

Intro

Lack of sources written by women

1st hand accounts: Héloise (12th cent)
Hrotsvitha (10th cent)
Hildegard of Bingen (Abbess, 12th cent)
Christine de Pisan (14-15th)

Previously assumed: more lit men

Questioned now because: Noble women's reading & devotion
Nuns
Bayeux tapestry

Women's opportunities

Opportunities for women didn't expand until High Middle Ages

Respectable occupations: Childbearing
Marriage
Religion

Noble women - pawns used by father for dynastic strategies

12th century English noblewomen 2x more likely to marry more than once, than noblemen

Medieval queens

Depended on contemp political sitch

Could exercise authority & influence behind the scenes

King died→successor still child→possible queen regnant (rare)

Queen regnant = queen ruling

King Edward the Confessor on Queen Edith

'In the arts of painting and needlework, she was...**another Minerva.**'

'She herself **excelled** in the writing of **prose** and **verse.**'

Multilingual: 'General language of **Gaul**', '**Danish** and **Irish**', 'and **English**, her native language'

'Her generosity was **incomparable.**'

Melisende

1129: Married Fulk V of Anjou

To rule as joint monarchs → Fulk tried to push Mel in background

After serious dispute between them, revealed: she had nobles' support

Then they co-ruled successfully

Their son Baldwin III fought a war against her→she defended her rights as co-ruler

'[She] had completely triumphed over **the handicap of her sex** so that she could take charge of important affairs'
- William of Tyre



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