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LORDSHIP AND GOVERNANCE BY THE INHERITING COUNTESSES OF BOULOGNE, 1160–1260

by
HEATHER J. TANNER

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ABBREVIATIONS

Alberic	Alberic of Trois-Fontaines. *Chronicon*. In *Recueil des Historiens des Gaules et de La France,* edited by M. Bouquet, 11: 349–63. Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1738–1876.
BM	Bibliothèque municipale
BNF	Bibliothèque nationale de France
Deslisle, Dam	Delisle, Léopold. "Recherches sur les comtes de Dammartin." *Mémoires de la Société des Antiquaires de France* 31 (1869): 1–80.
Gilbert	Gilbert of Mons. *Chronicle of Hainaut*. Translated by Laura Napran. Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005.
Gislebert	Gislebert of Mons. *Chronique de Hainaut rédigéd par Gilbert chancelier du comte de Hainaut Bauduin V (1040–1195).* Edited by Marquis de Godefroy Ménilglaise. Tournai: Malo et Levasseur, 1874.
Huillard-Bréholles	Huillard-Bréholles, Jean Louis Alphonse. *Titres de la maison ducale de Bourbon*. 2 vols. Paris: Plon, 1867–1874.
JH	*Continuatio Historia regum de Symeonis*. Edited by Thomas Arnold. 2 vols. London: Longman, 1885.
Lambert	Lambert d'Ardres. *Historia Comitum Ghisenensium.* In *MGH SS,* edited by J. Heller, 24:550–642. Hanover: Hahn, 1876.
	Lambert d'Ardres. *The History of the Count of Guines and the Lords of Ardres*. Edited and translated by Leah Shopkow. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001.
Lépinais	Lépinais, Eugene de. *Recherches historiques et critiques sur l'ancien comté et les comtes de Clermont en Beauvaisis du XIe au XIIIe Siècle*. Beauvais: Père, 1877.
Malo	Malo, Henri. *Un Grand Feudataire Renaud de Dammartin et la Coalition de Bouvines.* Paris: Champion, 1898.
Malo, cat.	Catalogue of Acts.
Malo p.j.	Pièces justificatives.
MP	Matthew of Paris. *Chronica majora.* Edited by Henry Luard. 7 vols. Roll Series. London, 1872–1883.

Nangis	*Chronique latine de Guillaume de Nangis*. Edited by Hercules Géraud. 2 vols. Paris, 1843.
MGH	*Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores*
MSAB	*Mémoires de la Société académique de Boulogne*
Plessis	du Plessis, Toussaints. *Histoire de l'église de Meaux*. 2 vols. Paris, 1731.
RHC OC	*Recueil des Historiens des Croissades Occidentaux*. Edited by D. Bongar. 5 vols. Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1866.
RHGF	Bouquet, M., ed. *Recueil des Historiens des Gaules et de La France.* Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1738–1976.
RRAN	*Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum, 1135–1154*. Edited by H. A. Cronne and R. H. C. Davis. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968.
RT	Robert of Torigni, "Chronicle." In *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I*, edited by Richard Howlett, 4:3–316. 4 vols. London: Roll Series, 1890.
Teulet	Teulet, Alexandre. *Layettes du Trésor des Chartes*. 5 vols. Paris: Plon, 1866.

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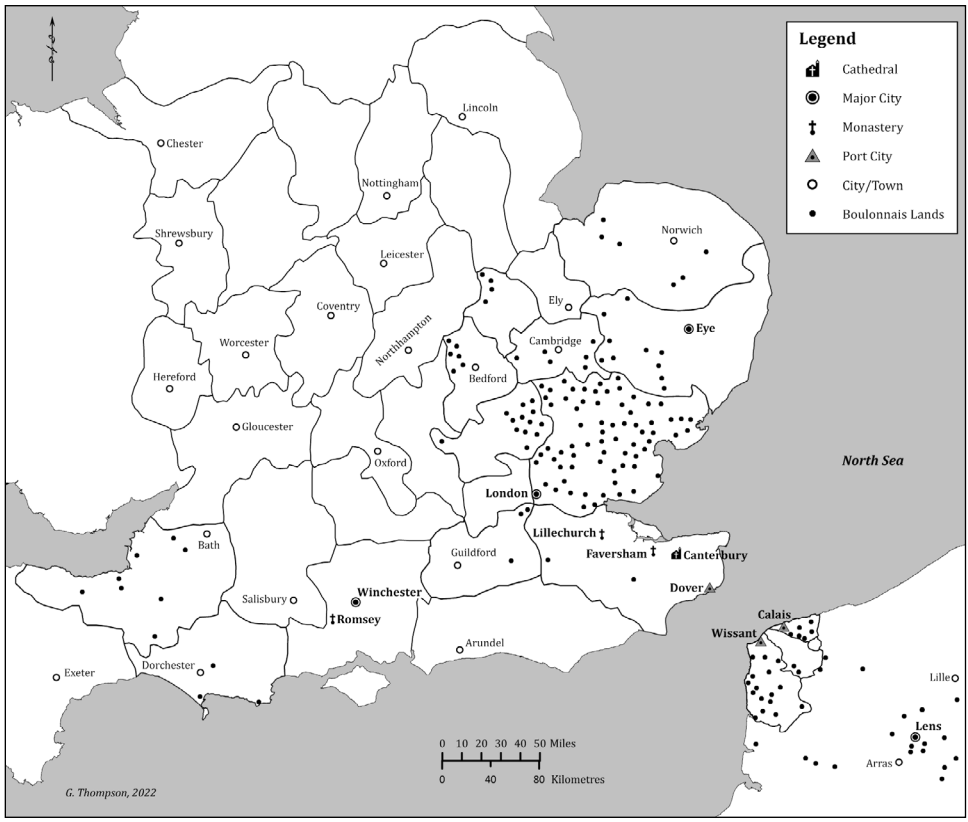
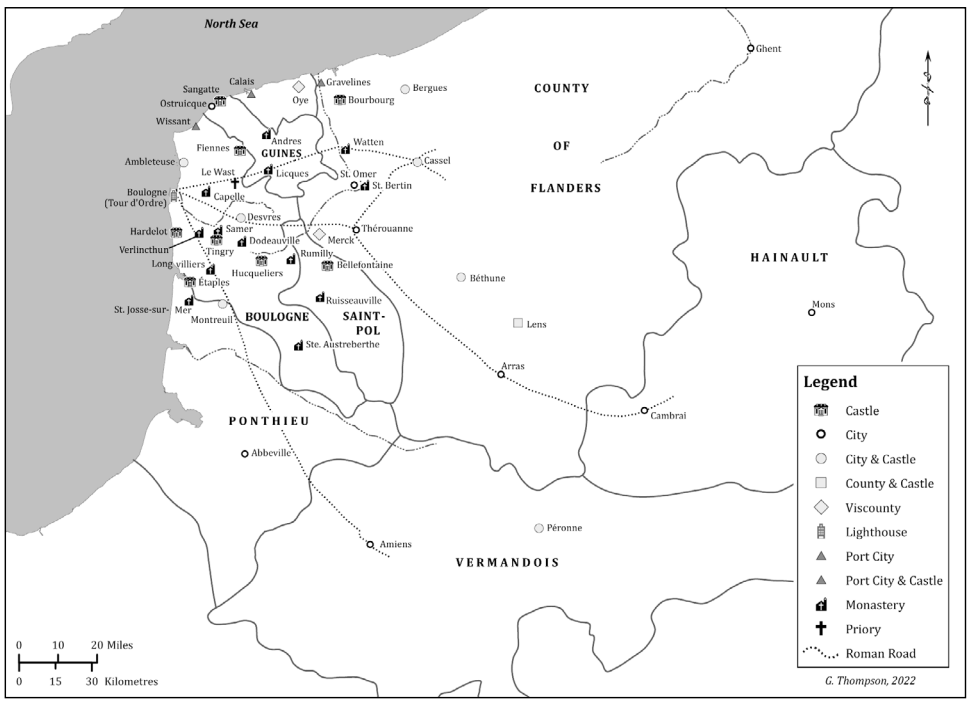


Map 1: Boulonnais Comital Lands (1154–1160). Map by Gordon Thompson, 2022.



Map 2: Boulogne and Flanders (1160–1260). Map by Gordon Thompson, 2022.

Map 3: Northern France (ca. 1160–1260). Map by Gordon Thompson, 2022.

INTRODUCTION

THE GENESIS OF this project dates back to a multi-disciplinary conference on the *Roman de Silence* organized by Regina Psaki at the University of Oregon. I was intrigued not only by the plot, but also that it was written in the Picard dialect, as Picardy and its northern neighbours had a series of women who inherited counties and other lordships. The thirteenth-century Arthurian verse romance by Heldris de Cornüalle, with its unique gender-bending plot and its theme of just governance and lordship, juxtaposed the literary and lived reality of gender and power. As a political historian, I was struck by the author's use of gender imagery in exploring the nature of lordship. Through the use of ambiguity and the manipulation of gender stereotypes, Heldris offers a model of political and personal lordship which is founded upon consultation, consent, and self-restraint. While the poet's portrayal of the characteristics of good lordship is in many senses conventional, his hero(ine) and the parallels drawn between lordship and marriage affirm an unorthodox notion that women should play an active role in both governance and marriage.

The poet's unapologetic presentation of his hero(ine) as the best knight and *jongleur* in England and France proffers a critique of social norms by illustrating the performative nature of gender, and an indirect affirmation of the successful rule of the region's inheriting countesses. As such, the romance also implicitly defends the established Aristotelian gender continuum against the new gender model which posited men and women as binary complements.[1] For Heldris, women who were on the "masculine" end of the spectrum could wield power wisely and well. Although the *Roman de Silence* is unique in style and plot, the poet's contemporaries also present competent and powerful women in medieval fabliaux which routinely mock societal hierarchies and conventions.[2] These fictional presentations of capable and commanding women accord well with the evidence of elite women's behaviour of the eleventh and early twelfth centuries. Lordly women were not unfeminine nor unfamiliar to society.[3] Heldris's plot of a king who forbade female inheritance (and by extension lordship), as Sharon Kinoshita has argued, was a critique of Philip II of France's interference in inheritance practices and aristocratic power.[4] It also highlights the issue of women's access to the land and the associated powers of lordship that came with it.[5] Historians have established that primogeniture and patrilineage, while increasingly important in the central medieval period, were not pursued to the

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1 McNamara, "The Herrenfrage," 3–29.

2 Muñoz, *Disabusing Women*, 36. Chretién de Troyes' *Erec et Enide* shares one plot element with the *Roman de Silence*: Erec orders Enide to remain silent throughout their quest to regain his honour. This silencing is shown to be foolish and displays a later twelfth-century understanding of the importance of good women's counsel.

3 LoPrete, "The Domain," 13–35, and Livingstone, "Recalculating the Equation," 17–29.

4 Kinoshita, "Heldris de Cornuälle's," 397–409.

5 Tanner, "Lords, Wives, and Vassals," 138–59.

exclusion of younger sons and daughters. Therefore, women acquired property (land and moveable wealth) through dowry, inheritance, and gifts throughout the medieval period.[6] As heiresses and wives, elite women obtained land and thereby lordship. But to what extent were they able to wield their power in the later twelfth through mid-thirteenth centuries? To assess this, one needs to examine the impact of an array of factors: the extension of royal power, the growth of bureaucracy, the establishment of formal feudal practices, the institution of written law, and the new model of gender complementarity.

Why this approach? The intertwined elements of land, lordship, and gender have been central in the analysis of medieval women's access to power since the publication of Jo Ann McNamara and Suzanne Fonay Wemple's seminal article, "The Power of Women through the Family" in 1973.[7] They argued that early medieval women's power was rooted in family and inheritance practices. Elite women's access to power declined ca. 1100 with the revival of more centralized government, Church- enforced monogamy, and the development of patrilineage and primogeniture. Between 1973 and the 1990s, scholars examined inheritance practices, conceptions of family, and systemic misogyny. These studies broadened the definition of power from strictly officeholding, law, and force, and expanded it to explore indirect forms of power and authority. Also key was the analysis of the public-private dichtomy central to modern understanding of power.[8] The result was a focus on women's intercessory power, widowhood as a period of greatest power and legal agency, and the centrality of the household in governance and work.[9] Scholarship since the 1990s—such as the work of Amy Livingstone, Kimberly LoPrete, Lois Huneycutt, and Frederic Cheyette—have shown that elite women of the later eleventh and early twelfth centuries routinely acted as lords.[10] Scholarship on thirteenth-century countesses has been more focused on patronage, with recent work exploring the role of women's social networks.[11] The scholarly consensus is that thirteenth-century noblewomen exercised more indirect power, especially when married. For example, Erin Jordan in her study of Jeanne and Marguerite, countesses of Flanders and Hainaut, has argued that these countesses exercised authority, "defined as the legitimate right to act," while power, "defined as the ability to impose one's will on others," was the

6 See chap. 2, n12.

7 McNamara and Wemple, "The Power of Women," 126–41.

8 For a summary of the trends see Owens, "Noblewomen and Political Activity," 209–20.

9 Carpenter and MacLean, *The Powers of the Weak*; Fradenburg, *Women and Sovereignty;* Parsons, "The Queen's Intercession," 147–77; Collette, *Performing Polity;* Wilkinson, "Women in English Local," 212–16.

10 Cheyette, *Ermengard of Narbonne*; Livingstone "Extradordinairement ordinaire," 7–21; Bouchard, "Three Counties, One Lineage, and Eight Heiresses," 25–46.

11 For example, see Jasperse, *Medieval Women, Material Culture, and Power*; Sigurdsson and Smaberg, *Friendship and Social Networks*; Schoolman, "Local Networks and Witness," 21–41.

preserve of men.[12] Studies of thirteenth-century widows reveal that they wielded significant power.[13]

The presumption that elite women were effectively silenced and effaced from governance by institutional and legal changes during the thirteenth century is coming under increasing challenge. Francesca Sautman, Kathy Krause, and Katrin Sjursen have recently argued that female lordship was effective in the thirteenth century.[14] Their arguments are built upon new interpretations of family structures and gender that refute the pervasiveness of primogeniture and patrilineage posited by the Duby-Schmid model.[15] Jo Ann McNamara's analysis of the spread of a new gender model and "the substitution of gender for class as the basic organizing principle in the new society"[16] is gradually working its way into the analysis of lordship and monarchy, as well as women's exercise of power in the central and late medieval periods. For example, scholars are examining how conceptions of masculinity and femininity influenced governance and law.[17] In the new legal history, scholars recognize law as an integral part of social relations, not just external mechanisms of social control (laws, personnel, and enforcement).[18] As such, there is more examination of the law as experienced and factoring in the multidimensional nature of medieval law, which had co-existing and competing legal systems (feudal, customary, royal statutes, and canon law).[19] The public-private dichotomy as an analytical framework has been further problematized as scholars utilize the lens of the household as the primary organizational unit of medieval society in order to understand governance and work. Thus, studying kingship misses the centrality of the extended royal family in the governance of the realm.[20] Lordship and monarchy are studied not as a collection of public power and duties, but

12 Jordan, "The 'Abduction' of Ida of Boulogne," 5. See also DeAragon, "Dowager Countesses, 1069–1230," 87–100 and Nicholas, "Countesses as Rulers of Flanders," 111–37.

13 For example, Wilkinson, *Eleanor de Montfort*; Mitchell, *Joan de Valance*; and Forrest, "Women Manorial Officers," 47–67.

14 See Krause, "The Charters of the Inheriting," 223–24; Sautman, "Constructing Political Rule," 49–66; Sjursen, "Weathering Thirteenth-Century Warfare," 205–22; Evergates, *Marie of France* and Tanner, "Elisabeth and Eleanor," 85–117.

15 Duby, *Hommes et structures*; Schmid, "Zur Problematick." For a clear and useful summary of the critiques of this model, see Crouch, *The Birth of the Nobility*, chap. 4. For a summary of the current understanding see Livingstone, *Out of Love,* 18–25.

16 McNamara, "The Herrenfrage," 23.

17 Stevens, "London's Married Women," 115–32; Cullum and Lewis, *Religious Men*; and Bromhall, *Authority, Gender and Emotions.*

18 Beattie and Frank, "Introduction: Uncovering Medieval Women," 5–8.

19 Musson, *Medieval Law in Context*, 3; Sugarman, "Writing 'Law and Society," 292–308, esp. 298–99.

20 See Woodacre, *Queens and Queenship*; Earenfight, "Without the Persona," 1–21; Jordan, "Corporate Monarchy," 1–15; Shadis, "Family and Friends," 193–223; Ormrod, "Monarchy, Martyrdom," 174–91; and Benz St. John, "In the Best Interest of the Queen," 21–41.

rather as mixtures of indirect and direct powers implemented through formal offices and informal networks of family and friends.[21]

In this study, I draw upon these new trends in gender, inheritance, and legal history in order to assess the effect of the expansion of centralized bureaucracy, royal power, and formal feudal practices on elite women's power in the later twelfth and thirteenth centuries in northern France. I have focused on the inheriting countesses of Boulogne—Marie II (r. 1160–1170), Ida II (r. 1180–1212), and Matilda III (r. 1223–1260)—with comparisons to neighbouring countesses (those who inherited their lands and those who married counts). There has been very little study of the Boulonnais countesses, and typically the focus has been on Marie's and Ida's marriages.[22] The choice of inheriting countesses allows me to analyze the significance of ownership of land via inheritance and marriage. Do we see these women exercising power and authority in this later period? If so, was the source of their power gained through marriage or from their natal families? Were there differences in the countesses' power and authority in their inherited lands as compared to their husbands' lands? Was their exercise of power limited by lordly control of marriage? Were they subsumed under their husbands' authority during marriage and effectively effaced from direct governance with the spread of the new gender model and its influence on law and institutions?

My working definition of authority is "the legitimate right to act" and of power as the "ability to exercise mastery over people, to organize people to cooperate, and to persuade people to act."[23] As such, power comes from a variety of sources—family, office, patronage, intercession, social networks—and fluctuates over time. Following Theresa Earenfight's model, my analysis of countesses' power will focus on "the sources of power and what people were actually doing."[24] One primary source of authority and power, throughout the Middle Ages, was land, which had rights of law, governance, and revenue collection associated with it. The medieval preference for direct heirs rather than more distant relatives meant that women inherited lands routinely.[25] In addition to the succession of female heirs in Boulogne, Flanders and Hainaut were inherited by women in 1191, 1206, and 1244; Vermandois by two sisters in 1164 and 1182; Ponthieu by three successive female heirs between 1221 and

21 See, for example, Rollason, "Forests, Parks, Palaces," 428–29; Hoofnagle, *The Continuity of the Conquest;* Weiler, "Knighting, Homage, " 275–99.

22 Jordan, "The 'Abduction'," see 1–20; McDougall, "The Making of Marriage," 1–19; Brown, "Inaudito exemplo," 21–34 and "*Eligit domum sibi placabilem*," 123–31; and Napran, "Marriage and Excommunication," 69–80; Tervooren,"Literaturwege: Ida von Boulogne," 113–20.

23 Jordan, "The 'Abduction,'" 5, and Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 1:94.

24 Earenfight, "A Lifetime of Power," 275.

25 Gilissen, "Le privilege de masculinite," 201–16; Godding, "Le droit au service," 15–35; Yver, "Les deux groupes, partie I," 197–220 and "Les deux groupes, partie II," 5–36; Milsom, "Inheritance by Women"; Holt, "Feudal Society and the Family," 1–28.

1277, and one female heir in St. Pol (1205).[26] An analysis of the surviving acta of these countesses and their husbands demonstrates these women's ability to exercise lordship within their inherited lands. As lords, they confirmed grants, presided over law courts, swore homage, provided military service, collected taxes and tolls, and oversaw municipalities. The countesses' exercise of power was predicated upon their age, marital status, and to some extent their gender. Like most medieval children, male and female, the inheriting countesses of Boulogne's marriages were arranged by family members, and, by the later twelfth century, lordly influence over these marriages was growing. This influence did not circumscribe their power within their counties, but did curtail these women and their husbands' ability to create alliances that counterbalanced growing royal power. Once married and in their early twenties, these women exercised their inherited authority and power alone and in conjunction with their husbands within their territories.

I agree with McNamara that the conjugal unit was the framework for women's exercise of power, and that lordly control over marriage was increasing; however, I differ over the source of these women's power and authority, which I see as stemming from their position as heir (or from their natal families), not as wife. Inheritance (or a legal grant) was the source of the legitimate exercise of power; therefore, who inherited was vital. In northern France and Belgium, movables and property acquired during marriage were the communal property of the married couple; the property each spouse brought to the marriage (*iretage/propres*) was treated separately for testamentary and inheritance purposes.[27] Scribal use of title, therefore, was not pro forma, it signified legal right and authority. Gender modified the exercise of lordship to the extent that men shared power in their wives' lands more than their wives did in their husbands' lands during marriage. For both men and women, age, not marital status, was the "trigger" or key factor in the exercise of power; noble men and women rarely exercised power prior to their early twenties. Reproductive responsibilities meant that some young women had a smaller role in governance during their childbearing years, although the influence of this varies. Governance, particularly in lands inherited by women, remained into the mid-thirteenth century the concern of the lordly couple. Moreover, the countess governed with full authority and power within her county as well as in her husband's lands. The exercise of power and diplomacy outside one's territories was primarily the realm of men, but women still intervened upon occasion. The growth of bureaucracy, at least in northern France, had no discernible effect on women's exercise of power. The extension of royal power circumscribed all noble lordship, but not significantly more so for female lords into the mid-thirteenth century. While the legal concept of coverture (or *femme covert*) was known in France and introduced into English Common Law in the late twelfth century, it was not routinely

26 See chap. 2, n12.

27 Vleeschouwers-Van Melkebeek, "Separation and Marital Property," 84. *Iretage* refers to inherited property; *propres* indicates property owned prior to marriage, purchased, granted, or inherited.