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Women of the West: Voices from the Home Front of the Crusades

by

Samantha Harvel

Under the Direction of Allen Fromherz, PhD

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2022

## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the experiences of women in Western Europe, especially France, during the Crusades of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Through an analysis of primary sources including crusade literature, letters, sculpture, and romantic *chansons*, this work seeks to illuminate the various ways that women utilized their voices in a period that held strong emphasis on the virtues of masculinity. In this thesis I argue that the campaigns of the Crusades created specific circumstances in Western Europe that allowed women to stretch the boundaries of medieval society's gender constructs while remaining somewhat within their confines. Additionally, I argue that though women were barred from official participation in the Crusades, they found their own ways of contributing to the crusading effort from home.

INDEX WORDS: Crusades, Medieval women, Religious women, Crusade literature, Courtly love

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2022

Women of the West: Voices from the Home Front of the Crusades

by

Samantha Harvel

Committee Chair: Allen Fromherz

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College of Arts and Sciences

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December 2022

**DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my late father, Dr. Lonnie Harvel, without whom I would not have discovered a passion for medieval history.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Allen Fromherz for his many years of mentorship and support, beginning when I was just a freshman at Georgia State University. My journeys abroad to Italy and Spain with Dr. Fromherz fostered my love for medieval history and greatly supplemented my education. Without his guidance and patience, this thesis would never have seen the light of day. I would also like to thank Dr. Rachel Ernst, whose guest lecture in an undergraduate class sparked my fascination with the Crusades and their cultural impact.

Outside of academics, my greatest support at Georgia State University came from my supervisor and mentor, Morna Gerrard, as well as the rest of the Special Collections department at the University Library. For nearly six years the 8<sup>th</sup> floor of the library was a safe haven for me where I was able to grow both as a historian and as a person, and I owe so many of my accomplishments to my time there.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of the ‘home front’ in wartime is often portrayed as a montage of victory gardens, Rosie the riveter, rubber and steel drives, and ration friendly baking recipes for how to bake a cake without butter. It is also often portrayed as a new twentieth century idea that history would be made not only by the men on the front line, but also by the many women who could turn their daily lives into long reaching support. We know so much about the home front in this time period simply due to the wealth of preserved sources and this seems to prove the idea that this was indeed the first time. In the 1940s World War II caused the absence and deaths of thousands of men and much has already been written about how this sparked a tectonic shift in women’s roles. Does this narrative belong to the twentieth century alone?

Nine centuries before that, the crusades, lasting from 1095 to around 1291, involved multiple campaigns to the Holy Land (among other targets) that took the lives of hundreds of thousands of men. Even those that did not perish were away from their land for years at a time given the difficult and distant journey necessary to travel from Western Europe to the Middle East. Many women were still at home throughout the long and arduous military campaigns. In this thesis I ask, what were they doing? More specifically, how were the lives of women impacted by the absence of so many men and how, if at all, did they participate in crusading on the home front? Women’s symbolic presence on the home front of the crusades mirrors the feminine icon Ecclesia, a maternal and bridal figure that is an embodiment of the Church which must be protected by male crusaders.<sup>1</sup> How if at all did this concept impact or reflect societies’ expectations of women’s roles?

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<sup>1</sup> This analysis of the symbolism of Ecclesia stems from: Daisy Delogu, “Allegory is a Woman” in *Allegorical Bodies* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015) 19-44. and Lora Walsh, “Ecclesia Reconsidered: Two Premodern Encounters with the Feminine Church,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 33, no. 2 (2017): pp. 73-91.

This thesis aims to explore both the various ways in which women supported the crusading effort from the West as well as how they discovered and utilized their voices in the midst of societal changes. It is important to acknowledge that medieval women's stories deserve to be told regardless of how far they stray outside of their expected gender roles. How they operated within those roles is as significant to the larger narrative of medieval history as when they break outside of them. The windows of opportunity, and scarcity of male labor, opened by the crusades allowed for women to access new avenues through which to exercise their autonomy. In some circumstances this involved pushing the boundaries of their gender role, but in others it involved restructuring and revolutionizing practices within those expectations.

### **1.1 Women in the Crusades: Historiography**

The crusades have a long and robust historiography going back several centuries which has been constructed by scholars around the world. Despite this, even relatively recent texts fail to fully explore the roles of women and instead relegate the topic to footnotes. It is only in the last three to four decades that some historians have begun to explore women's involvement in the crusades. However, a common trend throughout this push is a strong focus on the possibility (or impossibility) of women being a part of crusading groups travelling to the Holy Land or even active participation in the fighting in the East. This speaks to a larger tendency in gender history that emphasizes stories of women who drastically break boundaries or exhibit modern, feminist ideals. While these stories are captivating and certainly worth studying, so are ones of women who found ways to exercise their autonomy somewhat within the expectations of their culture.

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This paper will focus on women who stayed in the West and succeeded in either participating in the crusading effort or finding their voice within the constructs of medieval society.

The works of Helen Nicholson and Conor Kostick, who wrote some of the earlier studies of the participation of women in the crusades, were key to the development of this thesis. Both argued that although it is very unlikely women did any fighting, it is undeniable that women were present in crusading groups in roles ranging from noble wives to washerwomen.

Fundamental to this work is the collection of essays, *Gendering the Crusades (2001)*, edited by Sarah Lambert and Susan B. Edgington. The essays explore the construction of medieval gender roles in relation to the crusades as well as how women were represented in crusade literature and propaganda. In addition, Myra Bom's *Women in the Military Orders of the Crusades* and Meg Bogin's *The Women Troubadours* each contribute important facets of women's roles during this period that are often left out of general histories and thus are crucial in establishing a thorough account of women's contributions.

## **1.2 Sources and Scope**

As is the case with much of medieval gender history, this work is limited to the perspectives of noblewomen, literate religious women, and accounts written by men. The experiences of peasant women would be a rich addition to this text, however there are very few sources pertaining to their lives. In some cases, peasant women are mentioned in passing, but it is not enough information from which any conclusions can be drawn. Additionally, this thesis will cover the stories of women in Western Europe, most especially France. Though there are many fascinating accounts of women in the East participating in the military orders or establishing convents, those narratives lie outside the scope of this work. As mentioned above, much of the crusade historiography concerning women revolves around their participation or lack there-of in

military efforts in the East. Instead, I seek here to construct a narrative concerning the women that remained home yet were still impacted by the crusades.

The primary sources used in this thesis range from crusade chronicles to personal letters, as listed in my references section. Where it is possible, I have attempted to defer to the direct voices of medieval women through their letters. Crucial to this effort is the Epistolae Database from Columbia University. Chronicles about the crusades as well as letters to and from male writers fill in the gaps where a woman's perspective is unavailable or insufficient. In some cases, art from the crusade period allows for interpretation of societal norms around women and crusading. Lastly, I use papal letters, sermons, and proclamations in conjunction with literary accounts to draw conclusions about the gendering of the crusades.

### **1.3 Method and Theory**

For the purpose of this research, I will be following the Pluralist definition of a crusade, meaning any movement that was declared by a pope, connected to the war for the Holy Land regardless of location, and involved the participants taking vows. This is the definition most commonly used by recent crusade gender historians as it is inclusive of many different crusades, while still keeping the definition more narrow in scope than the Generalist view that classifies any religious war as a crusade. Additionally, this will allow inclusion of domestic crusades such as the Albigensian Crusade and the *Reconquista* in my analysis, which both had significant impact on the culture and society of France.

At the root of my research is a gendered analysis of medieval femininity during the crusades and the roles of women who remained at home. As such, this will largely be a social history. Ideally this would be a "history from below" (à la E.P. Thompson) and include the perspectives of a variety of women from different classes and races, however my sources have

limited me to focusing on mainly elite, European women.<sup>2</sup> Thus, it could more accurately be described as history-from-the-lower-top, given the slightly lower social status of women. It will be necessary to address in this thesis that the women who were able to find ways to exercise their voice were only able to do so because of privilege with either wealth or literacy. The gendered lens through which this work views the symbolism in medieval texts is guided by the theoretical framework of Caroline Walker Bynum. Bynum's works provide a blueprint on the methodology of interpreting the gendered symbolism of the Middle Ages, especially in the context of religion. In connection with this, I will use an analysis of crusade literature and papal language in combination with an examination of visual sources to construct a clearer idea of how women on the home front were viewed and the expectations placed upon them.

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<sup>2</sup> E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin, 2013), originally published in 1963.

## 2 CRUSADER WIVES

This chapter compares the representations and expectations of women left at home by crusading husbands and lovers with the realities of their experiences. In the literature and art about the crusades, the trope of the pining woman at home is consistently present. Though it is likely that romantic longing was a factor, the realities of these Western noblewomen's lives paint a slightly different picture. Many were left with the task of running large estates and some are even credited with passing down a passionate support of crusading to their children, despite the loss of their husbands. Additionally, there is evidence that the wives had far more influence over the actions of their husbands than literary depictions would have us believe. Urban II declared that men needed permission from their wives, but later in 1201, Innocent III reversed that policy.<sup>3</sup> If in fact wives were simply voiceless grieverers when their husbands chose to leave, why bother addressing the need for permission at all? These contrasting imageries, as well as other ways the wives of crusaders supported the war effort, are further investigated in this section. As noted previously, the vast majority of surviving sources surrounding crusader's wives are about noblewomen. The only pieces known about non-noble crusader wives are the provisions made for their well-being in the text of some charters. As such, this chapter focuses on the experiences of the aristocratic women whose husbands took the cross.<sup>4</sup>

### 2.1 Representation in Art and Literature

In a letter to the pope regarding the departure of crusaders, Bernard of Clairvaux writes that in France "one may scarcely find one man amongst seven women, so many women are widowed

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<sup>3</sup> Natasha Hodgson. *Women, Crusading and the Holy Land in Historical Narrative* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2007), 109-110.

<sup>4</sup> Hodgson, 111.



while their husbands are still alive.”<sup>5</sup> The mass exodus of men meant that there were a multitude of power vacuums left to be filled by the women they had left behind. However, in the art and literature of the crusades, the women at home are more often depicted as overcome with emotion and lost without their husbands. Throughout the crusading period, there is persistent imagery of a wife left at home in the West, pining for her husband. These women are described as broken hearted when their lovers leave, and anxiously longing for their return. For example, the *Chanson d’ Antioche* illustrates women across Europe’s reaction to the news spreading from the Council of Clermont:

The women and girls were beside themselves with grief, saying to each other ‘Alas! Better if we’d never been born!’ Those who were married petitioned their lords, saying: ‘We are your wives in the eyes of God. My lords, when you have completed your conquests and see the city where God suffered under a rain of blows, remember us – do not forget us.’<sup>6</sup>

Though this literary account cannot be taken as fact, it does provide insight into some of the cultural expectations of women and the imagery men associated with them. In this scene, the women are overcome with emotion at the thought of their husbands going away. Their request to not be forgotten implies that they will be waiting at home when the time comes for the men to return.

This literary trope is also present in numerous songs of troubadours, such as this pastorela by Marcabru:

Her eyes welled up beside the fountain,

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<sup>5</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, Epistola 247.2 in J. Leclercq, H.M. Rochais & C.H. Talbot (eds), *Sancti Bernardi opera*, (Rome: Cistercienses, 1957–77), pp 8, 141.; Conor Kostick. “Eleanor of Aquitaine and the Women of the Second Crusade” in *Medieval Italy, Medieval and Early Modern Women: Essays in Honour of Christine Meek*. Dublin: Four Courts, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Anonymous, trans by Susan B. Edgington and Carol Sweetenham. *The Chanson d’Antioche: An Old French Account of the First Crusade*. New York: Routledge, 124.

and she sighed from the depths of her heart.  
 “Jesus,” she said. “King of the world,  
 because of You my grief increases,  
 I am undone by your humiliation,  
 for the best men of this whole world  
 are going off to serve you, that is your pleasure.”<sup>7</sup>

The female narrator does not identify herself explicitly as a wife, however the imagery of a woman yearning for the crusader that has made his way across the sea remains the same. In this verse she is directly addressing Jesus, who she blames for the loss of her man. Marcabru takes the image to the extreme later in the piece:

...I do believe  
 that God may pity me  
 in this next world, time without end,  
 like many other sinners,  
 but here He wrests from me the one thing  
 that made my joy increase. Nothing matters now,  
 for he has gone so far away.

These last lines show that in Marcabru’s imagined narrative, the woman’s entire world revolves around this crusader who has left. She has no joy and no reason for living during the absence of her lover. This concept matches with the societal expectations of wives at the time, or at least with the male interpretation of how a wife should view her husband.

From the crusaders’ point of view, the wives they left behind carried a great deal of symbolism for their journey. In departure scenes, the wives represent everything that the crusaders are sacrificing on behalf of the church. With their wives they leave behind comfort, love, and all of their possessions.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, as women, they echo the allegory of the female

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<sup>7</sup> Marcabru, trans by Meg Bogin. *The Women Troubadours* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1980), 33.

<sup>8</sup> Hodgson, *Women, Crusading and the Holy Land in Historical Narrative*, 113.

church, *ecclesia*, that the men are leaving to defend. In that moment of departure, the grieving wife herself represents the home front of the crusades. Fulcher of Chartres writes of the internal thoughts of a crusader leaving his devastated wife:

He, as if having no compassion, although in truth he had, and as if he had no sympathy whatever for the tears of his wife or the grief of his friends, although suffering secretly, he departed thus, steadfastly and unyielding in spirit.<sup>9</sup>

This description of the frame of mind of a departing crusader portrays him as a sort of martyr, denying his own feelings and abandoning his home for the sake of the righteous war in the Holy Land. The idea of the crusader as martyr is prominent in texts and imagery used as propaganda to encourage other men to take the cross, and the image of a stoic crusader leaving a grieving family can be found in many forms. A thirteenth century bible moralisée (picture Bible) housed at the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek compares the crusaders leaving their families to the biblical Abraham leaving his homeland behind. The bible, commissioned by Queen Blanche of Castile, depicts three crusaders wearing crosses stoically walking away while a visibly grieving family stays behind. In the family, a woman, presumably a wife or mother, and a little girl tear at their hair in agony as their loved one departs.<sup>10</sup> This image and comparison to Abraham further the notion that crusaders were to be seen as martyrs and that the wives and families serve as allegories for the worldly things they leave behind.

A piece of art found in the town of Nancy, France perfectly encapsulates the role of the wife that was commonly depicted. This grave relief depicts the main subject, Hugh I de Vaudemont in his crusader clothing, with his wife, Adeline de Lorraine, clinging to his side. The

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<sup>9</sup> Fulcher of Chartres, *Historia Hierosolymitana (1095-1127)*, ed. Heinrich Hagenmeyer (Heidelberg, 1913), 163.; Hodgson, 113.

<sup>10</sup> Christoph T. Maier, "The Bible Moralisée and the Crusades," in *The Experience of Crusading* ed. Marcus Bull et al., (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 212-214.

sculpture is meant to show his homecoming from years abroad in the Holy Land during the Second Crusade, where his waiting wife greets him.<sup>11</sup> In the statue, Adeline is portrayed facing towards her husband, with her arm wrapped around him. Her clothing and accessories are unassuming and lacking in detail, indicating that her presence serves as almost an accessory for the depiction of her husband. This depiction mirrors the above literary examples of women left behind by crusaders. Like the woman weeping at the fountain in Marcabru's pastorela, Adeline is rendered as if her being is centered on the identity and presence of her husband. And like the wives described in the *Chanson d'Antioche*, she has waited loyally for the return of her crusader and greeted him with open arms.

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<sup>11</sup> "Le Retour Du Croisé," Musée Lorrain: Palais des Ducs de Lorraine (Musée Lorrain à Nancy), accessed November 24, 2022, <https://musee-lorrain.nancy.fr/>.



*Figure 1 Relief of Count Hugues I of Vaudémont dressed as a pilgrim with a crusader's cross greeted by his wife Adeline de Lorraine after years abroad. 12<sup>th</sup> century, Musée Lorrain, Nancy, France. Accessed through [www.musee-lorrain.nancy.fr](http://www.musee-lorrain.nancy.fr)*



*Figure 2 Facial close-up of the relief of Count Hugues I of Vaudémont dressed as a and his wife Adeline de Lorraine after years abroad. 12th century, Musée Lorrain, Nancy, France. Accessed through [www.musee-lorrain.nancy.fr](http://www.musee-lorrain.nancy.fr)*

The idea of a woman left on the symbolic home front, languishing for her husband plays into the larger societal expectation that the medieval wife remained subservient and loyal to her husband at all times. This expectation can be clearly illustrated by an example of what happened when a wife stepped outside of that role. Eleanor of Aquitaine, the infamous Queen of France, and later England, was portrayed to the public as the antithesis of what was expected from the wives of noble crusaders. While on crusade with her first husband, Louis VII, Eleanor took an active role in the politics and strategy of the crusade, even going as far as to loudly, and publicly disagree with her husband. This combined with the dissolution of her and Louis's marriage led to the formation of something known as the "black legend" that followed her for the rest of her life and flourished after her death. Upon their return to Europe rumors began to spread swiftly about possible adultery committed by the Queen along with a number of other scandalous acts. Even chroniclers that did not provide any evidence of an adultery portrayed her stance against her husband as a form of infidelity itself, turning the rumors into legend.<sup>12</sup> This reputation as a rebel

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<sup>12</sup> Ralph V. Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Queen of France, Queen of England* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2011). 1-9; 91.

queen or Messalina figure, after the wife of Emperor Claudius who allegedly plotted against her husband, persisted well into the twentieth century. Only relatively recently has it been postulated that her real crime was not following the expected role of a noble wife.<sup>13</sup> Eleanor's reputation served as a cautionary tale to the wives of noblemen and of crusaders. They were expected to remain stalwartly loyal to their husbands and to not use their own influence in defiance of them. Nevertheless, women were able to exercise their autonomy and use their voices in the case of the husbands' absence.

## 2.2 Running of Estates

With thousands of noblemen away from home at any given time, this in turn meant that there were countless noblewomen left in the West. Though many did accompany their husbands or male relatives on crusade, the majority stayed home, and some looked after the family estates and affairs. This phenomenon occurred periodically during the Middle Ages in times of war or with kings not yet of age and notably occurred in Flanders frequently.<sup>14</sup> However, this chapter focuses specifically on regencies that occurred during and because of the crusades in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The charters made when men took the cross provide copious source material because they often included instructions for their wives during their absence and in event of their death. Thus, they allow us to identify cases where a crusader's wife acted as regent in her husband's absence.

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<sup>13</sup> Ayaal Herdam and David J Smallwood, "The Queen from the South: Eleanor of Aquitaine as a Political Strategist and Lawmaker," in *Strategic Imaginations: Women and the Gender of Sovereignty in European Culture*, ed. Anke Gilleir and Aude Defurne (Leuven University Press, 2020).

<sup>14</sup> See Karen Nicholas, "Countesses as Rulers in Flanders" in *Aristocratic Women of Medieval France* article for more on the regencies in Flanders.

Two examples of these crusade regencies are Adela of England, Countess of Blois (d. 1137) and Alix of Vergy, Duchess of Burgundy (d. 1251). Both women's husbands died en route to the Holy Land, leaving them as regents until their sons came of age. Although there is evidence that, in some cases, they maintained significant influence even after their sons' ascension. Columbia University's database, *Epistolae*, holds collections of letters from both of these women that provide valuable insight into the roles they assumed in the absence of their husbands. These letters give us record of the women's actions as regents outside of simply being named in charters. Although letters often went through many stages of editing and reproduction, the words attributed to Alix and Adela are an example of women at home in France using their voice and exerting power in ways that would not have been possible were it not for their husbands' absence on crusade.

Adela of England (d. 1137) entered the world a high-ranking noble as a daughter of William the Conqueror (d. 1087) and Matilda of Flanders (d. 1083). Her status promised that obtaining her hand in marriage would be extremely advantageous socially and politically to any European lord. Additionally, her advanced literacy, education, and experience meant she was not just a political pawn, but an asset in her own right. In the 1080s, William arranged for Adela to marry Stephen Henry (d. 1102), heir of Thibaut III, Count of Blois (d. 1089). This marriage fortified an existing alliance between the two nobles against the count of Anjou. It also aided William's goal of stabilizing his claims to power amidst hostilities in England's French territories.<sup>15</sup> It is evident that before ever becoming Countess of Blois, Adela was accustomed to holding extraordinary power over political arrangements, whether under her own agency or not.

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<sup>15</sup> Kimberly A. LoPrete, "Adela of Blois: Familial Alliances and Female Lordship," *Aristocratic Women in Medieval France*, 2000, pp. 7-43.



During their marriage, Stephen frequently involved his young wife in the majority of social, religious, and political actions made by the estate. Even before he left on crusade, Adela was a major part of running their personal estate, both jointly with her husband and of her own accord. In 1095, when Urban II called for all of Christendom to rise up and take back the Holy Land in the East, Stephen answered and took the cross. Adela encouraged and supported his endeavor and is said to have funded the bulk of the expedition.<sup>16</sup> Stephen's crusade charter lists Adela as his regent and a letter he wrote to her in 1098 during the Siege of Antioch reveals his feelings about leaving his wife as head of estate:

...I charge you to do right, to carefully watch over your land, to do your duty as you ought to your children and your vassals. You will certainly see me just as soon as I can possibly return to you. Farewell.<sup>17</sup>

This letter provides evidence in his own words of his sincere approval of her being in power as well as his view of her as a leader. Stephen is not asking her to pine for him or speaking of longing as is common in literary representations. Instead it is clear he saw her as an independent, capable political agent. In some cases, men were unable to go on crusade for fear of others taking advantage of their absence. For example, Stephen's cousin Helias could not fulfill his vow due to threats to his land and presumably the lack of a trusted regent. Stephen however trusted Adela to rule fairly and competently in his absence.<sup>18</sup>

In 1098, during the siege of Antioch, Stephen leaves the crusading party after taking ill. The church labeled him and others who left as deserters and morally shamed them by threatening

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<sup>16</sup> LoPrete, 17-20.

<sup>17</sup> A letter from Count Stephen of Blois (1098, March), *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*. Columbia University Libraries, 2014.

<sup>18</sup> LoPrete, "Adela of Blois," 20-21.

excommunication. Adela is alleged to have convinced him to set out again on crusade in order to restore the comital family's reputation and to fulfil his vow. In 1101 Stephen put his own group together and left for the Holy Land, once again leaving Adela in charge.<sup>19</sup> This letter from Adela to the public outlines a task left to her by Stephen during his second absence:

...he decreed and enjoined me to order the hearing of the suit between the monks of Conques and Rebais and to impose the supreme hand on their dissension. On the day established, therefore, the abbot of Rebais with his monks and accomplices and that brother Arnald by name whom the church of Conques had sent before me in the case, they came together as summoned, namely with the bishops Walter of Meaux, and Milo of Troyes and Arnoul abbot of Lagny as well, a judgment was worked out from the complaints of Arnald and the narration of the [monks of] Rebais, by my named bishops and abbot and the clerics of those churches.<sup>20</sup>

The suit refers to a decades old unresolved conflict that began with Stephen's father, Thibaut III and involved high level officials from local churches and monasteries. The fact that he trusted Adela with a task such as this provides further evidence that Adela was a ruler in her own right. She brought together a summit of the involved parties, plus other witnesses, and found a solution. This also signifies that every party present respected Adela's authority to represent the entire comital family.

Though Stephen did make it to the Holy Land in his second attempt, he sadly died in 1102 before he was able to return home. Adela continued to rule as regent and in 1107 declared that her son Thibaut, rather than her oldest, William, would be Stephen's heir.<sup>21</sup> At this point,

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<sup>19</sup> LoPrete, 23-24.

<sup>20</sup> A legal decision by Adela of England, Countess of Blois (1101), *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*. Columbia University Libraries, 2014.

<sup>21</sup> LoPrete argues that the previous conclusion that William was passed over due to mental incapacity is an oversimplification of the truth. Instead she asserts that Adela's decision had more to do with Thibaut's military prowess being more fitting for the needs of the estate; LoPrete, "Adela of Blois," 34-35.; Kimberly A. LoPrete. "The Anglo-Norman Card of Adela of Blois". *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*. The North American Conference on British Studies. 22, No. 4 (1990): 579-581.

though her sons were of age, she continued to act essentially as a regent. There is record of her handling major political decisions in the power struggles between Louis VI and regional lords as well as smaller tasks like handling donations to churches on behalf of both her and her son.<sup>22</sup> After several years ruling by her son's side Adela chose to retire to a monastery in 1120. However, this by no means removed her completely from power. Monasteries were powerful institutions. She maintained political influence, even as a nun, until her death.<sup>23</sup> For example, in the 1130s, shortly before her death, Adela wrote letters to her son Thibaut and the bishop of Chartres weighing in on a dispute between the monks of Francheville and the canons of St. Calais. In both letters she styles herself "nun of Marcigny, mother of count Thibaut" and asks that they honor a ruling previously made by her and the late Stephen.<sup>24</sup> Adela's long and powerful rule illustrates how the crusades opened the door for wives to take on the role of regent.

Alix of Vergy's<sup>25</sup> example offers a slightly different perspective as she was not regent during any of her husbands' crusade expeditions, but only after he died. Unlike Adela, Alix was a lower-born noble and little is known about her early life. Her father, Hugo of Vergy arranged her marriage to the Duke of Burgundy as a way to settle a dispute between the two families.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> A letter from Adela of England, Countess of Blois (1119), *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*. Columbia University Libraries, 2014; LoPrete, "Adela of Blois," 25; 39-40

<sup>23</sup> LoPrete, 26; 42

<sup>24</sup> A letter from Adela, Countess of Blois, Chartres, and Meaux (1133-1137), *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*. Columbia University Libraries, 2014.; A letter to her son, count Thibaut (1133-1137), *Epistolae*.

<sup>25</sup> Also referred to as Alice of Vergy in English texts.

<sup>26</sup> Valentina Karlíková, "The Duchess of Burgundy and Regent Alix of Vergy in the Light of Her Documents and Correspondence," *Prague Papers on the History of International Relations*, no. 2 (2018): pp. 7-28.

Odo III, Duke of Burgundy was a key figure in the Albigensian Crusade which took him to Languedoc to snuff out the heretical Cathars.<sup>27</sup> During this time period there is no evidence that Alix served as regent. In fact, the bulk of surviving documents written by her are dated after Odo's death. Just as his father before him, Odo did eventually decide to take the cross and travel to the Holy Land, and also like his father died en route in 1218. At this point, Alix became regent and began to rule Burgundy in her husband's stead. Odo III's will named two men intended to serve as close advisers to Alix and her son, however none of the documents from her regency available ever note their involvement or presence as witnesses. Thus, it can be assumed that Alix made her own decisions as regent, including on whose advice to take.<sup>28</sup>

During her regency, Alix handled the social, religious, and political affairs of the estate. In 1227, nine years after her husband's death, Alix signs a treaty with the count of Champagne:

I, Alix, duchess of Burgundy, and I her son, the duke of Burgundy, make known to all who will look at the present letters that we have sworn to our beloved and faithful Thibaut, count Palatine of Champagne and Brie, that we will help him against the count of Nevers and against any creature that may live and die....<sup>29</sup>

In addition to the military alliance, the treaty makes assurances that the Duchess's son, Hugh, will not marry certain ladies without the consent of Thibaut, count of Champagne. An interesting feature of this treaty is that unlike previous documents signed and issued by Alix, this one includes a disclaimer that her son could either renew or void the agreement when he reaches the age of 21:

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<sup>27</sup> Mark Gregory Pegg, *A Most Holy War: The Albigensian Crusade and the Battle for Christendom* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 66.; Also referred to as Eudes III.

<sup>28</sup> Karlíková, 12-13

<sup>29</sup> A treaty with Champagne from Alix of Vergy, Duchess of Burgundy (1227, July), *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*. Columbia University Libraries, 2014.

These agreements will last between us and the aforesaid Thibaut, count of Champagne, until Hugh, my son the duke, will have reached twenty-one years, and after he will have completed the twenty first year, if it please Hugh, my son, they will renew and confirm these agreements, and if it please my son Hugh, these agreements from then on will be altogether null...<sup>30</sup>

Though it was written at least a year before Hugh would reach 21, this document, and likely others from the same time period, laid the groundwork for the transition of power from his mother. This shows that although they wielded enormous power as regents, widows or wives of crusaders were expected to only be in that position temporarily. Nevertheless, this major treaty was addressed from and sealed by Alix and was seen as sufficiently binding. Though her reign may not have been as long and wide-reaching as Adela's, Alix's regency still provides a clear example of the crusades opening the door for women to use their political voices.

Even as regents, women were still subject to the social rules of the feudal nobility. In a letter addressed to the public, Alix of Vergy made a pledge to the king:

I have sworn on the sacred relics to my lord Philip, by the grace of God illustrious king of France, that I shall do good and faithful service to him against all men and women who might live and die and that I shall contract matrimony with no one except with the consent and will of the lord king.<sup>31</sup>

With this oath, she provides eight witnesses that swear to stand with the king against her if she were to break her vow. At the time, it was expected of widows to make this pledge to their lord, or in this case to the king as their remarriage was somewhat considered to be the "king's gift."

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<sup>30</sup> A treaty with Champagne, Epistolae.

<sup>31</sup> A letter from Alix of Vergy, Duchess of Burgundy (1218, August), Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters. Columbia University Libraries, 2014.

Essentially, it was known that marriages to noble widows came with power and capital benefits and thus were needed to be tightly controlled as valuable assets.<sup>32</sup>

The idea that these women were powerful as regents is not a case of retroactively applied modern thinking but is corroborated by the attitudes of fellow political leaders of the time. When Eleanor of Aquitaine, the notoriously remembered Queen, joined her husband on his crusade they left two men as regent in her place. Some sources say King Louis VII refused to leave her behind because of his infatuation, but others contend that it was a political decision over fears that as regent she would be too powerful. At the time she was one of the wealthiest people in Europe in her own right and had a multitude of allies separate from her husband. If in truth Louis chose to not leave her as regent for political reasons, it shows that he was well aware of the substantial power a woman regent could wield.<sup>33</sup>

In deeply catholic France, nothing was a greater symbol of power than acknowledgement from the pope himself. In the crusading period we see more than one example of popes recognizing the influence of these female regents and even going to them for support. Pope Paschal II made a significant visit to Adela of Blois in 1107 where he celebrated Easter with her and her whole county. During his visit, Paschal II met with Adela individually on multiple occasions and publicly blessed her family as well as approved her plan for reforming canons in the area.<sup>34</sup> His visit and subsequent blessing show that he saw her as worth dealing with as a religious and political leader, rather than just a figurehead or lowly widow.

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<sup>32</sup> Sue Sheridan Walker, "Feudal Constraint and Free Consent in the Making of Marriages in Medieval England: Widows in the King's Gift," *Historical Papers* 14, no. 1 (2006): pp. 97-110, 97.

<sup>33</sup> Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine*, 73.

<sup>34</sup> LoPrete, "Adela of Blois," 34.

The papacy supported women in other ways. In 1237, over 10 years after the death of her husband, Blanche of Castile received a letter from Pope Gregory IX requesting her support for the crusade in the East:

Truly, since unless aid is given to that empire soon, the holy land and the empire could suffer the harm of irreparable damage, we assiduously entreat your highness again that you not delay to help that empire, out of reverence for the apostolic see and us.<sup>35</sup>

The letter goes on to promise the same indulgences a crusader would receive in exchange for troops and funds. This exchange shows that he recognized her as the true power wielder of the kingdom rather than her son or any advisors, and thus chose to make his appeal to her directly.

It is evident that regencies held by crusader wives allowed them to use their voice as female lords in their own right, rather than only at the behest of or jointly with their husbands. In event of the absence or death of their husbands, these women were able to form treaties, solve political conflict, and even dealt with the highest powers of the Church. Though they were still held to some social requirements of noblewomen, the women regents defied expectations of women at the time and fulfilled their roles as powerful leaders. While simultaneously embodying the home front as women with children in need of protection, these women contributed to the crusading effort both directly and indirectly.

### **2.3 The Crusading Legacy**

Along with running estates, the wives of crusaders also became the caretakers of the crusading legacy. As we have discussed in this chapter, wives did carry a good deal of influence over their husbands, and as such could impact whether or not they went on crusade. Going back to the First Crusade, Adela of Blois provides a clear example of this type of power. Adela's

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<sup>35</sup> A letter from Pope Gregory IX (1237, October), *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*. Columbia University Libraries, 2014.

husband, Stephen became ill on his journey to Jerusalem and after the failed siege of Antioch decided to return home without fulfilling his vow. Because of this, he and those who accompanied him were seen as cowards and deserters. Reportedly, it was Adela who convinced Stephen to renew his vows and return to the Holy Land to redeem himself.<sup>36</sup> Actions such as this reflect the beginnings of a long-standing pattern of women carrying and enforcing the tradition of crusading.

According to Jonathan Riley-Smith, crusading became an integral part of family legacies by the late twelfth century. By that time crusading was no longer just a religious or political mission, but also a familial tradition to uphold. For example, Louis IX came from a long line of crusaders on both sides of his family. His father's side boasted crusaders from each generation going back to 1095 and his mother's side had several participants in the Spanish Reconquista. The pressure of such a lengthy and well-known family history likely impacted his decision to go on crusade. Similarly, Pope Gregory XI came from a crusading family which is apparent in his impassioned preaching on the crusades.<sup>37</sup> Later on, in 1252, women would have additional cause to encourage their husbands to take the cross as Innocent IV declared that the wives of crusaders would receive the same indulgences as their husbands, even if they remained at home.<sup>38</sup> Though women were previously able to get indulgences by supporting the crusades in other ways, this opened up a new avenue for their religious salvation.

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<sup>36</sup> LoPrete, "Adela of Blois," 23.

<sup>37</sup> Jonathan Riley-Smith. *The Crusades: a History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pg. 237; 245-247; 320; 434

<sup>38</sup> Lisa Perfetti. "Crusader as Lover: The Eroticized Poetics of Crusading in Medieval France." *Speculum* 88, no. 4 (2013): 932-57, 934-935.



Women of the aristocracy often outlived their husbands and other family members, especially in crusading families. This meant that they typically bore the responsibility of commemorating the lives of the deceased crusaders. These women played a key role in the passing on of oral traditions and helping to construct a family memory. Additionally, women from these families went on to bring the crusading legacy with them to families they married into and subsequently encouraged their husbands and sons to take the cross. Despite the many losses suffered by women in these families, having a virtuous and significant tradition to uphold meant that they would continue the legacy.<sup>39</sup> After the death of her husband, Alix of Vergy carried out his dying wishes by sending one hundred men on crusade to the Holy Land. Even though the crusade had cost her husband his life and the expense of sending these men was overwhelming, continuing the honorable legacy took precedence in her eyes.<sup>40</sup> In order to uphold the legacies of their families, women used their voices and influence over others to openly support and encourage men to take the cross. Just as these women acted as guardians of the estates in their husbands' absence, so too did they act as guardians of their legacy after their deaths.<sup>41</sup>

## 2.4 Conclusions

The symbol of the pining wife of a crusader from the eleventh century became so ubiquitous that it lasted well into the nineteenth century. Paintings and stories crafted centuries after the crusades frequently depicted women either grieving a departure or celebrating a return.<sup>42</sup> These

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<sup>39</sup> Nicholas Paul, *To Follow in Their Footsteps: The Crusades and Family Memory in the High Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017), 16; 135.

<sup>40</sup> A letter from Alix of Vergy, Duchess of Burgundy (1220, December), *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*. Columbia University Libraries, 2014.

<sup>41</sup> Paul, 64.

<sup>42</sup> Elizabeth Siberry, "The Crusader's Departure and Return: A Much Later Perspective," in *Gendering the Crusades*, ed. Susan Edgington, Sarah Lambert, (New York, NY: Columbia University

women were not meant to be people in their own right, but simply character-building accessories for the male crusaders. However, the image of crusader wives that the contemporary literature and art of the period presented does not quite match with the reality of their lived experiences. Rather than only spending their days weeping and pining for their husbands, they instead embraced new ways of exercising their autonomy. Though female regencies happened in other time periods and regions, the crusades created unique circumstances for the women to navigate.

Additionally, the wives were not only symbolic of the home front of the crusades, but they also took their own active roles in protecting it. For the crusaders, their wives embodied the sacrifices they made for their journey as well as the vulnerable female Christian church in need of defense. Though that symbolic comparison is apt, it is not comprehensive. These women used their power as regents and the influence of their voices to protect their estates, keep their families together, and even to support the crusaders by sending troops and safeguarding their legacy. Each woman has a different story with unique circumstances, but their common experience as crusader wives reveals similarities across western Christendom in responses to the crusades by elite women. Each one both represented and defended the home front of the crusades in their own way.

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Press, 2002), pp. 177-188.; For example, see William Bell Scott's watercolour painting *Return from the Crusade* in Siberry, 180.; Hodgson, *Women, Crusading and the Holy Land*, 113.

### 3 RELIGIOUS WOMEN

In Latin medieval society of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, crusading was seen as a fundamentally masculine activity. The language used in the original call to arms by Urban II, such as the term *fraternitatem*, served to communicate to the audience that this call was specifically for men.<sup>43</sup> This gendered crusading narrative mirrored the generally negative perspective on women held by the public at large and religious organizations. Nevertheless, religious women found a multitude of ways to support the crusading effort from home in the West. This chapter examines the experiences of women who provided support to the crusading effort on the home front but did not have vital governing duties such as acting as regent. Some braved the journey East, but the majority focused on garnering aid from the West and sending it over. Like the women on the home front of the twentieth century World Wars, women during the crusades were passionate in their support of the crusade campaigns and looked for new avenues of expressing their support either tangibly or spiritually. A number of women participated in officially sanctioned activities intended to provide spiritual support, some donated large sums and funded campaigns, and others chose to enter the military orders to support their charitable cause. Each potential path represented a potential opportunity for exercising their autonomy and using their voice to further their religious cause.

#### 3.1 Medieval Gender and Religion

Gender was a fundamental part of the structuring of medieval society. Male and female roles were not necessarily always aligned by biology, but instead were a web of mores, identities,

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<sup>43</sup> Constance M. Rousseau “Home Front and Battlefield: The Gendering of Papal Crusading Policy (1095-1221)” in S.B. Edgington and S. Lambert (eds), *Gendering the Crusades* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002) 31-44.

and concepts assigned to each gender.<sup>44</sup> In this way, the medieval church reflected the organization of the larger society. Writers from the period often used gendered language in an intentional effort to convey symbolism and the rhetoric of the church was no exception.<sup>45</sup> This analysis will not retroactively apply modern gender ideals, but rather explore how the expected gender roles of the time impacted the lives of medieval women. For medieval writers, masculinity was the dominant and default gender, however femininity was necessary as a literary foil to distinguish its qualities. Women other than biblical figures and saints were so rarely mentioned in religious texts that we can assume that when they are it is to remind us of the stark contrast between masculinity and femininity.<sup>46</sup>

It was an accepted fact in the minds of medieval Europeans that women were the weaker sex. As such, they were typically not expected nor allowed to bear the perceived weight of religious work or monastic life. Nuns had been around for centuries, but in the late eleventh century their numbers were low and their roles were perceived as insignificant by the public. Outliers in the monastic world were praised because they were seen as having surpassed the limitations of their sex. At the very end of the eleventh century, the First Crusade caused a considerable uptick in religious fervor. This resulted in large numbers of both men and women seeking a place in monastic communities.<sup>47</sup> This surge in female membership presented a

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<sup>44</sup> Sarah Lambert. "Crusading and Spinning," in S.B. Edgington and S. Lambert (eds), *Gendering the Crusades* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002) 1-15, 1.

<sup>45</sup> For more on medieval gendered symbolism, especially in a religious context, see the works of Caroline Walker Bynum including *Jesus as Woman: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (1982) and *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: the Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (1987).

<sup>46</sup> Lambert, "Crusading and Spinning," 2; 8.

<sup>47</sup> Myra Miranda Bom, *Women in the Military Orders of the Crusades*. Place of publication not identified: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 9-11. For more on the history and trends of medieval female monasticism see: *Women in the Medieval Monastic World* (2015) ed. by Janet Burton and Karen Stoner, *Equal in Monastic Profession: Religious Women in Medieval France* (1991) by Penelope Johnson, and

significant paradox known as *cura monialium* or the care of nuns wherein the monks are obligated to provide care to the weaker sex, but in doing so are subjected to their temptation. The maintained virginity or purity of monastics was paramount, therefore sexual temptation was seen as a significant threat. Because of this view, monastic orders felt they needed to protect women from the outside world, but also needed to protect themselves from women. This moral quandary meant that there was a vast spectrum of the level of female acceptance amongst monastic orders with the Benedictine based ones tending towards resisting female membership and Augustinian orders being more open.<sup>48</sup> Nonetheless, the mid twelfth century saw a marked increase in the admission of nuns to orders across Europe. By the end of the century, a pattern began to emerge. Many monasteries who had taken on female members or established female only houses began to see their upkeep as a burden. Tracing the female membership of the Cistercian Order further supports this idea. The most resistant to admitting women, the Cistercians gave in to pressure and began accepting them. They quickly shifted to primarily allowing female only houses rather than double monasteries, until finally they tried to stop accepting women at all. Though an extreme example, the Cistercians still align with the general trend in Europe. Consequently, the acceptance of women into monastic societies stalled by the end of the twelfth century.<sup>49</sup>

The same patterns and symbolism that were present in the larger scope of eleventh and twelfth century female monasticism can also be found in the rhetoric surrounding women and the crusades. “Crusading and Spinning” by Sarah Lambert, outlines how the crusades were

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Patricia Ranft’s works: *Women and the Religious Life in Premodern Europe* (1997) and *Women and Spiritual Equality in Christian Tradition* (1996)

<sup>48</sup> Bom, *Women in the Military Orders of the Crusades* 8; 12-13. This claim is based on the work of Giles Constable in *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century* (1996)

<sup>49</sup> Bom, 15-19.

deliberately gendered as a masculine endeavor by those who wrote about them. Lambert argues that the representation of women in crusade preaching, and literature is designed to emphasize the masculinity of the crusaders and their journey. In this way, a dichotomy that is formed between the masculine crusader and the feminine woman reflects the structure of medieval society where one gender definition cannot exist without the other.<sup>50</sup> According to Lambert, one of the most significant examples of this comes from the *Itenerarium Peregrinorum*, a narrative of the Third Crusade. In the story the author describes the use of distaffs, or spindles, used to shame men into joining the crusade army.

A great many men sent each other wool and distaff hinting, that if anyone failed to join this military undertaking, they were fit only for women's work. Brides urged their husbands and mothers incited their sons to go, their only sorrow being that they were not able to set out with them because of the fragility of their sex.<sup>51</sup>

Lambert compares this anecdote to the World War I practice of women handing out white feathers to civilian men in order to imply their cowardice. In both of these instances, women are akin to frailty, but are also at least partially responsible for encouraging strength in men. By using this example in his chronicle, the author is “gendering his story” and establishing the crusades as a masculine activity. In doing so, he consequently establishes the feminine activity as remaining in the West and supporting the effort in other ways.<sup>52</sup>

Pope Urban II's call to arms at the Council of Clermont in 1095 that sparked the First Crusade relied heavily on the comparative symbolism of crusaders as pilgrims and their military campaign as a pilgrimage. Robert the Monk's account of the sermon has Urban saying that

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<sup>50</sup> Lambert. “Crusading and Spinning,” 1-15.

<sup>51</sup> *Itenerarium Peregrinorum*, qtd in Lambert, 3.

<sup>52</sup> Lambert, 4.

Whoever, therefore, shall determine upon this holy pilgrimage and shall make his vow to God to that effect and shall offer himself to Him as a, living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, shall wear the sign of the cross of the Lord on his forehead or on his breast.<sup>53</sup>

When word of this sermon spread, men and women alike rushed to make vows and take the cross to defend the Holy Land. Women had long been included in the practice of pilgrimage, so why should this so-called pilgrimage be any different?<sup>54</sup> Though it is known that many women still took the cross and traveled East, it was almost never officially sanctioned by the church. Pope Urban II and his successors used masculine terminology and messaging in their preaching to ensure that men took the cross and that women would be discouraged from doing so. According to Fulcher of Chartres, Urban II referred to crusaders as *fili Dei* (sons of God) and that crusading as the most manful, or *virilius*, thing to do.<sup>55</sup> But the masculine imagery is not complete without feminine imagery to contrast.

Urban's sermon refers specifically to the violence against women committed by the Turks as a reason for embarking on crusade: "What shall I say of the abominable rape of the women? To speak of it is worse than to be silent."<sup>56</sup> This rhetoric goes hand in hand with the concept of the church as a virtuous woman in need of protection from the ruinous infidels. In Robert the Monk's recounting Urban refers to that traditional imagery by describing the city of Jerusalem as a woman to rescue:

This royal city, therefore, situated at the centre of the world, is now held captive by His enemies, and is in subjection to those who do not know God, to the worship of the

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<sup>53</sup> Robert the Monk trans. by Dana C. Munro, "Urban and the Crusaders", *Translations and Reprints from the Original Sources of European History*, Vol 1:2, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1895), 5-8.

<sup>54</sup> Lambert, 5; Rousseau "Home Front and Battlefield," 32-33.

<sup>55</sup> Rousseau, 33.

<sup>56</sup> Robert the Monk, trans. by Dana C. Munro, 6.

heathens. She seeks therefore and desires to be liberated, and does not cease to implore you to come to her aid. From you especially she asks succor, because, as we have already said, God has conferred upon you above all nations great glory in arms.<sup>57</sup>

Together, these ideas make it evident that thinking of women at home, metaphorical and physical, was necessary as motivation for the crusaders. Additionally, it further proves the claim the women embodied the idea of the home front, especially in a war where the front lines are constantly in flux. At the same time, the act of being conquered was often also described in feminine terms. Accounts of battles often used imagery to feminize the loser and assert the masculinity of the victor. In the rare times that women were reported as fighting in a crusade battle, they were described as “manful,” which in turn feminized the defeated enemy and furthered their shame.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, the crusaders held the belief that capturing the women and children of the enemies represented complete victory.<sup>59</sup> This conceptualization of feminine defeat and masculine conquering meant that at any given moment a woman embodied the idea of both victory and loss. The role of symbolic figure at home was seen as more important for a woman to fulfill than being a crusader.

The opinion of the general public tended to match Urban II’s feeling that active female participation tended to be more harmful than it was helpful and the literature about the crusades reflects that negative view.<sup>60</sup> In his account of the First Crusade, Fulcher of Chartres reports a scene where women were forcibly removed from the crusader camp.

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<sup>57</sup> Robert the Monk, trans. by Dana C. Munro, 7.

<sup>58</sup> Lambert, “Crusading and Spinning,” 6; 9-10.

<sup>59</sup> Fulcher of Chartres, *Gesta Francorum* (1128) qtd. in Lambert, 10.

<sup>60</sup> Rousseau “Home Front and Battlefield,” 34.



...the Franks, having again consulted together, expelled the women from the army, the married as well as the unmarried, lest perhaps defiled by the sordidness of riotous living they should displease the Lord. These women then sought shelter for themselves in neighbouring towns.<sup>61</sup>

This example shows how even though many women were allowed on the First Crusade, their presence was still often viewed as improper or as in extreme cases like this, insulting to God. Perspectives like Fulcher's in accounts of the First Crusade impacted subsequent crusades and thereafter women were strongly discouraged from participating. Later chroniclers like Giselbert of Mons blamed the failures of crusading efforts on the presence of women. His chronicle of the Second Crusade makes the claim that "because very many had their wives and their company marched women of every condition, marching in rows neither sensible nor lawful, they accomplished nothing..."<sup>62</sup> His conclusion that the women were the reason the crusaders failed to recapture Edessa emphasizes the perceived detrimental effect women have on crusading efforts and in turn prevents future ones from attempting the journey.

### 3.2 Women and the Home Front

Dissuaded from taking the cross, the religious women who remained in the West but felt strongly about the crusades faced a new challenge: how to support a campaign happening a continent away. The most popular avenues were through recruitment and financial support. As has already been covered in this paper, noblewomen were a key part of the familial legacy of crusading and were known to fund crusading expeditions. Aforementioned examples include Alix of Vergy, Eleanor of Aquitaine, and Adela of Blois. Another option for many women was

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<sup>61</sup> Fulcher of Chartres qtd in Conor Kostick. "Women in the First Crusade: Prostitutes or Pilgrims?" In *The Social Structure of the First Crusade* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008) , 271-86, 279.

<sup>62</sup> *Chronicles of Hainaut* qtd. in Conor Kostick. "Eleanor of Aquitaine and the Women of the Second Crusade" in *Medieval Italy, Medieval and Early Modern Women: Essays in Honour of Christine Meek*. Dublin: Four Courts, 2010.

joining the military orders that directly supported efforts in Jerusalem, as will be covered in the following section. Scholar Constance M. Rousseau, in her article “Home Front and Battlefield: The Gendering of Papal Crusading Policy (1095-1221),” outlines the changes over time of the possibilities for women’s participation in the crusading effort at home. Specifically, she focuses on the opportunities that were officially sanctioned by the Pope.

Nearly a century after the Council of Clermont, Pope Gregory VIII made the first call for public religious action to be taken at home to support the defense of the Holy Land. In a writing titled *Audita tremendi* (1187) Gregory asserts that the Saracens can only be defeated if those at home defeat their own sins first:

For this reason, everyone must understand and act accordingly, so that by atoning for our sins, we may be converted to the Lord by penance and works of piety and we may first alter in our lives the evil that we do. Then we can deal with the savagery and malice of our enemies.<sup>63</sup>

The actions he later outlines included fasting at different times of the week, special masses, and prayers for divine aid. Gregory also specifies that he himself and the cardinals would also fast with their families, showing how seriously he took these practices.<sup>64</sup> For the first time since the beginning of the crusades, women had the opportunity to participate in crusading on the home front without fearing societal backlash. These home front directives continued under

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<sup>63</sup> Pope Gregory VIII, *Audita tremendi* trans in *Crusade and Christendom: Annotated Documents in Translation from Innocent III to the Fall of Acre, 1187-1291* eds. Jessalyn Bird Edward Peters, and James M. Powell (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 7.

<sup>64</sup> Fasting directives are outlined in a letter from the pope recorded by Roger of Howden in *Gesta regis Henrici Secundi Benedicti abbatis: The chronicle of the reigns of Henry II and Richard I A.D. 1169-1192; known commonly under the name of Benedict of Peterborough*, ed. W. Stubbs (1867), vol. ii, 18-21. The pope died shortly after. For more on the relationship between medieval women and fasting see Carolyn Walker Bynum’s *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* .where she discusses a connection between how women expressed their religious devotion and the elements of life that were within their autonomy, such as food.

Pope Clement III and became part of the crusading tradition.<sup>65</sup> Later, Pope Innocent III expanded and codified religious activities where the home front could support the crusades. In his letter titled *Post miserabile* (1198), Innocent III presented new options for the giving of indulgences:

We also state that all persons who shall give suitable aid to the Holy Land at their own cost, according to the amount of aid they give, and especially in proportion to the feelings of devotion they shall manifest, shall be partakers in this remission.<sup>66</sup>

Previously, in order to receive the same indulgence as a crusader one had to send men at their own expense. However this expansion allows any type of contribution of aid to qualify, dependent on the donor's level of devotion (and depth of pocket). Innocent reiterated this policy in his 1213 proclamation, *Quia Maior*, declaring that women as well could receive the same indulgence as a crusader if they financed the journey of others or if they donated a substantial amount.<sup>67</sup>

In that same proclamation, Innocent specifically addressed the roles that women should play in supporting the crusades at home. His first order involved special prayerful processions of segregated groups of men and women:

And so we decree and order that every month there should be a separate general procession of men, and, where possible, separate for women, in humility of mind and body, where word of the salvation- bringing cross is proposed with diligent exhortation to the people, with devout insistence of prayers asking that the merciful God should take away the opprobrium of this confusion, freeing from the hands of the pagans that land in which he established all

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<sup>65</sup> Rousseau "Home Front and Battlefield," 34; Christoph Maier. "Mass, the Eucharist and the Cross: Innocent III and the Relocation of the Crusade" in *Pope Innocent III and His World* ed. by John Moore (Routledge, 1999) 352; 632.

<sup>66</sup> Innocent III, *Post miserabile 1198*, trans in. *Crusade and Christendom* eds. Bird, Peters, and Powel, 36.

<sup>67</sup> Innocent III, *Quia maior 1213*, trans in. *Crusade and Christendom* eds. Bird, Peters, and Powel, 109; Rousseau "Home Front and Battlefield," 38.

the sacraments of our redemption, restoring it to the Christian people to the praise and glory of his holy name.<sup>68</sup>

One such procession occurred at his direction just a year prior in support of King Alfonso VIII of Castile's crusade in Iberia. The event had very rigorous rules for order of procession, dress code, and schedule. Innocent took great care in outlining the differing expectations between men's and women's roles. The processional was considered a great success and there is evidence that Honorius III and Gregory IX held similar events supporting crusade efforts in 1217 and 1240 respectively. In addition to processions, he instructs that the Catholic people "should prostrate themselves on the ground" for a portion of the mass dedicated to crusaders as well as continue the suggested fasting and financial donations.<sup>69</sup>

Aside from the expanded home front participation and indulgence policy, Innocent's proclamation is significant because he was the first pope to specifically say *virii et mulieres*, men and women, when outlining the opportunities and expected activities.<sup>70</sup> He was also the first to acknowledge the importance of women's home front activities and the first to publicly recognize that their influence could help further ecclesiastical goals rather than harm them. Innocent III believed that a crusade could only be victorious if the entire society was behind it. It is likely that the loss of Jerusalem to Saladin in 1187 influenced this perspective.<sup>71</sup> Christoph T. Maier argues that Innocent III is responsible for "relocating the crusade" both in terms of location and spirituality. He argues that more people than ever who could not take the cross, women

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<sup>68</sup> Innocent III, *Quia maior* 1213, 111.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 111.

<sup>70</sup> Rousseau "Home Front and Battlefield," 38.

<sup>71</sup> Rousseau, 31.

especially, could now participate in the crusades on the home front. Therefore, it was not just armies in the East or in Spain bearing the burden of the crusades, it was also those in the west as individuals. Moreover, it was Innocent who firmly established home front efforts as a necessary and required part of crusade campaigns.<sup>72</sup> As Rousseau put it, now “women could provide significant and meaningful assistance by wielding the spiritual and fiscal weapons of holy war, if not weapons on the battlefield.”<sup>73</sup>

### 3.3 Hospitallers

Some women who were not satisfied with the outlined home front activities pursued the option of joining the efforts of the military orders and their corresponding hospitals. The military orders began with the 1118 founding of the Templars who combined warfare and religious devotion, thus creating a new kind of monastic life.<sup>74</sup> Just as in the larger monastic world, the acceptance of women varied from order to order and typically the spectrum mirrored that of their non-militant brethren. The Benedictine orders, like the Templars, were much more resistant to women members whereas Augustinian ones, like the Order of Saint John, also called the Hospitallers, more openly embraced them. For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus on the Hospitallers, who had the largest female membership.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Maier, “Mass, the Eucharist and the Cross,” 358-360.

<sup>73</sup> Rousseau, 38-39.

<sup>74</sup> To go deeper into the history of the military orders of the crusades would be outside the scope of this work. Though other orders are known to have had many female members, the Order of St. John presents the example with the largest number and most available sources. For this reason, I have chosen to focus on the Hospitallers and the opportunities they provided women. For a more in depth look at the military orders see Jonathan Riley-Smith’s *The Crusades: a History* (2014)

<sup>75</sup> Bom, *Women in the Military Orders of the Crusades* 1-3.

The Order of Saint John began as a hospital in Jerusalem that relied on financial supporters in northern Spain, France, and the Levant. Their main goal was charity through care and service, but also occasionally took military action. This larger emphasis on charity over contemplation or military action made it a more suitable community for women. Also, since the admission of women was seen as a service itself, their acceptance qualified as charitable acts for the male leaders. Later, the order expanded, and centers known as commanderies, which sometimes had hospitals, began to pop up in Europe. The Hospitallers attitude towards women differed greatly from the general feeling of military orders. Within the order, women appeared to be less marginalized than in other communities, their opportunities increased after joining, and they were retained and recruited eagerly.<sup>76</sup>

Fully pledged female members, referred to as *sorores*, were relatively rare due to the level of commitment required. The first known *soror* did not come about until 1146 when a woman named Adelis took the veil in front of the Hospitallers of Saint-Gilles and Trinquetaille before leaving for Jerusalem. Vows for membership included chastity, obedience, and poverty, which were often a deterrent, especially to aristocratic women. However, there were more flexible forms of association that were available to all kinds of women. One simple option was the *donat*, a mostly financial commitment. A sort of “buy now, receive later” arrangement, *donati* gave generously to the order in exchange for honors at their burial, spiritual benefits, and the promise to join later in life. They were almost exclusively of noble birth and required approval from the leaders of the order.<sup>77</sup> Though they did not use the term “*donat*,” the majority of Hospitaller associations in southern France were aristocratic financial benefactors. This association type was

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<sup>76</sup> Bom, 51; 62-63; 38-39.

<sup>77</sup> Bom, 39; 65.

popular with widows and single women such as Raiminda of Mornas who solidified her arrangement in 1177 at the women's Hospitaller house in Saint-Gilles. Couples also sometimes chose to make the arrangement together. When one spouse died, whoever survived would pledge full membership so that they would be taken care of. For example, Bernard Saint-Rémy and his wife signed on together in 1187. When Bernard died, the commanderie in Toulouse kept their promise and allowed her full membership.<sup>78</sup>

Between the commitment level of *donats* and *sorors* was the role of *consorores*. These women were not full members but would still receive spiritual benefits and a Hospitaller burial. Unlike *donats* however, there was no assumption or expectation that they take the veil later in life. Instead, they would continue to have a semi-member association with the order. *Consorores* were rare in the West and even rarer in France. One of the earlier examples of Western *consorores* was Beatrix of Roset who made her commitment in Gap, France circa 1121, however most later cases were in Spain, Italy, or Jerusalem.<sup>79</sup> A significant example of a *consoror* is Constance of France, daughter of King Louis VI and sister to Louis VII. After being once widowed and once divorced, Constance relocated to Jerusalem, purchased a village, and dedicated herself to the Hospitallers. In a letter to the public Constance wrote that:

...having seen with my own eyes the innumerable benefits of the holy house of the Hospital at Jerusalem, and the works of mercy which are shown in it by the members of Christ day and night for the service of humanity, with a sense of piety and mercy, I give myself as a fellow sister in the common chapter of said holy house, in the hands of master R[oger] of Les Moulins, to be buried in their cemetery.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Bom, 73-78.

<sup>79</sup> Bom, 39; 65; 74.

<sup>80</sup> A letter from Constance (c. 1178), *Epistolae: Medieval Women's Latin Letters*. Columbia University Libraries, 2014.

Though she moved East before taking the vow, her story is still relevant to this thesis. As countess of Toulouse, Constance likely would have had many interactions with the commanderie there and been witness to their service long before reaching Jerusalem. It is reasonable to assume that this would have influenced her later decision to join, as she would have most likely seen the women that were active there and known it was an option for her. Through their work in the West, women in the military orders such as the Hospitallers provided an example of possibility for other women seeking to devote themselves to the religious cause.

Hospitallers tended to view female membership positively, but they still faced the same quandary as other monastic communities: preserving the purity of their members. An unofficial interpretation of the Hospitaller rule addresses the issue of being around women in the order's mixed-sex houses:

If you happen, unexpectedly  
 To come where women trod,  
 Watch with care your chastity,  
 Which you have by the grace of God.  
 ...  
 Lest Satan leashes your staff immediately;  
 Do not allow a woman near your rod.<sup>81</sup>

Though humorous, the poem shows that they still viewed women as objects of temptation that warranted caution. By the 1180s, the order had embraced some level of segregation between the sexes, although it was never as extreme as other orders. They did begin to create woman only houses, but they never reached the extreme levels of locks and windowless cells that could be

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<sup>81</sup> *The Hospitallers' Riwle (Miracula et regula Hospitalis Sancti Johannis Jerosolimitani)*, ed. Keith V. Sinclair, Anglo-Norman Texts (London, 1984), 28.



found in the Gilbertine and Cistercian orders.<sup>82</sup> The first and largest female Hospitaller house in France began in 1236 as a mixed-sex hospital in Quercy, France that was given to the Hospitallers in 1256 and renamed Beaulieu. By the end of the century, the hospital was under the governance of a prioress and had only female members. Remarkably, the house survived all the way up to the French revolution, though it moved to Toulouse in the 1600s.<sup>83</sup>

As full members, women were appreciated for their contributions to prayers, estate management, and care of the sick and poor. Women had been involved with hospitals and Hospitaller congregations all over Europe since the beginning of the order, but the ability to make the association official increased their participation significantly. Most commanderies in the West did not have hospitals and it was even rarer for women-run houses. Instead, most houses, especially the female only ones, focused on the goal of supporting the crusades through prayer and financial contribution. This meant that membership in the order was an excellent avenue for a religious woman who remained in Europe but wanted to use her voice to support the crusading effort.<sup>84</sup>

Overall, military orders, especially the Order of St. John provided an alternate avenue for religious women to support the crusades. Not only did the Hospitallers allow female membership, they encouraged it and put significant effort into retaining them. They are known to have gone as far as suing women who attempted to leave after taking the veil. Though subject to some restrictions, the women of the order were not subjected to the extreme isolation promoted

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<sup>82</sup> Bom, *Women in the Military Orders of the Crusades* 109; 13; *The Book of St. Gilbert* ed. Raymonde Foreville and trans. Gillian Keir (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

<sup>83</sup> Bom, 97; 100-103.

<sup>84</sup> Bom, 111-112; 131.

for women by other groups like the Cistercians. Interestingly, prioresses of Hospitaller women's houses held much more autonomy than Hospitaller commanders due to their relative seclusion. For the devout women of Europe, the order offered both security and opportunity. Women from all walks of life joined the Hospitaller ranks and held a large variety of posts within the group. Some women, usually the aristocratic ones, became high ranking and influential members, some cared for the sick and the poor, some spent their time praying and singing in choirs, and some devoted their time to the literacy of young girls. Regardless of their occupation within the group, it is clear that membership was a viable and positive option for women seeking new ways to contribute to the crusades. And without the crusades, the opportunity to join this type of group would likely not have arisen.<sup>85</sup>

### 3.4 Conclusions

As has been established, the feminine symbol of women who remained in the West was crucial to the crusading narrative and subsequently to the motivation of crusaders. Women embodied the idea of the home front and the church, the objects that crusaders vow to defend from ruin at the hands of infidels. In some circumstances, the close association of crusading to pilgrimage, a practice open to any gender, meant that many women still took the cross and traveled to the Holy Land.<sup>86</sup> However, a far greater number remained. Just as their image was needed to contrast with the masculine ideal, so too were their aid efforts necessary to complement the active fighting of the men. Whether through processions, prayers, alms, or

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<sup>85</sup> Bom, 119-125; 130.

<sup>86</sup> Rousseau "Home Front and Battlefield," 34.

monastic vows, women discovered new ways of participating in the crusade and in turn found occasions to make use of their passionate voices. Without the crusades these novel windows of opportunity would not have opened and similarly the crusades would not have continued without the support of women on the home front. When analyzing the literature and papal language of the crusading period, it is clear that to the same degree that medieval gender roles informed crusading, so too did crusading pervade the gender expectations of the time.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Lambert, "Crusading or Spinning," 13.

## 4 ROMANCE, FEMININITY, AND THE CRUSADES

Scholars herald Southern France for being the birthplace of courtly love and the romantic lyrics of the troubadours.<sup>88</sup> Less well known but equal in their skill and arising from the same region are the women troubadours, known as the *trobairitz*.<sup>89</sup> These women, often writing anonymously or under pen names, wrote lyrics in similar styles to their male counterparts. However some authors stretched the boundaries of the gender roles of the *fin' amor* (fine or courtly love) system. This chapter examines the rise of the *trobairitz* as well as the specific circumstances that allowed them to come into existence as well as the system of courtly love in which they flourished. Finally, we explore the ways in which women found new opportunities to increase their autonomy through the intersection of medieval romance and the crusades.

### 4.1 History of the Troubadours: A Legacy of Love

In order to understand the social expectations of noblewomen as well as the culture of the *trobairitz*, the *fin' amor* should be put in historical context. The rise of songs and poetry in Western Europe is sometimes associated with the ‘Renaissance of the twelfth century’, immediately following the First Crusade.<sup>90</sup> The earliest known troubadour was Guilhem de Poitou, also known as William IX, duke of Aquitaine (d. 1127) who himself led a failed crusade.

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<sup>88</sup> For more on this claim see: Johan Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages*, 1919 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Meg Bogin. *The Women Troubadours* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1980); Richard, Taruskin . "Music of Feudalism and Fin's Amors." In *Music from the Earliest Notations to the Sixteenth Century*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 106-108; Michael Routledge, "Songs," in *The Oxford History of the Crusades*, ed. Jonathan Riley-Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 90-110.

<sup>89</sup> The term *trobairitz* has a contested etymology and history as covered in Elizabeth W. Poe's "Cantairitz e Trobairitz: A Forgotten Attestation of Old Provençal "Trobairitz""

<sup>90</sup> The concept of a "twelfth century renaissance" originates in Charles Haskins', *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* and is expanded upon in more recent scholarship such as *The Near West* by Allen Fromherz.

The word “troubadour” comes from the Occitan word, *trobador*, meaning “finder of words.” They were concentrated in the area of Occitania or Provençal and their works are written in the Occitan language, *lenga d’òc*. The troubadours of Provençal are known not just as authors of beautiful poetry and song, but also as the creators of the system of courtly love. Though they are credited with bringing the system to Europe, some scholars suggest that they were somewhat inspired by Arab court poetry from Andalusia. Like the troubadours, the songs of Arab poets were often about secret loves.<sup>91</sup> The songs of the troubadours can take many formats including a *chanson* which consists of one narrator, or a *tenson* with two people in dialogue with each other.<sup>92</sup> Their songs typically illustrate the social relations and feudal bonds of the period, placing a high value on honor and virtue.

The bulk of the troubadour legacy exists in the form of the *canso*, the love song. Most commonly, their lyrics centered around the wives and daughters of Occitan lords and featured noblewomen as the objects of affection for lower ranked men. Guilhem de Poitou, the aforementioned ‘first’ troubadour gives us an early example of the traditional *canso*:

Per son joi pot malaus sanar,  
 e per sa ira sas morir,  
 e savis hom enfolezir,  
 e belhs hom sa beutat mudar,  
 e·l plus cortes vilaneiar,  
 e·l totz vilas encortezir.

[For joy of her a sick man can be cured,  
 and from her anger a healthy man can die,  
 and a wise man go mad,  
 and a handsome man lose his good looks,  
 and the most courtly one become a boor,

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<sup>91</sup> Bogin, *The Women Troubadours* 45; Taruskin . "Music of Feudalism and Fin’s Amors." 106-108; Michael Routledge, “Songs,” 105.

<sup>92</sup> Bogin, 14.

and the totally boorish one turn courtly.]<sup>93</sup>

Guilhem's lyrics become the template for his successors who use similar levels of drama and passion to describe their lovers. Additionally, his works plant the seeds that will eventually grow into the system of courtly love. In this system, women are practically worshipped by their admirers and set on an unattainable pedestal. What is important to consider is whether or not this position is one that gives them more power or less. Within this structure, do the noble ladies have more autonomy, or are they simply trapped within the role created for them by the patriarchal system?

Outside of love, there are other types of song that address more political or moral topics, such as the *sirventes*. A famous composer of the *sirventes* was Bertran de Born (d. 1215) who was known for writing about his great love for war. His work 'Be'm platz lo gais temps de Pascor' begins as if it were a traditional springtime *canso* but takes a sharp turn into the promotion of warfare:

e plaz me, qand vei per los pratz  
 tendas e pavaillons fermatz,  
 et ai gran alegratge,  
 qand vei per campaignas rengatz  
 cavalliers e cavals armatz.

[and I like it when I see  
 tents and pavilions pitched across the meadows,  
 and I have great joy when I see armored knights  
 and horses lined up across the countryside]<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Qtd. in Linda Paterson, "Fin' Amor and the Development of the Courtly Canso," in *The Troubadours: An Introduction*, ed. Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 31.

<sup>94</sup> Catherine Léglu, "Moral and Satirical Poetry," in *The Troubadours: An Introduction*, ed. Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), 55-56.

The poem goes on to glorify the violence and given its deceptive opening, seems to be comparing it to the glory of love.<sup>95</sup>

Whether about love, fealty, politics, or morals, the songs of the troubadours were performed in noble courts across Southern France. Many scholars have wondered why the region of Occitania particularly became the birthplace of the troubadours and their songs. Meg Bogin argues that it can be traced back to certain Roman codices and policies of the Visigoths, but it is difficult to prove if they are the sole reason. What was true however, was that the region was well known for being less rigid than their northern counterparts, especially when it came to the social and political standing of women.<sup>96</sup> Additionally, the region was heavily involved in the crusades, as evidenced by how often they are referenced in troubadour poetry. All of these factors combined are likely to have encouraged the genesis of the troubadours, and later the *trobairitz*. Unfortunately, these same elements contribute to the region's suffering during the later Albigensian Crusade.

## 4.2 Connections to the Crusades

Though stories of love trysts in court and tales of violent crusading in the East may seem oppositional, they are intrinsically linked by their history and the values emphasized within them. The romantic lyrics of the troubadours are often intertwined with lyrics that either speak of

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<sup>95</sup> L'églu, 57.

<sup>96</sup> Examples of this phenomenon include Eleanor of Aquitaine, covered previously in this paper, as well as Ermengard of Narbonne. For more on the social and political landscape of women in southern France see Ayaal Herdam and David J Smallwood, "The Queen from the South: Eleanor of Aquitaine as a Political Strategist and Lawmaker," in *Strategic Imaginations: Women and the Gender of Sovereignty in European Culture*, ed. Anke Gilleir and Aude Defurne (Leuven University Press, 2020).

crusaders and the Holy Land directly or use them as literary devices to show a high level of devotion. As mentioned above, the first known troubadour himself was a crusader. Additionally, the crusades would impact the region of southern France in a way that enabled the inception of the trobairitz.

In the article, “Crusader as Lover: Eroticized Poetics of Crusading in Medieval France”, Lisa Perfetti elaborates on the intimate connections between love and crusading within troubadour lyrics. Perfetti explains that in some songs, the love for a woman was used to encourage men to take the cross as a way to earn their lady’s favor.<sup>97</sup> In other pieces, the crusading lover draws parallels between his love and devotion to his lady and his love and devotion to God. It is a common theme amongst troubadour lyrics to compare ladies to the Virgin Mary, so it is not much of a stretch to connect them with God himself. Additionally, the chivalry and virtuousness that are central to the *fin’ amors* are also key to the ideology of crusaders who see themselves as protectors of the church.

Though written by a trouvère, the troubadours of northern France, the poem ‘Aler m’estuet la u je trairai paine’ by Huon d’ Arras perfectly illustrates Perfetti’s analysis. The first three stanzas outline all of the reasons that one should take the cross thus repaying the suffering of Christ. He also quotes his lover as saying that she would grant him her favor were he to return and asks him to “be true like a *fin’ amant*”, drawing a parallel between the virtues of a crusader and those of a lover. Later in the poem, the speaker describes how his love for his lady and her promise of returning his affections will help him become a true crusader:

Dame vaillans, comment vivra cors seus?  
 Se le vostre ai od moi en compaignie,  
 Adès iere plus joians et plus preus:

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<sup>97</sup> Lisa Perfetti. “Crusader as Lover: The Eroticized Poetics of Crusading in Medieval France.” *Speculum* 88, no. 4 (2013): 932–57, 934-935.



Del vostre cuer serai chevalereus.  
 Worthy lady, how will my body live on its own?  
 If I have your heart with me for company,  
 then I will be forevermore joyful and valiant.  
 By means of your heart, I will be knightly.]<sup>98</sup>

Here Huon is explicitly connecting his success as a crusader to the love he has for his lady. In doing so, he is also aligning this love with the love for God he speaks of earlier in the poem which causes him to take the cross.

In other cases the imagery of a crusader or pilgrim is used as a literary device to express a man's devotion to his lover.

Ben tenc lo Seignor per verai  
 per q'ieu veirai l'amor de loing,  
 mas per un ben qe m'en eschai  
 n'ai dos mals, car tant m'es de loing;  
 ai! car me fos lai pelleris,  
 si que mos fustz e mos tapis  
 fos pels sieus bels oills remiratz!

[I consider true the Lord  
 By whom I shall see this distant love;  
 But for one good thing that happens to me  
 I get two misfortunes, for she is so distant;  
 Ah! how I wish I were a pilgrim there,  
 So that my staff and my cloak  
 Might be seen by her beautiful eyes!]<sup>99</sup>

These lyrics by twelfth century troubadour Jaufre Rudel can be interpreted in two ways. Either the man is wishing that he could be a pilgrim to his lady in a show of devotion, or he is a pilgrim in a faraway land wishing that his love could see him and his devotion to God. In both

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<sup>98</sup> Perfetti, 940.

<sup>99</sup> Perfetti, 936.

cases, the poem connects the strong feeling of romantic love with the spiritual love of a pilgrim.<sup>100</sup>

Outside of poetry, the crusades had a significant impact on the southern region of France. Trade and commerce were booming; however, thousands of men were either dead or away from home for lengthy periods of time. This provided more opportunities for women's autonomy throughout the West but was especially pronounced in Occitania where the effects of the crusades compounded with the existing uniqueness of the region. Lastly, because the troubadours themselves had been born out of Occitania, it became the perfect cradle for the birth of the *trobairitz*.<sup>101</sup> Thus, though the *trobairitz* rarely reference the crusades, their existence is directly connected to the act and imagery of crusading.

### 4.3 Gender Analysis

Because the courtly love system found in troubadour songs involved strict gender roles where the man expresses desire, and the woman is the object to be desired, female authors of these lyrics present unique complications.<sup>102</sup> Though it is evident that the work of the *trobairitz* is a significant example of women finding and exercising their voice during the crusades, the missing piece of the puzzle is what their intentions were in doing so. Were the women who wrote these poems acting in defiance of the *fin' amors* system? Were they simply playing with roles

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<sup>100</sup> In the early twelfth century pilgrim was often used interchangeably with crusader, as the crusades were seen as a type of pilgrimage. In the context of Jaufré's poem, the 'pilgrim' is meant to be read as a crusader.

<sup>101</sup> Bogin, *The Women Troubadours*, 14; 22-23; 35.

<sup>102</sup> Simon Gaunt, "The Look of Love: The Gender of the Gaze in Troubadour Lyric" in *Troubled Vision: Gender, Sexuality, and Sight in Medieval Text and Image* edited by Emma Campbell and Robert Mills. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

that exist within the confines of this system? It is impossible to come to any conclusions about the goals of these women from their work alone. Nevertheless the paradoxes presented by their lyrics offer insight into their intentions.

Simon Gaunt, in a study of troubadour lyric with male narrators, explores the gendered nuances of the often mentioned ‘gaze’ of desire. According to Gaunt, in this genre of poetry only a woman can truly be gazed upon, but the man is desperate to also be seen. An example used to illustrate this is found in the lyrics of Arnaut de Marueilh (d. 1200) from the end of the twelfth century:

Domna, Amors m’a dat tant d’ardimen,  
 quar sap qu’ieu fis vos sui e no.m destuelh,  
 qu’el cor m’a fag miralh ab que.us remir.  
 Domna, de Pretz sui en l’aussor capduelh,  
 mas per semblan mon cor no vos aus dir.  
 Domn’, el semblan podetz mon cor chazir.

[Lady, love has made me so bold, since it knows that I am true to you and never waver in this, that it has made a mirror in my heart in which I can gaze upon you.  
 Lady, I am at the highest peak of worth, but I do not dare to reveal my heart to you through my expression.  
 Lady, in my expression you can read my heart.]<sup>103</sup>

In this example, the speaker directly says to his *domna* that he desires to gaze upon her.

However, he also notes that his expression shows the true feelings that he wishes his lady to know, yet he does not dare let her see him. This creates an interesting gender paradox where to be loved is feminine, yet the pursuit of it is masculine.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Qtd. in, “The Look of Love: The Gender of the Gaze in Troubadour Lyric”, by Gaunt, 88-89. in “The Look of Love: The Gender of the Gaze in Troubadour Lyric by Simon Gaunt” in *Troubled Vision: Gender, Sexuality, and Sight in Medieval Text and Image* edited by Emma Campbell and Robert Mills. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, 88-89.

<sup>104</sup> Gaunt, 91.

These gender roles are further complicated when the authors are women. Laurel Amtower, in “Private Desire and Public Identity in Trobairitz Poetry”, argues that another paradox is introduced when women take on the role of troubadour. She explains that in troubadour poetry, “desire defines female agency, agency defines female desire,” so both the femininity and autonomy of the trobairitz is inherently tied to their desire.<sup>105</sup> In some works by the trobairitz, the women switch the traditional roles. An example of this can be found in the work, “*Ia de chanter non degra aver talan*” by Castelloza, an early thirteenth century trobairitz from Auvergne<sup>106</sup>

no.i ant ni seignoratge  
 que pois dompna s’ave  
 d’amar, preiar deu be  
 cavalier, s’en lui ve  
 proeza e vassalatge

[so when it happens that a lady  
 loves, she ought to court  
 the knight if she sees  
 prowess and knightly worth in him.] <sup>107</sup>

In these lyrics, the lady is suggesting that women ought to initiate the courtship of their loves rather than the traditional method of waiting for the attentions of the knight.

On the other hand, many women lyricists maintained the traditional roles wherein the man is expected to make the first advances towards the lady. The following excerpt from an exchange

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<sup>105</sup> Laurel Amtower. “Private Desire and Public Identity in Trobairitz Poetry.” *Dalhousie French Studies* 73 (2005): 3.

<sup>106</sup> Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, Laurie Shepard, and Sarah Melhado White, *Songs of the Women Troubadours* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 17.

<sup>107</sup> Castelloza, “*Ia de chanter non degra aver talan*” in *Songs of the Women Troubadours*, ed. and trans. Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, Laurie Shepard, Sarah White. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 147.

of *coblas*, or stanzas, between Garsenda de Forcalquier (d. 1257), countess of Provence and Gui de Cavaillon (d. 1229) illustrates how some women writers upheld the *fin' amor* structure.<sup>108</sup>

La Contesa de Proensa  
 Vos qe.m semblatz dels corals amadors,  
 ja non volgra qe fossez tan doptanz,  
 e plaz me molt qar vos destreing m'amors,  
 q'autressi sui eu vostre vulpillage  
 qar no.us ausaz de preiar enardir,  
 e faitz a vos ez a mi gran dampagne  
 qe ges dompna non ausa descobrir  
 tot so q'il vol per paor de faillir.

[The Countess of Provence  
 You who seem to me a true-hearted lover,  
 I wish you wouldn't be so hesitant;  
 I'm very pleased that you're beset by love for me,  
 for I am likewise forlorn on your account;  
 and you are hurt by your timidity,  
 for you dare not take the risk of courting;  
 you do yourself and me a great disservice,  
 for a lady simply doesn't dare reveal  
 all she wishes, for fear that she may fail.]<sup>109</sup>

In this *cobla* the countess clearly outlines the expected roles of the system of courtly love. She, the virtuous lady cannot display her affection for her lover. As such, it is his responsibility to court her, though it appears he is too shy.

These expected roles of masculinity and femininity are at the core of the discussion surrounding the “voice” of the *trobairitz*. In troubadour poetry, the *domna* are simultaneously erotic and virtuous whereas the *trobairitz* versions are viewed as a more realistic combination of the two.<sup>110</sup> Multiple scholars have noted that the lyrics of the *trobairitz* are more direct and

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<sup>108</sup> Bruckner et al, 163.

<sup>109</sup> Garsenda de Forcalquier, “Vos qe.m semblatz dels corals amadors” in *Songs of the Women Troubadours*, 55.

<sup>110</sup> Bruckner et al, xxix.

clearer than those of the men and are often more suggestive.<sup>111</sup> “*Estat ai en greu cossirier,*” a twelfth century work written by a woman with the pen name, La Comtessa de Dia, features a lady longing for her absent lover:

Ben volria mon cavalier  
 tener un ser en mos bratz nut,  
 q’el s’en tengra per erebut  
 sol q’a lui fezes cosseillier;

[I’d like to hold my knight  
 in my arms one evening, naked,  
 for he’d be overjoyed  
 were I only serving as his pillow,]<sup>112</sup>

This illustration of the two lovers embracing, naked in bed exhibits the direct eroticism of some *trobairitz* lyrics.<sup>113</sup>

From Bietris de Roman, a woman from the first half of the thirteenth century, comes a rare if not the only example of a woman writing a *canço* addressed to another woman. “Na Maria, pretz e fina valors” appears to feature a woman speaker expressing her intense love and devotion to a virtuous lady.<sup>114</sup>

Per q’ evos prec, si,us platz, qe fin’amors  
 E gausiment et doutz umilitatz  
 Me puosca far ab vos tan de socors,  
 Qe mi donetz, bella dompna, si.us platz,  
 So don plus ai d’aver gioi esperansa,  
 car en vos ai mon talan  
 e per vos ai tut so c’ ai d’alegransa

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<sup>111</sup> Bogin, *The Women Troubadours*, 65-66; Bruckner et al, *Songs of the Women Troubadours*, xii.

<sup>112</sup> La Comtessa de Dia, “*Estat ai en greu cossirier,*” in *Songs of the Women Troubadours*, 11.

<sup>113</sup> Bruckner et al, 142-143.

<sup>114</sup> Bruckner et al, 153.

e per vos vauc mantas ves sospiran.

[For this I beg you, please, to let pure love,  
Delight, and sweet humility  
give me the help I need with you  
so you will grant me lovely lady, please,  
what I most hope to enjoy;  
for in you lie my heart and my desire:  
I have all my happiness because of you,  
I'm sighing many sighs because of you.]<sup>115</sup>

Because of its unusual authorship, this *canso* has gained notoriety amongst historians of Occitan lyricists. At first glance, one might be inclined to interpret these lyrics as religious devotion to the Virgin Mary, since the addressed lady is referred to as Lady Maria. However, the poem does not contain any religious symbolism or spiritual references that would validate this claim.<sup>116</sup>

Some scholars such as Meg Bogin and John Boswell have declared this to be an important and iconic example of lesbian poetry, while others argue that the poem could not have been written by a woman as homosexuality was unlikely at the time.<sup>117</sup> Alison Ganze offers a different perspective. She asserts that scholars have overlooked the fact that the poem may not be romantic or erotic at all. Rather, it matches the tone and language often used between men displaying fealty or attachment to one another. Thus, she argues, it is reasonable to conclude that courtly women would also communicate in that manner. Though it is impossible to prove

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<sup>115</sup> Bietris de Roman, “Na Maria, pretz e fina valors”, in *Songs of the Women Troubadours*, 33.

<sup>116</sup> Alison Ganze, “‘Na Maria, Pretz e Fina Valors’: A New Argument for Female Authorship,” *Romance Notes* 49, no. 1 (2009), 23.

<sup>117</sup> Bogin, *The Women Troubadours*, 176; John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 265; Ganze, “A New Argument for Female Authorship”, 24-25.

whether or not the author was a lesbian, there is no valid argument to discredit the fact that she was a woman.<sup>118</sup>

Another area where many researchers differ is in how lyrics of the *trobairitz* should be interpreted from a historical perspective. Meg Bogin asserts that the women wrote as themselves rather than as a fictionalized character (contrasting with the glorified knight in male troubadour poetry), therefore the poems can be read as insights to the actual feelings of historical women.<sup>119</sup> In direct opposition to Bogin, Matilda Bruckner argues that just because the words are more direct, does not mean they are literal. In her article, “Fictions of the Female Voice: The Women Troubadours”, Bruckner asserts that it is foolish to conclude that the women did not exaggerate or elaborate their feelings for the purpose of songwriting, just as the men were known to do.<sup>120</sup>

In a literary analysis of *trobairitz* poetry, Claudia Keenan agrees with Bruckner that it is more likely that the women engaged with the fictionality of the poetry just as their male counterparts did. As such, these works should be viewed as fiction written by women rather than as poetic diaries.<sup>121</sup> Laurel Amtower further contradicts Bogin’s thoughts on how to interpret the “voice” of the *trobairitz* by arguing that whether realistic or fantastical, the *trobairitz* voice exists within the constraints of the social structure of *fin’ amor* and the “feminine identity” contained in the poems does not stray past that. Rather than the authentic voice of women, the poetry should be viewed as a “socio-cultural projection of a feminine voice that recognizes both the limitations

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<sup>118</sup> Ganze, 32.

<sup>119</sup> Bogin, *The Women Troubadours*, 65.

<sup>120</sup> Bruckner, *Songs of the Women Troubadours*, 1; Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner. “Fictions of the Female Voice: The Women Troubadours.” *Speculum* 67, no.4 (1992): 865-891.

<sup>121</sup> Claudia Keelan. “Do You or Don't You Love Me, Baby? Finding the Trobairitz: An Essay and Translations.” *The American Poetry Review* 42, no. 3 (2013): 24.



of being an idealized love object and the potential for assuming instead the active, desiring voice of the lover.”<sup>122</sup> Regardless of whether or not the lyrics of the *trobairitz* are interpreted as exaggerated fantasies or realistic expressions, they provide insight into how women viewed the system they existed within. Bogin’s argument that the lyrics are more direct does show that these women stretched the boundaries of their role; however, Amtower is correct in her assessment that the fundamental system at the heart of the poetry is not altered much by the female authors. This either suggests that the women were somewhat satisfied with their position in the system, or that they recognized their work would achieve more popularity if they did not stray too far from the boundaries.

Outside of the fin’ amor, some women also entered the world of politics and religion through their *sirventes*. One of the rare examples of this is “Greu m’ es a durar,” written by Gormonda de Monpeslier in the early thirteenth century. Gormonda’s *sirventes* is notable not only because a woman wrote about politics, but it was also a direct response and contradiction to “D’un sirventes far” by Guilhem de Figueira (d. 1250). Guilhem’s famous *sirventes* heavily criticizes the actions of Rome regarding the crusades and general immorality. Gormonda’s response is a fierce defense of the Roman church, especially regarding the Albigensian Crusade.<sup>123</sup>

Rome lo reys grans  
 qu’ es senhers de dreitura  
 als falses Tolzans  
 don gran malaventura  
 quar tot a sos mans  
 fan tan gran desmezura  
 q’ usquecx lo rescon

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<sup>122</sup> Amtower, “Private Desire and Public Identity in Trobairitz Poetry”, 4-6.

<sup>123</sup> Bruckner, et al, *Songs of the Women Troubadours*, 182-185.

e torbon est mon

[Rome, may the high King  
lord of righteousness,  
bring fire misfortune  
on the false Toulousans  
who against His laws  
commit such outrage,  
for everyone hides it  
and the world is confused;]<sup>124</sup>

The above stanza references the people of Toulouse, a main target of the Albigensian Crusade due to their heretical belief in Catharism.<sup>125</sup> Here, Gormonda expounds upon the evils of the Toulousans and calls for God and Rome to attack them, contradicting Guilhem's assertion that the crusade was unjustified.

Qui vol esser sals,  
ades deu la crotz penre,  
per ereties fals  
dechazer e mespenre

[One who wishes to be saved  
should now take up the cross  
in order to defeat and punish  
the false heresy;]<sup>126</sup>

In this stanza, Gormonda is directly calling to the men of France, claiming that if they join the crusade against the people of Languedoc they shall be saved by God. Gormonda's powerful *sirventes* is significant because it is a rare example of a medieval woman publicly contradicting

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<sup>124</sup> Gormonda de Monpeslier, "Greu m'es a durar," in *Songs of the Women Troubadours*, 113.

<sup>125</sup> Jonathan Riley-Smith. *The Crusades: a History*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 284.

<sup>126</sup> Gormonda de Monpeslier, "Greu m'es a durar," 117.

the politics of a man in lyric form. Additionally it is one of the few examples of a *trobairitz* referencing the crusades and using their lyrics to encourage others to take up the cross.

Another *sirventes* written by an anonymous woman addresses the moral failings of the original troubadours including misogyny and deceitfulness.<sup>127</sup>

que.n son passat, dic que son fort peccaire,  
 qu'ilh an mes lo segl'en error  
 que an dig mal de domnas a prezen  
 e traustug silh q'o auzon crezo.ls en  
 et aissi an mes lo segl'en erransa.

for I say those old-time troubadours,  
 who are dead now, gravely sinned,  
 putting the world in confusion,  
 when they openly spoke ill of women;  
 and all who hear their speech believe them  
 and grant that such things seem true;  
 thus they have plunged the world in error.<sup>128</sup>

Though anonymously written, this *sirventes* is an excellent example of a woman using the art of lyrical writing to publicly share a strong opinion that may have been rejected or ignored in other circumstances. Whether writing about love or politics, it is evident that the *trobairitz* used the format of troubadour poetry to express their unique voices and exercise their autonomy.

#### 4.4 Conclusions

In sum, not only were the crusades pivotal in influencing the beginning of the troubadours, but also became the backdrop for the development of the system of courtly love and for the birth of the *trobairitz*. The interpersonal structures codified within their poetry cannot be divorced

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<sup>127</sup> Bruckner et al, 180.

<sup>128</sup> Bruckner et al, 99.

from the societal impacts of the crusades. Crusader stories and imagery were integral to the works of the troubadours, with devotion to God and devotion to one's lover becoming intertwined. Therefore, even though the female troubadours scarcely mention the crusades directly, it is perceptible that their works were still influenced by them.

By writing and performing songs, the troubadours were able to publicly share their social or political opinions, their romantic fantasies, and could potentially influence their audience. This was also true for the women who followed in their footsteps. The *trobairitz* are a key example of women in Western Europe finding new ways during the crusades to exercise their autonomy and use their voices. Unique attitudes towards women in the south of France along with a widespread absence of men contributed to the opportunity for the *trobairitz* to express themselves in the ways of their male predecessors. Their feminine voice as authors presents interesting paradoxes in regard to the traditional romantic systems found in court poetry, and they often pushed up against the roles that had previously been set for them as ladies of the court. However, with the exception of some notable examples, the majority composed lyrics that fit well within the confines of the *fin' amor*. Nevertheless, writing and publishing at all was bold for these noblewomen and their works are invaluable to understanding the social, political, and romantic attitudes of women in Europe during the crusades.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

Lora Walsh argues that a modern, feminist approach to the figure of Ecclesia, the feminine church, should label her not just as a tool of the medieval patriarchy used to further their idea of the church, but also as a direct challenge to masculine oriented theology.<sup>129</sup> Sometimes, she was described as being victim to male violence, especially in times of war. However, in other scenes she is depicted as the church victorious wearing a crown and clothed in finery with enemies beneath her.<sup>130</sup> In this same way, the women who remained in the West during the crusades embodied both an object to protect and a source of support. Both the allegorical and corporeal women represented the complexity of medieval femininity. Whether writing chansons, serving in military orders, or running large estates, the women on the home front of the crusades significantly impacted the culture and the politics of the time. Some put great amounts of effort into supporting the crusading effort from home while others simply found new ways of expressing themselves within the strict constructs of medieval gender. Both groups found and utilized their voices in a period where a woman's voice was rarely listened to or respected.

This work has only grazed the tip of the iceberg of stories waiting to be told about women in the West during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in relation to the crusades. There are thousands of crusade charters containing details about men who took the cross as well as the women and property they left behind. These charters could potentially lead to a more in-depth survey of women whose husbands, sons, or fathers went on crusade, leaving them to manage their affairs. Additional research into these underexplored narratives would provide new

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<sup>129</sup> Walsh, "Ecclesia Reconsidered: Two Premodern Encounters with the Feminine Church," pp. 73-91.

<sup>130</sup> Delogu, "Allegory is a Woman" 19-44.

perspectives to the centuries old historiography of the crusades. Furthermore, the field of medieval gender history would greatly benefit from further study of these women, for if women's history is limited only to studying those who are seen through a modern lens as breaking boundaries, then many rich stories will be lost.

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