celebration of her as a battlefield leader the result of her public piety, or a more realpolitik assessment of a vulnerable polity that needed allies? It is fortunate for the Papacy that Matilda never put them in a position of having to choose, or even define.

Conversely the Empress Maud, of our three figures, enjoyed the least ecclesiastic support both during her life and after (if we allow Joan's execution was fundamentally political in nature and abjured by the Church within two decades of her death). To a degree this can also be seen in the letters written between her and prominent religious authorities. While popeless Matilda received letters from many prominent holy men of her day, including Thomas Becket, Hildebert, and even a copy of a letter Anastasius IV gave Eleanor. While most of these letters concern Maud after her monarchical ambitions were laid to rest, it is of great significance that not one of the three letters we have during her Empress period legitimized her authority through any kind of religious appreciation. Maude, even by her supporters, is only ever seen through secular lenses,

[131] Duff. *Matilda of Tuscany: La Gran Donna D'Italia*. 294.

and insofar as they legitimize her position they invoke her ancestry. Further, her military efforts were ignored in toto. From the pen of a Benedictine monk, Hugh of Fleury, "I decided to collect this little book for you, my lady, so that the loftiness of your family might be known to posterity and the nobility of your ancestors published to future centuries."[132] From the monks of Malmesbury, "We therefore had the required document prepared with the list and names and years of the kings of the English. Then, indeed, allured by the desire for a larger narration with easy sweetness she prevailed on us to do a full history of her ancestors."[133] In addition to the fixation on her lineage rather than her religiosity, the comparatively minor religious figures are perhaps evidenced by absence. Empress Matilda was unique among the figures as her violence was the means to achieve her political ambitions, without the veneer of religious achievement. The stark difference in treatment between the Matildas by ecclesiastical figures suggests their opinion on such activity.[134]

Yet perhaps the greatest indicator of church reaction to the Empress was their paucity of material support before and after her capture of London. As has been related, Matilda found it necessary to concede a great deal to the English church for their continued support. The Archbishop of Canterbury proved especially slow to recognize her claim, doing so only after receiving the blessing of the captured Stephen. This tentative, conditional acceptance was quickly reversed by Queen Matilda's decisive victory at Winchester, following which once again England's ecclesiastical structure fell into step behind the usurper Stephen. The church not being supportive of Matilda is best evidenced by the simplicity that the church in England did not support her.

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[132] Crawford, Anne. *The Letters of the Queens of England*, 1066-1547, 49.
[133] Crawford, Anne. *The Letters of the Queens of England*, 1066-1547, 52.
[134] Pain, Nesta. *Empress Matilda: Uncrowned Queen of England,* 120.

The negative reaction to Matilda's ambition, and peremptory governing style, is extant everywhere in the language used to describe her by contemporary monks. In one of the more famous passages remarking on her entry into London, "Her forehead wrinkled with a frown, every trace of a woman's gentleness removed."[135] In the act of taking London, the act of ruling, Empress Matilda was stripped of her femininity in a way Joan never was, and in a pejorative rather than celebratory way as with her Tuscan namesake. She had the ambitions of a man, and acted as a male ruler both in governance and military matters. This was presented as intrinsically negative by the vast majority of religious chroniclers whose writings make their way down to us. Empress Matilda did not benefit from the elevated, holy femininity of Joan, nor the manifestation of masculine virtues in an unlikely vessel as did the Tuscan Matilda.

It is impossible to disentangle gender from reaction. Matilda was a second option, indeed perhaps a third as Henry I likely wished to live long enough to pass the kingdom over her head, down to his grandson. Moreover, the necessity of baronial oaths in three distinct years argues for the inherent weakness of a royal woman's position in the time period. That is to say, England's church most often went the way of the London mob, and men with worse claims had outwitted men with better claims in the Conqueror's line (including Henry I himself who outmaneuvered his brother's son), but the weakness inherent in Empress Matilda's position stemmed at least partially from her gender.

The negative reaction did not exist in a vacuum, and as with Joan and Matilda of Tuscany we see the inevitable link between ecclesiastical reaction and the politics of the day. Matilda's greatest single sin as far as England's church was concerned may not have been her seeking her father's throne, but rather the revocations of grants made and promises made to that church by

[135] Quoted in Fraser. *The Warrior Queens*, 156.

Stephen, up to and including confiscations of church lands.[136] And as has been noted, the Archbishop of Canterbury was fundamentally a force of inertia, hesitant to crown Stephen in defiance of King Henry's wishes until Stephen's power was clear, and equally hesitant to crown Matilda until her power was clear. It may be overstating the case to suggest the church blew with the winds, but invariably with all three women we see church figures operating in deeply partisan ways, forgiving gender violations when it benefited them, and damning them when it did not, rather than consistently maintaining any kind of principled position.

A Sword by Any Other Name: La Pucelle, Celeberrimae Principis, Domina Anglorum

The Austrian philosopher of language Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote that the limits of one's language functions as the limits of one's world, arguing that a world is simply a totality of facts and those facts may be seen as the propositions inherent in language.[137] While many disputed the argument (including an older Wittgenstein), it remains central to this chapter's notion that the language used to describe these atypical figures was central to their society's ability to conceptualize them, to define them, to understand them. The language of contemporary responses to female warriors, generals, and leaders reveals a level of cognitive dissonance in the observers. While they often sought to celebrate the achievements of Joan and the Matildas, they also made sure not to subvert the extant linguistic networks that had been established to clearly delineate between men and women. These frameworks were naturally reinforced in Wittgenstein's sense by Latin, French, and Italian being grammatically gendered languages. That is to say in these languages no noun can be used to refer to a person or thing without stating their grammatical gender, and generally the romance languages will decline any noun to agree with

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[136] Bradbury, *Stephen and Matilda: The Civil War of 1139-53*, 162.
[137] Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Trubner & Co., 1922, 13-22.

the gender of the person or thing being described. Thus a female dog in French is a *chienne*, a male dog is a *chien*. In Latin a king is a *rex*, a queen a *regina*, etc.[138] This rule is very widely adhered to, and when it is broken, as it would be by both Matildas, it demands analysis.

For her part, Joan was the individual of the three who would most insistently identify herself with her gender. Throughout her abnormally well-documented life, from every surviving letter we have that she dictated, every secondhand report of her speaking, and the painstakingly compiled minutes of her heresy trial, Joan always referred to herself as either Joan, or *La Pucelle* (French for The Maiden).[139] This was despite the ennoblement of Joan and her family by King Charles, a fact that her brothers and descendants wasted no time exploiting to the fullest, as near all their correspondence and contact with officialdom (including her parents' plea for her posthumous retrial) used the 'de Domrémy' title. When royal officialdom made note of Joan it would likewise be as Jeanne d'Ay de Domrémy.[140] Yet Joan herself appeared to prefer the religious qualities of sanctity, purity, devotion, over the social advancement of ennoblement. Intrinsic in her legitimacy was her virginity (what that says about the sexual ideals of fifteenth century France is fascinating but beyond the limits of this essay): the folk legends which spoke of a girl to save France from English occupation always stressed she would be an unmarried, unwidowed maid. So important was the parameters of this legend that to ensure them Charles VII had trusted noblewomen, including his mother-in-law, examine Joan for verification of her virginity.[141] Something as simple as a farm boy tryst may have prevented Joan from getting an army, so contingent was her legitimacy upon her very specific manifestation of gender.

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[138] In king and queen we see a remnant of Old English's grammatical gender present in Modern English, which generally lacks it.
[139] When directly asked her full name, first and last, for the one and only time in her life while documented in historical record Joan responded with, "Jehanne la Pucelle". See, Hobbins. *The Trial of Joan of Arc.*
[140] Taylor, *Joan of Arc: La Pucelle*, 51.
[141] Craig Taylor, *Joan of Arc La Pucelle*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006),, 61.

Thus was Joan's femininity always announced, even exacerbated, by the language with which society spoke of her, and with which she spoke of herself. Joan's virginity was among the least interesting aspects about her, yet it was the thing that along with her gender defined her naming convention. She would forever be *La Pucelle*, and after her crushing victory at Orleans she often would be *La Pucelle d'Orléans*. This title at least granted her the weight of her achievements, but at no point would the language surrounding her be degendered or desexualized. For most contemporary commentators, Joan's identity would be irreversibly linked to her gender and to her sexuality, and the outliers would be the Pizans who compared her to an Achilles, or the Alençons who compared her ability to that of a veteran military captain's (seemingly more impressed that Joan as an inexperienced soldier could maneuver artillery rather than that a teenage girl could).

In contrast to this aggressively feminine approach, Matilda of Tuscany established a complicated, dissonant linguistic legacy. Her foremost biography was Donizone's oft-cited poem carrying with it the subtitle, *Celeberrimae Principis Italiae,* or the most renowned prince of Italy.[142] Notably, Donizone chose not to go with the distinctly feminine form of *principissae.* Instead he elected for a form of *princeps*, the title once used by Augustus Caesar to describe his standing as first citizen of the new Roman Empire (and used by all his successors thereafter). *Princeps* additionally comes with a host of ancillary meanings beyond first before others, such as chief, sovereign, once even used to describe an elevated class of legionary within the Roman military. Given the care with which Donizone crafted his poem, it is unlikely that the naming was haphazard. Instead he emphasized the masculine implications such a title carried, especially

[142] Donizone, Paolo. Golinelli, and Vito. Fumagalli. Vita di Matilde di Canossa. 1. ed. italiana. Milano: Jaca Book, 2008,

when coupled with the superlative *celeberrimae,* implicitly comparing Matilda to the other princes and leaders of Italy, the vast majority of whom were male during Matilda's reign.

Yet Donizone did not erase gender as within the body of the text where he refers to Matilda primarily with feminine nouns, his favorite being "prudens comitissa", or the wise countess.[143] Nowhere does he use the masculine form "comes." As in much of the discourse surrounding Matilda's life there is a blurring of the masculine and feminine. She had no children beyond a single daughter that died shortly after birth, so the typical panegyrics of motherhood are lost to her, and she was a bad wife to bad husbands in bad marriages. Alternatively, she won so many battles so decisively that the works of all the foremost historians who deal with her, Bonizo, Mantuanus, and Donizone, instead celebrated her martial spirit and the use of that spirit on behalf of the papacy.

Another appellation Matilda earned in her life stemmed from Hugh of Flavigny invoking the term *virago. Vir* being the Latin root for man or man-like, a suffix was added to feminize the noun, and the resulting term was used exclusively to refer to women who displayed traditionally masculine qualities (sometimes pejoratively).[144] Its first popularized use is in the Vulgate Bible, where its primary translator, Jerome of Stridon, used *virago* in lieu of a traditional Latin word for a woman to denote the masculinity of Eve when describing her creation from the male form of Adam.[145] From its inception we see the utilization of *virago* in relation to Matilda as reinforcement rather than subversion of the extant gender paradigm, she is good because she is manlike, of man, or crafted from man. Hugh, noticeably, is not praising her because she has a

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[143] Donizone, *Vita Mathildis*, 40.
[144] Schulenburg, Jane Tibbetts. *Forgetful of Their Sex : Female Sanctity and Society, ca. 500-1100*. University of Chicago Press, 1998, 50-53.
[145] As was often the case in Talmudic and Early Christian study there was a blurring of the gender binary as Eve was seen as having both a masculine and a feminine nature given her ribby genesis, see, Helen Kraus. *Gender Issues in Ancient and Reformation Translations of Genesis 1-4.* Oxford University Press, 182.

'feminine intellect'. To men like Hugh, or the Ptolemey, there would be no concept of praising a feminine intellect as the feminine was merely an unevolved form of the masculine.

Matilda's linguistic legacy was ultimately a mixed bag. She is never deprived of her femininity, never allowed to be other than a woman, yet when bringing up her greatness time and again chroniclers and biographers reverted to the medieval stereotype of masculinity as the paragon, and she successfully embodying that paragon. That is to say Matilda was oft considered so exceptional, so wonderful, because she was so masculine. Unlike Joan, there was not a celebration of any aspect of her femininity (as she was neither mother nor virgin nor wife nor nun the limited mores of the time had difficulty classifying Matilda's femininity). Despite the complicated reception her audience had to her actions relative to her gender, her legacy only grew with time, and the glorification of this most martial woman would become endemic in Italy following her death.

The Empress Matilda, queen that almost was, experienced the greatest dispute among her naming conventions during her life. As Empress of the Holy Roman Empire she would alternate between the titles granted to her by that position and by those of her ambitions; signing charters and styling her coins *imperatrix* (empress) or *Rex Matilda* (King Matilda).[146] Though it would never enter wide usage, Matilda used both feminine and masculine gendered nouns to describe herself, blurring the nature of her unprecedented rule. For their part Stephen's partisans consistently sought to delegitimize her claims, most often referring to her as *comitissa Andegauensis* (Countess of Anjou), foreignizing her, keeping her title far from kingship and England, and fundamentally reducing her to a recognizable feminine role.[147] The *Domina Anglorum* (Mistress of the English) title by which history best remembers her represents the

[146] Porter, Johanne. "A new coin type of the Empress Matilda? The Rex Matilda cross moline type." The British Numismatic Journal 89 (2019): 109.
[147] Potter, *Gesta Stephani,* 97.

almost nature of her achievements. It was intended as a preparatory title, paving the way for ascension to the *Rex Anglie* styled by Stephen.[148] Of note is that such a preparatory title was not utilized by any of Matilda's predecessors, and may speak to the fundamental weakness of her position. What need was there for a novel title but for deeply felt anxieties over the traditional one? Her supporters further marked out the masculine nature of her character and ambitions, notably her status as a commander of men, by often referring to her as the *domina imperatrix* (or lord empress).[149] The Byzantine maze of Maud's naming operated as another kind of battlefield for this age, her supporters always striving for legitimacy, for emphasis on vim, mastery, command, and her detractors doing what they could to reduce her in both position and gender.[150]

Ironically the greatest of these reductions was inflicted upon by her supporters after her death. Upon her death in 1167 she was entombed at Rouen with an epitaph utilizing neither the *imperatrix* title she so favored nor the *Domina Anglorum* title that represented the highwater mark of her ambitions.[151] Instead, she was reduced to her relationship to the men in her life, and comfortable feminine roles. In an inscription to become famous after her death she was, *filia Henrici, uxor Henrici, mater Henrici*, daughter, wife, and mother to the Henrys in her life. In death he was reduced to the most basic and traditional gender roles with which Medieval society was comfortable, and all in direct relation to the men in her life who successfully claimed the throne she coveted. It was a disappointing fate for this most ambitious and daring of women.

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[148] Matilda's contemporary title actually being, *Anglie et Normannieque domina,* posterity has simplified the form and emphasized England over Normandy.
[149] Lumbley, Coral. "Imperatrix, Domina, Rex: Conceptualizing the Female King in Twelfth-Century England." *Medieval feminist forum 55, no. 1* (2019): 64–99.
[150] The author of this paper begs forgiveness for including 3 central figures with the name Matilda, and notes only that he avoided mention of Empress Maud's mother, Matilda of Scotland.
[151] Winkler, Emily A, "Æthelflaed and Other Rulers in English Histories, c.900–1150", *The English Historical Review*, Volume 137, Issue 587, (August 2022), 969–1002.

Interestingly, the Eve-derived *virago* word made a brief reappearance in William of Malmesbury's account, yet the term was presented only with negative connotations.[152] Maud as virago was an unnatural creature, abandoning the natural state of women for foul ambition. Matilda of Tuscany as virago was a glorious example of her sex, overcoming the innate weakness of her sex to exceed in masculine endeavors. This conceptualization is also present briefly in the *Gesta Stephani* where Stephen's Queen is praised as, "a woman of subtlety, and a man's resolution."[153] The diametrically opposed reaction to these two women with the same word is evidence for how contingent gender deviation was upon aspects that had nothing to do with gender. Political concerns, religious concerns, the material demands and self-interest of the present crisis, were often what determined how the individual observer saw a woman behaving as few did. Yet as compliment or pejorative, terms like virago were always used to reinforce the gender paradigm through speech. In Tuscany, a Matilda was great because she was, incredibly, able to act like a man in a cause most men favored. In England, a Matilda was tyrannical because she dared be presumptuous enough to act like a man in a cause most men did not favor. Neither woman, regardless of success and failure on the battlefield, escaped the constraints of gendered language by which they were evaluated.

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[152] William. *William of Malmesbury's Chronicle of the Kings of England*, 121.
[153] Potter, *Gesta Stephani,* 91.

Conclusion

At the end of our tripartite analysis I find that the capacity for women to wage war in the medieval period was greater than is commonly recognized. More importantly, that the societal reaction offered a dizzying array of perspectives, positive, negative, ambivalent, and conflicted. While some of these anxieties and contradictions must be tied to individual conduct (there is naturally no uniformity of reception for male military figures either), the commonalities enable some overall conclusions to be made. All the women present had to contend with integrating themselves into overwhelmingly male spheres, carrying themselves through war rooms in which no other woman would be present. And all had to deal with contemporary and post-facto authors who carried the biases of their time, almost always placing these figures relative to masculine ideals, and looking warily upon too great a deviation from non-military norms. Joan, notably, faced more blowback for crossdressing than for leading men into war.

Further, broader conclusions may be drawn from each sphere of reaction. The ecclesiastical reaction to these women was particularly variable, more subject to secular interests and realities than any grounded theological positions. Conversely military support for the three women remained relatively constant throughout their careers, even when defeat loomed large. Lastly, the linguistic legacy of this world, and the values it underpinned, was inescapable. Each of our figures would be spoken of and defined in some measure by their femininity. Joan had the sanctified femininity of the holy martyr, one Matilda was great because she overcame her femininity to act like a man, the other Matilda wicked for she dared to cast aside her femininity and act like a man. Despite those constraints, even in this small analysis we see the broad diversity of possible reception and engagement possible without a fundamental shift in the underlying value system by which all were judged.

This complex engagement with female figures extended far beyond the tangible, the figures we know who lived and fought as warriors and generals. Many if not all cultures in the medieval world had more apocryphal tales of women warriors. Saxo Grammaticus writes about the viking queen and shield-maiden Lagertha, detailing her great bravery, her extensive fighting on behalf of Ragnar Lodbrok.[154] On the other end of this world, one of Mohammed's earliest biographers, Al-Waqidi, wrote about a similarly celebrated figure, Khawla bint al-Azwar, reported to have fought bravely at the Prophet's side throughout the Rashidun Caliphate's conquest of the Levant.[155] That both these women may have have existed is incidental insofar as their scholarly existence, and the generally positive reception they received, displayed that even cultures on the periphery of medieval Europe in the Norse Vikings and the Islamic Caliphates had a far more complex, often celebrated, relationship with the woman soldier than is commonly assumed. Such figures likewise display how this time period held a deeply conflicted attitude towards women (both Viking and early Muslim societies being casually misogynistic as were all their contemporaries), carving out a space in their cultural sphere for their celebration, while ensuring the extant gender paradigm was never undermined in a systematic capacity. Lagertha or Joan, Khawla or Matilda, while these figures would be celebrated, their emulation on a large scale would never be encouraged.

That the medieval epoch was prejudicial and ignorant cannot be denied, the darkness that once defined it was in many corners extant, yet any serious foray into its thought displays a vibrancy and diversity that belay its stereotypical reputation. Any foray into its conduct displays a world with greater permeability than many might see. As much as any pre-modern age the

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[154] Saxo, and F. York (Frederick York) Powell. *The First Nine Books of the Danish History of Saxo Grammaticus.* Translated by Oliver Elton. Nendel, Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1967.
[155] Wāqidī, Muḥammad ibn ʻUmar, and Rizwi Faizer. *The Life of Muḥammad : Al-Wāqidī's Kitāb al-Maghāzī*. (Edited by Amal Ismail and Abdulkader Tayob. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ; Routledge, 2011).

Medieval World displays vibrant examples of exceptionalism that were treated with far more layered thought, seriousness, and often celebratory tones that many instances of exceptionalism receive even in our modern times. While it may well be argued war is a human endeavor that ought never be celebrated, so long as it is a feature of our life those women who engage in its ordeals while also defying their society's prejudice deserve the place they have carved for themselves in history.

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