

# ENCYCLOPEDIA OF WOMEN IN THE MIDDLE AGES



JENNIFER LATULIER

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*Encyclopedia of the Byzantine Empire* (McFarland, 2004)

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# Encyclopedia of Women in the Middle Ages

Jennifer Lawler



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This book is dedicated to Jessica,  
who makes everything worthwhile.

## *Acknowledgments*

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Many thanks to Dr. Michael Cherniss for putting up with my feeble attempts at noun declension for a those years; to Dr. Richard Hardin, who introduced me to Spenser, not a medieval poet but nonetheless a very good one; to Dr. Beverly Boyd, who pointed out that no one asked Emelye; and to Dr. Douglas Atkins, who once told me I was indeed a writer. All of you made this project possible.

## Preface

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When I first began studying the Anglo-Saxon language (Old English), we learned vocabulary words according to their frequency of usage in Anglo-Saxon poetry. The first week, we learned *man*, *war*, *blood*, *warrior*, and *mead*. The second week, we learned *sword*, *slain*, *grief*, and, with morbid logic, *revenge*.

Something like twelve weeks later, we learned *woman*. Apparently, early medieval poets didn't have much to say about women.

You could look at the entire history of the Middle Ages—including the work of modern historians—and come away with the impression that there were three women in medieval Europe: Eleanor of Aquitaine, Joan of Arc, and the ghost of the Virgin Mary.

In the mid-1980s, more and more academics and other writers began investigating and reporting about women's lives in the Middle Ages. But there still was not a general guide, an encyclopedia, focusing on medieval women. Because of this lack, I have produced this *Encyclopedia of Women in the Middle Ages*.

In this book, I have included a brief introduction that describes the world in which medieval women lived, an A to Z reference to medieval women and the various aspects of their lives, a glossary that defines general terms that a reader may need to know, and a bibliography that includes suggestions for obtaining additional information in a variety of subject areas.

The *Encyclopedia of Women in the Middle Ages* is intended for use by general readers interested in the Middle Ages, by history students learning about the Middle Ages, and by others interested in understanding more about the history of women's lives. May this book inspire you to seek further information about women in the Middle Ages.

—Jennifer Lawler  
*Summer, 2001*  
*Lawrence, Kansas*



## *Note about Language, Transliteration, and Names*

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In the Middle Ages, the historical period from about ad 500 to about 1500, few people had last names. Sometimes, but not always, nobles had and used a family name. Most people were known by their first names. They were further identified by their job, their place of birth, or a personal trait. Sometimes a person's relationship to another person was used, such as "Will's son" (eventually, "Wilson"). Even many villages went unnamed.

Given names were part of a family tradition and were an inheritance, so many families had several members with the same name or slight variations of it. When consulting primary sources, this multitude of similar-sounding people can make it difficult to know to which person the reference attaches. This is especially true in the early Middle Ages. It can be difficult and even impossible to trace ancestry.

Further, it was not uncommon for women to change their given names upon marrying. This happened most often when a noble woman married a foreigner and went to live in a foreign land. For instance, Edith, upon her marriage, became Queen Matilda of Scotland.

In the later Middle Ages, around the twelfth century, when individual identity was becoming more and more important, people took their last names from their lord or from their occupation. The use of last names was by no means widespread until after the end of the Middle Ages. Last names then became inherited, except in Scandinavia and Eastern Europe, where surnames—patronymics—were not fixed.

The fact that women were often referred to as "the bishop's sister" or "the merchant's daughter" rather than by their given names increases the difficulty of learning about women in the Middle Ages. Even in modern histories of the period, writers, infuriatingly, continue to refer to women this way, without giving a name. Further, primary documents about women are difficult to find, since they had few legal rights and do not appear in chronicles focusing on wars and kings. Therefore, as thorough as one may attempt to be, many interesting women have, perforce, been overlooked.

To add to the confusion about names, there is a tendency for medieval historians to translate foreign names into the vernacular. Thus, in France, the legendary saint is known as Jeanne d'Arc, while in England, she is called Joan of Arc. Eirene, a spelling commonly used in the Byzantine Empire, becomes Irene when Europeans write about her. Zoë becomes the rather less obvious Sophia. Also, vernacular names have been Latinized. The Anglo-Saxon Chrotichildis becomes Clotilda when scribes writing in Latin refer to her.

Further, because of language evolution, names have come to be spelled differently. Bardas can also be read, perfectly logically, as Vardas. Thus, historians have used both spellings. In addition, spelling was not standardized in the Middle Ages. A person might even spell her own name differently when writing it on different documents. Therefore, there are references to Suabia and Swabia, Adrian and Hadrian, and other such examples abound. In this work, all women are listed by their most commonly used first names.

Different languages use different alphabets. Transliteration creates problems, as names spelled one way using the Cyrillic alphabet or the Arabic alphabet may reasonably be spelled three or four different ways using the Latin alphabet. Thus, Mohammad, Muhammad, Mahmud, Mahmet, and Muhammed have all at one time or another been used to identify the prophet of Islam.

In this book, the spelling most frequently encountered in sources has been used. Extensive cross-references have been included in order to reduce any possible confusion, but it is always wise to check alternate spellings before assuming that a specific woman is not listed.

For most of the women in this book, information on family lineage can be found in the appendix of genealogical charts.

## *Introduction*

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There are special problems in writing about women in history and particularly women in the Middle Ages. The sources we have are more interested in the male-oriented spheres and in the lives of the nobility than in women and non-nobles. Even many modern historians focus on warfare and royal reigns. Although we do know a great deal about how certain noblewomen lived, we know a great deal less about non-noble women—the vast majority of women who lived in the Middle Ages. But some general conclusions can be reached.

Women of the Middle Ages were considered inferior to men in all ways. They could not hold public office, they could not become priests, and they could not hold official positions in the church. They required advocates to appear in court on their behalf. They were considered minors throughout their lives, with their husbands or fathers holding authority over them. A woman's father and, later, her husband, was obligated to protect her, much like the relation between a lord and his vassal.

The church frowned on women, even though they often converted to Christianity before their male family members and then persuaded their husbands and fathers to convert as well. They were considered sexual, depraved, unscrupulous, shameless, manipulative, even evil. Church fathers viewed women as instruments of the devil and faulted them because they could cause men to fail in their devotion to God. Many theologians spent considerable time and energy detailing the failings of women. Thomas Aquinas was one such theologian. He argued that women were inferior to men and should be subject to them. He even went so far as to say that the father had a more active role in conception and childbirth than the mother and so should be more loved by the child.

Theologians blamed women for original sin. Eve—and hence every woman—was the reason humanity had been barred from the Garden of Eden. Canon law specified that women were inferior to men and that wives were subject to their husbands and subservient to them. Wife beating was encouraged as a way to control women; physical abuse was common among all classes and was acceptable as long as it did not lead to death.

Some church leaders disagreed with the official view. Hugh of Saint Victor, for instance, pictured women as partners of men, although this was not a commonly held opinion. More typical were the instructions the Goodman of Paris compiled in a book for his wife-to-be in the fourteenth century: he counseled her to copy the behavior of a loyal dog who follows his master even if his master beats him.

In employment as well, women were considered inferior to men and were paid only half as much. However, they worked at many of the same trades as men did. They sometimes apprenticed in guilds and worked in shops owned by their husbands and fathers. They worked as domestics and as tavern and innkeepers. They had monopolies in some trades, such as ale-making, spinning, and other food and textile trades. Some craft guilds and occupations, however, specifically excluded women.

Women practiced as professors, physicians, and surgeons. Noblewomen served as regents for their young sons, managed households, and ruled in the absence of their husbands, who were often gone fighting wars, undertaking crusades, being held for ransom, or attending the king.

Although women worked, in general their purpose was to have children. If a woman failed to produce children—especially sons—she could be repudiated by her husband or forced to become a nun. The care of children, the sick, the injured, and the elderly was the province of women. A husband could

have mistresses, but a woman who committed adultery could be repudiated, physically punished, and in some cases killed. A man's illegitimate children were generally raised and educated in his household.

In many (though not all) regions, women could not inherit land, make a legal will, or testify in court. They required a male advocate to represent their interests. Women could possess or administer a seignury (fief) or rule an abbey, but throughout much of the world they were legally minors. "Unknown women"—those without a husband or father—were legislated against and expelled from villages and cities.

Women were often physically secluded from men. In France, they lived in the *chambre des dames*; in Greece and the Byzantine Empire, they lived in the gynaeceum. The romantic notion of a woman standing at a window or balcony waiting for a suitor to walk by is actually a realistic depiction of life for middle- and upper-class women. (If inappropriate relationships appeared to be forming, young ladies were kept away from the windows!) Until they were about twelve, they had some freedom to move about their home and village. After that time, they were closely supervised, even locked up. Often they were not even allowed to attend church.

Because marriages were arranged, strong, serious measures were taken to prevent unapproved elopements and sexual relationships that would reduce the woman's value on the marriage market. Women achieved their greatest independence as young servants or as widows. They derived all of their social status from men. Once widowed, they were expected to remarry soon, although traditionally they were allowed thirty days of mourning. Pregnant women were allowed special protection.

Unlike women in most other cultures, Roman women were legally independent of their male relatives. They could divorce their husbands and had inheritance rights. Some of this status was later conferred to the Germanic women who lived among them.

In the early Middle Ages, polygyny was common. Wives were bought, sold, and shared. Husbands could easily repudiate their wives. Only in the eleventh century did England finally pass a law banning the selling of women into marriage (although this practice continued for many years afterward).

Educated Germanic women were raised much the way men were: they fought in battles and hunted with men. Men provided a dowry to women upon marriage. Under law codes, however, Germanic women were always minors, although they could appear before law courts in their own right. The testimony of two or three women equaled that of one man. The Germanic notion that women needed protection melded with Christian doctrine and was assimilated by other groups throughout the Middle Ages.

Anglo-Saxon wives were purchased from their families. Nonetheless, they had considerable power over their property and could dispose of it as they wished. They possessed many legal rights and supervised the household. Divorce was through mutual consent. If an unmarried woman participated in sex, she was fined. If she was married, her lover was fined and bought her husband a new wife. Rape was treated like theft, also punished with fines.

The Burgundians gave women custody of their children and protected female inheritance. By the eighth century, Burgundian women were legally independent of their male relatives.

Frankish women were excluded from public office and from the official church. They were not allowed to actively participate in worship. Tribal law banned certain kinds of contact between men and women. A man who touched the finger of a free woman was fined fifteen shillings. For rape, he was fined forty shillings, double if the woman was married. The fine was payable to the woman's father or husband.

Around the year 1000, women in medieval Europe gained more rights. They commonly supervised households and attended guests. In some cases, they had legal liberty and could buy, sell, and hold land.

Gains and losses in women's legal rights and in their treatment at the hands of men were common throughout the Middle Ages. In many cases, women were more powerful and autonomous in the early Middle Ages than they were in the Renaissance. Whatever the time, there were always women of strong, fearless natures who managed to live their lives on their own terms.

## A

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### **Abbess**

The leader of a convent, a religious community of women. Only larger monasteries and convents, called abbeys, were ruled by an abbess (or the male equivalent, an abbot). Smaller communities had a prioress or prior as head.

Many well-known women of the Middle Ages, including Hildegarde of Bingen, were abbesses. They educated girls and women and served as protectors and patrons of culture and literature. While women in general had few political rights, abbesses were able to exercise political rights as the superiors of a monastic family. Sometimes they took over the functions of a priest, including celebrating mass, hearing confessions, and blessing novices, although the Catholic church forbade this practice. *See* Convents and Nuns; Hildegarde of Bingen.

### **Abduction**

Abduction, or forcible kidnapping, was a recognized form of marriage in the Middle Ages and was common until the twelfth century. Occasionally women aided their abductors. Depending on a woman's social position and value to her family, she could be kept imprisoned in her own home (to avoid liaisons of which the family did not approve and which might lower her value on the marriage market). For such women, being abducted was a form of liberation, and they were sometimes willing to go along with it.

Other women were not pleased to be kidnapped and forced into marriage, although they had little choice in the matter. The historical records show cases of married women being abducted for the purpose of marriage. Such was the situation of the queen of Breifne, a petty kingdom in Ireland, who was kidnapped by Dermot MacMurrough. The bloody conflict that followed led to Dermot's deposition and exile. *See* Marriage and Family.

### **Abuse**

Physical abuse of women and children was common in the Middle Ages. It was encouraged by theologians as a way to keep women under control. The law did nothing to stop family members from inflicting pain and injury on each other, although causing the death of another person was always a crime, except in cases of punishment for a serious crime, such as adultery. Both men and women abused children and servants (or other dependents) in order to force them to obey. *See* Marriage and Family.

### **Acha of Deira** (7th century)

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The daughter of Ælle, the king of Deira, an early Anglo-Saxon kingdom. Instead of her brother Edwin succeeding to the throne of Deira, a rival, Æthelfrith, invaded and seized the throne. When this happened, Acha's mother fled with Edwin to Wales, where they lived in exile. Usurpers often murdered the rightful heir and his family in order to eliminate a possible focal point for rebellion.

Stranded in Deira and left unprotected, Acha was forced to marry Æthelfrith, who felt the marriage would help legitimize his otherwise specious claim to the throne. Little is known about her life. Æthelfrith himself was killed in 616 when he attempted to murder Edwin.

**SUGGESTED READING:** Geoffrey Ashe, *Kings and Queens of Early Britain* (Chicago: Academy Chicago, 1990); John Hines and Walter Pohl, *Anglo-Saxons from the Migration Period to the Eighth Century* (London: Boydell and Brewer, 1998).

### **Adela of Blois** (d. 1137)

The daughter of William the Conqueror, she married Stephen, the count of Blois, with whom she had several children, including Theobald V and Stephen of Blois, who later became king of England by the expedient method of usurping the throne.

### **Adela of Champagne** (d. 1206)

Also called Alix. Queen of France, the third wife of Louis VII. The marriage helped normalize relations between the king and the independent nobles of Champagne. Her son Philip II Augustus was Louis's first heir. He later became king of France.

### **Adelaide of Sicily** (12th century)

Queen Mother. A wealthy widow and the mother of King Roger II of Sicily. After the death of her first husband, Roger of Sicily, she married King Baldwin I, the Latin king of Jerusalem, in 1113. According to their marriage agreement, if their marriage were childless, the crown of Jerusalem would pass to Roger, her son. Since both the bride and groom were older, children seemed unlikely.

Once Baldwin had spent Adelaide's enormous dowry, he had the marriage annulled and forced her to return to Sicily. She and Roger were much insulted, and relations between the two governments remained strained for many years. Baldwin's treatment of Adelaide was not an uncommon occurrence in the Middle Ages. *See* Marriage and Family.

### **Adelaide of Italy, Saint** (931–999)

Queen of Burgundy, Empress consort of Emperor Otto I, and regent to her grandson Otto III. She was the daughter of Rudolf II, king of Burgundy, and Bertha of Suabia.

In 947, Adelaide married Clothar (Lothar), the Italian king of Burgundy. He died in 950, and Berenga

II of Ivrea seized the throne, imprisoning Adelaide. Later, Berengar's son and co-ruler, Adalbert, attempted to force Adelaide to marry him, thus enhancing his claim to the throne of Burgundy. Adelaide escaped and appealed to the German king and emperor, Otto I, for help. Otto invaded and married her himself. Otto's son, Liudolf, afraid that this union would affect his inheritance, rebelled against Otto. Otto soon suppressed the rebellion. A few years later, in 956, Liudolf died of malaria.

When, in 962, Otto was coronated as Holy Roman emperor, Adelaide became empress. Throughout his reign, Adelaide remained an important, trusted advisor.

Later, she became interested in Clunaic monasticism and worked to strengthen the bond between church and state. When Otto died, she tried to influence their son Otto II the way she had influenced him. Her perceived interference caused the two to become estranged, and she left Germany for the Burgundian court where she had grown up. Before his death, Otto II reconciled with Adelaide and named her as regent to his son Otto III. With her Greek daughter-in-law, Theophano, she served as co-regent. Theophano died in 991. Adelaide governed until Otto III became an adult, in 994. She retired afterward, founding churches and monasteries before her death. She was widely revered and became an unofficial saint. *See* Theophano (956–991).

**SUGGESTED READING:** Constance Brittain Bouchard, *Sword, Miter and Cloister: Nobility and the Church in Burgundy, 980–1198* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987); Mary Erler, *Women and Power in the Middle Ages* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988).

**Adelheid** *see* **Adelaide of Italy, Saint**

**Adeliza of Louvain** (12th century)

Queen of England. After the death of his first wife, Matilda of Scotland, Henry I, the king of England still had no male heirs. The purpose of his marriage to Adeliza was to produce such an heir. None of his sons survived, so he named his daughter Matilda as his heir. Her claim was contested by male relatives, eventually leading to a civil war. *See* Matilda of England.

**SUGGESTED READING:** John Hudson, *The Formation of English Common Law: Law and Society in England from the Norman Conquest to the Magna Carta* (New York: Longman, 1996).

**Adultery**

Adultery and other sexual “sins” were legislated against throughout the Middle Ages, with women more stringently punished than men. *See* Crime, Punishment, and Violence; Law and Women; Marriage and Family; Sexuality.

**Ælfgifu** (10th century)

Queen of Wessex and later queen of England. She married Eadwig (also known as Edwy), the king of Wessex. His advisor, Saint Dunstan, considered the marriage illegal and repeatedly referred to Queen



Ælfgifu as Eadwig's mistress. For this he was banished. Two years later, in 957, Eadwig died, and his brother Edgar succeeded to the throne. ~~Ælfgifu withdrew from court life for some years.~~

In 975, Edgar died, and his son Edward the Martyr assumed the throne. Since Edward was only fourteen, Saint Dunstan took control of the kingdom. Edward was soon murdered; his half-brother Æthelred II the Unready and his stepmother, Ælfthryth, were implicated in his death. Æthelred became king of England in 979; at that time he married Ælfgifu. Although she was probably in her late thirties or early forties by that time, she had a child with him, Edmund II Ironside, who would become king of England. Ælfgifu died shortly thereafter. *See* Ælfthryth.

SUGGESTED READING: Steven Bassett, *Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms* (New York: St. Martin's, 1989); Peter Hunter Blair, *An Introduction to Anglo-Saxon England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

**Ælfled** *see* Æthelflæd

**Ælfthryth (10th century)**

Queen of England. She married Edgar, the king of England, and became stepmother to Edward the Martyr, who succeeded to the throne in 975, when he was fourteen. She had ambitions for her own son Æthelred. When Edward was murdered in 979, it was assumed that she had a hand in the plot to kill him in order for her son to wear the crown. Æthelred indeed succeeded to the throne; he married Ælfgifu and had a son, Edmund II Ironside, who would also become king of England. *See* Ælfgifu.

SUGGESTED READING: Anne Dugan, ed., *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe* (London: Boydell and Brewer, 1997).

**Æthelburh (7th century)**

Queen of Northumbria. The sister of Eadbald, king of Kent, she married Edwin, king of Northumbria in 625. She was a Christian and succeeded in converting him within a few years of their marriage. She brought several Roman missionaries with her to Northumbria, where they began converting Edwin's subjects. This process of conversion angered Penda, the Mercian king, a pagan who despised the new religion. Penda allied with Cadwallon, another petty king, and they invaded Northumbria. At the battle of Hatfield Chase, Æthelburh's husband, Edwin, was killed and his army defeated. The Roman mission in Northumbria collapsed, and the kingdom itself was split into two parts. Æthelburh's fate is unclear, but with her help Christianity had established a foothold in England and would soon become the dominant religion.

SUGGESTED READING: David N. Dumville, *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar: Six Essays on Political, Cultural and Ecclesiastical Revival* (London: Boydell and Brewer, 1992); Richard Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion: From Paganism to Christianity* (New York: Henry Holt, 1998).

**Æthelflæd (d. 918)**

Also called Lady of the Mercians. Anglo-Saxon ruler of Mercia, a semiautonomous province; she also exerted authority in Northumbria and Wales. Æthelflæd was the eldest daughter of King Alfred the Great. In 886 or thereabouts, she married Æthelred, the ealdorman (“elder man,” or ruler) of the Mercians. She effectively served as co-ruler before the death of her husband, strengthening Mercia against the Viking incursions. After Æthelred’s death in 911, she assumed complete control of the kingdom.

She assisted her brother Edward the Elder, king of Wessex (ruled 899–924), to defeat the Vikings in eastern England. Æthelflæd built a fortress around Mercia while her brother Edward fortified the southeast Midlands. In 917, they attacked the Viking settlements in eastern England. She and her army captured Derby and Leicester, but she died before the end of the campaign. Edward took over her kingdom and finished driving out the Vikings. Mercia thus became part of Wessex. In the process Edward became ruler of much of Scotland, Wales, and Northumbria.

SUGGESTED READING: Richard P. Abels, *Alfred the Great: War, Kingship and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (Reading, MA: Longman, 1998); Geoffrey Ashe, *Kings and Queens of Early Britain* (Chicago: Academy Chicago, 1990); George Phillip Baker, *The Fighting Kings of Wessex* (New York: Combined Publishing, 1996).

### **Æthelthryth** (d. 679)

Also known by the Latin version of her name, Etheldreda, and the French version of her name, Audré. Twice-married virgin and monastic founder. She was the daughter of King Anna of the East Angles. Converted to Christianity, she was married, against her wishes, to Tonbert, the prince of South Gryw. He acceded to her wishes that she remain a virgin. After he died, she lived on the island of Ely, part of her dower lands, and pursued a life of quiet contemplation. Her reputation for goodness and virginity commanded the attention of Ecgfrith, king of Northumbria. She found his attention distracting and offensive, but she was forced to marry him anyway. According to her biographers, she convinced him to live chastely with her, pointing out that the Virgin Mary and Joseph made an excellent model for leading a married life without the stain of sin. After some years of this arrangement, Ecgfrith grew angry with her. She refused to relinquish her vows of virginity and joined a convent ruled by Ecgfrith’s aunt. He followed her there and had her expelled. With divine intervention, she was able to flee to Ely, where she established a monastery and became a nun. Finally, Ecgfrith married someone else.

After her death, her extreme asceticism was praised, and a cult grew up around her. When her body was moved sixteen years after her death, it was found to be uncorrupted, a sign of chastity. She was believed to be powerful even after death; she protected her lands and her monastery from destruction for many centuries. She became the example of virginity in Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History*. More medieval vernacular lives or biographies were composed in England about her life than about any other native female saint. Several of her biographers were women. See *Marriage and Family; Religion and Women*.

SUGGESTED READING: Venerable Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Gerald Bonner, *Church and Faith in the Patristic Tradition: Augustine, Pelagianism and Early Christian Northumbria* (New York: Variorum, 1996); David Hugh Farmer and J. F. Webb, *The Age of Bede* (New York: Penguin, 1983); Karen Winstead, *Chaste*

## **Agatha see Matilda of Scotland**

### **Agnes (1024–1077)**

Holy Roman empress. The daughter of Agnes of Aquitaine, who ruled Aquitaine as regent even after her son should have succeeded, and William V the Pious, the duke of Aquitaine, who died before Agnes married Henry III, the Holy Roman emperor, in 1043. In 1056, Henry died, and Agnes became regent for their young son, Henry IV. When he reached the age of majority, she refused to cede power to him, just as her mother had done with her brother. She was finally deposed in 1062, with the connivance of the German bishops. Afterward, she lived in Rome until her death; her son became a great enemy of the pope. *See* Agnes of Aquitaine.

SUGGESTED READING: H. Fuhrmann, *Germany in the High Middle Ages, c. 1050–1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Theodor Ernst Mommsen, ed., *Imperial Lives and Letters of the Eleventh Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

### **Agnes of Aquitaine (11th century)**

Duchess of Aquitaine. She married William V, the duke of Aquitaine, called the Pious, and had a daughter and son with him.

William died while their son was still a minor, and Agnes married Geoffrey Martel in order to protect her son's interests in Aquitaine. Martel invaded Aquitaine and established her as regent. Later, she refused to give up power even after her son came of age. He united with Martel to depose her, which they accomplished in 1058.

Her daughter Agnes would become empress of the Holy Roman Empire and would also refuse to give up power when her son came of age. *See* Agnes.

SUGGESTED READING: Jane Martindale, *Status, Authority and Regional Power: Aquitaine and France, Ninth to Twelfth Centuries* (New York: Variorum, 1996).

### **Agnes of France (b. 1171)**

The sister of Philip Augustus, king of France. In 1180, at age nine, she married Alexius II Comnenus the ten-year-old son of Mary of Antioch and the Byzantine emperor, Manuel Comnenus. Alexius's mother, Mary, ruled as his regent until a coup in 1182 deposed Mary and Alexius; both were murdered. In 1183, Agnes, a twelve-year-old widow, was forced to marry the sixty-four-year-old usurper, Andronicus Comnenus. Despite her young age, he consummated the marriage. He made her change her name to the Greek Anna.

Andronicus was deposed by Isaac Angelus in 1185. He was murdered by an angry mob, and Agnes was

again made a widow; this time she was only fourteen.

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SUGGESTED READING: H. W. Haussig, *A History of Byzantine Civilization* (New York: Praeger, 1971); Alexander P. Kazdan and Ann Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

### **Agnes of Poitiers** (12th century)

Queen of Aragón. The sister of Duke William IX of Aquitaine, she married Ramiro II, king of Aragón known as Ramiro the Monk, in 1136. The marriage, for purely political convenience, enabled Ramiro to secure his claim to the throne. Because he was a member of a religious order, ordinarily he would not have succeeded to the throne after the death of his brother Alfonso I. Ramiro did not want to rule in his own right. Rather, he wanted to control succession.

Agnes gave birth to their daughter, Petronila, late in 1136, and in the following year an alliance with Barcelona was created when Petronila was betrothed to Ramon Berenger IV, the count of Barcelona. Ramiro gave him rulership of Aragón and withdrew to a monastery. Agnes returned to France. *See* Petronila.

SUGGESTED READING: Thomas N. Bisson, *The Medieval Crown of Aragon: A Short History* (London: Clarendon, 1991); Bernard Reilly, *The Kingdom of León-Castilla Under King Alfonso I, 1065–1109* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

### **Agrestizia** *see* **Dindrane**

### **Ahkas**

Spirit wives or spirit women associated with religious worship practiced by medieval Scandinavian women. *See* Religion and Women.

### **Alice of Jerusalem** (12th century)

Princess of Antioch. The daughter of Baldwin, the Latin king of Jerusalem, she married Bohemund II, prince of Antioch, who was killed in 1130 at the age of twenty-two. They had a two-year-old daughter at the time.

Alice served as regent of Antioch after the death of her husband and barred her father from entering Antioch. Baldwin saw an opportunity to rule Antioch, so he resorted to force, took the throne, and exiled her to Laodicea. In 1135, four years after her father's death, Alice was finally allowed to return. Through trickery, her young daughter, Constance, then seven years old, was abducted and forced to marry Raymond of Poitiers, a son of Duke William IX, in order for Raymond to claim the lands. Alice returned to her place of exile and died almost immediately. *See* Constance of Antioch.

SUGGESTED READING: Thomas S. Asbridge, *The Creation of the Principality of Antioch: 1098–*

1130 (London: Boydell and Brewer, 2000); Steven Tibble, *Monarchy and Lordships in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, 1099–1291* (London: Clarendon, 1990).

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### **Alice Perrers (1348?–1400)**

Called Dame Alice. Mistress to Edward III, king of England. She came to court as a ward of Queen Philippa and became Edward's mistress after Philippa's death. Like most royal favorites, she was despised at court. She was not of noble birth, which was also a cause of resentment.

Alice exercised enormous influence over the king and was a good friend to Chaucer and to John of Gaunt. Eventually, she married Sir William Windsor, who had served the king's sons in the military, and continued as the king's mistress. Intelligent and clever, Alice was notorious for her manipulation of the king.

An act of Parliament finally banished her from court in 1376, but she was brought back by the duke of Lancaster to keep the king occupied during his declining years as the nobles sought to gain power at the expense of the English Crown. Alice's life is an example of the few routes women had to gain power and influence. *See* Philippa of Hainaut.

**SUGGESTED READING:** May McKisack, *The Fourteenth Century: 1307–1399* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); John Taylor, *Politics and Crisis in Fourteenth-Century England* (New York: Sutton, 1990).

### **Alix *see* Adela of Champagne**

### **Amalasantha (d. 535)**

Ostrogothic queen of Italy. Her father was Theuderic, and her son Athalaric was heir to the throne. Because of his youth, she effectively administered the government, ruling over an Italian kingdom from the city of Ravenna. During her regency, there was unrest between the Goths and the subject Romans.

Like her father, she admired Roman culture and attempted to rule as he had. She was well educated and fluent in Greek and Latin. She tried to influence her son to become well educated and cultured as well, but he was removed from her control by a group of Gothic nobles who disapproved of her plan for educating him. Instead, Athalaric became a dissipated alcoholic and died at the age of seventeen.

After her son's death, the Ostrogoths opposed Amalasantha's desire to remain in power, primarily because she was a woman. The Ostrogothic king was also the military leader; since a woman was not prepared to lead troops into battle, she could not rule.

The title passed to one of Theuderic's nephews, Theodehad, who Amalasantha believed would rule jointly with her. To this end, she asked the emperor and the senate to approve this arrangement, which they did. Unknown to her, however, Theodehad had secretly negotiated separately with the Byzantine emperor, Justinian, promising him territory in Italy if he recognized Theodehad as sole ruler.

Amalasantha was imprisoned and later murdered by Theodehad, although he continued to insist to Justinian that he was treating her well.

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SUGGESTED READING: Thomas Burns, *A History of the Ostrogoths* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Peter Heather, *The Goths* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998); Thomas Hodgkin, *Theodoric the Goth* (New York: AMS Press, 1992).

## **Amazons**

Race of warrior women in Greek mythology. In medieval legends, they were female Goths who traveled to Africa to establish their own country. They allegedly cut off their right breasts in order to practice archery. Their society excluded men; occasionally they would have intercourse with captive men or men from neighboring countries in order to reproduce. Male children were sent away or killed.

In the Middle Ages, stories about Amazons could be found in travelers' tales, Arthurian romances and even in Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale*.

SUGGESTED READING: Josine Blok, *The Early Amazons: Modern and Ancient Perspectives on a Persistent Myth* (Boston: Brill, 1994).

## **Anchoress**

Female religious hermit. Anchoresses secluded themselves from contact with the outside world, often living in remote areas. Sometimes anchoresses were walled up in a chamber with only a window to the outside world through which food could pass. See *Ancren Riwe*; Convents and Nuns; Religion and Women.

SUGGESTED READING: Anne Savage, *Anchoritic Spirituality: "Ancrene Wisse" and Associated Works* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1991).

## ***Ancren Riwe***

Also *Ancrene Wisse* (Anchoresses' Rule or Anchorites' Rule). A twelfth-century religious work by an unknown author that describes how young women could seclude themselves for religious reasons. It was also used in some medieval convents as a rule of the order. Although didactic, the work is also energetic, realistic, and informative. See Anchoress; Religion and Women.

SUGGESTED READING: "*Ancrene Riwe*": *Introduction and Part I* (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1984); Georgianna Linda, *The Solitary Self: Individuality in the "Ancrene Wisse"* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

***Ancrene Rule* see *Ancren Riwe***

***Ancrene Wisse* see *Ancren Riwe***

## **Anna of Byzantium** (10th century)

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Byzantine princess of Kiev. Sister of Emperor Basil. She became betrothed to Vladimir, prince of Kiev, over the objection of the Byzantine people; no Byzantine royal person had ever married a foreigner (and a heathen at that.)

Nonetheless, in 989, she and Vladimir were married. Just before the wedding, Vladimir converted to Christianity. Their Kievan subjects soon followed. This was typical of conversion stories in the Middle Ages: a woman would convert and convince her husband (or father) to follow suit. Once he did so, he would require his family, followers, and subjects to convert as well.

After their marriage, Vladimir gave up his other wives and mistresses and became Saint Vladimir. *See* Conversion.

SUGGESTED READING: Simon Franklin, *The Emergence of Rus: 750–1200* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Longman, 1996); Vladimir Volkoff, *Vladimir: The Russian Viking* (New York: Overlook Press, 1988).

## **Anna Comnena** (1083–1153)

Byzantine princess and historian. The daughter of Alexius I Comnenus, the famous Byzantine emperor and Irene Ducas. When she was fourteen, she married Nicephorus Bryennius, a court official who eventually achieved the rank of caesar. With him, she had four children.

Anna believed she would be her father's successor, although she had a younger brother, John Comnenus, who was capable of inheriting the throne. When her father was dying, she and her husband conspired to kill her brother. In this, her mother, Irene, supported her. Anna's plot was discovered, her property was confiscated, and she was barred from court. Exiled, she sought refuge at the monastery of Kecharitomene, which her mother had founded. There, she became a nun, and when she was fifty-five, she wrote the *Alexiad*, a prose epic history of her father's reign and the First Crusade, one of the most famous and important histories of the Byzantine Empire. *See* Irene Ducas.

SUGGESTED READING: Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad of Anna Comnena* (New York: Viking, 1985); Thalia Gouma-Peterson, *Anna Komnene and Her Times* (New York: Garland, 2000).

## **Anna Dalassena** (11th century)

Empress mother and regent for her son Alexius I Comnenus, Byzantine emperor. Her husband, the Byzantine heir, refused the throne after his brother abdicated. Anna was furious at his decision. The imperial crown then passed out of the Comnenus family. Michael VIII Ducas, who succeeded, was deposed by Nicephorus III and eventually abdicated in favor of Anna's son Alexius. Anna was elated at this turn of events.

Alexius married Irene, a member of the Ducas family to resolve tensions, but Anna encouraged him to insult the Ducas family by excluding his own wife from his coronation ceremony, which he did.

Alexius wanted his mother to rule in his place, and Anna served well in this capacity. Alexius conferred authority to her to rule when he left the empire to fight Robert Guiscard, the leader of a Norman invasion.

The Byzantine Empire came under attack from a number of enemies during this period, including Scythians, Muslims, and Europeans. Eventually Anna and Alexius were able to repel the invaders and strengthen the empire. Anna's granddaughter Anna Comnena schemed to rule the Byzantine Empire but was unable to do so. Forced into exile, she wrote the *Alexiad* about her father's reign. See Anna Comnena.

**SUGGESTED READING:** Lynda Garland, *Byzantine Empresses: Women and Power in Byzantium, A.D. 527–1204* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Barbara Hill, *Imperial Women: Byzantium, 1025–1204: Power, Patronage and Ideology* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1999).

### **Anna Notaras Paleologina (d. 1507)**

Eldest child of a wealthy Byzantine family. Her father, Grand Duke Loukas Notaras, was a high official in Constantinople and served as ambassador to Venice and Genoa.

When Constantinople fell to the Turks in 1453, her father and most of her siblings were imprisoned by the sultan and later murdered. Anna and two of her sisters had been sent to Rome a few years earlier when trouble seemed imminent. Her youngest brother, Isaac, was able to escape the Turks and join his sisters.

During her years of exile, she remained Orthodox. In the 1470s, she tried to found a Greek colony in Siena, wanting to create a community of Byzantine refugees in order to maintain their language, culture, and religion. Although Italian officials approved of the plan, it was never carried out. After this failure, Anna moved to Venice.

She refused to marry and also refused to become a Catholic nun (many wealthy unmarried women did become nuns). No Orthodox convent existed in Venice. The Venetian authorities banned the public practice of the Orthodox faith on the grounds that it was error or heresy and to prevent angering the pope. Anna, after repeatedly complaining about the lack of Orthodox churches in Italy, finally built her own chapel in her own home where Orthodox mass could be celebrated. Throughout her life, she supported Greek scholarship and had a library of her own. See Religion and Women.

**SUGGESTED READING:** Robert de Clari, *The Conquest of Constantinople* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); John Julius Norwich, *Byzantium: The Decline and Fall* (New York: Knopf, 1996).

### **Anna of Savoy (c. 1306–c. 1365)**

Also known as Anna Paleologina. Known in the West as Joanna or Giovanna. Regent and empress. She was the daughter of Amadeo V, count of Savoy, and Marie of Brabant. She became a Byzantine empress through her marriage in 1326 to Andronicus III, who was at odds with Andronicus II. Andronicus III's first wife had died, and the future of the Byzantine Empire depended on his marrying again and producing



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