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Women and power

Introduction

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As Pauline Stafford writes about queens in the early Middle Ages, what shapes the text about the powerful woman is: 'every possible form of bias and distortion ...malicious gossip, political propaganda, deliberate suppression of facts, inadequate knowledge, blatant anti-feminism, even simple lies.

...The texts which tell us about powerful women must be interrogated closely, for, although the information from writers such as Gregory and Bede purports to be history, medieval chroniclers understood history in terms of patterns and types.

...If the woman wields power for ends which the writer approves, then she is an Esther, a Judith and ornament of her people; if she uses her power, however effectively, for ends with which the writer has no sympathy, she is a Jezebel.

Definitions

Importância da distinção entre poder e autoridade :

To adapt the classic distinction made by Max Weber, power is: 'the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will, despite resistance'; when 'power rests on the notion that an individual has the "right" to impose his will, and when it is exercised within a hierarchy of roles, it is defined as " authority "' (Lamphere 1974: 99).

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... Nor must we discount ' influence ' when considering the relations of medieval women to power.

Diminuição da autoridade institucional da rainha depois dos anos 980, quando mulheres regentes governavam grande parte da Europa, de Itália, através da Alemanha, até ao Báltico, em Inglaterra e em França.

The early period

In the early part of the period, as Christian missionaries spread northwards and westwards among the Germanic tribes, women in this area seem to have shared some authority with men.

...Bede's accounts of English royal couples, together with the custom of enthronement, where king and queen sat side by side on formal occasions, and the later ritual of consecrating the queen, all point to a concept of queenly authority, even if the notion of complete Germanic egalitarianism cannot be sustained. The queen's authority was always derived from the king, mediating between him and his warriors in ritual and treasure-giving: she had no status of her own .

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Christian queens were particularly charged with the conversion of pagan husbands.

...Women's power, as in most periods of history, derived from two related sources: family and wealth . Status was bestowed by father and husband; thus a wife could be rejected if that more politically advantageous match could be made with a more influential family.

...By the ninth century the need to find a bride to match one's rank while avoiding contravention of the church's consanguinity laws had become near-impossible in France.

...The economic basis of power is crucial to our understanding of women's status in the medieval period.

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...the lives of many royal women demonstrate a choice of sanctity over queenly authority. There is a clear connection between the capacity of royal women in France and Anglo-Saxon England to endow monastic houses, and the establishment of double monasteries, where an abbess often herself of royal blood ruled over nuns and monks.

...part of the royal woman's responsibility was to watch over the land's monastic foundation And the queen's maintenance of the shrines and royal mausoleums was an important part of her duties.

Women and arms

Among the aristocracy, the tenth and eleventh centuries saw a growing number of women emerging as chatelaines . They held landed property and were responsible for providing military manpower and for the administration of justice in their domains.

... The empress Berengaria was caught unawares by a Muslim force at Toledo in 1139 when her husband, Alfonso VII , was elsewhere. Berengaria averted the attack by declaring that there was no honour in winning a castle from ladies . To emphasise the extreme femininity of the garrison's occupants, she and her ladies put on their (/158) finery and withdrew to the summit of the castle where they played musical instruments until the discomfited attackers withdrew (Dillard 1984: 15).

Referência a casos de defesa armada e mesmo de ataque por parte de mulheres: Contemporary chroniclers found nothing out of the ordinary about such women, though later medieval writers view both Æthelþeod and Richilde as prodigious, even as transgressive in their actions McLaughlin argues that women's direct participation in fighting declined as warfare ceased to be organised on a domestic basis, that is, under a lord and his troop of retainers.

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...Unlike the fighting women of non-western traditions, the career of the European woman warrior ends in domesticity or death.

The amazon story was inherited from classical sources, but the shield-maiden and female knight have their genesis in this period.

The later period

Women lost their power basis at different times for a number of reasons. They were still able to acquire power within the family, and in times of conflict when male mortality was very strong often inherited their dominions. Contemporary writers engaged with the troubling figure of the heiress in various ways: a stock figure of medieval romance is the king's only daughter, who must be won, despite rival suitors and the king's opposition, if the hero is to achieve maturity and prosperity.

...Changes in dowry customs and inheritance laws weakened the queen's position in the High Middle Ages.

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Eleanor of Aquitaine (d. 1204) was perhaps the last medieval woman ruler to exercise the kind of authority common in the early period. She inherited more than a quarter of modern France, a possession which she kept under her own control during her two marriages to the French king Louis VII and the English Henry II .Eleanor accompanied Louis on the First Crusade, giving rise to scandalous rumours about her relationship with her uncle, Raymond , ruler of Antioch; her marriage with Louis was never to recover, though it is probable that, had Louis appointed her Regent of France, Eleanor would have been content to stay behind. Eleanor 's adventures in the East quickly became the stuff of legend: an anonymous author in Reims, writing in the year 1260, spins a splendid tale of how Eleanor fell in love with Saladin, leader, leader of the Saracens, and was on the point of turning apostate and eloping with him when Louis was alerted by one of the queen's appalled maid-servants. In the early part of Henry 's reign Eleanor often acted as his regent in England while he was abroad maintaining the Crown's French territories. Later the couple became estranged through Eleanor 's encouragement of her son's political ambitions. After Henry 's death Eleanor emerged as a political force to be reckoned with, protecting Richard I 's interests in England while he was at the Crusades. When he was taken prisoner on his way home she was largely responsible for raising ransom. When she married Henry II ,Eleanor found he intended simply to add her territory to the other Crown lands. Although she took particular pains to try to ensure that one of her younger sons should rule independently over Aquitaine after her death ...only John , king of England, outlived her. John was unable to retain control over the distant duchy, however, and the French king Philip Augustus regained Aquitaine soon after Eleanor 's death.

Royal women, thus lost power as the role of the queen was redefined. Richenza (d. 1141), ...was the last German empress to sign her own decrees. Opportunities for exercising informal power also diminished in comparison with the early period , for the noblewomen had always been able to participate in public life to some extent through her kin connections. Now, however, royal courts began to institute echelons of trained civil servants to administer affairs of state, staffed by men educated in arts or law at the universities. ...Church reform limited the noblewoman's power to intervene in Church affairs as law patronage (the right of rulers to appoint to ecclesiastical positions) was withdrawn, and the close alliances of queen and bishop so often depicted by Bede and Gregory of Tours were no longer advantageous to the Church.

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... Bennett's summing up of the Brigstock findings could serve as a neat summary for the status of women in post-1000 Europe: 'the extension of public power to women when convenient, and their exclusion from political authority no matter how inconvenient, might apply to medieval English women generally Medieval women, in short, were often

powerful but they were never authoritative' (Bennett 1988: 29).

...By the end of the medieval period women had lost many of the rights they had enjoyed in the years before 1000 . As ever, birth or marriage into a powerful family bestowed informal power; possession of land and money before marriage and during widowhood conferred legal rights which disappeared on marriage. Participation in public affairs had become a near-impossibility for women of all classes, except where influence might be effected behind the scenes, in the role of royal wife, mistress, or as queen mother . Under any other circumstances a woman could not speak or act in public domain, unless she had authority derived from God.

... from the twelfth century onwards both nuns and secular women increasingly turned towards the divine to give meaning to their lives. ...These women were authorised to speak by their visionary experiences of the divine and their interventions were textual, grounded in traditions of prophecy and mystic revelation.

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1. Fredegund (597, rainha dos Francos)

Textos extraídos da obra de Gregório de Tours, *The History of Franks* , e de *Liber Historiæ Francorum* .

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2. Sigrid the strong minded (rainha no território da Suécia)

Relatos de acontecimentos ocorridos entre 993 e 1000.

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3 Anna Dalassena and imperial power (texto de Anna Comena 1083 - depois de 1148 , princesa bizantina, acerca da sua avó)

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...For my grandmother had an exceptional grasp of public affairs , with a genius for organisation and government ; she was capable, in fact, of managing not only the Roman Empire, but every other empire under the sun as well. She had vast experience and a wide understanding of the motives, ultimate consequences, interrelations good and bad of various courses of action, penetrating quickly to the right solution, and adroitly and safely carrying it out. Her intellectual powers , moreover, were paralleled by her command of language . She was indeed a most persuasive orator ...

Not only was she a credit to her own sex, but to men as well; indeed, she contributed to the glory of the whole human race.

...She herself set a firm example to everybody else , with the result that the palace assumed the appearance rather of a monastery under the influences of this really extraordinary woman and her truly saintly character; for in self-control she surpassed the famous women of the old, heroines of many a legend, as the sun outshines all stars . As for her compassion for the poor and her generosity to the needy , no words could do justice to them. ...Priests and monks she honoured in particular: they shared her meals and no one ever saw her at table without some of them as guests. Her outward serenity, true reflection of character , was respected by angels but (/175) terrorised even the demons, and pleasure-loving fools, victims of their own passions, found a single glance from her more than they could bear; yet to the chaste, she seemed gentle and gay . She knew exactly how to temper reserve and dignity ; her own reserve never gave the impression of harshness or cruelty, nor did her tenderness seem too soft or unrestrained and this, I fancy, is the true definition of propriety: the due proportion of warm humanity and strict moral principle. She was by nature thoughtful and was always evolving new ideas , not, as some folks whispered, to the detriment of the state...

Alvild the pirate

Textos extraídos da obra de Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum* , composta por volta de 1200 .

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Queen Philippa and the burghers of Calais

Texto do século XIV .

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The noble queen of England, who was extremely pregnant , humbled herself and besought his pity so tenderly that she could not be withstood.

A noble lady known to Christine de Pizan

179 7. The way of life of the wise princess

Textos de Christine de Pizan, extraídos de *The book of the City of Ladies*.

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Joan of Arc

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