

THE QUEEN, THE COUNTESS AND THE CONFLICT: WINCHESTER 1141

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During the 'Anarchy,' a succession conflict between King Stephen and Empress Matilda 1135-54, the both the Empress and Stephen's wife, Matilda of Boulogne, Queen of England, played important parts. This is particularly seen in 1141, as Stephen was imprisoned, and the Queen took leadership of the royal faction. This chapter examines aspects of female authority and how gender was used by contemporary writers to connote the appropriateness both the Queen's and the Empress' actions. Using two contemporary narratives, the Gesta Stephani and William of Malmesbury's Historia novella, ultimately demonstrates that both women's authority and leadership were accepted as a part of the role they were meant to play as elite women, and gender was a part of casting deeply nuanced meanings to their statuses as Queen, Empress or – potential – king.

In the height of the Anglo-Norman civil war of 1135-54, Winchester was the location of a significant turning points in a year filled with turning points, 1141. Following the death of King Henry I in 1135, the throne was taken by his nephew, Stephen of Blois, rather than by his chosen heir, his daughter Matilda (the widow of Emperor Heinrich V, hence her title Empress). As the political dust started to settle with Stephen seemingly in a good position, he lost the confidence of the church in 1139 after arresting bishops over property issues, and in in the same year, having already started the reconquest of

Normandy under her second husband Geoffrey, duke of Anjou, the Empress moved from Normandy to England to begin her campaign for the throne.

1141 was a year of changes for both the Angevin and the royal factions. The Battle of Lincoln in February saw not just an Angevin victory but, importantly, the capture of King Stephen. The Empress' star was on the rise, and she acted accordingly, moving to plan her coronation in London the same year. In March, she was received in the city of Winchester by its bishop, Henry of Blois, the brother of King Stephen, who offered her the King's castle and treasury there. He instructed the people of Winchester to declaim her as 'their lady and their queen'.¹ Empress Matilda then went to London. Queen Matilda, Stephen's wife and countess *de jure* of Boulogne, shortly thereafter sent envoys to the Empress for the release of her husband from prison, without success. The Queen brought troops to the south bank of London and agitated the already agitated Londoners; the Empress and the Angevins were forced to flee to Oxford without the coronation taking place. The Queen treated with the Bishop of Winchester successfully, whilst the Empress returned to Winchester with her army. The Bishop and the Queen followed, to set for what would become a double siege of and in the city. The Empress was based in the royal castle on the southwest of town, a key location in case of the need to evacuate the city for points westward, her strongholds; the abbey at Wherwell to the northwest of the city was further fortified by the Empress' man, John Marshal. The Angevin forces besieged the bishop's palace, and in turn, the royalist forces under William of Ypres, the Queen's kinsman, counter-sieged the city. As the counter-siege tightened, Wherwell and Andover both fell to the royalist forces, and in order to avoid being trapped in an increasingly enclosed city, the Angevin contingency was forced to flee west towards Ludgershall. In an attack at the rear guard at Stockbridge, the Empress and Brian fitz Count were able to flee, arriving first at Ludgershall before

carrying on to Devizes, whilst many, including her brother Robert, earl of Gloucester, and her uncle David, king of Scotland, were captured. The Queen retook Winchester, and the bishop's alliance was firmly reaffixed to his brother's cause. The Empress returned to Oxford for the ensuing negotiation for the release of her brother in exchange for the King; the Queen and her son acted as hostages for the safe conduct of the two prisoners back to each other's camps. At the end of 1141, having gone through the twists and turns of a captured king, a government starting to realign to a new regnant queen, and the loss at Winchester, the King, Queen and Empress all found themselves in the positions they held at the beginning of the year.

In the midst of this hectic year of civil upheaval, we see two women exerting and exacting authority over the political and military sphere against each other, which is unprecedented in the Anglo-Norman world: the Empress, in attempting to reclaim her inheritance of the kingdom of England and duchy of Normandy, and the Queen, attempting to overturn the state of play whilst her husband was incapacitated from rule by his capture. The extent that these two women acted against each other is surprisingly understudied, though perhaps not so surprising in the face of a historiography that, in the past, has tended to place the spotlight on Stephen (and, further previously, Robert of Gloucester.) It provides a tantalising opportunity to seek to understand what could be considered acceptable or even normative abilities for elite women in the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman sphere. Indeed, neither woman was an exception or exceptional, but to understand either, they must be placed next to each other.²

This is the basis for this chapter: to study writing about Matilda of Boulogne and Matilda of England at the siege of Winchester and surrounding actions to discern contemporary thought about female authority in the Anglo-Norman world but also

throughout areas of Europe in the twelfth century.³ This further links to discourse on Biblical women creating exemplars for female authority as seen through Bernard of Clairvaux and particularly William of Malmesbury, who were acquainted with the Queen and Empress, respectively. Many discussions of the Empress in particular are caught up in questions of medieval misogyny, and rather than continue to expound on that line of historiography, I instead wish to try to discern what contemporary medieval writers said about, and wrote about, the authority of the Empress and the Queen in this pivotal year in light of some of the intellectual climate of the writing to try to seek something in between an interpretation of misogyny in medieval writers, and these women as exceptional women.

In the course of this one year, these two women undertook many of the same actions: they gathered men and troops, commanded (if not led) military action, engaged in diplomacy and negotiation, in seeking her own, or her husband's own reign. As such, contemporary writers had an interest in their actions – not solely as women, but as *women in positions of authority*. In reading these texts together, and these women together, we attempt a better understanding of not only their actions but their ability to wield authority, and the contemporary opinions around women's authority. In order to try to do this, this chapter will create a close read of the two contemporary sources which are strictly dedicated to the war's actions: the anonymous *Gesta Stephani* and William of Malmesbury's *Historia novella*. Whilst both authors were writing contemporaneously to the action – and with their own agendas – a comparative approach of these two is best to see the authors' horizons of understanding of elite female authority in the mid-twelfth century without interlaying our own. The concept of a 'horizon of understanding' is one identified by Jans Robert Jauss in order to seek a dialogue with a text in order to understand it without readerly presentism, though here

I will be seeking to place the two texts in dialogue with each other as well.⁴ In order to further the dialogue I will be at points working through previous translations in order to offer new nuance to well-trodden texts, illuminating previously understudied aspects of both women's elite authority, and considering particularly meaningful allusions to a literate twelfth-century audience that the writers used to create meaning and understanding of female authority. In order to do this, I will be looking at how each writer is portraying the Empress' and Queen's actions in 1141 to try to discern an assessment of their comparative perceptions with their abilities and authorities in light of their gender.

This, in some sense, is a constructivist exploration as these sources tell us much about the construction of knowledge as well as the creation of the representation of these two women. The construction of the actions of Matilda and Matilda give us significant information in a historical and historiographical sense not only about the Anglo-Norman Civil War, but about how the twelfth-century world was trying to understand female authority, how knowledge was constructed and construed about the female authority, and how this has affected our own constructions of the past.

Each text will be taken in turn, the *Gesta* followed by Malmesbury, to see how each woman was written in 1141. Following this, a section will consider aspects of gender seen not just in Matilda or Matilda but throughout the 1141 episodes. Ultimately this chapter will argue that both authors give little sense of problems with female authority and that the actions undertaken by both women were unexceptional for the time, but a combination of authorial political alliance backfilled with gendered expectations, rather than negativity towards female authority, contributed to gendered representations to two individuals. By both using a wider, comparative interpretation of

gender in the texts, we find both women accessing authority that was not only available to them, but expected of them, as elite women in the twelfth century.

GESTA STEPHANI

Whilst the authorship of the *Gesta Stephani* is unknown, the book's contemporaneity to the events, and its favour of King Stephen, are in no doubt. It first came to modern light in 1619 from an 'imperfect and incomplete' manuscript in the possession of the bishop of Laon, according to its first editor Andre Duchesne, who also gave it its title of *Gesta Stephani*. By the mid-nineteenth century this manuscript was lost and editions relied on Duchesne's version, until R. A. B. Minor's mid-twentieth-century discovery of another manuscript housed in Valenciennes.⁵ The 'vividness of the writing'⁶ has led to any number of proposals of authorship, none wholly seen as satisfactory or conclusive. R. C. H. Davis suggested Robert of Lewes, bishop of Bath, on grounds of location and geographic familiarity, though more recently Edmund King proposed a 'monk or canon of one of the London houses, with connections at court and some experience as a confessor' on similar grounds.⁷ Although it is possible, as King posits, that the piece was a 'single literary composition,' it is widely accepted that there was likely a break in the writing around the year 1147, and the final book written near or after the close of the war.⁸

Queen Matilda appears infrequently in the *Gesta* despite her significance in the actions of 1141. It is the London episode, rather than the Winchester one, which contains more of the Queen's role. The Queen is firstly described by the author as 'a woman of a subtle heart and a man's resolution'.⁹ Her London actions are fully outlined: firstly, she petitioned the Empress for Stephen's release and the security of her son's

inheritance.¹⁰ In the course of this she was abused by harsh language in seeking insurance for the granting of her son's inheritance from the Empress' faction. It was splendidly written that, when that tactic had failed, she 'expect[ed] to obtain by arms what she could not by supplication'.¹¹ The Queen then 'gave orders that they should rage most furiously around the city with plunder and arson, violence and the sword, in sight of the countess and her men'.¹² These actions then moved the Londoners to side with the Queen and King, forcing the Empress and the Angevin contingency to flee Westminster. Upon the Angevin exit, the Queen then was admitted to the city of London, where 'forgetting the weakness of her sex and a woman's softness she bore herself with the valour of a man'.¹³ She then 'won over' and 'urged [the barons] persistently to demand their lord back with her' but in contrast, she 'humbly besought' the allegiance of Henry of Blois, bishop of Winchester.¹⁴ Her 'woman's tearful supplications' were 'pressed on [the bishop] with great earnestness'.¹⁵ In all of this, the Queen was successful.

When the Queen moves on to Winchester, her actions take more of a backseat, but they are still there. Before reverting to the standard trope of the phrase of 'the king's troops' during the main actions, it is Queen Matilda who brings an army to Winchester and commands them to besiege the besiegers. Although somewhat obfuscated by both the Latin and its translation, the phrase, when broken down to its subject and verb, is 'Et regina...obsidebat'. This, she does 'with greatest energy and spirit'.¹⁶ From this point the Queen again drops out of sight in the Winchester episode.

The Queen in the *Gesta* very much plays the role of the queen with the authority of that position: supplications, negotiations, intercessionary actions. However she also very much plays the role of a leader, too: ordering her men on the Southbank to 'rage

most furiously' and taking up the siege in Winchester. The *Gesta* praises her for all of these actions, including the description of her as 'a woman of a subtle heart and a man's resolution'¹⁷: the best of both genders, perhaps. She has before been recognised as 'a war leader for her husband';¹⁸ in the *Gesta* this is most obvious.

The Empress plays a fuller part in the *Gesta*, unsurprisingly as she is often the focus of the writer's ire as the main contestant against the King. The 1141 episodes with the Empress begin after Stephen's defeat and capture at Lincoln. The Empress is described as putting on

an extremely arrogant demeanour, instead of the modest gait and bearing proper to a gentle woman, began to walk and speak and do all things more stiffly and more haughtily than she had been wont, to such a point that soon, in the capital of the land subject to her, she actually made herself queen of England and gloried in being so called.¹⁹

Upon being admitted to Winchester with the alliance of Henry of Blois, Matilda is given the King's castle and treasury, and the town was made to salute her 'as their lady and queen'.²⁰ Upon this, the Empress 'began to be arbitrary or rather headstrong', and receiving visitors 'ungraciously and at times with unconcealed annoyance, others she drove from her presence in fury after insulting and threatening them.'²¹ With 'extreme haughtiness and insolence', she rebuffs her key advisors David of Scotland, Robert of Gloucester and Henry of Blois.²²

Upon arrival in Westminster, the Empress calls together the men of London to demand taxes from them, 'not with unassuming gentleness, but with a voice of authority'.²³ The Empress responds to their denials 'with a grim look, her forehead wrinkled into a frown, every trace of a woman's gentleness removed from her face, blazed into unbearable fury,'²⁴ and sends them away. The actions were to have significant consequences as the Queen's movements with her men and the men of London caused the Angevin faction to flee Westminster. At first, like Nero fiddling over the burning Rome, the Empress carries on at dinner while the Londoners pour out of the city gates towards Westminster. But at last the Angevins flee whilst the Londoners pillage the palace. It was, according to the *Gesta*, a disorderly flight.²⁵

When the Angevin contingency reaches Winchester, the Empress is accompanied by a large fighting retinue. At this point, she begins to plan for the ensuing siege: she 'gathered into a vast army the whole array of those who obeyed her throughout England, and gave orders for a most rigorous investment both of the bishop's castle...and of his palace'.²⁶ At the ultimate failure of the action in Winchester, as the Angevins flee, the Empress is barely seen in the action, though here we see what might have been a singular compliment or sense of approval from the writer of the *Gesta*. The Empress is described as 'always above feminine softness and had a mind steeled and unbroken in adversity', a statement that almost sounds admiring in ways that echoes descriptions of the Queen, even while it contrasts it.²⁷

WILLIAM OF MALMESBURY, *HISTORIA NOVELLA*

The authorial political inclinations are very clear in Malmesbury's *Historia novella*. Written through the year of 1142, it is long supposed that the text is roughly contemporaneous to the actions up to that point.²⁸ The manuscript begins with a dedication to Robert, earl of Gloucester; clearly the text will go on to support the Angevin claim in a larger sense, and Robert in a more particular one. Seen as a 'sequel' to the *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, all known remaining manuscripts of the *Historia novella* are found in *GRA* manuscripts.²⁹ Malmesbury's promise of a fourth book of the *Historia* was never delivered,³⁰ hence the reckoning of his death after 1142.

Indeed the dedication to Robert of Gloucester gives us a clear steer for Malmesbury's writing. There is a strong, known connection between the two, with Malmesbury giving Robert (along with the Empress and King David of Scotland) copies of the *Gesta Regum Anglorum* on its completion around 1125. Indeed, the monks at Malmesbury note in a letter to the Empress that she should use it as a module for instruction from its own examples of kings and queens,³¹ indicative of their assumption of her as heir apparent to Henry II. As Björn Weiler notes, already by c. 1125, David, Robert and Matilda were thought to likely play significant roles in the growing succession issues surrounding Henry I.³² Malmesbury's loyalty to the descendants of Henry I took priority in his dedication of the *Historia novella*, as did his loyalty to Robert, in whom he saw much of what a king should be.³³ Malmesbury thus focusses on Robert to an unsurprising degree in his narrative around the civil war.

This, however, gives a better perspective to view the Queen in 1141. Malmesbury spurns a great deal of adjectival description around both women, but in this, the actions speak for themselves. To begin with, we have the Queen's intercession on behalf of her imprisoned husband following Lincoln. Christian, a clerk of the Queen, presents to the

legate and council a letter from Queen Matilda: 'The queen earnestly begs all the assembled clergy, and especially the Bishop of Winchester, her lord's brother, to restore to the throne that same lord, whom cruel men, who are likewise his own men, have cast into chains'.³⁴ Here the Queen is not only acting as intercessor on behalf of the King, but also utilising her rank as the highest in the land to summon her authority to ask this of the legatine council. The Empress at this time had been declared 'lady of England and Normandy'³⁵ but not only does the Queen, no doubt, not recognise this as legitimate, she also had the title and rank of 'queen' at her disposal in the same way that the Empress used her imperial title. The Queen also utilises her role to convince Henry of Blois to return to his brother's side. At an audience in Guildford, Henry was 'influenced by her tears and offers of amends'.³⁶ Although this meeting is translated as an 'intimate conference at Guildford',³⁷ and the Queen cast as a tearful supplicant, in actuality this would have been Henry coming to the Queen to meet within the confines of the royal residence at Guildford, a significant stage-setting for the scene. The Queen's tears – like the king's anger, discussed below – are well-known tropes of royal displays of authority and power so whilst the Queen may well have used the trope commonly and effectively available to her, she did so within her royal household: the bishop, in effect, is acted on by the Queen's intercession here, within the physical reminder of her status in her own household.

The Queen also demonstrates herself to be a valuable manager and keeper of high-ranking prisoners. When Robert of Gloucester is captured at Winchester, his captivity is a genteel one by order of the Queen: she, 'though she remembered her husband had been fettered by his orders, never allowed any chains to be put on him or ventured anything that would have dishonoured his rank'.³⁸ Robert ends up held in Rochester, where the Queen is sometimes resident and indeed takes active control over

his imprisonment.³⁹ As with her role in intercession above, her rank and role in the highest available office in the kingdom made her viewed as not only a possible, but perhaps even the best possible candidate to manage Robert's imprisonment.

The Queen was adept at negotiations and diplomacy, and she has even been noted as being the saving grace of her husband's 1141 campaigns. Even before 1141, her abilities at negotiation were well-known with her brokering agreements between Stephen, her husband, and King David of Scotland, her uncle, in 1139; and her negotiations with Robert of Gloucester on behalf of Stephen in 1140; as well as securing the betrothal of her son to the daughter of the king of France.⁴⁰ Her abilities as negotiator were noted in more than just the two main contemporary texts under study here: equally, *Liber Eliensis* compares her to the Queen of Sheba in acknowledging her efforts to release her husband during the 1141 campaigns.⁴¹ The Queen also acted as a hostage for safe passage in a finite, bilateral agreement for the exchange of Robert for the King. The Queen and Eustace were handed over to the earl's men at Bristol in exchange for the King; the King, 'at speed,' went to Winchester and released the earl, who then left his son hostage with the King as he returned 'rapidly' to Bristol and released the Queen and Eustace.⁴² As further surety to ease Robert's mind, Henry of Blois and the Archbishop of Canterbury were offered as conditional hostages should the King not have kept to the agreements; as the exchange went without hitch, neither were taken into custody by Robert. As with most hostageships that are finite and bilateral for times of truces,⁴³ there is no indication of distress or constraint but instead the Queen, and her son and heir, were not only the best but the most appropriate hostage for someone of the King's rank. In fact, it is unlikely that anyone else would have done, and doubly so seeing as how Robert's concern was for respect of rank when it came to this

prisoner exchange between an earl and a king.⁴⁴ This was a role that not only could have been, but should only have been enacted by someone of the Queen's status.

Vestiges of the Queen's authority can be seen throughout her actions in 1141. In the lead-up to the fighting at Winchester, the roads are said to be 'watched by the queen and the earls who had come'⁴⁵ to blockade the city. Later, when Robert is in captivity, the royalist earls both try to cajole him to their side, and when he refuses, he is threatened: 'they would send him overseas to Boulogne to be kept in bondage there for life'.⁴⁶ Whilst Boulogne is, no doubt, over the sea, it is also and certainly not coincidentally the land in which the Queen was the ruler in her own right and through the right of her family before her.

Bearing in mind that this all is from the quill of a writer who was pro-Empress, or at least pro-Robert and therefore pro-Angevin, the fact that Malmesbury does not demonise the Queen or her actions – either as a part of the royalist camp, or as a woman – may come as a surprise. However, Malmesbury gives no indication of dismay either at the Queen's actions, or her ability to undertake them. Queen Matilda was acting in the interest of Stephen, but was acting, no doubt, and utilising to her fullest the authority and power given to her not simply as queen of England, but countess of Boulogne. It was a right that she knew and deployed well. Through the course of the Anglo-Norman Civil War, her position as countess as much as her role as queen offered her underlying authority to undertake actions, and her presence in Boulogne sporadically throughout the 1140s demonstrates her recognition of the importance of this role, especially after the near-debacle of 1141.⁴⁷ Matilda called upon her ability as the countess of Boulogne in a number of ways: by the blockading and capture of Dover from Robert of Gloucester in 1138 with her navy and allies from Boulogne⁴⁸ to the issuing of charters whilst in

Boulogne sometime 1148⁵². The latter in particular is demonstrative of her continuing and possibly dominating authority as countess *suo jure*: her son Eustace had been endowed count of Boulogne at his coming-of-age in 1147⁴⁹ though in the 1148⁵² charter Matilda is queen of England with Eustace merely 'my son from England and Boulogne.'⁵⁰ The honour of Boulogne in England was Matilda's by right, and this too she was keenly aware of: 'It was hers, she said – "my manor", in which she exercised "my rights," managed by "my clerks" and household officer, in accordance to her instructions.'⁵¹ Matilda's charters show her awareness of her own rights via her ancestors in Boulogne, and it was an important part of both her access to authority and her extraordinary wealth.⁵² In 1141, she used her authority as both queen and countess to act on behalf of Stephen and Eustace.

The Empress, as might be expected, receives a better rap here than in the *Gesta Stephani* although it must be noted that, with Robert the centre of Malmesbury's attentions, she does not receive a spotlight. After Lincoln, towards the London episode, 'the most of England respected her rule'.⁵³ However, after the upset of the Londoners, the Angevins left Westminster with order and discipline, and the Empress herself is described as a 'virago,' a 'woman of masculine spirit' as Potter translates it, or even, simply, a heroine or warrior.⁵⁴ This is not the only time that Malmesbury describes the Empress as such: when the Empress returns to England to take up her fight in 1139, he again calls her a 'eadem virago'.⁵⁵ Here, noting the Empress as a virago in these times specifically of leadership, Malmesbury follows the writing of Isadore of Seville and St Jerome in particular, writers he was both familiar with.⁵⁶ Despite modern connotations of the word virago, this was not the insult it sounds. This will be discussed further below.

When the Empress ultimately loses support in London, and the support of Henry of Blois, it is not for the *Gesta's* reasons of arrogance or anger, but for having broken faith with her barons, 'being unable to show restraint in the enjoyment of what she had gained'.⁵⁷ No specific examples are given and indeed Malmesbury places most of the impetus for the Empress losing followers as the fault of Henry of Blois.

(EN)GENDERING FAULTS

The heart of many questions in the secondary works on the Empress and (less so) the Queen lies in gender, slander, and gendered interpretations, which, probably for the worst, has tended to come from the *Gesta*. Interestingly enough, the *Gesta* uses gender more frequently than Malmesbury does, and almost always intended to slander, but not exclusively thrown at the Empress. For example, in 1141 the author repeatedly accuses men who turncoat from Stephen's side to the Empress as 'effeminate'; more specifically, these are in the circumstances after Stephen's capture at Lincoln, and aimed at those who did so *without* putting up resistance to the Angevins. Those who showed resistance were spared gendered slander. Earl Alan of Cornwall submits only after 'he found his adversaries to be too strong for him and was captured, put in chains and subjected to torment in a filthy dungeon until he assumed the yoke of forced submission and the most degraded servility...and delivered over his castles to [the Earl of Chester's] disposal'.⁵⁸ This, clearly, was not a man who willingly handed over his properties to the Empress, and so was simply presented as being overpowered. Likewise, Earl Hervey le Breton, husband of Stephen's illegitimate daughter, 'was besieged a very long time in the castle named Devizes by a mob of plain peasants leagued together for his harm'

before surrendering and returning to Brittany.⁵⁹ Here, too, Hervey mounted significant resistance before his ultimate submission.

But those who did not resist did not fare so well in the eyes of the author of the *Gesta*. Hugh, earl of Bedford, behaved 'carelessly and slackly (for he was a dissolute and effeminate man)', and simply handed over his castles to Miles de Beauchamp in the wake of the King's imprisonment.⁶⁰ Likewise, Robert de Oilli of Oxford, and the earl of Warwick are derided as 'soft and delicate men' for having 'under no compulsion...transferred their allegiance to the countess'.⁶¹ Clearly, one's masculine respectability relied on one's resistance to submission, according to the author of the *Gesta*. Those who put up a fight were not cast in valourised, masculinised terms, but those who did not resist are very specifically feminised.

But the opposite was used as well. The Empress in particular comes under frequent scrutiny in the *Gesta* for losing her feminine qualities. These have been frequently noted, such as the infamous moment in London where she reacts to the Londoners with anger. Immediately after the submission of de Oilli and Warwick, the Empress became confident as noted above: 'instead of the gentle and modest bearing of a gentlewoman, she began to walk and speak and do all things more severely and insolently than she usually had'.⁶² Here, she is not acting like a gentlewoman but more importantly, she is not acting like a king either. The word 'mansuetudo' is telling in this case. Equally, in demanding fees from the Londoners, she acts without 'mansuetudo', without a benevolent kingly manner, but instead acts imperiously or commandingly – with the word 'imperioso' literally coming from the word 'imperium', empire, a not-so-subtle reminder of the Empress' status.⁶³ In the same scene, she 'with a grim look, her forehead wrinkled into a frown, every trace of a woman's gentleness removed from her

face, flared with impatient displeasure'.⁶⁴ With both statements, in her bearing after the submission of de Oilli and Warwick and in the infamous episode with the furrowed brow, the combination of 'mansuetudo' and 'mulier' or 'feminae' certainly weight a gendered interpretation of Matilda's lack of feminine gentleness. However, the third, when she is acting without 'mansuetudo' and with 'imperiositas', is more specifically a comment on a lack of kingly behaviour.⁶⁵ This sense of 'ease of manners and civility in the action of good kings...politeness, but above all a concern for the honour status and standing of a ruler's subjects' implied by 'mansuetudo'⁶⁶ is lacking with Matilda's actions here. She is not acting with a king's ease or concern for her nobility in these episodes; she is not acting like a proper king.

Additionally, there remains the issue of her anger. Rather than Potter's translation of 'fury,' I would suggest as above, 'impatient displeasure'. The alternative meanings of 'indignatio' allows this, but the further indication of a lack of 'mansuetudo' and kingly behaviour is noted by the lack of either 'furor' or 'ira' in the phrase. A king's anger could be either righteous – *ira* – or evil, unrighteous – *furor* – as was frequently written.⁶⁷ Potter's translation of 'fury' is also seen in the scene where the Empress is admitted to Winchester the first time in that 'others she drove from her presence in fury after insulting and threatening them': 'alios autem iniuriis et minis afflictos indignando a se abigere'.⁶⁸ Again, neither 'furor' or 'ira' are used here but instead 'indignando' – scorn or indignation, not regal anger or anger enforced by violence.⁶⁹ Similar to the Empress' lack of kingly behaviour as noted with 'non simplici cum mansuetudine',⁷⁰ here, the Empress' emotions, whether rage or displeasure, were again not that which would mark her out as a king, neither *ira* nor *furor*. This is no surprise; to the *Gesta*, the Empress was certainly not the rightful ruler, but here her anger marks her out as not a *king* as well.

The Queen's praise for being a 'woman of a subtle heart and a man's resolution' should also hardly be seen as exceptional for the writer of the *Gesta*. Although this writer criticises the Empress for failure to behave as a king, praising the Queen for acting like a man falls in line with contemporary thoughts about female authority. Bernard of Clairvaux famously instructed Melisende of Jerusalem to 'put your hand to strong things and show a man in a woman'.⁷¹ The Queen had met Bernard in Boulogne and was in occasional correspondence with him;⁷² it is not impossible that he may have counselled her similarly as Melisende. Additionally, the Queen's calling on her own resources in Boulogne are well within the sphere of activities of a female authority figure. As noted above, the Queen was very actively aware of her role leading Boulogne and consistently used resources from her own patrimony to assist the King, from calling in Flemish soldiers and sailors to using Boulogne as a negotiating piece for prisoners to go over the sea. Although lost in most Latin texts, but near-contemporaneous to the Anarchy, Queen Morphia of Melitene, wife of King Baldwin II acted similarly to Matilda of Boulogne within Morphia's reign in Jerusalem. Morphia commissioned soldiers from her native Armenia to rescue her husband from his 1123 captivity in Khartpert, as well as assisted negotiating his ransom in exchange for hostages including her youngest daughter Ioveta, in another example of a woman's bellicose activity in support of a husband with a habit of being captured.⁷³ Similarly to Morphia's drawing on her patrimony in Armenia, Queen Matilda thoroughly involved Boulogne and her sources in the Anarchy. Neither the *Anonymous Syriac Chronicle* nor Orderic Vitalis make anything of Morphia's involvement; the same should be expected of Queen Matilda in 1141.

Malmesbury is somewhat more tempered in his gendered casting of characters. The *Historia novella* is not a text prone to windy adjectival phrases, so the ones Malmesbury does use stand out. The Queen's actions may be implicitly gendered, but

they are ones that are gendered for a woman who is a queen. The actions taken by the Queen are ones that are indeed female, but that of an elite woman who holds specific and particular authority: her tears, her supplication are not signs of submission but signals of wielding her official authority, as discussed above.

Malmesbury does, however, use more specifically gendered terms for the Empress, most particularly of the term 'virago'. Translated by Potter as variations of 'a masculine woman', not badly, the term has a much deeper connotation than that. Kirsten Fenton points out that Malmesbury uses the term *virago* to 'defeminise' women in authority, make them 'honorary men in the process', but this use is restrained to women he admires. Gender is defined by Malmesbury as 'by men in relation to women'.⁷⁴ This is no surprise, as this concept of two binary sexes seen in relation to one another is as old as Aristotle and Malmesbury might have learned this, for example, from Aelfric's late tenth-century *Grammar* amongst other writings.⁷⁵ But I am not certain that a status of honorary man is solely what Malmesbury was seeking for the Empress, as using *virago* casts another precedent and another version of man. *Virago* is not only a gendered term, it may be *the* gendered term. *Virago* is used in the Vulgate Bible at Gen. II:23 for the creation of woman from man's rib. It is the only instance *virago* is used in the Vulgate Bible, and Jerome's commentary explains his use of this word as an important translation from the Hebrew from the Latin to maintain the alliteration and the etymology from 'iš to 'iššāh – from *vir* to *virago*: 'This one shall be called *virago*, because she was taken from *vir*'.⁷⁶

Eve may not seem an obvious reference for Malmesbury to use with the Empress. The biblical model for earlier medieval queens were often Judith and Esther. Although Malmesbury was writing about the miracles of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the late

1130s,⁷⁷ he appeared not to draw upon Mary for either the Queen or the Empress in his *Historia Novella*. The *Miracula Sanctae Mariae Virginis* is a 'work of deep personal devotion' written to 'kindle the same ardent devotion in its readership'⁷⁸ rather than a commentary on history, politics, or any sense of it being a model for earthly behaviour. Indeed, the Marian exemplar for queenship had not yet reached great influence, with its main proponent, Bernard of Clairvaux, contemporaneously preaching the Marian form of intercession during the period of the Anglo-Norman Civil War.⁷⁹ But in pre-lapsarian Eden, Eve represents a translation of Adam, a version of man, and one who disrupted and shared Adam's unique power.⁸⁰ With the Empress as a *virago*, following Jerome and the Vulgate, perhaps Malmesbury is referring to the Empress as *a* first woman in the way that Eve was *the* first woman: in the Empress' case, potentially the first queen regnant in England.

Virago has significant meaning in bellicose situations as well. *Virago* has the classical denotation of a female warrior, and the influential *Etymologies* of Isidore of Seville notes this:

A *virago* is so named because she does manly things, *virgum agere*, that is, she does a man's work, and her strength is masculine. The ancients thus named strong women. But a virgin is not properly called a *virago* if she does not exercise the office of a man, although if a woman really does a man's work, as an Amazon, she is rightly called a *virago*.⁸¹

Virago was occasionally, and effectively, used to describe elite women in leadership positions in the period under bellicose situations. Matilda of Tuscany, for example, was referred to as a *virago* by Hugh of Flavigny for her support of Pope Gregory VII's reforms, of which she was, until her death, 'the military arm of the reformers'.⁸² Hugh of Flavigny was, at that time, himself a supporter of the reforms⁸³ and so this should not be, and has not been, taken as slander. Malmesbury too was familiar with Isidore's writings⁸⁴ and, although he used the term very sparingly, this sense of the Empress being a *virago* should not be taken as insult but, instead, compliment and a gendered one at that. Malmesbury, at least, saw little wrong with the Empress enacting leadership in situations such as the return to England in 1139, and the orderly retreat from Winchester in 1141. His use of *virago* only emphasises this when in comparison to other women leaders at the time, doubly so in light of his clever allusion to the Empress as the potential first ruling queen of England.

CONCLUSIONS

Very frequently, whilst we tend to ignore the Queen for the perhaps more colourful character of the Empress, we have dismissed many of these contemporary constructions particularly of the Empress as pure bias in the writer, and societal misogyny overall, rather than trying to approach it with what Hans Robert Jauss has called the horizons of understanding.⁸⁵ When this relationship between reader and text is dialogical, interactive rather than passive, we come closer to the worldview of the writers and the societies. Too often we've taken a singular rather than a comparative approach to these texts and these women; too often scholarship has neglected to create a dialogic discourse between them. What appears to be gendered, negative or

misogynist, should be tempered as there is no real consistency between the two texts and their display of aspects of gendered authority. Malmesbury's *Historia novella* by and large talks about the Queen's queenly virtues, and praises the Empress' masculine qualities for leadership in war; the *Gesta Stephani* both phrases the Queen's womanly aspects but also her masculine behaviours whilst denigrates the Empress for behaving like a man but not a king. Both the Queen and the Empress are active leaders in both texts, undergoing negotiation and diplomacy, leading in war, and undertaking duties of elite people in the period. The Queen acts as a queen, and the Empress attempts to act like a king (unsuccessfully, as the *Gesta* would have it.) To some degree, both texts give a sense of elite people taking up the business and roles that they were literally born to do, as the uppermost echelon of Anglo-Norman society. Queen Matilda is undertaking actions bestowed to her by coronation; 'she was expected to rule with the king.'⁸⁶ The Queen as queen is undertaking a gender role that could almost be called a queenly gender, reflective of both her gender and her status, and going through all the actions and motions both as a queen and, when necessary, in place of the King. The Empress attempts to act like a king, with her father's spectre over her and her lessons with Heinrich V in the courts of the Holy Roman Empire the exemplars she knew best, which no doubt fostered her strong will and determination not to be a 'passive cipher,' but may have hindered her ability to *be* a king.⁸⁷

But how this has been constructed in the past and the present, has had a profound effect on our understanding of gender, authority and activity in the past. Scholarship is fortunately beyond the phase of thinking that women who held power were exceptional, or that status within a highly hierarchical society did not affect gender and authority.⁸⁸ Clearly the Queen and the Empress were of the highest social class that could exist in secular society in the Anglo-Norman world in the twelfth century. It

should come as no surprise that they enacted secular and military authority during the Anglo-Norman Civil War, particularly at the turning events in Winchester. When we impose readerly presentism onto the texts of the war, we impose our own constructions of knowledge onto the twelfth-century writers who were writing with their own understanding of their world. In a very real sense, both Malmesbury and the anonymous writer of the *Gesta Stephani*, in the case of the Queen and the Empress, perfectly accepted female authority within the boundaries of their roles in the societal hierarchy, including both secular rule and military leadership, as something inherent to the class of people to which the two women belonged. Gender then served as a backfill to highlight or denigrate as needed, according to political inclinations. This can be seen through careful consideration of translation to nuance gendered understanding of the writing, considering aspects of the women's authority which have been understudied, and examining clever allusions which gave very particular meaning and connotations of elite female authority to the readers of these twelfth-century texts. Beyond this, we can see some aspects of the intellectual climate of the twelfth century which both sees this wider acceptance of elite female authority in other contexts, with historical and biblical comparatives to draw from and allude to in the writers' works, particularly from Malmesbury. With a comparative approach to the two main contemporary sources to the Anglo-Norman Civil war, we can better see what authority looked like to the Queen and the Empress, and how the Queen and the Empress could enact (unexceptional) roles of authority within the political and intellectual climate of the Anglo-Norman sphere of the twelfth century.

ABBREVIATIONS USED

- Bernard Bernard of Clairvaux , *Sancti Bernardi opera*, ed. J. LeClercq and H. Rochais. 1979. Rome: Eds. Cisterciennes, Volume 8, cited by ep. number. Translations from *Epistolae*, <https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/>.
- GS Potter, K. R. (trans. and ed.) 1976. *Gesta Stephani*, London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd.
- HN William of Malmesbury, *Historia novella*, ed. and trans. K. R. Potter, 1955. London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd.
- LE Fairweather, J. (ed. and trans.) 2005. *Liber Eliensis*, Woodbridge: Boydell.
- OV Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis, Volume 6*, ed. and trans. Marjorie Chibnall. 1978. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- RRAN Cronne, H. A., and David, R. H. C. 1968. *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum, 1066-1154*, vol. 3, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

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¹ GS 118-19, 'in publi

se ciutatus et fori audientia dominam et reginam acclamare praecepit'. Translations from Potter 1976 unless specified.

² See Lois Huneycutt, forthcoming; Catherine Capel's doctoral study at the University of Winchester will also shed more light on some of these issues.

³ Through the course of this paper, I shall refer to each Matilda by their given and chosen titles, how they represented themselves: Empress and Queen. I do hope the Empress would have forgiven me the use of her lesser title, 'countess', for the sake of a nicely alliterative title, though I doubt she would.

⁴ Jauss 2001.

⁵ This manuscript recap comes from King 2006, 195-7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁷ Davis 1962; King 2006, 206. King also notes Julia Crick's discovery that the Valenciennes manuscript contains materials found in works from Merton and Southward Pories, strengthening a connection to London: 205 n.90.

⁸ King 202-3.

⁹ *GS* 123, 'astuti pectoris virilisque constantiae femina'; Potter's translation differs only slightly as 'a woman of subtlety and a man's resolution'.

¹⁰ *GS* 123, 'nunciis ad comitissam destinatus, pro viro ex carcerali squalore eruendo, filioque illius ex paterno tantum testamento hereditando, enixe supplicavit'; the 'squalor' of the imprisonment is very likely an embellishment based on what would be expected of a king's treatment in captivity and equally in light of Robert of Gloucester's treatment as a prisoner (see below); *HN* 50, 55.

¹¹ *GS* 123, 'quod prece non valuit, armis impetrare confidens'.

¹² *GS* 123, '...utque raptu et incendio, violentia et gladio in comitissae suorumque prospectu ardentissime circa civitatem desaevirent praecepit'.

¹³ *GS* 126-7, 'sexusque fragilitatis femineaeque mollitiei oblita, viriliter sese et virtuose continere'.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 'invictos ubique coadiutores prece sibi et pretio allicere'; 'humiliter supplicare'.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, '...quidem flexus tum lacrymosis mulieris precibus, qua sei instantissime suggerebat'.

¹⁶ *GS* 128-31; the full phrase is 'Sed et regina cum eximio militantium robore, cumque invicta Londoniensium caterua, qui fere mille cum galeis et loriceis ornatissime instructi convenerant, interius obsidentes vivacissime exterius et ardentissime obsidebat'.

¹⁷ *GS* 123, [See n. 10, above.](#)

¹⁸ Crouch 2000, 260.

¹⁹ *GS* 118-19, 'illa statim elastissimum summi fastus induere supercilium nec iam humilem feminae mansuetudinis motum nel incessum, sed solito severius, solito et arrogantius procedere et loqui, et cuncta coepit peragere, adeo ut in ipso mox dominii sui capite reginam se totius Angliae fecerit, et gloriata fuerit appellari'. A suggested partial retranslation is below.

²⁰ *GS* 118-19, 'dominam et reginam acclamare'.

²¹ *GS* 120-1: 'cuncta coepit potenter, immo et praecipitanter agere'; 'inuite et cum aperta quandoque indignation suscipere, alios autem iniuriis et minis afflectos indignando a se abigere'.

²² *GS* 120-1: 'supercilii et arrogantiae'

²³ *GS* 120-3: 'non simplici cum mansuetudine sed cum ore imperioso'.

²⁴ *GS* 123, Latin in [n. 65](#) where it is under further discussion.

²⁵ *GS*, 124-5.

²⁶ *GS* 126-7: 'Illa igitur [vniversam](#) sibi parentum per Angliam militiam, edicto ubique propenso, in grandem exercitum convocavit, castellumque episcopi.....sed et domum illius, quam ad instar castelli fortiter et inexpugnabiliter firmarat, validissima obsidione claudere praecepit'.

²⁷ *GS* 134-5: 'femineam semper excedens mollitiem, ferreumque et infractum gerens in adversis animum'; here, Potter translates 'excedens' as 'superior to'.

²⁸ Potter 1955, xiii.

²⁹ Minors 1955, xxxviii-xxxix.

³⁰ *HN* 77.

³¹ Letter from the monks of Malmesbury to Matilda, *Epistolae*, <https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/205.html> (accessed 19 November 2020).

³² Weiler 2005, 6, n. 13.

³³ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

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- ³⁴ *HN* 55: 'rogabat regina obnixe omnem clerum congregatum, et nuncupatim episcopum Wintonie fratrem domini sui, ut eundem dominum regno restituerent, quem iniqui viri, qui etiam homines sui essent, in vincula coniecissent.' Robert of Gloucester had put the king in chains after consistently finding him outside of his area of custody, including at night: *HN* 50.
- ³⁵ *HN* 54: 'Anglie Normannieque dominam'.
- ³⁶ *HN* 58: 'eiusque lacrimis et satisfactione infractus ad liberationem germani animum intendit'.
- ³⁷ *HN* 57-8: 'familiare apud Geldeford cum regina'.
- ³⁸ *HN* 66: 'que licet meminisset virum suum eius iussu fuisse compeditum, nichil ei unquam vinculorum inferri permisit, nec quicquam inhonestum de sua maiestate presumpsit'
- ³⁹ *HN* 66.
- ⁴⁰ Tanner 2003, 140; Chibnall 1999 [reprint], 92
- ⁴¹ *LE* 398.
- ⁴² *HN* 61-2: 'cum festinato'; 'celeriter igitur permensa via'
- ⁴³ Kosto 2012, 24, 28.
- ⁴⁴ *HN* 67-9; Chibnall 1999 [reprint], 115.
- ⁴⁵ *HN* 59: 'a regina, et comitibus qui venerant, undique foras muros Wintonie abservate sunt vie'
- ⁴⁶ *HN* 68: 'minas intentare ceperunt, quod eum ultra mare in Bononiam mitterent, perpetuis vinculis usque ad mortem innodandum.'
- ⁴⁷ Chibnall 1999 [reprint], 95-6; Crouch 2000, 202, 248; Crouch 2008, 51; King 2010, 310.
- ⁴⁸ *OV* vi. 520-1; King 2010, 311.
- ⁴⁹ Crouch 2000, 245.
- ⁵⁰ Crouch 2000, 248n, 261n; partly printed in Davis 1990, 167: 'regina Angl[orum]'; Eust[achii] filii mei Angl(ia) et Bolonia'
- ⁵¹ King 2010, 311, citing *RRAN* iii, 301 'meum manerium', 541 'de iure meo et precessorum meorum', 'mei manerii', 554 Hubert, the queen's chamberlain issues this 'ex parte regine'.
- ⁵² King 2010, 311; Tanner 2003, 136; *RRAN* 541, for one example: 'fore de iure meo et predecessorum meorum'
- ⁵³ *HN* 56: 'Pleraque tunc pars Anglie dominatum eius suspiciebat', translation my own.
- ⁵⁴ *HN* 56: 'euidem virginis'. For the Empress as a warrior, see Hanley 2019.
- ⁵⁵ *HN* 24.
- ⁵⁶ Thomson 2003, 42, 44 and 210; Sønnesyn 2012, 116-18.
- ⁵⁷ *HN* 58: 'set ipsam temerasse, que adquisitis uti modeste nescierit'
- ⁵⁸ *GS* 116-17; 'adversariis praevalentibus, captus et catenatus, supliciisque in carcerali squalor fuit addictus; donec coactae humilitatis et vilissimae servitutis induens ceruicem, et hominium comiti Cestriae faceret, et castella sua illius deliberationi permetteret'
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 'in castello, quod Divisa dicitur, a simplici rusticorum plebe in unum se globum in malum illius coniurante'; King 2010, 129.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 'ut vir laxus et effeminatus'
- ⁶¹ *GS* 116-19, 'viri molles et deliciis magis' (my own translation); 'aliis quoque sponte nulloque cogente ad comitissae imperium conversis'
- ⁶² *GS* 118-19, Latin above in footnote 20; my translation
- ⁶³ *GS* 120-1, 'illa, ditioribus quibusque mandatis, infinitae copiae pecuniam, non simplici cum mansuetudine sed cum ore imperioso, ab eis exegit', translated by Potter as 'she sent for the richest men

and demanded from them a huge sum of money, not with unassuming gentleness, but with a voice of authority.'

⁶⁴ *GS* 122-3, 'illa, torua oculos, crispata in rugam frontem, totam mulierbris mansuetudinis eversa faciem, in intolerabilem indignationem exarsit'. Potter translates the last clause as 'blazed into unbearable fury'. McGrath further notes the association of anger with not only heat or fire, but with physical distortion of one's expression: 2019, 25-6.

⁶⁵ Weiler 2005, 20-1.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

⁶⁷ Barton 1998, 156-7; McGrath 2019, 24-7.

⁶⁸ *GS* 120-1.

⁶⁹ McGrath 2019, 25.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ 'Opus est ut manum tuam mittas ad fortia et in muliere exhibeas virum', *Bernard* ep. 354.

⁷² *Bernardi* ep. 534 and 315 with the latter indicating a meeting at some time in Boulogne c. 1130-37.

⁷³ *Anonymous Syriac Chronical*, 92; *OV* iv, 114-15; Harari 2007, 78; Hamilton 1987, 148. Baldwin II had allied with Gabriel of Malatia with his marriage to his daughter Morphia and had Armenia within his sphere, but that these actions stemmed from Morphia should not be overlooked.

⁷⁴ Fenton 2008, 51-2.

⁷⁵ Thomson 2003, 45-6; Monk 2011, 15; Lochrie 2011;

⁷⁶ Dutripon 1868, 1460; Hayward 1995, 113-14; Jerome, *Hebrew Questions on Genesis*, ed. and trans. Hayward, 32.

⁷⁷ Thomson and Winterbottom 2015, xv; Sønnesyn 2012, 60.

⁷⁸ Sønnesyn 2012, 68.

⁷⁹ Pranger 2012, 194.

⁸⁰ Bloch 1987, 11; Campbell n.d.

⁸¹ Sharpe 1964, 50.

⁸² Cassagnes-Brouquet 2014, 41.

⁸³ Cassagnes-Brouquet 2014, 41; Thomas and Mallet 2011, 301-6.

⁸⁴ Thomson 2003, 42, 44 and 210; Sønnesyn 2012, 116-18.

⁸⁵ Jaus 2001.

⁸⁶ Tanner 2003, 135.

⁸⁷ Chibnall 1999 [reprint], 206.

⁸⁸ Tanner 2019; Weikert 2020.