

### Intro

Lack of sources written by women

**1st hand accounts:** Héloïse (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

