

## Recalculating the Equation: Powerful Woman = Extraordinary<sup>1</sup>

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FOR MUCH OF the modern historiography on medieval women, any woman who exercised any sort of power or influence was considered in some way “extraordinary.” The idea that a noble-born woman could be powerful and influential without qualification was simply not something that most scholars working before 1990 could digest or, in some cases, even recognize. Hence caveats were applied to account for a woman’s power: she was an heiress; she was from a powerful family; she had an “unusual” relationship with her husband or son; she was a powerful personality; she had influential friends. The operating assumption was that for a woman to have power either she or her situation had to be remarkable or unusual. That it was common and accepted for aristocratic women to hold courts, resolve disputes, mete out punishments, make proclamations, have clients, be patrons, command men, or hold office was something that had yet to be acknowledged or assimilated.<sup>2</sup>

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1. These comments were originally presented at “Debating Women and Power in the Middle Ages: A Round Table Discussion” in 2014 at the International Medieval Congress at Leeds. The roundtable was organized by myself and Elena Woodacre and sponsored by *Medieval Prosopography* and the Royal Studies Network. Other roundtable participants included Theresa Earenfight (Seattle University), Joanna Huntington (University of Lincoln), Therese Martin (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid), and Penelope Joan Nash (University of Sydney).

2. The impulse to equate women with power as “extraordinary” continues. Although Ralph Turner’s *Eleanor of Aquitaine, Queen of France, Queen of England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009) is well grounded in the sources and offers a solid interpretation of Eleanor, it conforms to the outdated assumption that because she had power, Eleanor was somehow extraordinary. In contrast, the collection of essays, *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Lord and Lady* (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2008) edited by

Thankfully, recent scholarship on aristocratic and royal women has abandoned the equation of “Powerful Woman = Extraordinary” and has proven beyond any reasonable doubt that elite women regularly, mundanely, routinely, exercised power of all sorts.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Constance Berman’s article in this issue provides several case studies that drive home this point. Yet while most recognize that women of the upper classes exercised some sort of power or influence, much remains to be done. In this essay, I would like to make some suggestions as to how to move that conversation forward. My comments will be framed within the context of my own work on the aristocratic families of the lands of the Loire and my new research project, the life of Countess Ermengard of Brittany (ca. 1070-1147), but hopefully they will provide ideas to ponder, adapt, or

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Bonnie Wheeler and John Carmi Parsons moves beyond this simple trope and places Eleanor in context. Georges Duby also included a chapter on Eleanor of Aquitaine in the first volume of his *Women of the Twelfth Century* collection in which he reduces her to an overly sexualized woman who controlled men through her body. Georges Duby, *Women of the Twelfth Century: Eleanor of Aquitaine and Six Others*, trans. Jean Birrell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 5-21.

3. This is a rich and lengthy bibliography. Just to give a few examples: Kimberly A. LoPrete, *Adela of Blois: Countess and Lord (c. 1067-1137)* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2007); Amy Livingstone, *Out of Love for My Kin: Aristocratic Family Life in the Lands of the Loire, 1000-1200* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010); Erin Jordan, *Women, Power and Religious Patronage in the Middle Ages* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Fredric L. Cheyette, *Ermengard of Narbonne and the World of the Troubadours* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001); Theodore Evergates, ed., *Aristocratic Women in Medieval France*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); Shennan Hutton, *Women and Economic Activities in Late Medieval Ghent* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Linda Mitchell, *Joan de Valance: The Life and Influence of a Thirteenth-Century Noblewoman* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Louise Wilkinson, *Eleanor de Montfort: Rebel Countess in Medieval England* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012); Lois L. Huneycutt, *Mathilda of Scotland: A Study in Medieval Queenship* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2003); Miriam Shadis, *Berenguela of Castile (1180-1206) and Political Women in the High Middle Ages* (New York, NY: PalgraveMacmillan, 2009); Janna Bianchini, *The Queen’s Hand: Power and Authority in the reign of Berenguela of Castile* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Theresa Earenfight, *The King’s Other Body: Maria of Castile and the Crown of Aragon* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

adopt, for others working in different times and places. Three topics will be explored: 1. Pushing beyond “look, women had power”; 2. Minding the gap or rather ignoring the gap; and 3. Charting (or, perhaps more accurately, following) new paths to investigate women’s experience and power even more deeply.

### **Look, Women Have Power!**

In the 1980s when I began my dissertation work, women’s history was just becoming accepted as “legitimate” (although I was advised not to label myself a women’s historian as it would damage my credibility and chances of getting a job). A topic that occupied many doing medieval women’s history was investigating if the models of patriarchy and repression that had come to define women’s lives in the Central Middle Ages actually represented noblewomen’s experience. Much of this scholarship was in response to the assertions made by Georges Duby about the “male” Middle Ages and the repressive nature of the aristocratic family. To explore these issues, I selected charters as documents of practice in an attempt to eschew the “misogynistic bias” of medieval prescriptive literature that had informed so much of the scholarship to that point. Initially I had hoped to focus just on Adele of Blois, but at that time it was believed there was not enough information extant to examine an aristocratic woman who was not a queen. As Lois Huneycutt reminds us in her contribution to this discussion, the study of queenship was also just beginning to develop at this time, and there was some skepticism among the Old Guard that even queens merited investigation—let alone a paltry countess. (The scholarship of Kimberly LoPrete, Linda Mitchell, Louise Wilkinson, Fredric Cheyette, and Theodore Evergates has since established both the viability and importance of writing the life of an aristocratic woman.<sup>4</sup>) So instead of a biography, I framed my research as a prosopography of aristocratic families with particular

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4. See preceding note for citations. In recent years, many biographies of queens and countesses have been published. This represents an important shift in the scholarship as it becomes clear there is ample material to write the lives of individual women. Countess Ermengard is a case in point, and I have found my own research shifting toward writing the lives of individual women.

attention to women in those families.<sup>5</sup> Contrary to Duby, who found no women's voices and argued they were marginalized, I discovered lots of women screaming from the charters who were fully fledged, inheriting, and respected members of their family and class.<sup>6</sup>

My work on the women of the Chartrain is representative of what many others were doing for other women at different times and places in the medieval world (including the contributors to this issue of *Medieval Feminist Forum*). This collective scholarship nuanced or outright debunked the powerlessness of what Christine Adams terms the "inherited narrative" that had been crafted by Duby and has established that women did exercise power, formally, informally, over people, places, things, politically, spiritually, artistically, literarily, and so on. No more ink needs to be spilled proving this. Rather it is now time to move on from establishing that women could have power to showing how they actually used it, individually, as part of a ruling couple, as a parent, or collectively. The essays by Tracy Adams and Kathy Krause, however, demonstrate just how entrenched modern scholars' assumptions or misinterpretations of medieval women have become in the secondary sources and how we must work to eradicate them. By demonstrating the inaccuracy of Duby's assertions to literary scholars, Krause's work on merging literature with historical context is particularly critical to moving the conversation forward.

The work of early medievalists might also prove helpful in providing an approach to the question of women and power. These scholars frequently see women ruling alongside of men, yet do not feel the need to prove that a woman exercised power independently.<sup>7</sup> This approach

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5. Influenced by German historiography, *Annales* studies, and social science, prosopography had proven a useful tool in charting lives of medieval aristocrats.

6. Duby famously said "The Middle Ages were resolutely male. All the opinions that reach and inform me were held by men, convinced of the superiority of their sex. I hear only them." Author's Note, *Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages*, trans. Jane Dunnett (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

7. See, for example, Rachel Stone, *Morality and Masculinity in the Carolingian Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Valerie L. Garver, *Women and Aristocratic Culture in the Carolingian World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009); Martha Rampton, *Magic, Women and Ritual Power through the First Millennium* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), forthcoming 2017.

has much in common with Theresa Earenfight's description of a queen being the "king's other body" as a way of understanding how elite women exercised power or embodied the right to rule. In light of recent discussions and panels on medieval queenship, I would suggest that we have perhaps gotten too hung up on formal titles and too preoccupied with gauging women's political power in relation to men.<sup>8</sup> Female rulers from countesses to queens are qualified as somehow "lesser" or not as powerful because they did not have a formal title or undergo some sort of ceremony such as coronation, investiture, or sacralization (although some clearly did). Many elite men did not have formal titles nor was their power ceremonialized, but we do not question their ability to exercise power, determine the course of political events, or stir the political pot.

Writing about how women exercised power is something to be confronted in my study of Ermengard of Brittany. This woman led a fascinating life. She was the daughter of Count Fulk IV le Rechin of Anjou who married Count Alan IV of Brittany and ruled the county while Alan was on crusade, co-ruled with him upon his return, and then with her son Count Conan III until her death in 1147. Ermengard also corresponded with many of the important clerics of her day including Robert Arbrissel and Bernard of Clairvaux. She traveled to the Holy Land to visit her brother, King Fulk I of Jerusalem, where she may have founded a church. Ermengard lived an active political and spiritual life until she died at around eighty years of age.<sup>9</sup>

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8. Here I am referring to the sessions at Leeds 2014 on queens, specifically "New Directions and Research in Queenship Studies," organized by Elena Woodacre and the Royal Studies Network.

9. Remarkably, Ermengard has been virtually ignored by scholars. There is some discussion of her relationships with Robert of Arbrissel and Bernard of Clairvaux, but nothing that focuses solely on her. See Shaun Madison Kraemer, "Interpreting the Letters of Bernard of Clairvaux to Ermengard, Countess of Brittany: The Twelfth-Century Context and Language of Friendship," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 27 (1992): 217-50; Jacques Dalarun, "Robert d'Arbrissel et les femmes," *Annales: Économies Sociétés Civilisations* 39, no. 6 (1984): 1140-60, [www.jstor.org/stable/27582074](http://www.jstor.org/stable/27582074). For an article length study of Ermengard's life, see A. Bourdeau, "Ermengarde, comtesse de Bretagne: Entre Robert d'Arbrissel et Saint Bernard, fondation de l'abbaye de Buzay," *Bulletin de la société d'archéologique et histoire de Nantes et de la Loire inférieure* 75 (1935): 173-97. Philippe Carrer has published a recent popular biography of

The challenge to writing Ermengard's political life will be to explore precisely how she exercised power. And as both Lois Huneycutt and Marie Kelleher suggest in this forum, I will need to be clear in defining what I mean by "power" as "power" existed in many forms—from *auctoritas* to the quotidian. Ermengard was a politically well-connected woman who held courts, handed out justice, resolved disputes, engaged in diplomacy, and commanded men (much like the countesses described in the romances of the time). But she never "ruled in her own right," "merely" as co-regnant with her husband and then her son. Does this diminish the power Ermengard wielded? The influence she commanded? Does this make her "lesser" than male rulers or male royal favorites? Or those women who ruled alone or in the absence of a husband or son? I don't think so. My aim for this study is to avoid qualifying Ermengard or justifying that she did have power, but to show how she ruled, what she did, whom she influenced, whom and what she controlled. This will provide a context or framework for her power—not how it compared with that of men.

### Mind the Gap: Looking Beyond the 1000 Divide

The seminal article, "The Power of Women through the Family, 500-1100" by Jo Ann McNamara and Suzanne Wemple, combined with Duby's assertions of an eleventh-century transformation in family structure that disadvantaged women to create an unintentional chronological divide in the scholarship.<sup>10</sup> As a result, most scholars focus their

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the countess, but it tends to be more of a psychological evaluation of Ermengard and her actions rather than a historical analysis of her life: *Ermengarde: L'autre duchesse de Bretagne* (Kergangwen: Coop Breizh, 2003). See also my recent article, "Extraordinairement ordinaire: Ermengarde de Bretagne, femmes de l'aristocratie et pouvoir en France au Moyen Age, v. 1090-1135," *Annales de Bretagne et des pays de l'Ouest*, 121, no. 1 (2014): 7-25.

10. Jo Ann McNamara and Suzanne Wemple, "The Power of Women through the Family," *Feminist Studies* 1 (1973): 126-42. Reprinted in *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 83-101. Jo Ann McNamara did later reconsider the argument she and Wemple made in this article. While she was persuaded that the decline in women's power due to changing family structure may have come after the twelfth

attention either before or after the turn of the millennium.<sup>11</sup> Those working in the centuries after 1000 AD tend to be engaged with the question of whether women's experience did hit a downward trend around the year 1100, as postulated by McNamara, Wemple, and Duby. Although scholars working in other parts of Europe have largely discarded this model of a precipitous decline in women's power after the millennium, Penelope Nash suggests that it still needs to be tested in regard to the experience of elite women in the Holy Roman Empire. In contrast, scholars working before the eleventh century are not as concerned with charting women's decline in status but rather focus on the ways women did or did not exercise power and influence. Few studies bridge the gap of the divide of the millennium, which has resulted in the assumption that women's experience was somehow fundamentally different post circa 1000 than it was before. Consequently, the assertion that "effective barriers" to women's power "common" post 1000 did not exist in the earlier period has become entrenched.

Further exacerbating this gap is the way political history has been framed. For instance, the debate surrounding the "feudal revolution" as putting an end to the Carolingian world and heralding the development

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century, she still believed that these transformations occurred and resulted—along with other factors—in the decline women's status. See Jo Ann McNamara, "Women and Power through the Family Revisited," in *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 17-30.

11. There are some exceptions to this rule. Pauline Stafford, for example, considers women in England from the eighth through the twelfth century. See, for example, "Queens, Nunneries and Reforming Churchmen: Gender, Religious Status and Reform in Tenth- and Eleventh-century England," *Past & Present* 163 (1999): 3-35, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/651168>; "The Portrayal of Royal Women in England, Mid-tenth to Mid-twelfth Centuries," in *Medieval Queenship*, ed. John Carmi Parsons (Stroud: Sutton, 1993), 143-67; "The King's Wife in Wessex, 800-1066," *Past & Present* 91 (1981): 3-27, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/650516>. Jane Tibbets Schulenberg's study of religious women also included women post 1000. *Forgetful of their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society, 500-1100* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001). Penelope J. Nash is currently working on comparing the tenth-century Empress Adelheid with the eleventh-century Countess Matilda of Tuscany, *Empress Adelheid and Countess Matilda: Medieval Female Rulership and the Foundations of European Society*, forthcoming Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

of the political order that would come to define France in the Central Middle Ages has created a political chronology that emphasizes difference between the tenth and eleventh centuries. In the historiography of medieval England, the conquest of 1066 has often—and perhaps reasonably so—been seen as a divide between Anglo-Norman and Anglo-Saxon women. But do these political narratives—often constructed by modern historians—reflect women’s experience? Does the insistence on difference overshadow commonalities in women’s experience across such geo-political events?

For the realms of the former Carolingian polity, I would advocate that historians working on women need to query if this gap is an artificial barrier resulting from modern constructions of the medieval past. In her contribution to this discussion, Elena Woodacre highlights the continuity of queenship between the medieval and early modern periods. Based on my own work in the Chartrain, I suspect that there may be similar continuities between those aristocratic women living in the tenth century and those in the eleventh or twelfth. Research on the countesses of Brittany confirms this supposition.<sup>12</sup> To place Ermengard in context, I needed to know the lives and experiences of earlier countesses. My preliminary research on these women reveals that the eleventh-century

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12. In spite of wielding considerable power and influence, the lives of the eleventh and twelfth-century countesses of Brittany—like Ermengard—have been neglected. Ermengard’s granddaughter Constance was a formidable woman who stood up to the Plantagenets. Even though there is an excellent edition of her charters, edited by Judith Everard and Michael Jones, no in-depth biography of her life has been undertaken. Aspects of her life have been examined in articles: Yannick Hillion, “La Bretagne et la rivalité Capétiens-Plantagenets: Un exemple: la duchesse Constance (1186-1202),” *Annales de Bretagne et des Pays de l’Ouest* 92 (1985): 111-144; and Michael Jones, “La vie familiale de la duchesse Constance: Le témoignage des chartes,” in *Bretagne et pays celtique: Langues, histoire, civilisation: Mélanges offerts à la mémoire de Leon Fleuriot, 1923-1987*, ed. Gwennolé Le Menn and Jean-Yves Le Moing (St. Brieuc and Rennes, 1989). For a more recent comparative approach to Breton countesses, see Joëlle Quaghebeur, “Havoise, Constance et Mathilde: Princesses de Normandie et duchesses de Bretagne,” in *Bretons et Normands au Moyen Âge: Rivalités, malentendus, convergences; Colloque international de Cerisy-la-Salle, 5-9 octobre 2005*, ed. Joëlle Quaghebeur and Bernard Merdrignac (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2008), 145-62.



countesses would have had much in common with Ermengard. Like her, they ruled the county with their husbands and sons, supported church reform, were generous ecclesiastical patrons, and central players in the politics of the time. Ideally, I would like to push back into the tenth century for information on the Breton countesses, but given the devastating impact of the Viking raids on Brittany, which resulted in little documentation surviving from the Carolingian period, this may not be possible. The current framework of the eleventh century as a watershed moment in European women's history, I would argue, needs to be re-interrogated, even discarded. It is time to start building bridges to span this gap.

### Charting New Paths

To conclude my comments, I'd like to suggest some profitable avenues for adding flesh to the bones of the lives of medieval women. What drew me first to aristocratic women was the question of their standing or role in the medieval family. While the 1980s were a virtual golden age for the study of aristocratic families in particular, and the medieval family in general, studies of family (with a few exceptions) have nearly disappeared from scholarship. Yet examining medieval elite women in the context of their family still provides new insights and understanding. Jonathan Lyon's recent monograph on the sibling relationships among the princely families of medieval Germany indicates that approaching family dynamics from a horizontal perspective can be fruitful for yielding insight into women's influence and experience.<sup>13</sup> Erin Jordan is taking a similar approach in investigating the lives and relationships of the daughters of King Baldwin III of Jerusalem. Harkening back to Ermengard once again, investigating her relationship with her half-brother Count Fulk V of Anjou (who went on to become King Fulk I of Jerusalem) has been extremely valuable in understanding Ermengard's interactions with her father as well as her enthusiasm for Cistercian spirituality.

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13. Jonathan Lyon, *Princely Brothers and Sisters: The Sibling Bond in German Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013).

Another set of relationships that merit further investigation—and here I am being derivative by merely reinforcing what others have already started—are the relationships among elite women themselves. Theresa Earenfight’s article “Royal Women in Late Medieval Spain: Catalina of Lancaster, Leonor of Albuquerque, and Maria of Castile” in *Writing Medieval Women’s Lives* and Linda Mitchell’s work on the Marshal women have demonstrated just how valuable examining longitudinal connections or interactions between women from the same large kin group can be.<sup>14</sup> Katherine French’s investigation of a late medieval London widow, Joanna Moreland, traced her important friendships with other women that tied Joanna to her community of Westminster.<sup>15</sup> Putting women from different backgrounds in dialogue with each other is also a beneficial way of understanding women’s experience. For example, Valerie Garver’s exploration of two women—one noble, the other peasant—revealed much about what shaped the lives of Carolingian women.<sup>16</sup> Investigating Ermengard’s relationships with other women, like her stepmother Queen Bertrada, her sisters-in-law, her mother-in-law, and her daughter, will be useful to understanding her life. Looking for aristocratic women’s ties—familial, economic, spiritual, geographic, temporal—with other women is a rich vein to follow and mine further.

Anyone who has worked on medieval women has encountered “the wall of silence” in trying to fill in some major gaps in the lives of medieval women. But as Marie Kelleher points out in her essay, “unlooked-for places” need to be identified and examined to flesh out how women—royal, elite, and non-elite—exercised power. Most of us

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14. Theresa Earenfight, “Royal Women in Late Medieval Spain: Catalina of Lancaster, Leonor of Albuquerque, and Maria of Castile,” in *Writing Medieval Women’s Lives*, ed. Charlotte Newman Goldy and Amy Livingstone (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 209-26. Linda E. Mitchell, *Portraits of Medieval Women* (New York, NY: Palgrave Press, 2003).

15. Katherine L. French, “Well-Behaved Women Can Make History: Women’s Friendships in Late Medieval Westminster,” in Goldy and Livingstone, *Writing Medieval Women’s Lives*, 247-66.

16. Valerie L. Garver, “Girlandis and Alpais: Telling the Lives of Two Textile Fabricators in the Carolingian Empire,” in Goldy and Livingstone, *Writing Medieval Women’s Lives*, 155-72.

have been trained to use texts as the basis of our research. Yet the landscape and material culture has much to tell us about medieval women's history. Moving the focus of my research from the Loire valley to medieval Brittany has reminded me of the importance of understanding the environment and landscape.<sup>17</sup> This knowledge is useful for comprehending how a woman exercising power would negotiate this landscape. By placing ourselves in the neighborhoods, shrines, domestic spaces, and even the larger environment, we can discover much and formulate questions that take us in different, profitable, directions. Charlotte Newman Goldy used the lived spaces of the neighborhood of Muriel of Oxford to uncover much about her life and her interactions with other women.<sup>18</sup> Like Lois Huneycutt, I would suggest that material remains can also yield information on lives of elite women. The ground-breaking collection of articles edited by Therese Martin, *Medieval Women as the "Makers" of Art and Architecture*, has demonstrated the richness of this approach.<sup>19</sup> These essays examine women's interaction with all sorts of material culture, ranging from grand churches to castles to handwork to tombs to manuscripts. Tracing patronage, possession, and design/execution of material culture can provide unique insight not only into women's connections and relationships with their family, their peers, other women, ecclesiastical communities, but also their spiritual and religious values and needs.

The study of medieval women would also benefit from digital humanities projects that visualize and make data available online. Theresa Earenfight presented her database of non-childbearing royal women at the Royal Network Studies Conference in 2014. This project will be immensely useful to those charting the life cycles of these queens as well as those interested in reproductive or medical issues. Sharing this

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17. For an excellent example of environmental history, see Ellen Arnold, *Negotiating the Landscape: Environment and Monastic Identity in the Medieval Ardennes* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

18. Charlotte Newman Goldy, "Muriel, a Jew of Oxford: Using the Dramatic to Understand the Mundane in Anglo-Norman Towns," in Goldy and Livingstone, *Writing Medieval Women's Lives*, 227-46.

19. Therese Martin, ed., *Reassessing the Roles of Women as the "Makers" of Medieval Art and Architecture*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

data will be a tremendous contribution to the field.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Christian Raffensperger has developed a map that visualizes the marriages of the Kievan Rus' royal family.<sup>21</sup> The visualization of these matches demonstrates just how well integrated the Rusians were into the dynasties—hence politics—of Western Europe, and women were often the vectors for these relationships. Many of us have developed our own databases, catalogues of acts, and biographical registers, but few share this information on the web. Access to such data would help to overcome temporal and geographic separation for the study of medieval women and provide opportunities for collaboration.

The scholarship on medieval women of the last generation has demonstrated the richness of sources that document medieval women's lives. Theodore Evergates's edition of the cartulary of Countess Blanche of Champagne is a seminal contribution to the history of women as well as a call to arms for others to delve into the sources and create editions of archival material.<sup>22</sup> Tracy Adams's examination of Isabeau of Bavaria reiterates how vital it is for scholars of medieval women to return to the primary sources to strip away centuries of misogyny (intentional and unintentional) and uncritical readings of these documents. The need for new, but also revised, editions of cartularies, pipe rolls, and other sources was highlighted at the "Beyond Exceptionalism" Conference held at Ohio State–Mansfield in September 2015. Conference participants working on women from all over medieval Europe commented that the older editions reflect the preoccupations of earlier generations who were looking for information on political, legal, or administrative history in the medieval documents. As a consequence, clauses and details concerning women were often not of interest and left out. As libraries, such as the British Library, drastically limit access to fragile originals, scholars are encouraged (if not forced) to consult old editions of sources which

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20. The database is currently in the final stages of development before it goes "live" on the web.

21. For information on this project, see <http://gis.huri.harvard.edu/rus-generalogy/about-the-project.html>

22. Theodore Evergates, ed., *The Cartulary of Countess Blanche of Champagne* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010).

can be problematic for the study of women. Clearly there is a need to bring out new editions of both previously edited and unedited material. Two PhD students from the University of Iowa, Heather Wacha and Yvonne Seale, are currently considering bringing out an edition of the charters of the Premonstratensians, and it is my hope that more scholars of medieval women will take up such projects. While many might not have the interest (or eyesight) to take on an entire cartulary, including translations of charters and other documents of practice in our publications is certainly feasible. Web sites could also fill this need. Perhaps it is time to develop a web site for charters and other documents of practice much like Columbia's *Epistolae* website.<sup>23</sup> The TELMA site that provides transcriptions of medieval French charters housed at the Institut de recherche et d'histoire de textes is an invaluable resource.<sup>24</sup> Yet the overwhelming number of documents can make it difficult to find those relevant to women. Collaboration among scholars expert in charters and those investigating the lives of medieval women might result in a project combining these two approaches that would be extremely useful to all medievalists. If we are ever to rebut the narrative of "women didn't have power" and demonstrate that women's power was normative rather than extraordinary, it is imperative that the sources recording that they did in fact enjoy *potestas* be brought to print—either on the page or on the screen.

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23. This site is dedicated to letters written by and to women from the fourth to the thirteenth centuries. It provides the Latin text of the letters, often an English translation, and a biographical sketch of the women author. <https://epistolae.ccnmtl.columbia.edu/>.

24. See <http://www.cn-telma.fr/cartulR/introduction/>. Early medievalists at King's College London have developed a digital humanities project that has been compiling the charters from Charlemagne's reign. Historians of medieval women might consider a similar approach. <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/depts/history/research/proj/charlemagne.aspx>.