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Endowed with Manly Courage: Medieval Perceptions of Women in Combat

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ENDOWED WITH MANLY COURAGE: MEDIEVAL PERCEPTIONS OF
WOMEN IN COMBAT

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
History

by
Katherine Rose Hager
May 2018

Accepted by:
Dr. Caroline Dunn, Committee Chair
Dr. Rod Andrew Jr.
Dr. Elizabeth Carney

ABSTRACT

In the Middle Ages, a certain subset of women occupied a liminal space between the masculine and feminine spheres. These were the women who participated in armed combat and who were the enactors of aggression as opposed to the passive recipients of violence. There is debate today regarding whether medieval women lacked the capability, means, and training to engage in bellicose endeavors. Meanwhile, other scholars see in the male-voiced records of fighting women disdain for the female warriors.

This study argues, first, that women did have the capacity in the Middle Ages to engage in combat and, second, that the men who wrote about female warriors, both in historical chronicles and in romance, viewed the women with nuance and complexity that often manifested as open admiration. In order to investigate these topics, the author engages with sources such as the Royal Armouries I.33 manuscript and other medieval *fechtbücher*, or fighting manuals, to explore the practicality of women studying swordsmanship. In addition, the study analyzes medieval histories such as Orderic Vitalis' *Historia Ecclesiastica* and medieval romances, including *Le Roman de Silence*, to understand how society viewed female fighters.

Through analysis, this thesis seeks to answer why the studied medieval writers readily accepted the existence of militant women, and to examine under what conditions women who took up arms were regarded as praiseworthy protectors of society even as the women, at least on the surface, subverted the social norms they defended.

DEDICATION

To Scott Hutchison, who is at my side with sword and buckler.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to offer my gratitude to Dr. Caroline Dunn, who not only served as my committee chair, but also had a knack for guiding me in the direction of research I might have otherwise missed. I am also grateful to Dr. Elizabeth Carney for her help and for all the hours she patiently dedicated to reading Latin with me. I hope that my translations did not offend the Romans too badly. I offer sincere thanks to Dr. Rod Andrew Jr., who not only allowed me to invade his Southern history class with the medieval world, but who also provided tremendous encouragement and support. Last, but by no means least, I am thankful for all of the energy Dr. Paul Anderson has invested in me and my academic career, even when I changed my mind.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

As soon as one undertakes an investigation of women in medieval combat, it becomes apparent that the scholarly conversation centers upon an illiterate peasant girl from Domrémy, France. Joan of Arc has captured the attention of academics, writers, and filmmakers alike, and her name is synonymous with the concept of the medieval female warrior in popular culture.¹ At the mention of women in medieval combat, the image of Joan in her armor with a white and gold standard held aloft springs readily to people's minds. This study is not about the remarkable Maid of Orleans, but such is her presence that one can hardly approach the discussion without acknowledging her name and achievements. History and popular culture both have contributed to immortalize the martial achievements of a peasant girl who led a beleaguered army to victory after victory, and the reputation is justly earned as she astounded her king and vexed her enemies with abilities which should have been beyond her knowledge. However, the Maid of Orleans was not the first medieval woman to don armor and hazard herself in combat.

¹ Joan of Arc has served as the subject for numerous films in various countries. Her short life has captivated both filmmakers and film-goers since 1898 when George Hatot made the first short film centered upon the doomed heroine. Many more films would follow. Popular cultural discussions—and quasi-academic discussions intended for layman consumption—concerning women in medieval combat almost without exception include Joan of Arc. See, as an example, the article in *Smithsonian* which presents Joan as the “original nasty woman,” a dubious honor which also excludes previous female warriors from the discussion. Kat Eschner, “Remembering Joan of Arc, the Gender-Bending Woman Warrior Who Changed History,” *Smithsonian.com*. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/remembering-joan-arc-original-nasty-woman-180961709/> (accessed March 29, 2018).

The discussion on women in medieval combat cannot be limited to Joan of Arc lest historians risk losing sight of the larger picture of female martial participation. Centuries before Joan petitioned the Dauphin for the opportunity to save France in God's name, women actively participated in combat, and a discussion that engages exclusively with an extraordinary French girl cannot explore the full depths of a complicated issue that touches upon military history, gender and literature. The discussion on women in combat must go beyond Joan of Arc because the instances of women taking up arms go beyond her, and the conversation must look backwards in time to a world before Joan herself existed. For these reasons, this thesis explores other women, both factual and fictional, who participated as aggressors in combat.

The conversation about women in medieval combat owes much to Megan McLaughlin who initiated the discussion while introducing the question of gender to the discourse. In her interrogation of the sources, McLaughlin argued that the historical records pertaining to women in combat envisaged a pattern of the hardening of gender roles as the public and domestic spheres diverged; prior to the strict defining of gender roles, the presence of women in medieval combat was not something to dismiss as "accidental," but evidence of a culture in which gender roles were more porous and open to the fluidity of one's place in society.² Other historians have since taken up the investigation of the presence of women in medieval combat, including an accessible and fascinating compilation of essays edited by Susan Edgington and Sarah Lambert.³ Helen

² Megan McLaughlin, "The Woman Warrior: Gender, Warfare and Society in Medieval Europe," *Women's Studies* 17 (1990), 205.

³ For further reading, see *Gendering the Crusades*, ed. Susan B. Edgington and Sarah Lambert (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001). I found this selection of essays highly informative in guiding my initial

Nicholson has also contributed to the debate about whether or not women participated in combat and what might have been the social ramifications of female martial participation.⁴

However, despite the scholarly contributions of numerous academics, the conversation on women and combat still has many facets which remain unexplored. Some historians remain unconvinced that women seriously took up arms in an aggressive manner, and the discussion of women's military presence must take into account the arguments that women lacked the capability, means, and training to engage in bellicose endeavors.⁵ Other scholars see in the male-voiced records of fighting women disdain for the female warriors.⁶

This study seeks to fill a gap in the scholarship by first demonstrating that women did have the capacity in the Middle Ages to engage in combat and by then arguing that the men who wrote about female warriors, both in historical chronicles and in romance, viewed the women with nuance and complexity that often manifested as open admiration. Social motives drove the way in which medieval writers portrayed female warriors, and

research. Although my discussion will branch out beyond the crusades, this collection challenged my previous understanding of the roles women undertook in combat and encouraged me to conduct more research in the field of women in the medieval military.

⁴ Helen Nicholson, "Women on the Third Crusade," *Journal of Medieval History* 23, no. 4 (1997): 335-349. Although the article focuses on the Third Crusade, the author includes discussions on women in the martial sphere in Europe and about the possible social implications of women in combat.

⁵ For further reading, see Matthew Bennett, "Virile Latins, Effeminate Greeks and Strong Women: Gender Definitions on Crusade?," in *Gendering the Crusades*, ed. Susan B. Edgington and Sarah Lambert (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), 16-30. This study will revisit Bennett in a later discussion.

⁶ See Michael R. Evans, "Unfit to Bear Arms": The Gendering of Arms and Armour in Accounts of Women on Crusade," in *Gendering the Crusades*, ed. Susan B. Edgington and Sarah Lambert (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), 45-58. As with Bennett, Evans demonstrates hesitancy in acknowledging to what degree medieval women may have participated in combat. Evans goes further than Bennett in his interpretation of Orderic Vitalis' portrayal of female fighters, a topic which this study will also investigate.

the appearance of women such as Alvild, the princess-turned-pirate, and Camille and Silence, both fictitious but admired fighters, offer a deeper understanding of the medieval world in terms of gender and warfare.

This study is a discussion about liminal women, those who traversed the line between the masculine and the feminine spheres. It also contributes to the discussion about medieval combat since the participation of women as active aggressors in the martial world reveals a new understanding of the nature of medieval combat. This study brings together an understanding of medieval combat alongside an understanding of gender constructs within society in order to demonstrate a general admiration among medieval writers towards women who fought. However, such acceptance did not come without conditions as the female warriors must still adhere to acceptable societal roles; their martial activities were respected and extolled when the women upheld social stability rather than subverting it. To a degree, the correlation of respect with societal uplift is not unique to women since the writers, both of history and of romance, portray favorably men who fought to the benefit of society and condemn those whose aggression jeopardized society.

The difference lies in the divergent expectations of how a male contributes to society versus how a female contributes. The world of warfare has always been a masculine sphere by its nature, as shall be discussed, and the women who entered upon the medieval battlefield did so while walking a fine line between societal protagonist and antagonist. The medieval warrior woman could participate (so long as she remained virtuous and mindful of her gender). In an uncertain world, a woman of childbearing

years who sacrificed the home and hearth for the sword and spear risked the future of her society. As such, women who were either pious, committed virgins, or who performed their martial duty and then reclaimed their accepted place as wives and mothers, earned praise from the medieval writers.

In terms of setting the scene against which the medieval authors wrote, this study first addresses the question of whether women even engaged in combat. The questionable nature of the chronicles has rendered them excellent for exploring the medieval mindset, but it makes reliance upon their content for factual evidence dubious. Instead, this thesis will engage with other pieces of evidence which strongly indicate that women played an active role in combat. Among these sources is an examination of the Royal Armouries I.33 manuscript which is a fighting manual designed to teach sword and shield techniques. This document is unique not only because it is the first known fighting manual, but because it includes a depiction and a description of a woman seriously training to fight.

The fighting manuals, or *fechtbücher* as they are commonly known, provide a greatly under-studied trove of information not only about combat and duels, but also about women since female fighters appear as active participants. Currently, there is a dearth of scholarship regarding the importance of the I.33 manuscript as it concerns women as serious students of a martial skill. The manual has become important among historical fencers who seek to re-create the medieval martial styles of swordsmanship, and has been utilized similarly by scholars such as Rachel Kellett who have studied its illustrations to gain insight into the form and function of sword maneuvers as depicted in

other medieval sources.⁷ Yet, the woman with the sword and round shield remains a curiosity essentially wondered at but not discussed. This investigation utilizes the fighting manual as a source for understanding not only whether women engaged in martial activities, but whether they were taken seriously as combatants. This study will then investigate medieval chronicles and romance in order to gain an understanding of how the medieval world viewed women who engaged in combat.

The female fighter, while respected within social constraints during the Middle Ages, was not seen as normative by the people of her time, and this paper does not intend to argue otherwise. Ultimately, this is a study less about whether women existed in the masculine sphere and more focused upon understanding what their existence meant in societal terms. From the evidence, it seems clear that women did participate, but it cannot be overstated that the evidence does not point to large-scale female involvement in the martial world. Instead, this study seeks to answer why medieval writers readily accepted the existence of militant women, and to examine under what conditions women who took up arms were regarded as praiseworthy protectors of society even as the women, at least on the surface, subverted the social norms they defended.

⁷ For an example of how the I.33 manual has been used academically, see Rachel E. Kellett, "Royal Armouries MS I.33: Judicial Combat and the Art of Fencing in Thirteenth- and Fourteenth-Century German Literature," *Oxford German Studies*, 41, no. 1 (April 2012).

CHAPTER TWO

SKELETONS AND SWORD MANUALS: EVIDENCE FOR THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN COMBAT

“Stygian Pluto dares not attack anyone that the violent monk dares, and the old woman full of cunning.”⁸

A woman stands in guard with an arming sword held ready and a buckler positioned in *custodia secunda*, set at chest height and in preparation of turning her opponent’s anticipated strike.⁹ She meets the opponent’s attack blade against blade and initiates a counterattack, utilizing her advantageous position to strike the attacker’s buckler with her own. Buckler thrust aside, she rotates the sword upward and delivers the killing blow to the opponent’s head. The battle belongs to the bold woman with the aggressive attack.

Thus described is a page from the curious fighting treatise Royal Armouries MS I.33, also known as the Walpurgis Manuscript. Created between 1270 and 1320, the treatise served as a fighting handbook which outlined the theory and practice of sword and buckler fighting used in the late thirteenth century. Written in Latin with German terminology, it originated in Francia and describes a medieval fighting style dating to the thirteenth century. While the entirety of the manuscript serves as a fascinating source for

⁸ “Non audet Stygius Pluto tentare quod aude[t] effrenis monachus, plenaque dolis anus.” From the opening line of the Royal Armouries MS I.33. accessed October 01, 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20031208194317/http://freywild.ch:80/i33/i33a.html> , Folio 1r.

⁹ A buckler is a round shield which measures no more than 18 inches in diameter and is designed for one-handed use. *Custodia secunda*, or second ward, is a stance from which a fighter prepares to engage an opponent. The second ward is typically assumed with the sword held at the right shoulder with the buckler raised. In this instance, the second ward has been adjusted, a curiosity which will be discussed at greater length in this chapter.

the re-creation of medieval martial skills, the last two pages of the manuscript give it a place in a wider debate about the role of women in medieval combat and warfare. Those last pages focus on two participants: the teacher and the student. Unlike the rest of the manuscript, however, this particular student sports long tresses, wears feminine garb and is identified by the name Walpurgis. This student is a woman.

Over recent decades, a debate regarding the role of women in medieval combat has emerged. Where women were once seen as only the recipients of violence and the victims of warfare, historians and gender studies scholars are questioning the level of female participation in combat and how that shift in understanding shapes the perception of the medieval landscape. Documents such as the Royal Armories MS I.33 present interesting evidence in the ongoing discussion about the medieval woman and her involvement in combat. As recently as twenty years ago, Helen Nicholson was investigating the question of whether women even participated in the Third Crusade, let alone took up arms.¹⁰ Understanding the place of Walpurgis allows for historians to delve even deeper into the nuanced and complex place of women in medieval society, and helps expand the way in which women entered into the masculine martial sphere.

However, not all historians in the debate have reacted positively to this shift in perception. In an otherwise serious and scholarly examination of the role of women in medieval combat, historian Matthew Bennett adopts a light view of the question, and implies that the academics who seek to understand the deeper role of women in medieval

¹⁰ Nicholson examined the twelfth century chronicle *Itinerarium Peregrinorum* which dismissed the idea that women participated on the crusade. Her article served as a refutation to the image presented by the chronicle of passive women relegated to the European domestic scene. See Helen Nicholson, "Women on the Third Crusade," *Journal of Medieval History* 23, no. 4 (1997) : 335-349.

combat truly seek to strike a blow against the patriarchy in support of “women power.”¹¹ Bennett’s quip, although small in the vast field of scholarship, still demonstrates a view which, in its oversimplification, undermines the study of the complex and nuanced nature of medieval women in combat. The implication that those scholars who find medieval women in the male world of combat are concerned more with attacks against patriarchy than the quest for historical truth echoes the older notion that women received violence, they did not enact it. However, in Bennett’s defense, he draws heavily from Nicholson for support, and he concedes that instances occurred where women showed agency in times of siege, even mentioning the actions of Queen Matilda in England.¹²

An effort to interrogate the sources and generate a wider understanding of a complicated subject does not imply that an impulse to empower women lies at the heart of the undertaking. Rather, by better understanding the complexities of women in medieval combat, the historian gains a clearer view not only of women, but of the nature of combat itself along with the men who primarily waged the battles. The quest to find the true role of militant females in medieval society does not detract from the ability to see the historical truth, but rather expands it by illuminating connections which tie together myriad aspects of the historical reality for medieval people.

Yet, the more important point that Bennett’s approach raises is that in order to expand upon the role of women in medieval combat, one must address the concept that women did not fight, or that when they did, their actions provided little more than a

¹¹ Matthew Bennett, “Virile Latins, Effeminate Greeks and Strong Women: Gender Definitions on Crusade?,” in *Gendering the Crusades*, ed. Susan B. Edgington and Sarah Lambert (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), 25.

¹² Bennett, 26.

curious footnote in the understanding of medieval military history. As a consequence, it becomes necessary to explore the possibility that women participated in combat as active aggressors to a greater degree than has been credited to them. This is not to say that the medieval world viewed female combatants as the norm, or as a lifestyle which many women should strive to emulate. However, the women who did take up arms and who did defend themselves and their world certainly existed and they garnered respect from the men who wrote about their deeds.

This chapter takes a particular interest in demonstrating the reality of such martially minded women who not only existed, but who enabled the medieval world to find a more comprehensive understanding of masculine virtue. The concept of medieval female combatants played an important role in fostering the masculine military psyche of the Middle Ages. In the women who participated in combat, one sees a shifting of gender norms and a willingness—or at least, a temporary acceptance in times of duress—towards moving away from the feminine sphere and orienting themselves within the masculine sphere. Consequently, those women who did take up arms in a masculine fashion emphasized the difference in spheres both by their perceptions as well as their actions.

However, without first investigating the scope of women as martial aggressors, one can hardly move towards the argument that their participation impacted the role of male warriors. Addressing the full involvement of women in medieval combat presents its own set of challenges. Not least of the problems is the reality that if medieval women wrote about their martial exploits, they have been lost to history; the evidence which

comes down to us speaks in a masculine voice as male chroniclers and historians have recorded what military deeds women may have undertaken.

An additional challenge comes in the form of parsing truth from invention. The nineteenth-century historian Joseph François Michaud presents an example of the challenges a historian must face in uncovering the truth when the subject has been draped in fantasy. In his *History of the Crusades*, Michaud includes the intriguing anecdote about Florine of Burgundy and her fiancé Sweno, a Danish prince. Ambushed by Muslim forces while en route to Jerusalem during the First Crusade, both Florine and Sweno fought valiantly, rallying the troops and personally fighting in the midst of the battle.¹³ Despite being severely wounded, Florine stayed by her fiancé and, “still fighting, she sought with Sweno to open a passage towards the mountain [...]”¹⁴ Alas for the brave couple, theirs was to prove a futile stand and they both perished in battle. Yet Florine and her heroism breathed again in the nineteenth-century world. In Michaud’s work, the renowned artist Gustave Doré provided the illustration which immortalized Florine and Sweno’s last moments, giving place of prominence and action not to the dying Sweno, but to the ardently-fighting young Florine. The princess’s courage proved so extraordinary that in 1855 William McCabe wrote a novel about the young woman who so valiantly fought her enemies.¹⁵

¹³ Joseph François Michaud, *History of the Crusades*, vol. 1, trans. W. Robson (London: George Routledge and Co., 1852), 134.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ See William Bernard McCabe’s *Florine, Princess of Burgundy: A Tale of the First Crusade*. Unfortunately, the exploits of the titular protagonist are not the true focus of the novel, merely a highly dramatized climax to a convoluted and maudlin storyline which de-emphasized Florine’s purported story.

From the perspective of historians seeking examples of female combatants, Florine stands out as a brilliant woman taking up arms and fighting in the masculine sphere, even if dire and unexpected circumstances compelled her actions. It seems obvious that her example provides evidence of the reality of women taking part in combat. Yet, when the scholar turns to the account of Florine as portrayed by Albert d’Aix, a source cited by Michaud, the picture of the ferocious princess shifts. Rather than making a bellicose last stand with sword bare and troops rallied, Albert’s version has the wounded Florine riding away from the action on a mule.¹⁶ Fleeing the battle on a mule—however sensible a choice that would be—is a vastly different reality than a literal to-the-hilt last stand amid the bodies of her loyal knights and retainers. As a further conundrum, this odd metamorphosis leaves the historian with one less true example of women fighting as warriors, although numerous websites report Michaud’s story of Florine without questioning the origins of the tale.¹⁷

Since the days of Michaud, more substantial evidence to support the participation of women in medieval combat has come to light. In 1982, the Joint Expedition to Caesarea Maritima unearthed the skeleton of a crusader in the remnants of armor comprised of bronze plates on a leather backing; upon examination, the skeleton was

¹⁶ “Nam eandem in mulo sedentem sex confixerunt sagittis, versus montana fugientem.” “For they, [the Turks] with six arrows, pierced through that same woman sitting upon a mule, fleeing towards the mountain.” Translation mine. Albert of Aix, *Historia Hierosolymitanae Expeditionis*, Liber III, *The Latin Library*, accessed October 02, 2017, <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/albertofaix/hist3.shtml>.

¹⁷ As though more warnings against taking websites at face value needed to be offered in the present day, the Wikipedia page on Florine repeats her valiant story while citing Susan Edgington and Sarah Lambert’s *Gendering the Crusades*, specifically pages 53-54. Reading both the first and second edition of the book turns up no mention of Florine, on the cited pages or elsewhere in the book. The mystery around the curious princess of Burgundy deepens. See Wikipedia, “Florine of Burgundy,” accessed October 01, 2017 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florine_of_Burgundy.

found to be a female.¹⁸ More recently, DNA testing has determined that a Viking warrior once thought to have been male was, in fact, a female.¹⁹ Another DNA sampling along with osteological analysis performed on a separate Norse burial site in 2011 found that some of the remains which would traditionally have been identified as male due to the presence of swords and other martial items in the grave, were sex-typed as being female.²⁰ However, while the existence of these skeletons demonstrates that at various points and in various cultures during the Middle Ages women donned arms and armor, a handful of remains cannot speak for the women across all of medieval Europe.

While the skeletons can provide evidence for their own cultures and their own times, they also point to something uncomfortable about modern historians and scholars, and that is the reluctance to accept the potential for medieval women to have played a more aggressive role in combat than has been previously considered. The crusader skeleton uncovered in 1982 was dubbed “Joan of Caesaria” by her discoverers.²¹ Little else may ever be known about the identity of the armored skeleton, but it will bear a nickname linking her to one of the few—if not the only—women in medieval history known commonly for her military participation. In fact, to the average person today, what little knowledge he or she may have regarding women in medieval combat most likely will start and end with Joan of Arc. The Viking skeleton re-identified as a female in 2017

¹⁸ Robert J. Bull et al., *King Herod's Dream: Caesarea on the Sea* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988), 224.

¹⁹ Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson and others, “A Female Viking Warrior Confirmed by Genomics,” *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 164, no. 4 (2017): 854-855, 853-860.

²⁰ Shane McLeod, “Warriors and Women: The Sex Ratio of Norse Migrants to Eastern England up to 900 AD,” *Early Medieval Europe* 19, no. 3 (2011): 348, 332-353.

²¹ Robert J. Bull et al, 226.

was originally discovered in the 1880s and was typed as male upon being unearthed due to the items buried with the skeleton; and for upwards of 120 years, scholars not only did not question the identification, but some Viking scholars “have been reluctant to acknowledge the agency of women with weapons.”²² It seems when it comes to historical women in combat, they are Joan of Arc, or they are nobody.

Due in large part to the murkiness of identifying real, historical women who engaged in battle, sources such as the Royal Armouries Manuscript I.33 take on an important role in investigating the juncture between women and active participation in medieval combat. However, in order for the manuscript to serve as a source, one must address the function of the manuscript, which is to say that it must be identified what the source is and what it is not. Practically speaking, the purpose of the manuscript is unknown to scholars and remains a subject of some debate, although little discussion has centered around the larger implications of the inclusion of Walpurgis. In fact, very little scholarship has focused on Walpurgis as more than a passing curiosity as most who study the manuscript have done so with the specific intention to recreate the medieval sword work outlined in the text. Only recently have scholars begun to seriously consider that Walpurgis might be indicative of something larger within the medieval world.²³

²² Hedenstierna-Jonson, “A Female Viking Warrior Confirmed by Genomics,” 855.

²³ In an interesting piece of recent scholarship, historians Valerie Eads and Rebecca L.R. Garber investigate the possible meaning behind Walpurgis as a name choice, and conclude that although the Walpurgis image is named and the other participants in the manuscript are not, Walpurgis is meant as a medieval Jane Doe rather than a reference to a real person. See Valerie Eads and Rebecca L.R. Garber, “Amazon, Allegory, Swordswoman, Saint? The Walpurgis Images in Royal Armouries MS I.33,” in *Can These Bones Come to Life?: Insights from the Reconstruction, Reenactment, and Re-creation, Vol 1 Historical European Martial Arts* ed. Ken Mondschein, 5-23 (Wheaton, IL: Freelance Academy Press, Inc., 2014).

The manuscript clearly purports to teach armed combat with the sword and buckler, but the question remains as to whether said combat was for the battlefield or for the judicial duel. During the Middle Ages, the judicial duel permitted a person to seek legal redress through means of individual combat. Although convention generally exempted women from the necessity of engaging in a judicial duel personally, scholars have found evidence that women did, on occasion, participate.²⁴ However, whether or not a woman taking part in a judicial duel would use a sword and buckler is less easy to determine. The arming of combatants with club and shield (“*cum fustibus et scutis*”) endured with remarkable tenacity from the Carolingian period until the fifteenth century.²⁵ For many judicial combatants, a club and shield offered the untrained person an opportunity to defend his or her interests—a practical point which probably goes a long way to explaining the lasting adherence to such simple weapons.

Some scholars have suggested that the MS I.33 exists to teach monks practicable self-defense in a violent era and claim that the manuscript might have been written by a former knight who became a monk himself.²⁶ Or could the manuscript be intended to prepare the practitioner for both the formal duel and the battlefield? The last suggestion may not be an unrealistic possibility. The manuscript focuses on a series of wards reoccurring throughout the text, illustrating how the combatant may place the sword and shield so as to defend himself (or herself) while readying the weapon for an advantageous strike. Depending upon which ward the combatant utilizes determines the logical options

²⁴ Robert Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 112.

²⁵ Bartlett, 110.

²⁶ Rachel E. Kellett, “Royal Armouries MS I.33: Judicial Combat and the Art of Fencing in Thirteenth- and Fourteenth-Century German Literature,” *Oxford German Studies*, 41, no. 1 (April 2012): 44.

of attack available to him since each stance has tactical advantages and disadvantages. James Hester, a curator with the Royal Armouries and a scholar who has studied the I.33 manuscript, has noted a similarity in stance along with position of the sword and shield between the fourth ward as illustrated in the manuscript and the warriors depicted in the Bayeux Tapestry.²⁷ With the two examples set side-by-side, the similarity in position is striking. Both combatants have sword raised with point backwards, elbow bent at head-level, while the shield is maintained before the chest with arm not at full extension.²⁸ Even the stance puts the feet equidistant from the shoulders with the sword-foot forward and the weight on that lead foot. While the similarity in position may be coincidental, it would be a fortuitous coincidence, indeed, for the artisan of the tapestry to haphazardly have portrayed a warrior in what would come to be a recorded and utilized fighting ward.

It is also worth noting that, although the combatants in the I.33 manuscript are not depicted in armor, the lack of protective equipment does not prohibit the training from being transferable to the battlefield. While the I.33 manuscript is the earliest fighting manual known to date, later fighting manuals frequently also depicted the students without armor. Johannes Liechtenauer, one of the most renowned medieval sword masters, had his teachings recorded in a *fechtbuch*, or fight book, in the late 1300s which served as a guide to the combat of the sword. In the beginning of his work, Liechtenauer stated his purpose as teaching the “art of fencing with the sword, on foot and on

²⁷ James Hester, “Home-Grown Fighting: A Response to the Argument for a Byzantine Influence on MS I.33,” *Arms and Armor* 9 no. 1 (2012), 79.

²⁸ Hester, p. 79. James Hester helpfully included the pictures in his text so that the reader may compare the positions for him or herself.

horseback, in armour and without.”²⁹ Liechtenauer clearly intended that his work provide the basis for understanding the skills necessary in combat, both on the battlefield and in the duel; however, within the text itself, he rarely differentiates between attacks against the armored and unarmored opponent. Instead, the manual emphasizes the interaction of blade against blade, and the techniques required to handle the sword as opposed to wear the armor; after all, like the I.33 manuscript, the later *fechtbücher* were manuals to focus on swordsmanship, as opposed to the entire scope of employable military weapons.³⁰

In the debate about the ultimate purpose of the I.33 manuscript, as it relates to women, Rachel Kellett has concluded that it would have been unlikely that a woman would have trained in the use of the sword as depicted for battlefield combat or for mere exercise.³¹ Instead, Kellett posits that a woman such as Walpurgis would likely have been studying the art for the sake of the judicial duel.³² While that is a sensible suggestion and one which might well have been the case, two important points confuse the matter. The first difficulty is that the manuscript was not intended as a guide for the casual practitioner of swordplay, but served as a “system of *advanced applications* of the sword and buckler” and also for demonstrated skills and maneuvers which went beyond the foundational aspects of swordsmanship.³³ Hester points to the imprecise descriptions

²⁹ *Cod.HS.3227a or Hanco Döbringer fechtbuch from 1389*, trans. David Lindholm, accessed October 03, 2017 http://www.thearma.org/Manuals/Dobringer_A5_sidebyside.pdf, 13v. It is worth noting that the authorship of the manuscript remains disputed. The teachings are attributed to Johannes Liechtenauer, but the true identity of the manuscript’s author is yet undetermined.

³⁰ Hans Talhoffer, a mid-fifteenth-century sword master, proves as an exception since his *fechtbuch*, preserved as Manuscript Thott 290 2°, contains depictions of myriad martial implements from swords to siege machines.

³¹ Kellett, 47.

³² *ibid.*

³³ Hester, 81.

which assume a level of understanding beyond reading the manuscript.³⁴ Advanced swordsmanship is not a skill readily learned in a matter of a few lessons, but instead requires devotion of time and effort. If the woman in MS I.33 did represent a person studying for a judicial combat, such a woman would simply not have had the time to learn the skills contained within the manual.

The second point which confounds the idea that the fictional Walpurgis may have been studying for judicial combat relates to the advanced nature of the manuscript's techniques. The skills Walpurgis and the priest demonstrate do not exist in a vacuum, but instead relate as part and parcel to the greater understanding of swordsmanship as presented throughout the manuscript. Which is to say that the techniques Walpurgis utilizes are ones which any practitioner may learn, and they belong in the larger context of the skills—in order to understand the manuscript's teachings, Walpurgis must know what the unnamed male student is learning as he must understand the skills she is learning. The pieces of knowledge cannot be separated and still create a functional style. A parsing of the text reinforces that Walpurgis must understand the information which comes before so that she might perform her own attack while anticipating what the priest will do as a defense or a counterattack. The text assumes knowledge of the previous attack and defense possibilities by directing the reader with the advisement that “from these are brought forth everything which was discussed about the first ward, which was considered in the first quire.”³⁵

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ “Ex hiis generantur omnia que habuntur [habetur] de prima custodia, de quibus habetur in primo quaterno.” Royal Armouries MS I.33, Folio 32r.

However, the skills demonstrated by Walpurgis were skills which could be transferrable to combat, regardless of the purpose for which she learned them. A male studying the manuscript for the purpose of martial instruction would learn the same techniques as Walpurgis with a notable variation: the skills the female combatant demonstrates in the manuscript have been adjusted to suit her smaller frame. When compared with the form of the male student who adopts the same *custodia secunda* (second ward) in the earlier section of the manuscript, Walpurgis stands in a more upright position and she keeps her sword and buckler closer to her body rather than extending the buckler.³⁶ Standing more upright would allow Walpurgis to be able to match the height of the opponent as he maintains the traditional crouched position. This modification and its result can be seen in the illustration on folio 32r of the manuscript as Walpurgis faces the priest.³⁷ Her back straighter and her front leg at less of an angle, she is able to maintain a face-level stance with her opponent. In contrast, the male student only rises out of the deeply extended leg stance once, and that occurs on the first page of the manuscript as he rises up to deliver a severe downward strike.³⁸ Although the Latin does not describe the strike, one may observe the downward angle of the student's face, the way the buckler has been positioned to guard against a strike upward to his throat, and the angle of the upraised sword; all those movements correlate with a person who has raised up in the instant before delivering a committed downward strike. Nowhere else in the manuscript do either the priest or the male student adopt such a narrow-footed stance with an upright

³⁶ Kellett, 48.

³⁷ Royal Armouries MS I.33, Folio 32r.

³⁸ Royal Armouries MS I.33, Folio 1r.

posture; only when they close distance and envelope the opponent's weapon, such as is demonstrated on folio 12v, do the men move from the stability of the wider stance and the guarded posture.³⁹

The adaptation of the stance to Walpurgis' unique physical requirements demonstrates that the manuscript intended female involvement in the study of swordplay on a level which necessitated forethought on the part of the writer. Rather than simply overlay a female figure onto a male posture, the creator of the manuscript portrayed the nuanced difference necessary to teach a female combatant. Such a portrayal involves recrafting the techniques with the feminine body in mind, and indicates that the creator had to approach the technique from another practical angle in order to make Walpurgis' maneuvers effective within the system of swordplay being taught. It also indicates that the female fencer was not included as a fanciful depiction but, rather, as a serious student of the art.

The result of the adapted stance is twofold: it presents a female studying the manuscript's techniques as a means to approach a fight on terms better suited to her structure, but it also demonstrates to male fighters the alternative stance which a woman might adapt. It might be too far to say that this inclusion is evidence that men were being taught how to fight female combatants, but it does show that the creator put special thought into the needs of a female fighter so that she could best succeed in a martial encounter with a man.

³⁹ The manuscript describes the maneuver as “docet sacerdos clientulum suum circumdatis bracchijs adversarij recipere gladium et scutum,” or, “the priest teaches his student, with the arms of the opponent having been enveloped, to take the sword and shield.” Royal Armouries MS I.33, Folio 12v.

It is also worth noting that the adapted ward used by Walpurgis is seen in variation as the “woman’s guard” (*posta de dona*) in Fiore de’ Liberi’s fifteenth-century Italian fight book *Flos duellatorum*.⁴⁰ As yet, scholars have not found a direct connection between Fiore’s fight book and the I.33 manuscript despite the similarity of the position.⁴¹ The difference in time between Fiore and the writing of the I.33 manuscript is significant, but the occurrence of wards designed specifically for female combatants across the centuries does indicate a continued interest on the part of women in the art of the sword; while Walpurgis may be unique, she was not an anomaly or a quirk of one medieval sword master’s fancy. Walpurgis reveals that women trained in sword work with enough frequency that the creator of an advanced manuscript found it necessary to re-work the theory of the system to suit the specific needs of a female combatant.

In addition to Walpurgis’ adapted stance, the maneuver she executes against her opponent proves noteworthy, not because it was adapted to her—on the contrary, the male student demonstrates the same attack elsewhere in the manuscript—but for its inherent aggression. The manuscript describes the attack as, “From these above binds, Walpurgis undertakes a shield strike, because she was above and the first prepared.”⁴² In order to understand the full effect of the maneuver demonstrated by Walpurgis, one must consult the illustration which accompanies the Latin text. *Schiltslac* is a German fighting term for a shield strike, and as the illustration in the manuscript shows, the person utilizing the strike engages the opponent’s shield, hitting it so as to bind the opponent’s

⁴⁰ Kellett, 48.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² “Ex hiis super[ioribus] allegacionibus Walpurgis recipit schiltslac [shield strike], quia erat superior et prius parata.” Royal Armouries MS I.33, Folio 32v.

own shield against his sword, rendering a counter attack difficult. Simultaneous with the shield strike, Walpurgis thrusts her own sword toward the opponent's face. Such a maneuver cannot be executed half-heartedly or with trepidation; it requires the skill of combining proper timing with aggressive commitment. However, to initiate such an attack also imparts risk to the attacker who must enter her opponent's area of reach. If not executed with precision and adequate force, the opponent can overcome the attack, and Walpurgis will have done no more than place herself at the opponent's mercy.

Walpurgis does not passively receive the cleric's attack, but instead seizes the initiative and performs an aggressive, forceful attack of her own which seems contrary to the general modern view of medieval women. In the I.33 manuscript, the scholar finds that there is no need to quest after fanciful stories of Burgundian princesses in search of "women power"—if that were even the motivation for historians of female subjects—when real medieval women did learn some practical applications of sword work.

How then does Walpurgis and her sword work fit into the larger picture of the medieval world? It is all very well and good to say that a manuscript shows a woman learning sword techniques, but does it mean anything to the study of history? In response to such questions, one must address some modern conceptions of medieval women in combat. In his investigation of women on crusade, historian Michael Evans discusses the recorded occurrences of women participating as armed combatants and emphasizes how the medieval world viewed female fighters as unnatural and how such women were

restricted to the “‘female’ weaponry” of knives rather than swords.⁴³ Matthew Bennett questions the possibility that medieval women could have learned sword work because it was a knightly trade “jealously guarded as a socially exclusive skill by a military caste.”⁴⁴ If Evans and Bennett sound hesitant in admitting that medieval women could study the art of the sword, their hesitation is not unfounded in historical precedent. Instances of women taking up the sword were rare in the crusade chronicles and medieval ecclesiastics actively discouraged women from participating in military hostilities. In his treatise on war and law, entitled *L’Arbre des Batallies* (*The Tree of Battles*), the fourteenth-century writer and cleric Honoré Bouvet lists women in his chapter “What people can and must be restrained from going to war,” along with “old men, the ill, the deaf and blind, or people too young who cannot endure armor.”⁴⁵ The historians who dismiss the potential for medieval women to handle knightly weaponry have long had valid reasons to conclude that women’s place in combat was marginal.

In truth, the preponderance of evidence supports the idea that women in combat were highly unusual, and an analysis of the I.33 manuscript cannot and should not be seen as an attempt to normalize female participation in battle. What is important about the existence of I.33 is that the contents repudiate many previously-held concepts about

⁴³ Michael R. Evans, “‘Unfit to Bear Arms’: The Gendering of Arms and Armour in Accounts of Women on Crusade,” in *Gendering the Crusades*, ed. Susan B. Edgington and Sarah Lambert (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), 55.

⁴⁴ Bennett, 25.

⁴⁵ “Quelles gens ne peuvent ne ne doivent estre contrains de aller en guerre,” and “anciens hommes, ou malades, sours et aveugles ou gens trop jeunes qui ne pourroient endurer le harnois”. Honoré Bouvet, *L’arbre des batailles*, https://archive.org/stream/LArbreDesBatailles/L_arbre_des_batailles#page/n9/mode/2up accessed October 02, 2017. Translation mine.

the feasibility of women in combat. Of course, one must be careful in pressing the case lest the idea be given that women in combat was normative; as evidence has not yet come to light demonstrating a large-scale participation of medieval European women as frontline fighters, one must be aware that even in making a case for the warrior female, the subject is still an outlier, although an important outlier whose existence challenges some conceptions about the medieval world. However, the inclusion of Walpurgis in I.33 offers evidence that women could, in fact, handle the medieval weapons and could undertake advanced training in those weapons.

The medieval woman seeking to learn the martial skills need not have consoled herself with the use of a kitchen knife, or other “womanly” implement. Though she might be the “weaker sex,” as medieval chroniclers so frequently reminded their audience, a mastery of the sword did not lie outside her abilities. The idea which comes into the present day of the sword as an unwieldy, heavy weapon requiring brute strength and stamina with no finesse does not have roots in historical reality. The idea of swordsmanship requiring strength and nothing else owes much to its perpetuation to scholars of the modern era. Even renowned nineteenth-century medievalists such as Sir Charles Oman fostered an inaccurate depiction of swordsmanship to such a degree that their comments upon medieval sword work have done a “disservice” to the true understanding of the mechanics of medieval weaponry.⁴⁶ The swords of the Middle Ages certainly required strength—a scholar would be hard-pressed to find a training manual

⁴⁶ John Clements, “Wielding the Weapons of War: Arms, Armor, and Training Manuals During the Later Middle Ages,” in *The Hundred Years War: A Wider Focus*, eds. L.J. Andrew Villalon and Donald J. Kagay (Boston: Brill, 2005), 453.

that does not address the need to strike strongly or with the whole body—but the importance of strength should not come at the cost of skill. Returning to the master Liechtenauer, one finds him teaching “that the weaker [fighter] wins more easily by use of his art than the stronger by using his strength. Otherwise what use would the art be?”⁴⁷ For Liechtenauer, one of the most important skills to develop in swordfighting was the ability to “feel” the opponent through his blade which allows the fighter to judge the strength of his opponent and to “win the first strike,” thus enabling the fighter to seize control of the encounter.⁴⁸ One may recall the attack executed by Walpurgis in the I.33 manuscript wherein she won the encounter with her aggressive attack that took advantage of her superior position; her attack is echoed in the later instruction given by Liechtenauer.

Once one sees Walpurgis handling the blade and striking a successful, aggressive blow, one can understand the true nature of the art of the medieval sword. Walpurgis’ bladework emphasizes that medieval male warriors needed skill and training, not simply a barrage of hard and fast strikes, in order to overcome their opponents. Sources such as the I.33 manuscript prompt historians and scholars to reconsider the nature of medieval combat and the potential participation of women. The fight books, particularly the Walpurgis manuscript, offer insight into the feasibility of a traditionally weaker combatant studying the art of swordsmanship with anticipated success; they offer evidence against the earlier assumption that women, because of the strength endurance

⁴⁷ *Cod.HS.3227a* or *Hanko Döbringer fechtbuch from 1389*, trans. David Lindholm, accessed October 03, 2017 http://www.thearma.org/Manuals/Dobringer_A5_sidebyside.pdf, 22v.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

demands of armed combat, could not engage in it. Additionally, the inclusion of a female combatant in a fencing manual gives insight into how medieval men perceived training a weaker student and demonstrates that at least some of those teaching the art of the sword found methods of adapting technique to suit a woman's physical limitations.

When brought together, skeletons and sword manuals point to a deeper level of female participation in martial activities than has long been considered. While the participation can be overstated, and one must take care to maintain that the evidence is not conclusive for the existence of a widespread military presence for medieval women, the existence of women in the martial world has support which challenges previous ideas about the role of women. At the same time, this awareness gives insight into aspects of the male participation within the martial world, proving the necessity of skill over pure strength, and demonstrating that the masculine sphere at least occasionally found room for women who would choose to enter it. More than presenting a simple need for modern "women power," the understanding of medieval women in combat, particularly through the I.33 manuscript, fleshes out the worldview of the Middle Ages and broadens the modern understanding of medieval combat.

CHAPTER THREE

MULIEBREM ANIMUM SUPERGRESSA: THE VOICE OF THE CHRONICLERS

While the previous chapter's exploration of the realities of women in medieval combat has presented the case that women did, indeed, engage in martial pursuits in extraordinary circumstances, it opens the floor for the discussion of how medieval society perceived women who enacted violence in warfare. One of the challenges of studying the participation of medieval women in combat is the lack of source material written by women. This is not to say medieval men could not, or did not, write about women, but it does mean that the subjects one intends to study rarely produced written records about themselves. The lack of self-reflective sources requires that research be conducted through a filter which cannot convey the motivations of the participants, nor their thoughts and sentiments upon the events in which they acted. While it could be argued that even the majority of men who became the subjects of medieval chronicles were written about rather than recording their own experiences, the chroniclers still approached the fighting men with a certain understanding of the man's place in the world of combat. War has been, after all, a traditionally masculine environment and is understood in masculine terms. Even the Latin word for courage (*virtus*) originates in the word for man (*vir*), creating a linguistic connection that reflects a cultural understanding of what society expected of men. This cultural understanding suffused the medieval attitude towards men and the expectations of what made a man virtuous. Men fought.

Yet the chroniclers also explored another element of medieval combat: the participation of women. They explored not only women as the recipients of masculine aggression, but women who exercised agency and fought. It is through an exploration of how chroniclers engaged with the histories and how they approached women who crossed gender boundaries that a present day historian may observe much about the medieval concept both of men and women and the military world. As in all matters human, the chroniclers themselves were complicated people whose ideas and perceptions mingled with their letters, instilling a sense of confusion or even admiration for the bellicose women about whom they wrote. However, the chroniclers did not write about fighting women merely to record them for posterity or as a source of existential pondering, although those elements may form part of an individual chronicler's motives, but to tell the audience something important, to speak to a larger truth of the time that the female subject may represent. As a consequence, the women of these histories appear as individuals with agency and a will of their own—whether that will was used for righteous or unrighteous purpose varied, but these women acted in a way which struck the authors as exceptional and worthy of note. By puzzling through the chronicles and the depictions of women who stepped from one gender sphere to the next, one sees an attempt to understand the women and to engage with their stories. These chronicled women became the Other who bridged the distance between the feminine and the masculine. As long as they did not move too far from one role into the other, chroniclers often demonstrated a palpable respect for the women warriors interspersed throughout the narratives.

One chronicler in particular, Saxo Grammaticus, joined conquest with culture to demonstrate how people should act and who they should emulate. Set against a background of violence and military achievement, Saxo's chronicle contains allusions which his contemporary audience would recognize as entwined with the crusading imagery so prominent in twelfth and thirteenth century Europe. Through the curious example of the pirate maiden Alvild, Saxo brings to life the confluence of culture and conquest that shaped his world.

Writing between the years 1208 and 1218, Saxo undertook an ambitious history of the Danes which would come to be known as *Saxonis Grammatici Gesta Danorum*. As a source of history, Saxo arguably produced more fiction than fact, demonstrating that he knew how to enthrall his audience with a good yarn even as he purported to draw from myriad sources for authenticity. Generally speaking, scholars find his chronicle lacking in historical value as he incorporates dragons and satyrs alongside famous myths, giving credence to fantasy and reality alike.⁴⁹ Despite the chronicle's weakness as a source of immediate history, what Saxo recorded can still offer immense value to a modern historian who would see within the chronicle a reflection of the times and an indicator of the values which Saxo hoped to impart upon his readers.

In his preface, Saxo relates how Absalon, the archbishop of Denmark, delegated the task of writing the chronicle to Saxo, "the least of his attendants."⁵⁰ Thereby, it fell to

⁴⁹ Hilda Ellis Davidson and Peter Fisher, *Saxo Grammaticus The History of the Danes Books I-IX, Volume II, Commentary* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1980), 2.

⁵⁰ *Comitum suorum extremo*. Translation mine. Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*, 0.1.1. Det Kongelige Bibliotek, <http://wayback-01.kb.dk/wayback/20100504153427/http://www2.kb.dk/elib/lit/dan/saxo/lat/or.dsr/0/1/index.htm>. Accessed December 6, 2017.

Saxo to carry out the archbishop's desire to illuminate their fatherland.⁵¹ Saxo emphasizes the purpose of the chronicle by laying out that nationalistic desire in the opening sentence of the preface. Consequently, he makes certain that the reader understands that not only that the events in the chronicle speak to the greatness of Denmark, but the relaying of those events comes at the behest of the Church herself. What follows, in Saxo's mind, should be an instrument of moral betterment intended for the spiritual uplift of the population. Lest the latter part of his purpose remain unclear, the chronicler laments that Denmark only recently entered into Latin Christendom and the underlying reluctance to adapt to the cultural shift from paganism to Catholicism, chastising the Danes as slothful and ignorant in their hesitancy to embrace Latin and the church.⁵²

It is against that backdrop of cultural shifting that Saxo wrote his chronicle, and that intellectual setting also bears consideration when engaging with his text. His is a didactic work with each story having a place in the betterment of his people; the women, as the men, exist for the support of Saxo's goal. By approaching the *Gesta Danorum* from the aspect of what message it conveyed to the people, the historian uncovers interesting approaches to women and their relation to fighting, spirituality, and gender norms.

In general terms, as a chronicler, Saxo displays the complicated reactions which medieval historians had towards their female subjects. It is in understanding Saxo and his

⁵¹ Saxo describes Absalon as "having always blazed with the greatest desire to illuminate our fatherland." *Absalon patriam nostram, cuius illustrandae maxima semper cupiditate flagrabat*. Ibid.

⁵² Saxo writes that, concerning the Danes, "sloth was equal to ignorance." *Segnitie par imperitiae*. Ibid.

approach that one may better understand not only his subjects, but also his world and what that world valued. Each of the accounts he presents appears with a mixture of emotions ranging from respect and admiration to bewilderment. In a way which might come as unexpected, the chronicler uses the story of Alvild to acknowledge a role in his world for women who enter the masculine sphere. Such a role has boundaries which mark the line between acceptable and inappropriate, but the boundaries still stretch far enough to question that which is considered normative.

The maiden Alvild stands out as a curious exemplar of Saxo's attempt to better the morals of his people. What makes Alvild curious is that she displays both superlative modesty coupled with an innate ability to enact militant savagery. Yet even above that seeming incongruence is the underlying message which Saxo tells by means of the maiden, a message which must be understood through the context not of her time, but through Saxo's world of the early thirteenth century. Ultimately, it is a message born of the crusading spirit.

The chronicler introduces Alvild as a child just out of the cradle, so modest that she covered her own face to avoid producing desire in those who might behold her.⁵³ To further safeguard the youngster as she matured, her father, the king, placed a viper and a dragon to guard her bedchamber.⁵⁴ When the pirate Alf, son of King Sigar, slew the two

⁵³ "Alvild, who just about from the cradle itself displayed so great a belief in modesty, that she kept her face constantly veiled with a robe, lest her form produce the slight stimulus of desire in another." *Alvildam, quae tantam verecundiae fidem ab ipsis propemodum incunabilis praeferebat, ut os peplo iugiter obnuptum haberet, quo minus formam suam alienae libidinis irritamentum efficeret.* Saxo Grammaticus, 7.6.1.

⁵⁴ Saxo refers to the serpentine guards as "viperam anguemque" which could be translated as a viper (vipera) and a snake (anguis), but from the context of the story, it seems likely that anguis should refer to a dragon or a serpent of some fearsome quality as Saxo and Alvild both make much of the hero's feat in slaying the creature. As to the translation of "vipera" as "viper" rather than the generic "snake", it bears

protectors, the feat impressed Alvild who agreed to marry the intrepid young man. Only after her mother intervened for unspecified reasons and induced Alvild into contempt towards the young Dane (*Alvilda ad Danici iuvenis contemptum adducta*) did the maiden turn to drastic measures—Alvild herself became a pirate.⁵⁵ Indeed, the formerly modest lady became a warlike pirate (*ferocem piratam*).

Alvild's exact motivation for choosing piracy above other escapes is not explored in the chronicle, so the audience is left without a bridge to link Alvild's contempt and her move to piracy. In fact, without a clear reason given, it seems a very radical shift to cast aside modesty and embark upon such a masculine and violent adventure. However, in the context of the time at which Saxo wrote *Gesta Danorum* and, mindful of his purpose to encourage the moral uplift of the Danes, the truly complicated and nuanced aspect of Alvild's story coalesces. At the time of *Gesta Danorum*, the crusade against the Wends in 1147 still resonated in the psyche of many Danes. The crusading spirit of the Second Crusade had spread throughout Europe and reached into regions not previously considered crusading targets, including the Iberian peninsula and the Mediterranean. The zeal to campaign against enemies of Latin Christendom also swept into Denmark where the Wends raided the lands of the Danes. In the crusade against the Wends, the "terminology, institutions and practices of crusading warfare" manifested for the first

noting that only one type of venomous snake makes its habitat in Denmark—the viper *berus*, or the European adder, a species of viper. Lars H. Evers, "Adder Bite: An Uncommon Cause of Compartment Syndrome in Northern Hemisphere," *Scandinavian Journal of Trauma, Resuscitation and Emergency Medicine*, 18 no. 50 (2010), <https://sjtrem.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1757-7241-18-50>. Accessed 6 December 2017.

⁵⁵ Saxo Grammaticus, 7.6.4.

time in that region.⁵⁶ The attendant aspects of crusading warfare brought by the Wendish Crusade linked Denmark in consciousness with a movement that spanned the rest of Europe and invested the people with a divine purpose—Denmark had a crusade right at its own borders which would bring the same benefits as the crusades in the Holy Land. With the pope offering the same spiritual rewards as the crusades in the Middle East—plenary indulgences for those who undertook the crusade and martyrdom for those who died—at least two Scandinavian kings found reasons to set aside interpersonal animosity and unite against the Wends specifically to attain the spiritual benefits offered by the Baltic crusades.⁵⁷

Ultimately, the gains, both spiritual and temporal, of the Wendish Crusade can be disputed. At the outset, there seemed among some of the European participants from outside Denmark to be a distinctly spiritual force driving the expedition which would manifest in the conversion of the pagans. Yet, from the perspective of the papacy and the clergy, the secular ambitions of the leaders subverted the goal of the crusade with greed, in particular, impeding the potential spiritual progress.⁵⁸ The chronicler Helmold of Bosau, who wrote in the decades following the crusade, envisaged the endeavor as a pious expedition sullied by the corruption of the participants, particularly the Danes whom the crusade would most benefit. To Helmold, the military action was a righteous cause intended to “avenge the death and destruction which they [the Slavic people] had

⁵⁶ Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change 950-1350* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 263.

⁵⁷ Jonathan Phillip, *The Second Crusade: Extending the Frontiers of Christendom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 240.

⁵⁸ Phillip, 243.

inflicted upon the worshippers of Christ, especially upon the Danes.”⁵⁹ Despite the arrival of a crusading force to avenge them, the Danes came out worse for the campaign, in Helmold’s estimation, because the other crusade leaders essentially abandoned the beleaguered Danes, seeing instead that it was not in the best interest of the other leaders to defeat the Slavic forces.⁶⁰ Instead, a truce was eventually enacted which brought terms favorable for the Wends: the Slavic people would convert to Christianity and set free the captured Danes.⁶¹ As those with the benefit of hindsight might predict would happen, once the primary force withdrew, the Wends disregarded the treaty. With no military force to compel obedience, they renounced their conversion and released only the Danish captives who were not fit for labor, keeping those “whom more robust years fitted for work.”⁶²

It would be strange, indeed, for such a series of events to not remain in the minds of the Danes only a generation removed from the fighting. And then there was Helmold’s contention that the Danes themselves had acted in a way which would provoke attack from the Wends, since the Danish soldiers demonstrated how their people were “pugnacious at home, unwarlike abroad” and, therefore, susceptible to being overpowered by an outside force.⁶³ In essence, the Germanic chronicler slighted the masculine virtue of the Danish people.

⁵⁹ Helmold, *Chronicle of the Slavs*, in *The Crusades, A Reader* 2nd ed., ed. S.J. Allen and Emilie Amt (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 262.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Helmold, 262.

There is no mention of Helmold or his account in the *Gesta Danorum*, so one cannot draw the conclusion, tempting though it might be, to place Saxo's work as an answering salvo to his predecessor's slight, yet much of the *Gesta Danorum* extols the martial prowess of the Danes and reinforces the ideal of Danish masculinity. This, then, returns the discussion to the matter of a virtuous maiden turned pirate and how the influence of the crusading spirit suffuses the *Gesta Danorum* in unanticipated ways. With the zeal of crusade in the minds of the Danes, it becomes necessary to explore what connotations a pirate would elicit along the coast of Denmark in the early thirteenth century. To many in Denmark, piracy itself had become entwined with the crusading ideal in a way both tangible and symbolic. With the Wendish Crusade of 1147 having left Denmark scarred and still open to attack, a naval guild was created specifically to fight Slavic pirates raiding Danish lands. This guild behaved in much the same way as pirates with the dividing of spoils taken from defeated Slavic pirates.⁶⁴ Moreover, the guild referred to itself as *piratica*. However, the guild also manifested the crusading spirit as it reflected the structure of the military orders found in the Holy Land and across Europe in that all members were equal, regardless of social status, and it joined the spiritual aspect to the martial aspect with the *piratica*'s expedition acting as penance for the participants' sins.⁶⁵ The guild received support from the Danish people who provided financial assistance and allowed that the guild could seize any ship so long as the owner was recompensed with one eighth of the spoils attained.⁶⁶ The Danes had learned to fight

⁶⁴ Helen Nicholson, *Medieval Warfare* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 151.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

piracy with pirates, and they embraced the crusading mentality which was uniting Europe in order to achieve their goals.

What does a historian then make of a virtuous lady who turns pirate? Or, perhaps more to the point, what would Saxo's audience make of the story? One should also consider that piracy as a military tool in the Middle Ages did not necessarily have the stigma which it would acquire in later years; rather, in practice, it "is hard to distinguish [piracy] from other kinds of warfare."⁶⁷ As a consequence, Saxo's Alvild would be understood by a thirteenth century audience not to have run away to a dubious or scandalous profession; in their minds, she would have been participating in legitimate warfare. In furthering Alvild's tale, it becomes ever more clear that Alvild retains her virtue despite her transgression of social norms. This might relate to the implication that Alvild did not simply become a lawless brigand, but that she engaged in an act which the contemporary audience would associate with crusading themes. She was, after all, a maiden who had impressed Saxo with her tremendous modesty even as a young child—as though youthful innocence were not innocent enough for one with her inborn purity—and who appropriately admired a virtuous young man willing to face great danger for her hand in marriage. That Saxo, so frequently rich in details, leaves to speculation against whom she raided indicates that the audience is meant to see Alvild as a person around whom they can fill in the particulars as they would understand them; he invites the audience to come to Alvild on their terms rather than on the historical terms.

⁶⁷ Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, "Naval Warfare after the Viking Age, c. 1100-1500," in *Medieval Warfare: A History*, ed. Maurice Keen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 244.

Even as a warlike pirate, Alvild never ceded certain aspects of her femininity, an important distinction for the chronicler. Upon endeavoring to become a pirate, Alvild's beauty earned her the respect of a crew of like-minded female pirates who elected her their leader since their previous leader had died prior to Alvild's arrival.⁶⁸ Even among professional female warriors, the maiden's feminine aspects shone forth as her dominant trait. She did not acquire the position through force of will or through a love of bloodshed, but rather, through the feminine nature of her person. In so doing, she mixes the spheres of masculine courage and feminine grace, contributing to a sense that her manner of transgressing of gender norms is the proper way to rise above one's weak state. This is not to say that Saxo intended that women leave home and hearth in order to pursue military endeavors, only that he seems accepting of the possibility that at times such actions might not only be necessary, but admirable. It was, after all, during this time that Pope Innocent III re-examined the role of women on the crusading home front, and "in very exceptional circumstances," on the battlefield, to broaden the part they might play in the defense of Christendom.⁶⁹

Although that conclusion might seem at first glance to be an overextension of the story's implied meaning, when contrasted with other female warriors whom Saxo relates, Alvild and her example become more clearly defined as appropriate to the chronicler. Immediately following the story of Alvild, Saxo presents for consideration the example of a class of Danish women who neglected their natural sex and strode too far across the

⁶⁸ "[O]n account of the beauty of her form, she was elected the chief of the pirates. . ." [*O]b formae pulchritudinem piraticae princeps creata. . .* Saxo Grammaticus, 7.6.4.

⁶⁹ Constance M. Rousseau, "Home Front and Battlefield," in *Gendering the Crusades*, ed. Susan B. Edginton and Sarah Lambert (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), 32.

divide between masculine and feminine. Saxo never overtly identifies this group of female warriors by naming who they served or from what precise region they came, although he asserts that they once existed in the time prior to his writing the *Gesta*. However, even these female warriors he treats not with disdain or revulsion, but with what seems more as confusion and bewilderment, as though confronted by a creature more unbelievable than serpents guarding an infant.

As he comments on the Danish maiden-warriors' love of warfare and martial training, Saxo writes that "anyone would think that the women had cast aside [their womanhood]."⁷⁰ While that particular commentary does not ring with adulation, it is not the summation of the chronicler's thoughts. He openly expresses admiration for the military endeavors the female warriors undertook and is impressed that they "abandoned the weakness of female shallowness" in the pursuit of martial prowess.⁷¹ What ultimately concerns the chronicler, and what he impresses upon his audience, is not the women's devotion to military training, so much as their avid rejection of sexuality which made them "not desire the bridal bed, but be eager for death with javelins."⁷² By taking their aggressive proclivities too far, these particular women risked upsetting the social order which required women engage in the maternal and domestic aspects of society. For a society still living with the threat of pagan attacks, Saxo's concern holds a certain value as it would do little for the advancement of the people he is attempting to uplift if he

⁷⁰ *ut feminas exuisse quivis putaret*. Saxo Grammaticus, 7.6.8.

⁷¹ *Femineae levitatis mollitiem abdicantes* . . . Saxo Grammaticus, 7.6.8.

⁷² *non lecto, sed leto studentes spiculis appetent* . . . Saxo Grammaticus, 7.6.8.

encouraged the deaths of the women of childbearing years while there were men who could still handle the fighting.

The scholar Margaret Clunies Ross has argued that Saxo utilized pre-Christian women such as Alvild as active players in order to stress that the passive female reflected the Christian concept of womanhood while the active female belonged to the pagan past.⁷³ While the argument brings dynamic discussion to an understanding of the *Gesta*, it does not account for the overall didactic intent of Saxo's work and for the generally positive portrayal of Alvild who presented an active female actor operating within appropriate boundaries. Considering that Saxo undertook his history both for nationalistic pride and for instruction of a population which he feared had been hesitant in accepting the Catholic church, offering a positive and appealing view of the pre-Christian world would have risked creating a nostalgia for a past time rather than an impetus to embrace their Danish heritage and marry it to Christian practice. In the juxtaposition between Alvild and the women who had eschewed the marriage bed for battle, Saxo clearly illustrates that a woman's relation to the societal boundaries depended not upon an active or passive role, but upon a role which ultimately embraced marriage and motherhood.

Alvild finds a balance between the masculine and the feminine, and sets her situation to rights by never losing her femininity or relinquishing her call to motherhood. In Alf, the suitor who slew serpents for Alvild, Saxo renders a medium through which the audience should judge the maiden and her adventures. Alf, introduced by Saxo in virile

⁷³ Margaret Clunies Ross, "Women and Power in the Scandinavian Sagas," in *Stereotypes of Women in Power: Historical Perspectives and Revisionist Views*, ed. Barbara Garlick, Suzanne Dixon, and Pauline Allen (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 109.

and admirable terms as “surpassing his brothers in spirit and form,” still pursues Alvild as the object of his worthy affection.⁷⁴ In fact, when Alf sets upon a fleet of unidentified ships, he refuses to turn his crews around for fear of how he would shame himself if Alvild heard he had turned tail and run. Against the advice of his crew, for the fleet they have encountered is larger, Alf engages in a sea battle and boards the other ship. To his surprise, the warriors who bar his entrance are all women—he and Alvild, not recognizing one another, have attacked the other’s ships. Unlike the other warriors Saxo mentions who spurned the advances of men, Alvild welcomes Alf’s affection. The last Saxo writes of Alvild is that “afterwards, from her, he [Alf] begat a daughter, Gurith.”⁷⁵ If the couple produced other children, Saxo did not record their births.

Whether or not Alvild existed or was a construct of Saxo’s imagination, her use as a didactic tool to challenge both men and women is not without precedent in the medieval world. Rather, it is a theme seen time and again, and is predicated on the idea that the male and female soul maintain different qualities which the other might emulate. Where courage and strength were masculine traits, spirituality and chastity belonged to the feminine sphere, and that all men who would undertake a spiritual journey must recognize that which was “female” within themselves.⁷⁶ To Saxo, writing on behalf of a church prelate to a people who still remembered the Wendish Crusades and who still lived in a world marked by the general awareness of crusades, a character such as Alvild offered the opportunity to challenge both men and women to transcend the person nature

⁷⁴ *Ceteris [filii] animo formaque praestantior.* Saxo Grammaticus, 7.6.1.

⁷⁵ *[Alf] ex qua postmodum filliam Guritham procreavit.* Saxo Grammaticus, 7.6.7.

⁷⁶ Helen Nicholson, “The Head of Saint Euphemia,” in *Gendering the Crusades*, ed. Susan B. Edginton and Sarah Lambert (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), 116.

had created them to be. The concept of uplifting a woman as a role model intended to challenge both sexes was certainly not without precedent within Christendom, and the success of that example rests upon the idea that if a weak woman can accomplish something, so, too, can a man. Elements of that acceptance of female spirituality may be perceived even in places where one might least expect veneration of the spiritual feminine, such as in the houses and commandaries of the Templars. However, in those fighting monks—in some ways a contradiction nearly as bold as a virtuous pirate maiden—one sees the devotion of men who sought to strengthen their own faith and their own resolve in the face of death by venerating female martyrs such as St. Catherine and St. Euphemia. To the Templars, St. Euphemia in particular reminded them that if a “weak young girl could overcome pagan men, how much more should the physically strong Templars be able to face the Muslim hosts without fear!”⁷⁷

The recognition of female role models inspiring men dates in Christendom farther back than even the Templars and their treasured head of St. Euphemia. In the *Vita Altera*, the author opens the story of St. Matrona with the acknowledgement that praising virtuous women was necessary for the spiritual benefit of both sexes as it would induce women “to take up the same pains and rewards since they belong to the same sex, while men would not want to seem second to women and less noble in their labors.”⁷⁸ Like Alvild, Matrona donned men’s clothing and embarked upon a masculine pursuit in order to escape a man, but in Matrona’s case, she became not a pirate, but a monk who

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Symeon Metaphrates, “The Life of St. Matrona of Perge” in *Vita Altera* <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/Halsall/basis/matrona.asp> Accessed 10 December 2017.

surpassed all her brothers in virtue and piety, earning their respect.⁷⁹ The story of St. Matrona, although an Orthodox saint, demonstrates how spirituality allowed righteous women to transcend the feminine sphere into the masculine, if only temporarily, as Alvild had done, and offer themselves as exemplars to both men and women.

In Alvild, Saxo found the potential to bring the crusading spirit to his audience in a sidelong, but recognizable way. He linked the Danish past as something to be prized by its people to the unifying power of the Church as he accepted Archbishop Absalon's order to write a history that would glorify the fatherland. By describing a woman of unmatched modesty who could preserve her virtue even as she undertook a foray into a bloody world and still not lose sight of her natural purpose, Saxo speaks to the Danish people about the nature of not only womanhood and manhood, but about the place of warfare. In one woman, he unites an image of purity and ferocity which is tempered by an acceptance of one's place in the natural order of the world.

Saxo was not alone among the chroniclers who explored the role of women in the aggressive, masculine sphere of combat while passing a commentary upon the nature of society and womanhood. In his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Orderic Vitalis took up the discussion of women in a more directly combative role in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* with his introduction of the Norman noblewomen Helwise and Isabel. Written during the first half of the twelfth century, the *Historia Ecclesiastica* covers a wider scope than Saxo's text with Orderic intending a comprehensive history of the Church since the birth of Christ. As with the *Gesta*, Orderic wrote his chronicle for didactic purposes and firmly

⁷⁹ Ibid.

establishes in his introduction that he (like Saxo) was following the mandate of a superior within the Church.⁸⁰ In so doing, Orderic transfers some of the authority of his abbot who commissioned the recording of the events to his own voice in the telling of the history. As with Saxo, Orderic invokes the orders of one whose influence and status supersedes his own so that he, as the author, may speak not only for himself, but for the hierarchy of the Church. Unlike the *Gesta*, Orderic's writing lacks the overt appeal to nationalistic pride, instead focusing on the author's intention to have the work serve as a source for posterity and to inform future scholars in the way that previous works have informed Orderic's own writing.⁸¹

Understanding the context of Orderic's goals, the scholar finds an author whose writings reflect the traditionally accepted world of his time where men and women remain within their prescribed boundaries and where hierarchy brings order and justice. He does, however, also introduce women in very active military roles, particularly in the role of a protector who holds a castle against enemy combatants. In fact, this theme appears often enough in Orderic's work that Jean Truax posited that the chronicler "assumed that a woman would naturally be left in command of an absent husband's castle" as Orderic relates the events with very little reference to the uniqueness of the women's circumstances.⁸² The lady in defense of a castle does not, however, challenge

⁸⁰ Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis Volume I: General Introduction, Books I and II (Summary and Extracts), Index Verborum* ed. and trans. Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 130.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Jean A. Truax, "Anglo-Norman Women at War: Valiant Soldiers, Prudent Strategists or Charismatic Leaders?," in *The Circle of War in the Middle Ages: Essays on Medieval Military and Naval History*, eds. Donald J. Kagay and L.J. Andrew Villalon (Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 1999), 117.

the boundaries of Orderic's time as each instance involved a woman who, in leading the defense of the castle, was also actively defending her husband's property and his status. The female guardians actually supported the social order through their actions, particularly because, even in their active endeavors, they stayed behind the relative protection of walls and did not engage the enemy on the battlefield.

It is then curious to encounter the brief, but memorable, story of the noble ladies Helwise and Isabel who did not stay behind castle walls. Placed in the midst of civil war which had engulfed Normandy, the story of Helwise and Isabel, although short, still says much about how Orderic viewed martial women. In a vein similar to that of Alvild, the author presents the combative woman in a manner which speaks to wider issues in his world.

At first introduction, neither the Countess Helwise nor Isabel of Conches are described in laudatory terms. On the contrary, their actions reflect the worst qualities of women as they engage in a "malignant rivalry" which causes a furthering of the martial strife and civil unrest in their lands.⁸³ Compounding the issue, Orderic recorded the matter which caused the rivalry as "some slighting remarks," a source which the chronicler explains with clear disdain for the senseless vanity which "led to great bloodshed" and destruction.⁸⁴ Helwise, having taken offense at Isabel, roused her husband, Count William, to mobilize against Ralph of Tosney, the husband of Isabel. It bears noting that, although whatever words inflamed the ire of Helwise were first spoken

⁸³ *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis Volume IV: Books VII and VIII*, ed. and trans. Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 213.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

by Isabel, it was Helwise who reacted to words with anger and who initiated the physical aggression by coercing her husband to act militarily. In fact, throughout the discussion of the fighting in Normandy in the province of Évreux, it is Helwise's husband who continues the aggression whereas Ralph receives the injuries of the count's attacks. However, that salient point shall require further discussion as it reflects Orderic's overall didacticism and informs the argument which he presents with the story of Isabel.

Returning then to the two women who, according to the chronicler, worsened an already dire situation, the history makes an abrupt change in tone from first accusing Helwise and Isabel in tandem, to favoring Isabel as an admirable character. Within the span of one short section, Isabel undergoes a transition from an overweening and tyrannical pestilence who cows her husband and oppresses her people, to a woman full of martial prowess, beauty, and ultimately, respectable piety. While at a cursory examination, the transformation seems abrupt and disconcerting, closer scrutiny reveals that the chronicler maintains an internal consistency throughout the shift in portrayal, a consistency which can be understood through the Isabel's relationship to status and acceptable roles.

Orderic takes especial pains to emphasize that, while both Helwise and Isabel were beautiful (*elegantes*) and both terrorized (*terrebant*) their vassals and husbands, Helwise was "cruel and grasping" while Isabel proved herself "generous, daring, and gay, and therefore lovable and estimable to those around her."⁸⁵ How then does one reconcile this inherent contrast such that a woman who terrorized both husband and vassals could

⁸⁵ Orderic, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis Volume IV*, 213.

also, within one sentence, transform into a representation of female admiration? In essence, the difference arises in Isabel ultimately knowing her place in society and offering a net gain to the society as opposed to a net loss. Both engaged in mutual “*emulatione*” or rivalry, as it is often translated. Yet, in dissecting the Latin, “*emulatione*” may also mean “ambition” as well as rivalry. One need not imagine that Orderic would praise trite feminine rivalries between powerful women, but it seems likely that the connotation of “ambition” also suits the didactic theme. Helwise and Isabel both nurtured and pursued ambitions which were outside of their station, ambitions which involved the military power of their husbands harnessed for the women’s self-interested purposes. The nuancing towards *emulatione* as ambition may be perceived in the proceeding description of how the ladies caused strife not only in their strivings against each other, but in the more general vexing of husbands and vassals; Helwise and Isabel alike envisage a history of struggle for authority which they misused.

While the same fault of overreaching ambition fell to Helwise and Isabel, they did not remain equally culpable in their affronts against societal norms. In part, they might both have possessed the ability to be petty and tyrannical, but they were driven by different mechanizations. Orderic clearly says that the women “were very different in character” and then lays out how the two counterparts digressed.⁸⁶ Turning again to the original Latin, a nuanced approach to Isabel and Helwise elucidates the difference between two formidable women and offers context to explain where one represents an admirable personality and the other a corruption of power. In the seminal English edition

⁸⁶ Orderic, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis Volume IV*, 213.

of Orderic's history, the scholar Marjorie Chibnall renders the Latin description of Helwise as "*atrox et auara*" into "cruel and grasping."⁸⁷ Certainly, the translation as presented does capture an aspect of the nature of the daunting countess and is technically accurate while fitting with the narrative; however, the Latin "*atrox*" can also be translated in a notably different direction as "savage" rather than "cruel." While cruelty reflects a debased nature, the application of "savage" to a woman would have rendered the deeper insult for it demonstrated a chiefly unhuman form of cruelty. In addition, *atrox* can be rendered as "bloody" or as "fierce," all of which strike a particularly bellicose connotation, giving a distinction to Helwise's individual aspect of cruelty. Orderic portrays Helwise not only as cruel, but as a person who transgressed boundaries with her aggressive cruelty.

In contrast, Isabel, whom Orderic records as wearing armor and riding as a knight, merits praise rather than condemnation, a curious subversion of expectations where a modern reader might anticipate the specifically martial woman to be depicted as *atrox* rather than "*amabilis et grata*."⁸⁸ Based upon his chronicle, Orderic did not perceive a militarily-minded woman as threatening in and of herself, and seemed to accept that a certain penchant for martial endeavors reflected well upon both a woman and her husband. Indeed, Orderic makes much of Isabel's martial prowess and compares her admirably to the warrioresses of legend, ranking her alongside Camilla and Hippolyta.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Orderic, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis Volume IV*, 213.

⁸⁹ In general terms, the medieval literature viewed with favor the female warriors in myth and romance. It bears a brief notation here that a comparison between a purportedly historical woman in a chronicle and a fictional Amazon would have born positive association. Various reasons may account for the positive

Where Orderic perceived the potential for the dangerous assault against social norms lay within a woman's willingness to domineer her husband. Orderic offers no evidence that Helwise worked in tandem with Count William, only that she incited him to violence on her behalf over petty slights. Isabel, in contrast, united her strength with Ralph of Tosney, and her skills and presence were capable of adding to his esteem. She would have proven herself a better model had she abstained from personal ambitions and had she left the ruling of vassals to the authority of her husband, but Orderic had the authorial ability to portray a person in nuanced terms, crafting a character who was a mix of the negative and the positive.

Orderic's willingness to depict his subjects in nuanced, human terms has also been noted by Jean Blacker who argues that Orderic concerned his chronicle not with women and men knowing their gender-specific places in society but with the impact which the abuse of power had upon its victims.⁹⁰ Specifically, Orderic saw women as "equally capable of making good or bad decisions about how to use power," and judged the women based upon their actions rather than their sex. In the case of Isabel and Helwise, this certainly seems to be the case. However, one may see that in regards to judging the proper use of power, Orderic linked a woman's use of power to how it impacted the social order. In his depiction of Isabel of Conches, Orderic employs that technique of humanizing his subject; Isabel is neither purely good nor purely oppressive,

regard, but a more developed discussion on the medieval approach to the female warriors in fiction will be discussed in the following chapter.

⁹⁰ Jean Blacker, "Women, Power, and Violence in Orderic Vitalis's *Historica Ecclesiastica*," in *Violence Against Women in Medieval Texts*, ed. Anna Roberts, (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1998), 45.

she is a person at once flawed and admirable, traits which the chronicler gives also to his male subjects. Immediately following his discussion of Isabel and Helwise, Orderic makes mention of Richard of Montfort who died while attacking monastic property and showing a general disregard for the sanctity and the authority of the Church itself.⁹¹ Such a transgression would surely have struck a chord with the chronicler monk who wrote of how the monks of St. Peter of Conches “vainly implored him [Richard] with tears and appeals to God to desist from the attack.”⁹² Despite such a personal touch in the narration, Orderic still approaches Richard, whom he called a great lord, with admiration and a certain sympathy as he describes the mourning which took place on Richard’s death.⁹³ Such scenes which depict the mixture of sin and goodness inherent in his subjects comes through in Orderic’s portrayal of Isabel; the chronicler ascribes to the warrior lady a depth of personality as real as any attributed to the warrior men. Orderic may pass judgement on his subjects, but he also makes evident to his audience that the existence of sin within a subject does not nullify all that might be good, just as one who might perform worthy acts may also succumb to great wickedness. Such attention to a complex appreciation of human nature gives scholars reason to delve deeply into Orderic’s writings and parse through the characters’ actions in a search for full understanding.

Corroborating the idea that Isabel ultimately served as a positive didactic example of womanhood was Orderic’s relation of her later years following the death of Ralph. As

⁹¹ Orderic, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis Volume IV*, 215-216.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Orderic, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis Volume IV*, 216-217.

a widow, she joined a convent and traded the world for the veil after “repenting the mortal sin of luxury in which she had indulged in her youth,” the elderly Isabel “worthily reformed her life.”⁹⁴ The historian Michael Evans has suggested that the sins of which Isabel repented upon her entrance into the religious life were her military exploits, but such an interpretation is at odds with Orderic’s overall estimation of her character.⁹⁵ After depicting her martial exploits positively but her personal, ambitious exploits as damning, it seems more likely that her repentance of youthful sins refers to the trouble she stirred up for her husband and his vassals through her malignant rivalry with Helwise. Her overreaching ambition caused more distress in Orderic’s estimation than did her penchant for distinguishing herself in battle. In the last part of her life, Isabel fully reconstructs her life, merging piety with courage so that, as she once took up arms in the cause of her husband, she would eventually take the veil in the spiritual cause of Christianity. Both acts present a woman who subordinated her needs to those of masculine authority—first her husband, then her heavenly lord—and freed herself from the petty animosities and the self-interested pursuits which had sullied her otherwise admirable character.

As they undertook sweeping historical works intended to provide intellectual and spiritual sustenance to their Christian audiences, both Saxo Grammaticus and Orderic Vitalis engaged with the idea of militaristic women. Liminal individuals who bridged the gap between masculine and feminine spheres, the warrior women provided a didactic opportunity for both chroniclers to address the proper bounds within their contemporary

⁹⁴ Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis Volume III: Books V and VI*, ed. and trans. Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 129.

⁹⁵ Evans, “‘Unfit to Bear Arms’: The Gendering of Arms and Armour in the Accounts of Women on Crusade,” 54.

societies. While neither Saxo nor Orderic embraced as normative the female combatant skilled at arms and capable in battle, the authors did not shun them from a place within society. Rather, both Saxo and Orderic transformed the women into spiritual exemplars who united masculine and feminine concepts while not losing sight of their own place within the social stratus. As only two writers, Saxo and Orderic's works cannot claim to speak definitively for the medieval mindset and, instead, offer but a glimpse into the mind of scholars who found themselves engaging with women who, to them at least, had existed as real people and fought in the masculine sphere. However, these two particular writers spoke with influence, and their words held weight both in their times and beyond. While Alvild and Isabel might have been obscure, Saxo and Orderic were not, and they wrote in a tradition even larger than themselves, drawing upon spiritual ideas to inform their audiences. When confronted with women who did not embody the traditional image of femininity, the chroniclers incorporated those individuals into the histories not by stripping the women of their identities, but by identifying the overlap between the history and the moral lesson. In so doing, a pirate maiden and an armored lady might inspire piety and right action in all audiences who encountered their endeavors.

CHAPTER FOUR

POETIC REFLECTIONS: UNDERSTANDING WOMEN IN MEDIEVAL COMBAT THROUGH CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

Charging into the midst of chaotic battle, hurling to the ground their foes before them, two warriors of unrivaled skill command their respective battlefields. One leads a contingent of several thousand knights and joins battle with such force and skill that the enemy flees in terror. The other, a daring youth, charges into single combat to save the life of a king, overwhelming a skilled knight and hacking the adversary's arm clean through. Their names are Camille and Silence, and on account of their exploits, they earned glory and admiration. Yet, unlike the skeletons uncovered in the dig sites of Caesarea and Scandinavia, these two fighters never donned armor. Nor did their feats inform the chronicles of historians such as Saxo and Orderic; no scholarly Latin texts preserve the deeds of Camille and Silence. Rather, these two warriors—maidens both—crafted by a poet and a minstrel, lived not in life but in the imaginations of the audiences who listened to their tales. Camille appears as a warrior queen in the romance *Eneas* and Silence offers her name to the romance *Silence* as the cross-dressed protagonist who demonstrates a martial skill unrivaled by her male peers. They are fictional, but they are also historical as their stories give insight into how the medieval world viewed the role of women, the nature of combat and the border between the masculine and the feminine.

Women in medieval writing often appear as passive recipients of violence or as active participants in urging their men toward lofty deeds. They serve as mothers or lovers or objects of quests, but rarely do female characters stride to the foreground girt

with sword and shield to vie against the men. At times, they do wear armor, such as the example of Guiborc in the *chanson de geste* *Aliscans*, but even then, they keep to the edges of combat and their donning of armor contains notes of humor.⁹⁶ As in the historical world of the Middle Ages, rare was the warrior woman in medieval literature; however, like their real life counterparts, such women did exist and their unusual, active nature affords insight into how medieval audiences received the idea of a woman in the masculine sphere of combat. Precisely because they deviate from the normal feminine course in romance, Camille in *Eneas* and the eponymous young maiden in *Silence* warrant a closer investigation which takes into account the discussions in the previous chapters. Historians and other scholars have studied both women in other essays, but none have yet to orient these characters in light of the evidence that women did, on occasion, take up arms aggressively—even with training, as the Royal Armouries Manual I.33 suggests—or considered medieval historical attitudes toward female warriors in the chronicles. The romances have been studied as sources for history and for their literary merit, but the presence of real female skeletons in armor and the illustrations of women in practical *fechtbücher* shift the discussion in a new direction. As with the chronicles, a reading of the romances reflects a willingness within the medieval world to respect female warriors even as they transgress gender boundaries with the stipulation that the individual ultimately accepts her femininity and does not upset the social order. So long

⁹⁶ Juliann Vitullo, “Contained Conflict: Wild Men and Warrior Women in the Early Italian Epic,” *Annali d’Italianistica*, 12, *The Italian Epic & Its International Context* (1994): 46.

as the heroine respects the social order in an approved manner, she might even rival and surpass men in feats of arms and chivalry.

In the quest to understand medieval perceptions of women in combat, the scholar delves first into the reality through skeletons and sword manuals, then crosses into the curious realm of chronicles where history and myth blend, and then explores the fictionalized world of romance. In the first, one sees the world as it was, in the second as medieval writers perceived it had been, and in the third as medieval audiences found diversion in imagining it might be. While chroniclers such as Saxo Grammaticus and Orderic Vitalis merged history and fantasy, the writers still approached the works as though engaging with an objective truth. While moments of pity, anger, triumph, and myriad other emotions peek through the works, the primary motivator for both chroniclers was a didactic telling of history which sublimated the emotional for the factual. Medieval literature knew no such constraints. Romances such as *Eneas* and *Silence* demonstrate the emotional resonance of their times, giving a glimpse into the shadowland that stretches between reality as experienced and reality as imagined. If the chroniclers gave musculature to the idea of a woman warrior, then the romances gave the idea breath and a heartbeat, and shaped the passion of the audience toward the idea.

One of the caveats of studying literature from a historical perspective is that the researcher should not read too literally what the creator intended as figurative. Which is to say that what each medieval author wrote was meant to evoke emotion or to enliven a story, not necessarily to reflect with perfect accuracy the world as the audience believed it should be. Romances represent a world that might have been and offer a glimpse into

the emotions and the values of the audience even if the stories do not directly portray a world that truly existed.

Both Camille and Silence deserve consideration in the discourse on women in medieval combat because, like their real-world counterparts, they differ markedly from the average woman in their arena. As the evidence supporting factual women in combat indicates that the experience of those women was a liminal experience for a minority of women, so also do the exploits of Camille and Silence stand out as unusual from other female characters in romance even as they bridge the divide between masculine and feminine spheres in literature.⁹⁷

In order to assess the importance of Camille and Silence, the discussion first requires a foray into the traditional place of women in medieval romance literature. When most frequently encountered, women in romances might be characterized, as in the words of Corinne Saunders, as those “who wait,” essentially restricted to the margins as the story focuses upon the deeds of the men whom the women support.⁹⁸ However, while the women in literature occupied the edges of the story, such auxiliary roles were not necessarily passive. The female characters provided emotional engagement with the story, often lamenting and weeping the departure of their men, thereby infusing an

⁹⁷ Caroline Jewers has written an informative article which includes a discussion on the fictional nature of the romantic world. In the romance, all content focuses the narrative on the masculine adventure of the hero and generally strips the female characters of any substance, leaving them in the story as “decorative.” See Caroline Jewers, “The Non-Existent Knight: Adventure in *Le Roman de Silence*,” *Arthuriana* 7, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 87.

⁹⁸ Corinne Saunders, “Women and Warfare in Medieval English Writing” in *Writing War: Medieval Literary Responses to Warfare*, ed. Corinne Saunders, Françoise Le Saux, and Neil Thomas (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, an imprint of Boydell & Brewer, 2004), 196.

emotional element into the action.⁹⁹ Furthermore, the attendant women comprised the audience of the grand tournaments in stories such as the *Morte Darthur* where they occasional act as tournament judges, or they might urge their men to greater feats of glory through exhortations and even, as in the case of Dame Lynette against Sir Gareth, with displays of scorn.¹⁰⁰

Regardless of how active the typical female romantic character may have been, she still remained on the sidelines as the story followed the adventures of the man she exhorted or the son she grieved upon losing to a chivalric quest. Women bolstered the emotional aspect of the story and supported the male characters largely from a distance; they did not contend with the knights in a gleaming array of arms and armor. As a general rule, the masculine and the feminine spheres remained discrete: men fought while women supported their warriors. As a consequence, the role for women in romance remained a constrained role in which the female character's movement could display some variance (such as mother rather than lover, or chastiser rather than supporter) but which rarely disturbed the gender roles in society.

However, two female characters emerge from the romances who present a different aspect of behavior displayed by those whom one would expect belonged neatly in the feminine sphere. Both Camille and Silence move between the feminine and the masculine spheres, and their presence in the romances offers insight into the value medieval audiences placed upon the rigidity of those spheres as well as upon the potential

⁹⁹ Saunders, 196.

¹⁰⁰ Saunders, 198.

for such spheres to be challenged. Reading both *Eneas* and *Silence*, one uncovers an authorial sympathy towards the warrior women which presents both Camille and Silence as transcending the female sphere and entering the male world of combat on terms which render their participation both noble and thought-provoking.

Dating to the twelfth century, most likely composed between 1155 and 1160, the romance *Eneas* was written by an unknown Norman poet.¹⁰¹ The story retells Vergil's *Aeneid* with "relative fidelity" while reworking the poem in order to adapt it to appeal to the culture and times of the poet's audience.¹⁰² As a consequence, the romance reflects the values of chivalry and knighthood, transforming the titular character of the *Aeneid* into a knight leading other knights in a world that reflects not the ancient world, but that of the writer and his audience. Twelfth-century ideas and culture so deeply suffuse the romance that scholars have found the work valuable as it permits an unparalleled opportunity "to view in detail the transformation of a major classical literary work into the spirit and idiom of another civilization."¹⁰³ The unknown poet has, in short, overlaid his world into that of Vergil's story and inadvertently left for later scholars a clear glimpse into the medieval world. What *Eneas* reflects back to modern readers is less of the classical world and more of the twelfth century as the poet held up a mirror to show the audience their values and their world view. As the original *Aeneid* told of Roman values rather than Trojan, so does *Eneas* say less of Rome and more of medieval France. The role of women, too, in *Eneas* does not represent how the medieval audience thought

¹⁰¹ John A. Yunck, Introduction to *Eneas: A Twelfth-Century French Romance*, ed. and trans. John A. Yunck (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 3.

¹⁰² Yunck, 7.

¹⁰³ *ibid.*

Trojans and Latins interacted with women, but how the poet's contemporaries viewed women.

In the character of Camille, a reader encounters a depiction of women who express masculine valor which stands out from the usual feminine sphere of the "women who wait." While Camille presents as a secondary character, she is by no means an inactive or unimportant character in the story. Nor does she appear as a mere curiosity to astonish the audience. Rather, she appears a bold and active person with vitality; the author deems her worthy of respect and her fate as worthy of great lament.

The medievalist Lorraine Kochanske Stock has argued that the portrayal of Camille in *Eneas* represents an adverse image, one which exposes "a negative gender bias" through the description of the warrior's armor, treatment by the author as reflected by the behavior of other characters towards Camille, and her means of death on the battlefield.¹⁰⁴ This interpretation deserves further investigation both for its compelling argumentation and for the complex implications which historical discussion can bring to the understanding of Camille's representation. History offers the opportunity to approach Camille from a positive perspective, one which demonstrates how a medieval audience could find a female warrior as a positive character. Through this understanding, Camille provides a deeper view into the medieval understanding of women, combat and gender.

When examined in conjunction with the historical evidence, the depiction of Camille in *Eneas* is a positive representation of a valiant warrior who retains her

¹⁰⁴ Lorraine Kochanske Stock, "'Arms and the (Wo)man' in Medieval Romance: The Gendered Arming of Female Warriors in the *Roman d'Eneas* and Heldris's *Roman de Silence*," *Arthuriana* 5, no. 4 Arthurian Arms and Arming (Winter 1995): 57.

femininity while succeeding in the aggressive, masculine pursuit of martial prowess. As with Alvild, Camille may be admired by a medieval audience because she does not upset the social order despite her achievements in the martial realm. In crafting the depiction of Camille, the poet had the example of Vergil's original Camilla from which to source the character's creation. A noticeable difference between the two renderings of warrior relates to the Amazonian heritage that Vergil emphasizes but which the Norman poet eschews, choosing instead to focus upon Camille's resplendent beauty. The difference reflects a deliberate choice on the part of the medieval writer as he reflects the values of his own culture, but that difference also helps reshape Camille from an exotic and deliberately wild "other" to an admirable character worthy of the audience's appreciation.

In the *Aeneid*, Camilla appears with very feral imagery even as a child when she wore not a "long, flowing cape" but a tiger pelt as a cloak and hunted wild animals while still a toddler.¹⁰⁵ As she engages in battle, Vergil describes her actively taking part in the brutal scene as "an Amazon, one breast bared for combat."¹⁰⁶ Time and again, Vergil's Camilla is linked to ferocity and a wildness that borders on the preternatural; she is fear-inducing to the enemy, and representative of an unsettling blurring of boundaries to the Roman audience. The medieval poet tempers that ferocity by shifting the attention to her beauty. In so doing, the poet draws upon an intellectual concept rooted in tradition—the idea of beauty as an external representation of feminine goodness. The concept that appearance reflected character predated the twelfth century romance and had its roots in

¹⁰⁵ Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: The Penguin Group, 2006), 307.

¹⁰⁶ Virgil, 309.

ancient perceptions of virtue and beauty.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, a woman of high status such as Camille should have been anticipated by the audience to strike an attractive figure, particularly as outward beauty was synonymous with “upright female behavior.”¹⁰⁸ In keeping with the societal expectations, the poet eloquently details Camille’s appearance both when she is introduced and when she appears before the battle. Camille arrives in the story as a woman to whom “no mortal woman was her equal in beauty” such that the poet describes every aspect of her face from her forehead to her nose to her eyebrows as exemplars of feminine splendor.¹⁰⁹ She wears clothing woven by fairies, and even her horse is a gorgeous creature upon which the poet lingers with admiring details.¹¹⁰ She is not, however, simply attractive in form, but the poet pointedly describes her as “wise, brave, and courteous” while her manners “which are of more worth than beauty” compare in quality to her physical attractiveness.¹¹¹ She is, in total, a woman both admirable in body and in spirit.

That the poet also distances Camille from the Amazon-esque roots of Vergil’s character is important as Amazons could be seen as virgins who shunned the company of men entirely, but they often had another tradition in which they initiated sexual encounters with men for the purposes of both offspring and “bodily pleasure.”¹¹² As shall

¹⁰⁷ Valerie L. Garver, *Women and Aristocratic Culture in the Carolingian World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 37.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Eneas: A Twelfth-Century French Romance*, ed. and trans. John A. Yunck (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 135.

¹¹⁰ *Eneas*, 135-136.

¹¹¹ *Eneas*, 134-135.

¹¹² Karma Lochrie, *Heterosyncrasies: Female Sexuality When Normal Wasn’t* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 103.

be discussed in more detail later in the chapter, the twelfth-century Camille needed to retain her purity in order to reflect the proper message to the audience and to win that audience's acceptance and appreciation.

John Yunck asserts that the description of Camille is "a compelling revelation of the taste of the romancer and his audience, for whom there could hardly be a more attractive embellishment to the action than an exotic and beautiful lady warrior."¹¹³ This appeal to feminine beauty is important from a historical perspective considering how, within a short period, Camille will leave behind the feminine sphere of fairy-crafted silks and enter the masculine sphere in a very bold and aggressive manner. As with Alvild, Camille must find the balance between the feminine and the masculine, because if she loses the connection to her natural sex, she will risk upsetting the social order.

However, it is that very adherence to the feminine that, according to Stock, casts Camille in a negative manner. Stock contrasts Camille's introductory description with that of Eneas arming himself prior to battle and finds that the two images demonstrate a bias against Camille's role as a true warrior because the scene makes no mention "of any ceremonial putting on of any of this exotic attire, much less weapons, protective garments, helmet, or shield."¹¹⁴ As a result, Stock perceives the poet as undermining Camille's status and, therefore, presenting her to his audience as an inferior warrior. The comparison and the argument remain curious for a couple of notable reasons. The first reason is that this lavishly descriptive scene is the poet's introduction of Camille; in order

¹¹³ *Eneas*, 134, footnote 76.

¹¹⁴ Stock, 60.

for her to maintain her precarious position, it is imperative that he emphasize the attachment to the feminine sphere for the same reason that Alvild could only present an admirable character if she ultimately embraced a role as wife and mother. Camille, as a sworn virgin, cannot embrace that maternal role, so other characteristics of femininity must take pride of place in her description.

Secondly, while Stock argues that Camille does not receive an arming scene as would a male warrior, one may note that a second descriptive scene of Camille immediately proceeds her engagement in battle. As she meets with Turnus to discuss pre-battle strategy, she appears carrying a lance and a shield, and wears a hauberk “white as snow” and a helmet “glittering and bright, all quartered with fine gold.”¹¹⁵ The description includes further detail of Camille’s battle gear, including her horse and the quality of her shield. While the second description is not as detailed nor as long as the first, it certainly gives an impression of martial power and presence equal to any afforded to the secondary male characters. That Stock compares Camille to Eneas himself and finds the descriptions unequal does a disservice to the maiden warrior: Eneas shall go on to found Rome, he is sprung from the womb of a goddess, and his fate shall dictate the fate of the world. Besides which, he is the title character, and it would stand to reason that his armor, wrought by a god, should fill several pages of description. No male warrior receives the attention that Eneas receives in the romance, so it would make little sense for Camille to be elevated to the same status as the man who would found Rome. That

¹¹⁵ The description includes further detail of Camille’s battle gear, including her horse and the quality of her shield. While the second description is not as detailed nor as long as the first, it certainly gives an impression of martial power and presence equal to any afforded to the secondary male characters. *Eneas*, 191.

Camille does not equal Eneas in glory or in description does not indicate that the poet intended the audience to view her as a devalued warrior or a negative character.

If Camille does not have a proper arming scene, the poet does, however, emphasize Camille's role as an admirably heroic figure by permitting to her participation in another tradition of the romantic characters: the hero's entrance into the city.¹¹⁶

Camille may not have had the armor of Eneas, but she did merit an entrance that echoed his arrival into Carthage and which would have resonated with a medieval audience as a common romantic *topos*.¹¹⁷

In regards to the way in which male characters perceive Camille, it is noteworthy that the only character who demonstrates misogyny toward her is a Trojan, Tarcon. He taunts her with various sexual innuendos which Stock argues are evidence of the author's "complicity with his male character's leering misogyny" because the speech does not take place in Vergil's original.¹¹⁸ Perhaps that is the case, but more likely it serves to demonstrate Camille's commitment to chastity, a trait which would emphasize to a medieval audience her connection to the feminine aspects which a virtuous woman ought to guard.¹¹⁹ Upon hearing the taunts, Camille is "full of shame and very great anger"

¹¹⁶ Yunck, *Eneas*, 137.

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Stock, 65.

¹¹⁹ The gendering of chastity in the medieval world is an interesting topic in its own right. Although society expected that women remain chaste while men had a greater degree of sexual liberty, the self-control which comprised the virtue of chastity was considered a masculine trait. So strong was the masculine component of sexual self-restraint that medieval monks would attempt to redefine the idea of masculine gender identity so that the volitionally celibate monks and clergy did not excise their masculinity upon taking their vows, but rather, they reclaimed their masculinity through the channel of chastity. For further discussion, see Ruth Mazo Karras, "Thomas Aquinas's Chastity Belt: Clerical Masculinity in Medieval Europe," in *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives* eds. Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008): 52-67.

which she avenges by immediately attacking the offender and killing him. She then issues a strong rebuke to his mangled corpse that she did not come to engage in “debauchery” or to show herself off, but to “practice chivalry.”¹²⁰ The scene represents less of an authorial condoning of harassment and more of an opportunity for Camille to display her prowess and her virtue. In presenting the speech along with Camille’s immediate shame and aggressive response, the poet does not undermine Camille or support Tarcon’s taunt by its inclusion. Rather, the poet raises an argument against Camille—that of questioning her feminine virtue and chastity simply by engaging in an actively masculine role—and permits her to answer for herself both in word and deed. Camille demonstrates strong agency in the scene as she first confronts her own emotions, articulates a well-constructed retort, and then overcomes her adversary with impressive skill.

Alas for Camille, ferocity, beauty, virtue, and wisdom do not confer invincibility. As in the original rendering of the story, she falls in battle, struck down by a coward’s treachery. Intent upon seizing a fine helmet studded with jewels from off an enemy she killed, Camille leaves herself vulnerable to attack, and the sneaky Trojan Arranz, who trailed her throughout the battle but dared not face her in combat, kills her at a distance with a thrown dart. It is a tragic death, to be certain, but Stock, in her analysis of the scene, argues for something even more dishonorable than death at a coward’s hand. Stock contends that Camille dies specifically because the warrior maiden overreaches her boundaries as a woman and attempts to claim a prize that she cannot possess, namely, the gilt and jeweled helmet. The posited theory makes a compelling argument. Stock explains

¹²⁰ *Eneas*, 195.

that the jewels on the helmet are “stones of *vertu*” which a medieval audience would recognize as containing supernatural protective properties—they would also recognize the strength of these stones as “gendered male from its very etymology.”¹²¹ In other words, Camille transgresses the bounds of appropriate gender roles and threatens the social order, and for that sin, she must die.

The importance of maintaining social order has appeared before in stories about female warriors. Saxo’s description of Alvild could present a positive exemplar of courage while the hardened warriors who scorned the marriage bed represented a threat to the stability of society because the former operated within appropriate boundaries while the latter flaunted the social order. However, to say that Camille dies for her moment of gendered indiscretion does not account for several factors. Even Stock concedes that the warrior Turnus looted a ring from a body, and that the ring would be the cause of his death as stated in the poem itself.¹²² However, turning to the text of the poem, one finds the ring described as containing the setting of “a lion cub carved of a jacinth.”¹²³ In the medieval *lapidaria*, or books on the powers of precious stones, jacinth appears in various capacities, but two of its particular symbolic uses stand out for this discussion. In the book of Revelation, the jacinth is one of twelve gem stones which comprise the foundations of the New Jerusalem; this designation did not happen at random, for it harkens back to the twelve gems decorating the breastplate of the high

¹²¹ Stock, 61.

¹²² Stock, 68.

¹²³ *Eneas*, 169.

priest Aaron, one of which medieval tradition held as the jacinth.¹²⁴ As Camille receives her death for coveting the jeweled helmet, so does Turnus die for looting a jacinth-adorned ring. Yet why should Turnus die because of the stone? He, as a man, should have the right to access that symbol of masculine power, but the poem specifies that Turnus' act of taking the ring and placing it on his finger is "folly" and that "because of the ring he was to die."¹²⁵ Moreover, not all gem stones were reserved in the medieval world specifically for men. Even the jacinth which, in the medieval understanding, adorned the breastplate of Aaron, might serve as a potent charm used by either sex against various physical ailments and for the defense of the wearer and his or her home.¹²⁶ Clearly, even a stone associated with such a masculine-oriented image as the biblical first high priest could have gender-neutral affiliations. Considering the mutative symbolism of gem stones in the medieval world, it can be argued that an audience would recognize the jewels as having meaning, but one cannot say for certain that the medieval mind would read the stones as gendered any more than the armor upon which they appear. Which is to say that, in a story where a virtuous maiden dons armor and fights for chivalry, where men must skulk in hiding for fear of facing said maiden, and where a warrior as fierce as

¹²⁴ George Frederick Kunz, *The Curious Lore of Precious Stones*, (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1913), 302-303. This is an interesting book offering a trove of fascinating information. However, how reliable it might truly be in regards to the curious facts within, I cannot attest as it does not notate all the sources for its information. I chose to quote it here because it is one of the sources Stock utilized for her discussion on the *vertu* stones, and it seemed appropriate to refer to the same source. For a more modern discussion on the jacinth and its medieval role in lapidaria, see Steven A. Walton, "Theophrastus on *Lyngurium*: Medieval and Early Modern Lore from the Classical Lapidary Tradition," *Annals of Science* 58, no. 4 (2001), 368-372.

¹²⁵ *Eneas*, 169.

¹²⁶ Walton, 369-370.

Turnus swoons “repeatedly” at her death, it becomes more difficult to state with definitiveness that any given item may claim its associated gender.¹²⁷

That both Turnus and Camille die on account of plunder they seek to acquire seems more significant than the gendering of the treasure. Another possible reading of the scene points to Camille dying not because she overstepped gender boundaries, but precisely because she exists within the masculine sphere and must contend with masculine risks. As she seizes upon the fatal helmet, oblivious to the lurking treachery of Arranz, the narrator comments, “She was occupied with a great deal of nothing, but thus it goes with covetousness: men covet many things from which they will gain nothing but their deaths.”¹²⁸ Considering that Camille had only just recently rebuked Tarcon’s corpse with a passionate protestation that she had come for chivalry, it seems curious that she should find herself singling out a combatant solely to win his helmet, and getting down from the advantageous position of her horse in pitched battle to loot the body. However, upon seeing the helmet, she determines that she must have it or she will “value herself poorly.”¹²⁹ The sin of greed undoes Camille as it eventually undoes Turnus, though his undoing must wait as he serves a role as a primary antagonist against Eneas. Camille, as one of many ancillary characters, receives the results of her lapse immediately.

¹²⁷ *Eneas*, 198. In an interesting twist, Turnus’ behavior upon hearing of Camille’s death strikes the reader as being markedly like the reaction normally reserved for the women in romances. Turnus swoons, weeps, and swears he shall give up living, all before following the body a significant distance outside the city where he repeatedly kissed the corpse before, at last, returning to his responsibilities back in the city.

¹²⁸ *Eneas*, 196.

¹²⁹ *ibid.*

Stock has argued that this inglorious end reflects an act of “textual sexual harassment” as the narrator includes the lecture on the covetousness of men.¹³⁰ Camille has been humiliated even as she tries to prove her martial worth. Perhaps, indeed, the author wished to mock the maiden warrior whom he uplifted in beautiful imagery, and who gave such a powerful retort to the discourteous Trojan. It is possible the author intended the audience to find contemptuous a character who valiantly slew many enemies upon the battlefield, and who earned the esteem (from his reaction, dare one say love?) of the respected Turnus. It could be that the funeral preparations which encompass pages of description including details of the great sorrow of Camille’s subjects was intended in derision. It is more likely, when Camille is read as a complete character, that the author acknowledged to the fullest measure that she has fought in the masculine sphere, and she has succumbed to a temptation which would entrap men. Rather than a judgement on her martial pursuits, it is a recognition that people on the battlefield behave in manners counter to the benefit of their better natures. A male warrior would have met the same end. As the scholar Valeria Viparelli said of the original Camilla, “She dies because she fights for the wrong side.”¹³¹

Through death, Camille fulfills her final role as she reclaims the feminine sphere in which women typically act during a romance: she encourages Turnus to seek out single combat with Eneas and take responsibility as a hero for his own destiny, however ill it may play out. She does so unaware that she has spurred him to action, a fact which places

¹³⁰ Stock, 68.

¹³¹ Valeria Viparelli, “Camilla: A Queen Undefeated Even in Death,” *Vergilius*, vol. 54, (2008), 22.

her in the ultimate auxiliary role for a female in romance. As a corpse, she has become one of the “women who wait,” although, in her case, it should not be seen as a negative relinquishing of power, but as a positive blending of the role of male and female characters. It is by her own virtue which has achieved this, as she has joined the masculine and the feminine. She has claimed both male virtue by her deeds on the battlefield and attendant recognition by Turnus who admires both her beauty and her devotion to chivalry, and female virtue by her adherence to chastity. The poet distanced her from her quasi-Amazon past, gave her the chance to affirm her commitment to chastity publicly and defiantly, and presented her in a balance of masculine and feminine imagery. Whatever sins she might have committed, she does not upset the social order in life or in death.

If it seems overly optimistic to say that a medieval poet should find a sense of masculine-feminine balance in somebody so extraordinary as a female warrior, one should consider that the medieval approach to femininity encompassed ideas which in the modern time appear peculiar. The concept of a woman as a deformed or inferior version of a man came into the medieval world through Aristotle but also gained hold in the theological philosophy of Thomas Aquinas who entertained the debate about whether God had erred in the creation of woman.¹³² With this understanding of the woman as an incomplete man both in physical and intellectual aspects, came an interesting approach to the desire to overcome the inherent weaknesses of the female sex.

¹³² James M. Blythe, “Women in the Military: Scholastic Arguments and Medieval Images of Female Warriors,” *History of Political Thought* 22, no. 2 (Summer 2001), 263.

The previous chapter investigated women who overcame the limits of their sex in order to lead a life outside the feminine sphere. St. Matrona cast aside her female identity and joined a monastery, but her example does not stand alone in all of Christendom. The story of Marina, called Marinus, tells of a young girl raised as a boy by her father so that she could enter the monastery with him.¹³³ Various other stories of females donning male attire and living under masculine identities (a step which even Camille did not undertake as she remained openly female) abounded during the Middle Ages, and medieval people accepted these stories not only as truth but as positive exemplars of women striving to overcome themselves. Christianity had a tradition stretching back before the fall of Rome in which theologians, operating under the idea that a woman represented a half-formed man, considered it necessary and proper to embrace masculine characteristics at a foundational level. St. Ambrose commented that a woman who accepted Christ casts aside her status as a woman and “progresses to perfect manhood, to the measure of adulthood of Christ.”¹³⁴ While Ambrose likely was not arguing that women should literally transform into men, his thoughts still reflected the concept that those who leave behind their pagan lives transition from the weak to the strong, from the partial to the complete.

There was, however, a stipulation in these stories of transformation: chastity. Women who chose to undertake the world of men also had to renounce a fundamental aspect of womanhood, and that was female sexuality. They need not have been virgins

¹³³ Vern L. Bullough, “Transvestites in the Middle Ages,” *American Journal of Sociology* 79, no. 6 (May 1974), 1385.

¹³⁴ Bullough, 1383.

upon transforming their lives, but for the woman to “approach the male level of rationality,” she would sacrifice her future sexuality and devote herself to chastity.¹³⁵ In this context, the poet’s insistence on vociferously preserving Camille’s chastity makes excellent sense because she becomes representative of the women who foreswore the feminine to properly follow the masculine. Unlike the women warriors in Saxo’s *Gesta Danorum* who bemused the chronicler with their scorning of the marriage bed for javelins, Camille devotes her virginity to something higher: the pursuit of chivalry. In so doing, she reflects the ideals represented in many of the legendary saints of the medieval world. She could not, of course, devote herself to Christ in a story set in a pre-Christian world, but she could devote herself to an idea that a medieval audience would associate with deeply Christian values.

The romance *Silence* hearkens to the familiar concepts of the female transcending into male, but unlike Camille, Silence actually presents herself as a male rather than as a female entering the male world. This undertaking of the male identity unites Silence more closely with the tradition of transvestite women in Christianity who find that they can achieve a fuller existence as a man than as a woman. The romance *Silence* is a complex story which offers much for discussion on myriad subjects from gender to society to legal custom to warfare and even to the world of minstrels and troubadours. Richly constructed and full of life, the story follows Silence whose family send her away to receive a noble boy’s training since she cannot inherit as a girl on account of a law passed by the king. The treatment of women and the martial world within *Silence* deserves its own deep

¹³⁵ *ibid.*

discussion and many scholars have approached the story with the analysis it merits in its own right.¹³⁶ Regarding the romance's use in the present discussion, it cannot be afforded the detailed investigation that brings the contradictions and nuances to light. Rather, it serves as a strong indicator, when taken in conjunction with all the previous evidence, of how the medieval world viewed the women who fought.

Although raised as a boy and ultimately determined to see through her duty to her parents, Silence herself does not accept the masculine role without trepidation and much deliberation. In fact, unlike Camille and Alvild and the numerous Christian saints who adopt their new sphere of influence without any profound debate, Silence internally fights with herself over the truth of her identity. The struggle between the personified forces of Nature, Nurture, and Reason, reoccurs throughout the poem at various junctures in Silence's life. When Reason engages in the debate, she appears as an ally of Nurture who encouraged Silence to continue her deception through well-constructed and sensible arguments.

During one particular episode in which Silence ultimately agrees to the wisdom of maintaining her masculine self, Reason wins the argument by pointing out all the things Silence stands to lose from her chance to earn knighthood to her place as her father's heir; perhaps more importantly, Reason contends that giving into Nature and reverting

¹³⁶ *Silence* has received much attention since its late discovery in 1927, and researchers have explored a variety of subjects through the lens of this unusual romance. For a reading on the romance's portrayal of the appropriation of power by both men and women, see Lorraine Kochanske Stock, "The Importance of Being Gender 'Stable': Masculinity and Feminine Empowerment in *Le Roman De Silence*," *Arthuriana* 7, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 7-34.

back to her feminine form would be “almost as bad as killing herself.”¹³⁷ Although such a harsh condemnation may seem hyperbolic on the surface, Reason’s argument serves as a rebuttal to the notions which Nature’s protestations have implanted in Silence: that he is “unnatural” and that his charade is an affront to God’s creation.¹³⁸ In order to counter the ideas which Nature has encouraged in Silence, Reason must invoke the reference to suicide—the ultimate sin a medieval Christian might commit, a sin whose gravity would supersede the seriousness of rebuking one’s God-given form. St. Aquinas posited that the gravity of suicide lay in three parts, one of which included the concept that “life is God’s gift to man, and is subject to His power.”¹³⁹ The usurping of God’s power over life and death would certainly resonate as a more serious sin than offending the sensibilities of Nature, and Reason plays that argument well.

In committing to the path of a young man, Silence follows the calling of one who renounces sexual pleasures and maintains her purity. Even as the queen attempts through coercion and threats to force Silence into sleeping with her—for the queen remains ignorant that the youth she attempts so ardently to seduce is no man—the protagonist clings to her chastity while not betraying her true identity. Silence’s adherence to her masculine persona eventually leads to the queen conspiring against her, accusing her of

¹³⁷ Heldris of Cornwall, *Silence: A Thirteenth Century French Romance*, trans. Sarah Roche-Mahdi with an introduction by Sarah Roche-Mahdi, (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1992), 123.

¹³⁸ Heldris, 121. In this instance, the male pronoun “he” is appropriate as it reflects the pronoun used at that moment in the poem. In general, however, I will use the female pronouns because, by the end of the story, Silence has fully claimed her female self. A reading of the sex-specific pronouns applied to Silence could form a basis for a rich discussion on its own as Silence shifts from “he” to “she” and back again at various points in the story, all of which seem to occur as intentional shifts.

¹³⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, in *New Advent*, <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/3064.htm#article5>. Accessed 8 March 2018.

rape and having her sent off to be killed overseas. Although Silence avoids these traps, they parallel a common theme in the stories of female saints who have assumed male identities; both St. Margarita-Pelagius and Marina found themselves falsely accused of impregnating women and refused to save themselves by revealing their true identities, preferring instead to suffer the unjust consequences of crimes they had not perpetrated.¹⁴⁰

As with Margarita-Pelagius, who so surpassed her brothers in piety that they elected her prior of the abbey, so too did Silence outperform her peers in their own masculine sphere. As a squire, Silence “all made his peers tremble” when they practiced at martial activities such as jousting and wrestling.¹⁴¹ As the cross-dressed protagonist grows to become an adult, the king awards to her the knighthood, and at the tournament honoring all the young men who received the accolade, Silence wins the prize as tournament champion, having bested all the others.¹⁴² In combat itself, Silence distinguishes herself for ferocity and courage as she saves the life of the king and then fights on in a frenzy as “he kept on slicing off enemy legs and feet and fists” and presses the enemy into flight.¹⁴³ The poet notes almost as an understatement that “God was on Silence’s side, as you can plainly see,” but such a statement, off-handed though it might be, speaks to a deeper truth about not only the battle scene, but about Silence herself.¹⁴⁴ Silence’s piety and the favor her deeds find in the eyes of God earn mention time and again throughout the poem. As with the strong emphasis on Camille’s chastity, Silence’s

¹⁴⁰ Bullough, 1385.

¹⁴¹ Heldris, 117.

¹⁴² Heldris, 241.

¹⁴³ Heldris, 265.

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*

piety and struggles with conscience play a deeper role in understanding her perception to a medieval audience. By linking her with piety and virginity, Heldris strengthens the subconscious comparison between Silence and the cross-dressed female saints.

However, as Silence wears armor and fights in the masculine sphere, she also brings to mind the image of the soldier-saint in medieval hagiography. As such, she melds the masculine and the feminine concepts of piety in a more profound manner than even the cross-dressed holy women who adopt a male persona and male garb but who do not enter into a world that is completely defined by masculinity. While women could not enter male-only monasteries, there existed opportunities for them to join female convents, and both men and women became hermits, so a woman who assumes a man's identity and enters a monastery steps into a masculine sphere, but not into a sphere defined by masculinity such as a woman who goes to war.

In some regards, Silence might be viewed in the tradition of male saints who trained and served as soldiers, but who ultimately sacrificed their lives and identities for the Christian faith. The scholar Andrew Lynch argues, "Knight-martyr literature, like the Passion of Christ himself in the mystery plays, was written to provide an important counter-discourse to the romance version of knightly goodness."¹⁴⁵ At first glance, the concept of *Silence* being a counter romance may seem absurd, and perhaps it is. Scholars of literature could more aptly describe the complexities of the poem, and it would be an overreach for a historian to argue on such grounds. However, it is worth considering that

¹⁴⁵ Andrew Lynch, "Good Knights and Holy Men: Reading the Virtue of Soldier-Saints in Medieval Literary Genres," *Sanctity as Literature in Late Medieval Britain*, ed. Eva von Contzen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 55.

the romance incorporates concepts which run counter to the average medieval romance. When one takes into account that by placing a female protagonist in an active role at the center of the story rather than on the periphery in support of a male character, already *Silence* runs counter to the tradition of the romance. Elements of the counter-discourse are inherent in the poem and help explain the character of Silence.

In Lynch's argument, the soldier-saint might be a "good knight" but it is through converting the secular military service into "the higher form of martyrdom" that they attain sanctity.¹⁴⁶ Knights such as St. Edmund, who cast aside his weapons and accepted death at the hands of the Danes, subordinated their military tendencies in order to receive the honor of martyrdom in what is described as a "specific display of courage" common among the soldier-martyrs.¹⁴⁷ That Silence does not die in the poem does not disqualify her from following the model. Hers is a symbolic death as Merlin reveals her identity before the king and strips away her male identity, condemning her to life as a woman. If Reason argued that Silence's willful reversion to a female state would be almost as bad as suicide, Merlin's revelation is no less a cause of death. As she stands waiting in the courtroom for Merlin to explain himself—a course which Silence knows will reveal her identity—she expresses regret that she is about to lose the world she has worked to claim and she laments that she has been "a fool" to bring Merlin to court.¹⁴⁸ Torment, not relief, stirs Silence as her life is stripped from her, but like the soldier-martyrs, she does not

¹⁴⁶ Lynch, 38.

¹⁴⁷ Lynch, 50.

¹⁴⁸ Heldris, 303.

protest. All that she has worked for in the poem, everything she has trained and fought to accomplish, she loses. Silence the knight is dead.

Yet, through her “death” Silence receives glory and an elevated status that she had never imagined. By her loyalty, piety and chastity, she has won the admiration of the king. Her struggles have softened his approach to the inheritance laws he decreed which precipitated the events of the poem, and he rescinds the restriction on women inheriting.¹⁴⁹ The queen’s plots are revealed and she is put to death for her numerous acts of treachery. The death of the queen then frees the king to marry Silence, joining her to him in an exalted status as all the court rejoices. While such an ending rings almost tragically in the ears of modern audiences, a medieval audience with a different worldview would find the fate of Silence one of celebration. As the soldier-martyrs died and would receive rewards in the eternal court of their King, thus does Silence “die” and receive the reward of being united to her king and exulted for her deeds. To a medieval audience, Silence has achieved a fine ending indeed.

¹⁴⁹ Prior to Silence’s birth, King Ebain decreed that woman could no longer inherit in his kingdom after two noblemen fought a duel which killed both men and destabilized the political infrastructure of the kingdom because the nobles could not decide whose daughter should inherit. In medieval England and France, male inheritance was relatively straightforward; when no male heir existed and the inheritance must be divided between females, the legal process became more complicated due to the law being less specific in regards to order of inheritance. The eldest female usually, but by no means always, inherited and that lack of certainty led to legal complications as seen in the romance. For additional reading which specifically discusses the medieval inheritance and its importance in *Silence*, see Heather Tanner, “Lords, Wives, and Vassals in the *Roman de Silence*,” *Journal of Women’s History* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 138-159. Sharon Kinoshita’s article on *Silence* and inheritance laws also offers valuable insight regarding the importance of the story’s inheritance dispute as a medium for Heldris to engage in a discussion on subverting the function of the feudal aristocracy. Kinoshita’s in-depth analysis explores how the transgressing of gender roles fits with the larger theme of socio-political transgression. For further reading, see Sharon Kinoshita, “Heldris de Cornuälle’s *Roman de Silence* and the Feudal Politics of Lineage,” *PMLA* 110, no. 3 (May, 1995): 397-409.

Although Camille and Silence occupy the world of romance and their lives serve to entertain an attending audience, the two warriors offer insight into the medieval approach to fighting women. Both women serve as excellent conduits of discourse as they permit a modern scholar to consider their place in the intellectual and emotional world of the Middle Ages. In a world where chroniclers recorded the deeds of a female pirate and where swordsmen made serious and accurate record of training a female combatant to the study of the blade, the arena of fiction allows the nuance and complexity of intellectual interaction come to the fore in a tangible way. Societal order remained sacrosanct and did not suffer transgressions, but if stories are to be believed, it allowed more flexibility around the edges than many have previously thought. Men admired the Camilles and the Silences of the literary world, and must have had faith enough in their audience's acceptance that they could cast the characters with such boldness and vitality. Camille and Silence do not reflect the norm, nor do they reflect an ideal, but they do give a glimpse into the curious attitude toward women who participated in the masculine world of warfare and into the complexities that comprised the medieval world.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

To say that the medieval understanding of women in combat was complex and multifaceted would be to utter a serious understatement. The women who entered the historical and literary fields clad in armor and brandishing weapons speak to truths about how people in the Middle Ages approached not only the idea of martial women, but also the role of women—and men—in general, along with the medieval concept of combat and warfare. The women like Alvild, Camille and Silence were liminal women who navigated the line between the masculine and the feminine, but being liminal did not make them unacceptable to their worlds. Women who, with sword at the ready, existed outside the gender roles which we today superimpose upon the medieval people, still held an accepted and admired place within their own place and time.

The martial woman who understood the unique place she occupied—one which bordered on the masculine while still accepting the feminine through concepts such as virginity or motherhood—represented the ideal feminine achievement. These women transcended the socially accepted weaknesses of their sex and exemplified the strengths of the male sex, allowing them to adopt roles which otherwise might have been closed to female participants. Their willingness to challenge themselves and, through a combination of perseverance and purity, compete in the male world earned the warrior women respect from chroniclers such as Saxo and Orderic. One cannot overstress that, while today academics discourage a literal acceptance of the “facts” within Saxo and Orderic’s chronicles, the men who wrote the works treated the stories as truth. Whether

truth in the literary sense or truth in the spiritual, didactic sense (or perhaps both) can be debated, but both authors found women like Alvild and Isabel to be worthy vessels of positive moral learning.

The high regard in which the unknown author held Camille is poignant as page after page relates her funeral procession, the dramatic grief of Turnus, and the lamentations of her bereft people as her body is carried home. In a work about the man who would found Rome, the author found the story of Camille to be compelling enough to merit a great infusion of emotion. An author of any amount of skill would forego such a tangent if he thought it would not resonate with his audience, so her tragic presence in the poem says much about the esteem with which the author thought she should be regarded. Silence, too, reflects an audience's willingness to consider complex matters in regards to gender roles and the socially acceptable role of women. This is not to say that a medieval audience would agree that women should cast aside their sex and become males in order to seek glory, but there is a certain resonance that, when faced with a higher purpose, a woman could become a functional man and earn honor for her loyalty.

Then there is the matter of evidence supporting the active participation of women in combat. As has been stated in this study, the evidence does not support an argument that women in combat were normative. However, the evidence which does exist cannot be dismissed and it does point to clear instances of women who not only engaged in combat, but who were trained to some capacity. When set against this understanding, the chronicles and the romances take on a new life and speak to a greater nuance regarding the potential for women to walk between gender roles with societal approbation.

In the field of medieval military history and the role of women, this study has but scratched the surface and has provided one emergent voice in a discussion which will hopefully grow in vigor as scholarship develops. The future potential for discourse remains wide open as many sources remain to be interrogated and myriad approaches can offer variegated insight. The *Crónica Catalana de Ramon Muntaner*, for example, offers the potential to widen the discussion to include a more advanced discourse on women, warfare and nationalism. In fact, the Iberian peninsula at the time of the Reconquista provides fascinating examples of women who actively engaged in combat, both European and Moor, and deserves a developed place in the conversation.¹⁵⁰

The potential for future discussion is vibrant, and going forward from this study it would be intriguing to include a more developed investigation of the concept of clerics and monks walking a line between genders in a manner akin to the female warriors. It seems natural to then extend that discussion to the already complex role of the medieval military orders. Helen Nicholson has engaged with the question of how the Templars identified with female martyrs, but the academic dialogue would be strengthened by an analysis in light of the nature of female warriors and their unique place in the world both temporal and spiritual.

Ultimately, although the women who fought in the Middle Ages were not indicative of the quotidian existence of medieval women, they still have a powerful voice

¹⁵⁰ Alongside the *Crónica Catalana de Ramon Muntaner*, numerous other Iberian sources demonstrate examples of female military involvement as active participants in violence. Elena Lourie presents a fascinating argument about the Moorish female warriors who appear at Valencia in the *Primera Crónica General*, and demonstrates the potential for academic debate on the topic. See Elena Lourie, "Black Women Warriors in the Muslim Army Besieging Valencia and the Cid's Victory: A Problem of Interpretation," *Traditio* 55 (2000): 181-209.

in the discussion on perception of gender and medieval warfare. The time has come to recognize that women who donned armor and carried weapons extended beyond Joan of Arc, and to understand the world in which the warrior women operated and how they reflected an important aspect of the medieval mindset.

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