The many faces of Duchess Matilda: matronage, motherhood and mediation in the twelfth century
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The Rolandslied: Matilda's literary matronage and other responsibilities of noblewomen
The University Library of Heidelberg owns ‘manuscript P’, which contains the famous medieval Middle High German *Rolandslied* dated to the last quarter of the twelfth century.\(^1\) The text is also known in two other twelfth-century manuscripts, which though fragmentary, originally contained the same text, suggesting that the three twelfth-century manuscripts were based on a (lost) common model.\(^2\) Manuscript P, consisting of 9,038 lines concerned with Roland, Charlemagne and Ganelon, does however stand out when compared to the two other known manuscripts. It is the only one containing an epilogue (lines 9,039-9,094) identifying the scribe as Pfaffe Konrad, who also might be labelled as an author because he seems to have altered the French text he used as a model. Moreover, in this epilogue the identity of his patrons, Duke Henry and his wife, are revealed. This is, however, not to say that manuscript P was the ‘original’ manuscript, once possessed by the ducal couple. Lastly, the Heidelberg manuscript is the only one with an extensive cycle of thirty-nine pen and ink drawings, which has long attracted the attention of art historians. These illustrate the epic of Charlemagne, Roland and the other heroes engaged in their battles against pagans and traitors. The end of the battle against the Saracens in Spain is announced in the second-to-last drawing, where Charlemagne and his army arrive on horseback at Saragossa and Queen Bramimonde has opened the city gate as an act of surrender [ill. 1.1].\(^3\)

Charlemagne is recognisable by his long beard and his crown-shaped helmet; the queen can be identified by the decorated crown placed over her long hair. She kneels before the emperor with her arms stretched as a demonstration of her acknowledgment of his superiority and, at the same time, as an act of surrendering the city. Her maidservant stands in the doorway of the gate, while three men witness the scene from the city wall.

Battle scenes were among the most popular depictions of the Song

\(^1\) Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, Codex Palatinus Germanicus 112 (known as manuscript P); 123 fol., 207 x 147 (174 x 120) mm. Early Gothic minuscule dated at the end of the twelfth century. The complete text is divided into 331 verses of different length, which are recognizable by red initials. Folios without drawings contain 23 lines of text in one column, rulings can be detected. The drawings usually take up about 12 lines. The text was labelled *Rolandslied* in 1838. The writer Konrad merely speaks of ‘liet’, meaning epic which was not sung, Nellmann 1985, vol. 5: 121. The most recent edition is that of Kartschoke 2007 [1993]. It is largely based on manuscript P. Necessary departures from text P and additions, using manuscript A and S, can be found in the critical apparatus, Kartschoke 2007: 620.

\(^2\) Ms A (Strasbourg, Stadtbibliothek, Cod. Arg., 4521 lines, end 12th century) and Ms S (Schwerin, Landesbibliothek, 1246 lines, end 12th century). See Bertemes 1984: 46; Kartschoke 2007: 618. For the text’s dissemination and reception see Kartschoke 2007: 780-799.

\(^3\) I follow the spelling of the names of persons appearing in the *Rolandslied* and *Chanson de Roland* as used by Akizawa 2005, vol. 1: 39-124. When referring to characters in the *Rolandslied* I have chosen the English spelling, so it is probably more familiar to the reader than the German one. The first time a character is mentioned, the German name is put between brackets.
of Roland in twelfth-century art. According to Rita Lejeune and Jacques Stiennon’s monumental survey of the Song of Roland in art, still the most comprehensive work available, the episode where Queen Bramimonde surrenders the city and Christianity triumphs is depicted only in the Heidelberg manuscript of the Rolandslied discussed in this chapter. The only other twelfth-century example that perhaps features Bramimonde is found in the lintel of the west facade of the Cathedral of St Peter in Angoulême (ca. 1120). Lejeune and Stiennon suggest that Bramimonde is depicted behind the open door, wearing a small crown on her head, and holding Marsile’s bow [ill. 1.2].

However, this identification is disputable, as the crown is difficult to recognise and the facial expression is no different than that of the remaining figures. The few depictions of women appearing in the Song of Roland confirm the general notion that women play a marginal role in this text.

While this marginality may lead us to broaden our conclusions about both the depiction of women in chansons de geste and the importance attributed to women’s presence in these stories, this chapter focuses not so much on images of Bramimonde, but instead primarily concerns itself with Duchess Matilda, who figures in the epilogue of the Rolandslied. Once I have discussed her appearance, I will then consider Aude (fiancée or wife of Roland and sister of his friend, Oliver), Bramimonde, and a fourth woman (sister of Charlemagne, mother of Roland and wife of Ganelon), whose name is unknown. Compared to its French model (known as Ms O with 4,002 lines), the German text is significantly longer (9,038 lines) and features three women in the German translation of the Rolandslied, in addition to Matilda, who according to the epilogue is the person who requested its translation, that induced me to apply this literary text as a source to study noblewomen’s responsibilities at the court.

In the first section of this chapter, I will investigate Matilda’s role in shaping the Rolandslied as a text (1.1). Whether Matilda was responsible for the more prominent appearance of women remains inconclusive. It is difficult to deduce what degree of influence patrons had on the texts they commissioned or works dedicated in their name. The manner in which Matilda is mentioned in the epilogue, however, needs to be investigated, because it most definitely undermines the notion that Henry was the primary patron. I would argue that it is far more fruitful to consider this enterprise as one that Matilda ‘shared and paired’ with her husband. Moreover, her mention tells us about the audience envisioned by the story’s scribe, Paffe Konrad, when composing his text. While both the epilogue and Roland’s story suggest that Henry and Matilda were the primary audience, it soon becomes apparent that very little can be said with certainty when it comes to identifying Konrad’s intended audience (there was probably more than one audience) and what their expectations might have been.

In the second part, I will elaborate on my approach to the women in the Rolandslied and Chanson de Roland and how others have dealt with them in the past (1.2). The idea that female literary figures’ actions are instructive with regards to the duties and responsibilities of actual living medieval noble women is based on the assumption that the content of chansons de geste and other literary genres can, to a certain extent, be seen as representations of a reality. As both author and patron are part of this society, it stands to reason that the textual changes made in the Rolandslied, when compared to the Chanson de Roland, are likely to reflect medieval society’s ideas, or rather, its ideologies. This has been argued by those studying the Rolandslied in relation to Henry the Lion, lordship, vassalage, disputes and betrayal. The prospects and limitations of linking the duties of fictive literary women to that of contemporary noblewomen, will therefore also be examined. Subsequently, the actions of fictional female characters in the Rolandslied are discussed (1.3).
I wish to compare the passages from the Rolandslied (Heidelberg, ms P) with those of the French text (Oxford, ms O) in order to establish the degree to which women function differently in the two sources. In all likelihood, a French text, similar to ms O, was used as the German text’s model. When possible, I will investigate to what extent Matilda’s duties coincide or differ from that of the three women in the Rolandslied. This can broaden our understanding of Matilda’s duties at her husband’s court. Although the Rolandslied is a literary (fictive) text, the fact that I consider it to be related to medieval ideas about rulership, knighthood and female conduct may suggest that the text can be read as a mirror (speculum) for princes – or in this case princesses.9 These texts can be described as a political writings that provided explicit instructions for the ruler concerning government and behaviour. Examples of such books are John of Salisbury’s Policraticus (Statesman’s Book, ca. 1156-1159), Godfrey of Viterbo’s Speculum regum (1180-1183), written for Frederick Barbarossa’s son, Henry VI, and De instructione principis (On the Education of a Monarch, ca. 1218) by Gerald of Wales.10 While there are obvious differences between the aforementioned instructive works and the Rolandslied, both genres concerned the actions of men and women and provided commentary in relation to good versus bad behaviour, government and legitimate rule.11 The explicit instructive and moral nature of these mirrors intended for princes would make them suitable sources to study women’s responsibilities at court. That I have instead taken the Rolandslied as point of departure to study women’s conduct has two reasons. Firstly, instructive books, like Godfrey’s Speculum regum, are absent at Henry and Matilda’s court. Secondly, as Matilda and Henry are known to have commissioned the Rolandslied, we can at least assume that they took an interest in the story, and similarly, the manner in which women and men were portrayed.

9 Mirror of princes written for the king or his successor did not exist for their spouses. See Chavannes-Meuli 2004: 95.

11 This is pointed out by Lois L. Honeysett with regard to John of Salisbury’s Policraticus. See Honeysett 1994: 186-188.

We all wish for Duke Henry to be rewarded by God. The material is beautiful, the pious meaning is delivered by him. He had the book made known, which was written in France. This was wished for by the noble duchess, daughter of a mighty king. Radiant heavenly legions will escort them, after earthly burden, together with all the chosen children of God to a place where they will find eternal bliss. That they even considered having the story translated into German has heightened the honour of the empire. His exemplary conduct urged him to do so. Where lives a ruler today on whom ever was bestowed the same prosperity? The Lord is faithful and fair.12

The debates concerning the exact identity of the duke who ordered the translation of the French text, as mentioned in this epilogue, have resulted in a general agreement with regard to his probable identity: Henry the Lion.

According to most scholars, he commissioned the text around 1172. This identification is based primarily on events within the *Rolandslied* that would most certainly have appealed to a duke who had raised his sword to fight heathens living north of the Elbe – although his motive is more likely to have been territorial expansion rather than Christianity. Moreover, the story may have been even more appealing as Henry and Roland were both cousins of emperors, respectively Frederick Barbarossa and Charlemagne. When considering topics such as heroism and Christianity in the *Rolandslied*, a distinction should be made between works written for women versus literature sponsored by them.

Literary patronage, by both men and women, has received much attention. In his book on women readers D.H. Green summarised the debate on the definition of literary patronage when he observed that a distinction should be made between works written for women versus literature sponsored by them. In the first category, women can play a passive role: a work dedicated to a woman was not necessarily produced at her own request. In the second category, women who act as sponsors of literature – a term preferred by Green – play a more active role and are often referred to as being involved in the process (they request, reward, encourage and command). In reality, the distinction between active and passive female participation may not be so clear-cut. Whatever active or passive, it becomes clear that women as matrons played an ‘important role in the production and reception of books in the Middle Ages’. According to June Hall McCash, the role of women is undeniable in the rise of vernacular texts. Moreover, she considers the addition of female figures in vernacular texts as an indication that this audience included females. The translation of the *Rolandslied* from French into German might be a reflection of courtly taste. Whatever the case may be, the writer Konrad does suggest that the duchess had an interest in the text. From this, we can conclude that Matilda functioned not merely as a matron, but at the same time, was part of the broader audience for whom Konrad was writing. I will therefore discuss Matilda as matron, Konrad as the author (not just as the copyist he claims himself to be: *ich nebân der nicht an gemêret, / ich nebân dir nicht überhaben*, RL 9084-9085) and the intended audience to whom his message was addressed.

### I.I.I.

#### Matilda as matron of literature

With the exception of Karl Bertau and Christian Gellinek, scholars have devoted few words to Paffe (cleric) Konrad’s statement: *Des gertie du edele herzoginne, aines rîchen küniges barn*. Bertau accepted Dieter Kristoache’s contention that the *Rolandslied* was to be linked to Henry the Lion. He also observed that the genealogical reference to Matilda, the daughter of a powerful king, was repeatedly used in texts and inscriptions that mention Henry the Lion as a patron. Gellinek, on the other hand, was not convinced that the ‘Duke Henry’ mentioned in the epilogue was Henry the Lion. He suggested that ‘the daughter of a mighty king’ referred to the Byzantine Theodora Commena († 1184), who married Henry Babenberg, also known as Henry Jasomirgott († 1177). The Greek poet, Prodomos, referred to Theodora as daughter of a powerful king in her wedding poem. In the

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14 In the RL, the word ‘bairden’ or ‘heider’ (heather) is used, while in the Craft they are addressed as ‘paies’ (pagans).
15 Both terms refer to Saracens.
16 More often, however, the emphasis has been on the fact that Konrad established a relation between Duke Henry to Charlemagne (referred to with rîchen through King David (change Davi)). See Wiarszynski 1964: 108-122, esp. 110; Bertau 1982: 331-370 esp. 339.
17 Lintzel 1982: 41 (Henry took initiative, although Matilda suggested it); Mertens 1995, vol. 2: 204 (Henry commissioned the text in Brunswick); Derron 2010: 2 (Henry ordered the text to be translated into German).
18 According to most scholars, he commissioned the text around 1172. According to Green 2007: 204. Green does not agree with their narrow approaches of literary patronage, because it ignores that commissioners are Broadhurst 1996: 53-84 and Benton 1991 [1961]:3-43. Green – ne han diu edele herzoginne, aines rîchen küniges barn (RL 9024-9025). Bertau accepted Dieter Kristoache’s contention that the *Rolandslied* was to be linked to Henry the Lion. He also observed that the genealogical reference to Matilda, the daughter of a powerful king, was repeatedly used in texts and inscriptions that mention Henry the Lion as a patron. Gellinek, on the other hand, was not convinced that the ‘Duke Henry’ mentioned in the epilogue was Henry the Lion. He suggested that ‘the daughter of a mighty king’ referred to the Byzantine Theodora Commena († 1184), who married Henry Babenberg, also known as Henry Jasomirgott († 1177). The Greek poet, Prodomos, referred to Theodora as daughter of a powerful king in her wedding poem. In the
with the French text leads one to believe that Matilda acted as the mediator. Matilda's involvement is mentioned once again when Konrad writes: 'That they even considered having the story translated into German has increased the honour of the empire.' 29 Konrad's statement that Matilda wished the French text to be translated may be interpreted as a sign that one of Matilda's responsibilities was literary patronage. The omission of her name from the epilogue does not contradict this, as there are numerous examples where the names of female (and male) patrons and dedicatees are not mentioned explicitly. Benoît de Saint-Maure omitted what was probably Queen Eleanor's name from his Roman de Troie, referring to his (intended) matron as rich dame de rich rei (a powerful lady of a powerful king). 30 Matilda's famous half-sister, Marie of Champagne, is nowhere explicitly mentioned by the authors who credit her for commissioning a work, nor by those who dedicated their work to her name. She is commonly referred to as 'la contesse de Champagne' or 'ma dame de Champagne '. 31 One explanation for an omission of explicit references to patrons or dedicatees in literary works is that their involvement was already evident to the audience. They knew who these unnamed people were, when referred to as 'powerful lady', 'counsellor of Champagne' and 'daughter of the king of the English'.

Konrad is not the only writer in Matilda's surroundings to have referred to the duchess without explicitly mentioning her name. The poet and nobleman, Betran de Born, wrote two poems in which he describes Matilda without revealing her name. In his Casaut sui de mal en pena (I Have Fallen from Evil into Pain), written at the court at Argentan in Normandy, Bertran describes his tedious stay at the court, where Matilda, 'la Saisa' (the Saxon lady), was a welcome distraction. 32 In Ges de disnar non for'ãoimais maitis (You Shouldn't Spend a Whole Morning just Eating), Matilda is described as 'Na Lana', and Bertran expresses his wish that she would love him. 33 Bertran writes that he has left the Limousin to visit Anjou to see her. In his view, it is high status that raised her above other women. He believes the imperial crown would suit her. 34

References:

24 The Privilegium minus contains rights granted by Frederick Barbarossa to Henry Jasomirgott and Theodora in 1156 concerning the elevation of the margraves of Austria to duchy and the possibility that inheritance should also be possible through the female line of the ducal family. The privilege is linked to Henry and his wife. See Mäsöck, Lexma, vol. 7, cols. 230-231.

25 Gellinek 1968: 402–403. Three charters refer to Matilda as daughter of the king of the English. And the lady belonging to the altar of the Virgin in St Blaise in Brummen contains almost the same wording. Yet with the difference that the king is named Henry II and that Matilda is the granddaughter of Empress Matilda. Both choices are also depicted in the Gospel book discussed in Chapter 3.

26 Bertrand Robert, Treoig, Chronica, vol. 4, p. 234; Helmeid de Boucau, Chroniques de Gascogne (Carnac), 255-251; Charter 1172, MGH UU HDL: 143-145, no. 94.

27 A similar example of how women were involved in library patronage is that of Constance, wife of Ralph Fitz Gilbert. She asked the poet Gaimar to translate Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia Regum Britanniae from Old Anglo-Norman into Old French. Gaimar informs us that Constance ordered a copy of the Historia in the possession of Walter Espec. He lent it to Ralph Fitz Gilbert and Constance borrowed it 'of her lord, whom she loved much'. The impetus for the process of translating thus came from Constance. See Johns 2003: 38.

28 Green 2007: 208. Green's reference to the coronation miniature, which will be discussed in Chapter 3, in order to demonstrate the importance attached to Matilda's lineage makes sense. At the same time it can be argued that Matilda was not only involved in this process.

29 daz man ez für brâchte / in tiutische zungin gekêret, / da ist daz rîche wol mit gêret , RL 9031-9032.

30 O’Callaghan 2003: 301-316; Knueper 1993: 4-6 (addressing the problems of this line in the context of the rest of the epic poem). See also the elegies by Tristan le Breton in favour of her Greek captive Damirene, where this line and the praise on the queen are part of.


32 Astritch suggests something similar when discussing the identity of Duke Henry. An explanation who this duke exactly was, was not necessary because the intended audience knew who he was. See Astritch 1989: 263. Poem 8, stanza 1, uno pazi frico轮胎. Fait ch leuq carantina (A frisky gay Elena attracted me with a sidelong look). See The poems of Betran de Born: 162-163; Kolkmann 1974: 447-460.

33 Poem 8, stanza 1, c’latt esigen, espelios non pru ne Lana com la asignier de Pellou (I wish Lady Lana loved me, and the lord of Pellou too). See The poems of Betran de Born: 170; Kolkmann 1974: 451-453.
The poet joined up with Matilda at Argentan in 1182, where she spent some time during her exile (1182-1185) and gave birth to her son, William. Bertran was probably in Argentan due to a dispute with his brother, Constantine, concerning the castle of Autafort in the Dordogne. Bertran needed his overlord, Henry II, to settle the dispute. Our interpretation of Bertran’s love for the lady (a troubadour technique, an expression of Frauendienst, a desire to engage with other members of nobility) sheds little light on the relationship between the two. Similarly, his allusions to the duchess do not reveal whether Matilda was involved as a dedicatee, matron or audience. Accordingly, I am reluctant to attribute Casautz sui de mal en pena and Ges de disinar non for’oimais maitz to Matilda’s matronage.

The other text that has been related to the Welf court is the Tristan by Eilhart von Oberg, which is probably the oldest extant version of the tragic love story of Tristan and Isolde. Eilhart’s version is usually dated around 1170. Some identify him as Eilhardus de Oberg, a vassal of Henry the Lion whose name appears in charters from 1189-1207; others have suggested the poem was written by one ‘Eilhart’ from an earlier generation. The fact that Eilhart appears in the charters of the Welf court has led scholars to believe the Tristan was commissioned by Henry and Matilda, with the latter providing an Old-French Estoire to Eilhart. According to Volker Mertens, it is not clear who commissioned the Tristan; it could just as well have been one of Henry and Matilda’s sons, as contacts with the Anglo-Norman court would also have given them access to a French text as well. Georg Steer also expresses his doubts regarding whether the Tristan was commissioned by the ducal couple. First, there is neither an epilogue nor the Conclusion known in which Henry and/or Matilda are mentioned. Secondly, Eilhart’s name is featured only in texts passed down from the fifteenth century. Even though the Tristan is often connected to Henry the Lion and Matilda, there are just as many uncertainties. For this reason, this romance story is not considered as a source with which to further examine Matilda’s literary patronage.

The structure is indicated by the red initials: 9017-9048 (the writer reveals some-thing about himself but also tells his reader about his working method), 9077-9094 (the writer revealing his name and working method). The Rolandslied thus appears to be the only literary work that can be convincingly connected to Henry and Matilda. It is my contention that Konrad’s allusion to Matilda in the epilogue indicates that she is one of the patrons. It was she who talked her husband into translating the text from French into German. It is safe to assume that everyone at the Saxon court – and possibly outside it – knew very well who the duchess and daughter of this powerful king was. While Konrad may have felt no urge to specify the duchess’ identity, he was most certainly explicit in revealing his own name and function. Who he was and how he proceeded will be discussed in the next paragraph in an attempt to gain further insight into his relation with Matilda.

I.I.2

The writer revealing his name and working method

The writer of the Rolandslied begins his tripartite prologue by referring to and praising those who commissioned it. He ends it by revealing something about himself but also tells his reader about his working method:

If you like this poem, all of you remember me as well. I am the clerk Konrad. Just as it was written in the book in French I cast it into Latin and then translated it into German. I have not added to it, nor have I omitted anything.

In the end, the audience learns that the text they had read or listened to was written by a cleric, i.e. not a layman, known as Konrad. Jeffrey Ashcroft argues that he might have been the ‘magister’ and ‘presbyter’ Conradus who appears in Henry the Lion’s charters from at least 1174. He belonged to the staff of clerics who served at Henry’s Brunswick chancery, his chapel and several administrative functions. It seems this Konrad included his name so as

35 Poem 9, stanza 3. Ich haize n’er la corona romant., B73 109 (B73 109) (four words appear even higher. The Roman crown will be illustrated if it encircles your head). See The poems of Betran Mertens 1995, vol. 2: 207-209. First, there is neither an epilogue nor the conclusion known in which Henry and/or Matilda are mentioned. Secondly, Eilhart’s name is featured only in texts passed down from the fifteenth century. Even though the Tristan is often connected to Henry the Lion and Matilda, there are just as many uncertainties. For this reason, this romance story is not considered as a source with which to further examine Matilda’s literary patronage.

36 Harvey 1999: 12.

37 The Tristan is considered to be based on Béroul Old French text (Paris, Bibl. Nat. Ms fr. 2171, beginning and end of the story are missing), although it has also been suggested that Eilhart used another estoire or Un-Tristan. See Bödker 2015: 22. Medieval German Literature. A companion 2000: 118-119. There are three groups of early fragments. Yet the poet is named in the three complete manuscripts which all date from the fifteenth century. To what extent these manuscripts represent Eilhart’s original work is difficult to assess.


40 Ob la luz et gewâl, / all gedextet er nîs alt. / Ich haize der pfaffe Chrîstl e. / atz ez an dem hooche gebrachet sitz. / ich stëll ez in de latîneÂ sprach. / dann de di duchtich gekehrât. / ich erël zeiche decht ein. / ich erël zeiche decht die ich. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeiche decht die. / ich erël zeich
not to be forgotten by the audience. The most certain way to be remembered is by revealing your name.

Konrad then tells his audience that he worked from a French model. However, he does not explicitly state that Matilda provided him with the French model. Nor are there written sources informing us that Matilda owned many books or was an ardent reader. Yet it seems conceivable that Matilda may have been the person who provided the French model when considering her upbringing at the Anglo-Norman court of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine. Both have been considered as patrons of literature. While Karen Broadhurst has argued that fewer works can be attributed to Henry II and Eleanor’s patronage than had once been assumed, the fact remains that at the court where Matilda was raised, literature was an important part of cultural life. The heroic Roland was a famous figure in Henry and Eleanor’s domains, Normandy, Anjou, and from Aquitaine to Gascony. It is therefore likely that Henry II and Eleanor were at least familiar with the story. In the history of the Normans (Roman de Rou), written around 1160 by the poet Wace at the request of Henry II, the vassals of William the Conqueror sing a song about Charlemagne and Roland before engaging in battle at Hastings in 1066. The story of Roland was also known through the Anglo-Norman Chanson de Roland, contained in what is now known as the Oxford manuscript. This manuscript holds the oldest extant Old French version, probably written in the second quarter of the twelfth century.

The story of the treason by Ganelon and the Battle of Roncevaux, including its aftermath, were also part of the Chronicile of Pseudo-Turpin (or Historia Karoli Magni et Rotbolandi), added to the Codex Calixtinus around 1140 and copied by Geoffroy of Breuil in 1171 or 1178 for the Anglo-Norman court.

In Eleanor’s duchy, Aquitaine, there is visual evidence of the popularity of both the story of Roland and Charlemagne. The sculpture on the lintel of Angoulême (ca. 1120) depicts the battles between Bishop Turpin and Abime as well as Roland and Marsile. The short cycle ends with the return of the wounded

Roland, of Oliver and of the vassals who died at Roncevaux, Wace, The History of the Norman People: 181. Everyone said [about William]: ‘no man was ever so brave when spurring his horse or striking blows in such a way or supported such a weight of arms. Since Roland and Oliver there was never such a knight on earth.’ From Wace, The History of the Norman People: 132. The reference to one vernacular language to. See Kartschoke 1989: 209.

It was not uncommon for women to acquire books for their court or offer them to their (future) husbands, with themes addressing their interest and position. After their betrothal in 1326 and before his coronation in January 1327 Philippa of Hainault gave her husband, Edward III, the Livre d’Or Trésor by Brunetto Latini. Philippa is even depicted with the book in her hands, while her husband in the opposite margin stands empty-handed. While we can regard the individual who commissioned or received the book an important constituent of the audience of a literary work, there were probably others to whom the story would have

Meanwhile, the French story, be it a written text or orally transmitted, would have been translated to be read and heard at a German court. Matilda may have desired a translation based on a true interest in the story, which offers portrayed similarities between her husband and Roland and glorifies Charlemagne as Henry’s ancestor. It was not uncommon for women to acquire books for their court or offer them to their (future) husbands, with themes addressing their interest and position. After their betrothal in 1326 and before his coronation in January 1327 Philippa of Hainault gave her husband, Edward III, the Livre d’Or Trésor by Brunetto Latini. Philippa is even depicted with the book in her hands, while her husband in the opposite margin stands empty-handed. While we can regard the individual who commissioned or received the book an important constituent of the audience of a literary work, there were probably others to whom the story would have

...
appealed. Until now the intended audience of the Rolandslied has failed to attract any significant scholarly attention.

I.1.3
The intended courtly audience of the Rolandslied

When looking at the Rolandslied as a text reflecting the society in which its patrons lived, its reception or appreciation by the intended twelfth-century audience has to be taken into account. This is by no means an easy task, as the actual audience, i.e. the historical audience, no longer exists. Moreover, it was not just one audience, but rather several. The issue of medieval audience has to be taken into account. This is by no means an easy task, as it was not just one audience, but rather several. The issue of medieval audience(s) has been addressed by several scholars. In the case of the Rolandslied and its patrons, Henry and Matilda, I use the term intended audience, because it suggests that the author intended (or expected) his text to be read or heard by a certain audience.

The audience is easier to identify when a book’s content reveals it was presented or dedicated to a certain individual. This implies that there must have been a primary audience. In the case of the Rolandslied, this consisted of Henry and Matilda. However, the intended audience was not necessarily limited to the text’s patrons, but may also have included other members of the ducal circle, perhaps even the clerics reading the Latin text that Konrad wrote. An attempt will be made to reconstruct Konrad’s twelfth-century intended audience – the people he believed would be his listeners. According to Krueger this audience shared a sophisticated knowledge of courtly literary conventions.

The court, to be understood as a group of people that was not stable but fluctuating, was itinerant most of the time. Henry and Matilda indeed visited several residences, including Regensburg in Bavaria among others. Nonetheless, there was a Kernhof consisting of the court (personal surroundings of the ruler) and its household (the material infrastructure of the court). For Henry and Matilda – and their entourage (or at least part of it) – the most important residence seems to have been Brunswick, visited a minimum of twenty-one times by Henry in the period 1148-1180. Henry and Matilda’s building and patronage activities in Brunswick indicate that this city indeed was favoured over other places. Joachim Ehlers provides some insight into the people attending the court, though at the same time, he admits the statistics are obscured by the fact that there is insufficient evidence in the charters. Limiting ourselves to the years 1172-1184, the period in which the Rolandslied was written, we find four court chaplains as notaries in Henry’s entourage along with five other men known as capellani ducis. In the same period, seven counts also attended the Brunswick court. And of the thirteen leading ministerials (with several of these holding important offices such as seneschal and chamberlain), seven were at Henry’s court between 1172-1184. These men came from well-known families and formed the elite of the approximately 400 ministerial families that supported Henry. The fact that Ehlers does not include women may reflect the available documentation, as his results are based on charters in which they are absent. Nevertheless, since marriage was an important strategy in securing both political bonds and offspring, many of the ministerials and counts were likely married. For that reason their wives probably also appeared at Brunswick. They would have been present at special events, such as the presentation of the relics brought by Henry from the Byzantine court, the birth and baptism of his children as well as tournaments. To this we must also add that Matilda likely had her own entourage, even though there are no sources confirming this. In my opinion, the audience listening to the Rolandslied consisted thus not only of Henry, Matilda and their children, but also of clerics, counts, ministerials and noblewomen in various stages of their lives.

By thinking about Konrad’s intended audience, I have tried to catch a glimpse of the historical readers (or listeners) who encouraged the writer to write and/or translate. This audience consisted of both men and women. In all likelihood the latter were not only wives, but daughters, mothers and widows as well. While there is no denying that the Rolandslied was appealing to most men, it is my contention that the (mixed) audience consisted of both men and women. In all likelihood the latter were not only wives, but daughters, mothers and widows as well. While there is no denying that the Rolandslied was appealing to most men, it is my contention that the (mixed) audience...
also appreciated the part played by women in the story. This presumed appreciation stems from the fact that the male and female audiences were, as we will see, familiar with the women's actions.

1.1.4
The influence of the matron? An emphasis on female characters

To summarise, the epilogue of the Rolandslied offers some clues concerning its patrons. Pfaffe Konrad describes Henry as the person who presented him with a model text (daz buoch biez er vor tragen, gescrizen ze den Karlingem, RL 9022-9023). If we take the epilogue literally, Henry was the one who maintained relations with Konrad and seems therefore to have been the one who paid for the enterprise. Henry's contact with Konrad and the idea that the Rolandslied fits in with Henry the Lion's 'cultural representation of his aggressively expansionist territorial lordship' seem to have been the main reasons for considering Henry the Lion as its patron.66

According to Konrad, however, it was not Henry, but rather Matilda, who wished the translation to be made (Des gerte diu edele herzoginne, aines rîchen küniges barn, RL 9024-9025). Therefore I would indeed consider Matilda at least a co-patron – and perhaps even the chief patron – of the Rolandslied, because it was her wish to have the French material translated. There was probably more to the translation than the sheer appreciation of the text by the duchess, because the French version would have suited her just fine since she was able to understand French. Her interest is more likely to be viewed in relation to that of her husband, who would have enjoyed a story with which he could identify, but also in light of her own responsibility to entertain the court by providing them with a text to which many could relate. The Rolandslied was appropriate for reading at Henry and Matilda's court because it offered flattering parallels between Roland and Henry and because it was in tune with the crusading movements in the twelfth century. The text may also have been considered suitable in that it could provide Matilda with exemplary women with whom she herself could identify.

Whatever the exact reasons for ordering this text might have been, Henry and Matilda are likely to have had a say in any changes introduced by Konrad because they were paying for the book. In fact, it is possible that he made adjustments because he suspected his patrons would value them.67 This could explain the fact that, as we shall see, women in the Rolandslied figure more prominently than in the French text. The notion that this occurred at Matilda's request remains hypothetical, but when considering that she might have been the driving force behind the project, it is possible that she made such suggestions. Matilda, Henry and Konrad were probably aware that the Rolandslied would become more appealing when every member of the audience was able to identify him- or herself with one or more characters and events in the story. Before addressing the ways women are depicted in the Rolandslied and to what extent their actions can be related to the responsibilities of a twelfth-century female audience, I will elaborate on the use of the Rolandslied as a historical source.

1.2
Women in the Rolandslied

While the ‘small, but vital role’ women played in the Chanson de Roland was reason enough for French and American scholars to study them in the Old French text, their counterparts in the German Rolandslied have received little attention.68 That the role of women in manuscript P has never been at the heart of research into the Rolandslied is partly due to the fact that it has been looked upon as a text dealing primarily with men and ‘the heroic culture that valued war, loyalty to one’s lord, prowess and courage in battle – all masculine virtues’.69 It is therefore not surprising that this chanson de geste has mainly been studied from a male perspective.70 The lack of interest in the female characters probably reflects the scholarly interest in the interpretation of the epilogue, which hails Henry the Lion. In this section, I will

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68 Brault 1984: xxii. This is not to say that German scholars have less interest in medieval women than their French colleagues. Perhaps it is the more limited dispersion of the chanson de geste in Germany, as opposed to France, that explains the lack of interest in women in this genre.
69 McCash 2008: 46.
argue that a social-historical approach to literary texts can provide information about medieval women. Such a study of the Rolandslied is useful because it provides new insights into the way this text might have functioned and how it was perceived.

Petra Kellermann-Haaf discussed the text briefly as one of the forty-five courtly romances she studied in order to establish what political activities were undertaken by the women found in these literary texts. She starts by stating that Bramimonde is the only woman involved in politics, but she hardly retains any influence.71 Dieter Kartschoke argues that women only play a small role in the Rolandslied; the few words spent on women should not be taken as an excuse to overrate their significance.72 This warning against overvaluing the presence of women in the Rolandslied is unjustified for several reasons. First, studies on women in the Chanson de Roland and chansons de geste have revealed that while women appear less frequently than men, this does not mean they were insignificant. Ann Tukey Harrison concludes her analysis of Aude and Bramimonde by stating that both are ‘depicted as women in actions appropriate to women’.73 Second, the German text devotes greater attention to the three women than the French text – a reason, in itself, to reflect further on their role. Moreover, the women are not merely talked about (‘von Frauen gesprochen’), but rather have a voice of their own and actually speak to men.74 What we see is that women appearing in the Rolandslied reflect virtually every phase of the female life cycle: daughter, wife, mother and widow.75 Therefore, one cannot justifiably ignore these women if studying the Rolandslied in relation to its patrons and its audience.

According to Ursula Peters, writing in 1985, the use of literary texts in combination with other sources concerned with legal matters and social hierarchy is useful when studying issues such as rulership and the relations between lords and their vassals.76 While rulership and vassalage have long been associated with men only, the many studies on medieval women have confirmed that women were engaged in these affairs as well. In her study on German noblewomen acting as regents for husbands and sons, Bettina Elpers has demonstrated that chronicles and charters offer insights into the responsibilities of these women.77 She did not, however, include fictional literary texts as source material. That these texts can be instructive is demonstrated by Petra Kellermann-Haaf. She focussed on fictional women who functioned as rulers, regents, mediators and advisors and their actions in relation to actual historical female figures. She based her information concerning these historical women on research done by others who had in the past used charters, chronicles and annals. As Elpers’s study of maternal regents clearly indicates, these sources have proven their value. Kellermann-Haaf points out that the relation between fictional and historical women is not always straightforward. Courtly narratives frequently feature women who are given the opportunity to rule independently, while in reality, women were not so readily assigned these tasks and were often controlled by men.78 Because Kellermann-Haaf signals discrepancies between fiction and reality, she concludes that poets ignored some aspects of reality while including others. While the relation between fiction and reality is perhaps not always straightforward, it can be supplemental when seeking insight into women’s lives. Administrative sources and chronicles tell us about the content, type and duration of these activities, whereas fictional romance stories are instructive with regards to the means employed by women, their arguments and the reactions of the rulers.79

72 ‘So bemerkenswert im deutschen Rolandslied jeder der würgen Verse ist, in denen von Frauen gesprochen wird, so nahe liegt die Überbewertung’, Kartschoke 2007: 703.
73 Harrison 1985: 474.
74 In his article on women in the Chanson de Roland, Serrano does not look upon them as female characters with an own voice, but regards them as pawns in Charlemagne’s attempt to settle his guilt (sleeping with his sister who gave birth to Roland). See Serrano 1992: 110-116.
75 Although is it not explicitly stated the three women also seem to hold different ages: Aude having an age ready to be married (or perhaps was just married) is the youngest, Ganelon’s wife – who is the mother of the adult Roland and the immature Baldwin – could be in her late forties or even older, perhaps in her late sixties if we take her wisdom as a key to determine her age.
76 Peters 1985, vol. 2: 164-165. She gives a critical analysis of fictive literary texts such as the ‘his-
toire de mentalités’.
77 Elpers 2003.
78 Kellermann-Haaf 1986: 246. See also Liebertz-Grün 1981: 165-167. The article is not entirely satisfying for two rea-
79 sons: (1) the question posed on the function of romances as educational instruments is not answered; (2) the prob-
tems of this approach are not given although the para-
graph ‘Grenzen der Untersuchung’ suggests so.
The studies by Peters and Kellermann-Haaf point out that a social-historical approach to fiction, i.e. considering these texts as reflections of ideas within a society, is nothing new. Indeed, this is the way the *Rolandslied* has been studied. It was Dieter Kartschoke who argued that the poem is representative of its time, because it contains the idea of *honor imperii*, implicitly referring to the canonisation of Charlemagne and the promotion of crusading ideals. Moreover, the ideas put forth in the story and the content of the epilogue can be related to events in the life of Henry the Lion. The ‘Duke Henry’ mentioned in the epilogue must therefore be Henry the Lion. Karl Bertau considered the *Rolandslied*, with its references to David (in the epilogue) and the feudal system (as emphasised in the prologue), as part of Henry the Lion’s representation strategy designed to emphasise his royal descent and claim to power. It is perhaps the interpretation of the *Rolandslied* in relation to medieval lordship that has prevented scholars from studying the text from a female point of view, i.e. by discussing the women in the text or by discussing the epilogue in relation to Matilda.

There are several reasons that make it worthwhile to study the *Rolandslied* from a female perspective as a source that informs us about the expected responsibilities and behaviour of noblewomen. On a basic level, it cannot be denied that women feature in the text and that Matilda is mentioned in the epilogue. This in itself provides sufficient grounds for shifting our focus to women, rather than solely studying the male protagonists as has been so frequently done in the past. More importantly, the foremost interest of any audience, such as the one at Brunswick discussed above (1.1.3), lie in stories that concern matters related to its own world. In the line of Hans Robert Jauss, we might say that the *Rolandslied* agreed with its audience’s ‘horizon of expectation’. In other words, a given audience’s ‘literary baggage’ is necessary for it receive and judge new literary works. In Jauss’s view, this means that literature should be more than just the representation of a given reality: it should also shape a society. When literature merely mirrors daily life, this is something that is impossible. Interpreting the *Rolandslied* in this manner means that the more prominent role played by women indicates the changes to come with regards to women’s responsibilities at court. Yet I do not think this was the case. I believe that the writer and his patrons devoted more space to women precisely because these women were in a position to actually fulfil these roles. They were part of the audience and the world, be it as wives, daughters, mothers, widows, regents or rulers. While women may also have enjoyed reading about the heroic actions of men, we may presume that they likewise appreciated the occasional appearance of a lady in these books. This was their horizon of expectations.

This idea is supported by the fact that a comparison between the episodes featuring women in the German epic (Heidelberg, ms P) with its Old French model, the *Chanson de Roland* (Oxford, ms O), reveals that the women in the German text play a more prominent role. This indicates either that the person who commissioned the German text had other wishes or that its writer adapted the text with his own intended audience in mind. When the actions of the three fictive women are combined with historical sources related to Matilda – the latter being considered ‘official’ and therefore regarded as more trustworthy or objective – insight can be gained into the duties of noblewomen and the twelfth-century audience’s reception of the fictive women. Whenever the situations figuring in the *Rolandslied* cannot be directly related to Matilda (on the simple basis that Matilda was never in such a position), I have taken examples related to other family members, on both Matilda’s and Henry’s side, or their contemporaries, in order to demonstrate that the actions of the fictional women were familiar to the (female) audience.

## I.2.2

**Limitations of the *Rolandslied* as a historical source**

Although fictional sources can help in fill in the gaps ‘official sources’ leave behind, this source type is not without its limitations. There is the issue of a potential conflict between the actual situation and idealised norms as pro-
moted in texts.86 The fair Aude, wife of Roland, is a case in point. Her denial to marry Charlemagne’s son Louis after Roland has died might seem a noble or even pious act that the religious men may have been promoting. In reality, however, a woman of her young age and noble descent was likely to remarry, certainly when a king or emperor presented his son as candidate. This is evident from Clementia of Zähringen, Henry the Lion’s first wife. When her family fell out of grace with Frederick Barbarossa, the emperor summoned Henry the Lion to annul his first marriage in 1162. This is just one example of a woman who was expected (or forced) to resign herself to a man’s wishes. This demonstrates how difficult it is to view this idealised normative image of women in fictional narrative sources. Does it reflect an independence gained by women, or is it an image created by male writers to criticise women or label them as ‘inferior’?87 But we can also read women’s actions as a comment on male behaviour. Kimberlee A. Campbell contends that chansons de geste not only reflect dominant behaviour patterns (men fighting), but also marginal ones (verbally and physically aggressive women). This is not to say that a woman’s aggressive behaviour had the same political and social consequences as that of a man, but it does show that the concept of male force so strongly emphasised in the chansons is at the same time ‘reinforced and subverted by the epic discourse’.88

Queen Bramimonde, the wife of the pagan King Marsile who engaged in battle with Roland, presents another problem. If one assumes that the Christian audience identifies itself with the Christian heroes of the Rolandslied, and correspondingly, dislikes the pagans, how can Bramimonde then be considered an exemplary woman of power and a competent co-ruler? Or is she only capable of doing so because she is a pagan? This does not seem to be the case. Liebertz-Grün gathered many examples of fictional Christian women being credited with the same capacities as Bramimonde.89 It cannot be denied that Bramimonde can easily be seen as the embodiment of evil, a characteristic so eagerly attributed to women, and in this case, enhanced by the fact that she is pagan and seals the bond with the traitor, Ganelon. Both her relation to Marsile and her active involvement in the plot against Roland and Charlemagne make it easy to dislike this woman and regard her as evil. On the other hand, Bramimonde can also be viewed as a responsible queen taking care of the affairs of her sick husband. Moreover, to the audience it was probably evident that she embodies the topos of the converted heathen who, already during her reign, begins to doubt the pagan gods. Of course, this conversion represents the triumph of Christianity, but it as well signifies that a bad person can become a good person. All in all, Bramimonde’s actions make her a lifelike figure that must have been recognisable as such by both a male and female audience.

The text’s general preoccupation with heroic men and the triumph of Christianity also obscures its use as a source for the study of women, because the women in the story do not hold the same prominent position as men. Even when women in chansons de geste figure prominently, men have the final say in these texts and women’s power is illusory.90 The actions of women or the manner in which men talk about them confirm this: Aude is expected to re-marry; Bramimonde should not talk so much, because female advice is not always useful; and Ganelon’s nameless wife is incapable of managing her affairs completely on her own. Matthias Meyer – to my knowledge the only scholar who discusses the women in the Rolandslied – also comes to the conclusion that women are ultimately marginalised.91 He studies them in relation to the males appearing in the same scenes and considers the manner in which the writer has constructed masculinity.92 One way the writer of the Rolandslied enhances masculinity is by marginalising the position of women by ‘fading them out’.93 This happens either by ignoring her (Aude), by submitting herself to an attractive male (Bramimonde), or by letting her die (again Aude).94

While I agree that gender in the Rolandslied is a construction heavily influenced by its own time and society, whether the position of women in the Rolandslied is indeed marginal and whether the audience perceived it that way remains questionable. Can we really be sure that the nameless wife of Ganelon and the pagan Queen Bramimonde were looked upon negatively

87 Rohrer 1990: 172; Bumke 1989: 147-165 esp. 150 where he explains why a young warrior would not learn how to fight in battle formation from hearing the Song of Roland. See Kraug 1993: 3.
88 Campbell 1993: 251.
89 For example the fictive queen of Jerusalem, wife of Oren – must be viewed upon as a reason to get her out of the story. See Meyer 2003: 36-37.
93 Meyer 2003: 37 and 39. The other method is to exclude the converted heathen from the text.
94 Roland does not react to Oliver’s reference to his sister Aude (see line through which Oliver refers to Aude, RL 3868), nor does he reply to Oliver’s second comment on Aude (see note about Aude on p. 3868). Is it possible. The denial of Louis the Plass as her new husband – a useless marriage from a political point of view – must be viewed upon as a reason to get her out of the story. See Meyer 2003: 39.
because their husbands were villains? As I will discuss below, one can just as well view the nameless wife as the person looking after her husband’s spiritual well-being. This was a task more often performed by women and deemed important. Care for those in the hereafter was meant to ensure eternal life. At the same time, it could demonstrate and enhance one’s fame. And if these women were looked upon negatively, why did the writer then comment on their duties at the court of their husbands? That their husbands try to influence their spouses’ actions strengthens the notion that the text reflects the medieval reality that women were not passive.

Furthermore, the extent to which the patron influenced the content of the written (or copied) text and the extent to which the cleric who wrote or copied the text decided to adjust it according to his beliefs or rhetorical conventions cannot be assessed. The influence of clerical scribes is one reason to assume that the portrayal of women in medieval romance is never univocal: they frequently regarded women as inferior persons. Ironically, in chronicles and religious works written for women, these very same clerics praised them. This ambivalence is explained by Roberta Krueger in her discussion of the passage featuring a ‘rich dame de riche rei’ in Le Roman de Troie (ca. 1160) by Benoît de Sainte-Maure. This sentence has been regarded as a reference to Eleanor of Aquitaine, who is likewise considered the text’s matron. Krueger, however, points out that the passage concerning the ‘noble lady of a powerful king’ appears in Benoît’s description of female fickleness in reference to Briseïda and other women. According to Krueger, the passage is both a testament to Benoît’s misogynistic attitude and a demonstration of the problem of gender and its interpretation by the audience.

This brings me to one final limitation regarding the interpretation of fictional texts. It is difficult to assess the audience’s appreciation for the story in general and the female characters in particular. While we may assume that the response of (women) readers was anything but uniform and static, the precise nature of their responses remains difficult to grasp. Nevertheless, when a literary work was commissioned, an author tried to please his patron by narrating stories that appealed to potential readers or listeners. Such stories revolved around courts, knights, heroes, ladies, enemies, love, emotion – but also divisions in gender and class. This idea has been put forth by scholars who address the relation between literary production and women – either as patrons, audience or fictional characters. Imagery presented in literary texts is as complicated as the society in which it is produced. In this manner, it stands as a reflection of that society. This is one reason why one cannot claim a direct correlation between the narration and the events in the lives of noblemen and -women.

As already observed, literary texts as historical sources have their limitations. There can, for example, be a tension between literary female figures and historical women. Nonetheless, it is well worth considering what Aude, the nameless wife of Ganelon and Queen Bramimonde in the Rolandslied might tell us about the responsibilities of noblewomen – the women who were also present in the audience. That women in the Rolandslied, play a different role when compared to that in the Chanson de Roland supports this idea.

### 1.3 More than a woman: consorts, widows and regents in the Rolandslied

In both the Chanson de Roland and the Rolandslied, Bramimonde (Brechmunda in German), the wife of the Saracen King Marsile, is the woman who appears most frequently. Then there is also Roland’s fiancée, Aude (Alda). She is mentioned by her brother Oliver (Olivier) twice and appears in person to claim her husband after Charlemagne has returned to Aix-la-Chapelle (Aachen). The third female character is the intriguing ‘nameless woman’. She is the sister of Charlemagne, the mother of Roland, the wife of Ganelon and his son’s mother, Baldwin. Thus we see three capacities – i.e. that of sister, wife and mother – united in one figure. Because the nameless woman

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95 Krueger 1993: 4-7.
96 Krueger 1993: 16-17.
98 ‘the image of women in literature was complex and reflected the place of women in society generally’ is an important notion in Johns’s chapter on the way medieval women in relation to power are depicted in historiographical writings. See Johns 2003: 13 and Gaunt 1995: 3-16.
99 She presents a gift to Ganelone (in RL and ChdR), she weeps over her wounded husband Marsile (in RL and extended in ChdR) she receives the messengers of Baligant (in RL and shorter ChdR), she greets Baligant (in RL and shorter in ChdR), she cries over the death of Marsile (in RL and ChdR), she greets Bramante and the pagans are convinced (in RL and ChdR), Bramimonde addresses Charlemagne who laments his losses (only in RL). Bramimonde is Christianised (in RL and ChdR, albeit in different parts of the texts and in different fashions).
100 Aude is mentioned by Oliver in when Oliver asks Roland to blow his horn out of love for Aude in order to get help from Charlemagne (no basis durch minne swester Alda willen, RL 3980). Oliver mentions her again when he reproaches Roland for not blowing his horn earlier. He says to Roland: min swester Alda n auc an dînem arme niemer erwarme, RL 6012-6014.
links all of the protagonists together, she plays a vital role when compared to the other women. Nevertheless, in comparison with the other two women, she has been largely ignored in scholarly literature, probably because she does not perform her part actively. She has no direct voice herself, but is only spoken about by others. She is not actually physically present in any of the scenes: when her husband talks about her, he is either engaged in a conversation with Charlemagne and the other paladins or addressing his vassals before departing to Marsile. Both occasions are dominated by men, and while women in reality may not have been excluded from events such as meetings and departures, their presence does not seem to have been necessary either.

That women play a role in the Rolandslied and Chanson is not a straightforward indication that women had an interest in the story, but does make the story more appealing to a mixed audience consisting of women and men of various ages and professions. In this section, I will address the responsibilities of the women in the Rolandslied in order to get an insight into women's duties at court. At the same time, I hope to convince the reader that the text, as such, was more than just an entertaining and instructive text that displayed noble conduct for the sole use of men. First, the duties of Roland's fiancée, Aude, Ganelon's nameless wife and the pagan queen, Bramimonde, will be examined by discussing specific passages from the texts, each time followed by a comparison with Matilda. If we accept the idea that the Rolandslied was useful to Henry the Lion, because he could identify with the hero Roland, then Roland's fiancée, Aude, emerges as the ideal fictional character to investigate in relation to the duties and responsibilities of noblewomen such as Matilda.

1.3.1
Roland’s fiancée Aude as loyal and devout

The audience of the Rolandslied meets Aude for the first time when Oliver suggests that Roland should blow his horn as a call for help and adds that Roland should do so out of love for Oliver's sister Aude (nu tuoz durch miner swester Alden willen, RL 3868). Aude is not mentioned in the same episode in the Chanson, but in both texts Roland is determined not to blow his Oliphant. He seems to have made the right decision, because the Christians besiege the pagans at Roncevaux. Marsile, however, does not give up and fights back. This time Oliver, Roland and the other Christians face serious opposition. Roland addresses his people by saying that he would have blown his horn had there been any hope that Charlemagne would come to their rescue. Oliver replies that he should have done so the first time because this would have saved the lives of many noblemen. As a consequence, Roland will die and Aude loses her future husband.101 In the Chanson, Oliver also blames Roland for being stubborn about blowing the horn. Oliver is angry and snarls at Roland that: 'If I manage to see my fair sister Alda again, you shall never lie in her arms.' (ChdR 1720-1721). These words do not refer to the defeat that Roland and Oliver are facing, but reflect Oliver's anger towards Roland's precipitate action.

Aude's first appearance is a passive one, but she returns actively at the end of the Rolandslied, just before the trial against Ganelon, who is accused of treason. When studying the Chanson de Roland, scholars have pointed out that Aude offers an interesting opposition to Bramimonde.102 The same applies for the Rolandslied, as the main features of Aude and Bramimonde – respectively labelled as a 'quiet maid and dissenting queen' by Kinoshita – are also evident in the German text. In all likelihood, the audience of the Rolandslied recognised that Aude is a woman in love with Roland. The fair Aude appears at Charlemagne's court and tells him she wants Roland back, for it was he whom the king promised her and the man for whom she longs.103 In the Chanson, Aude also asks where Roland is, but the audience is informed that it is Roland himself, rather than Charlemagne, who promised he would take her as his wife (ChdR 3710). Aude can therefore be regarded as Roland's betrothed. In both texts, the king informs her with a heavy heart that Roland will not return because he is dead and buried. To this Charlemagne adds that he will provide her with a new husband, his son, Louis the Pious, who will rule over all of Charlemagne's domains. Only in the Rolandslied, however, is it explicitly mentioned that Aude will thus also

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103 RL 8692-8728.
rule as queen over all of France.\(^{104}\) The position of the future queen of France, as proposed in the Rolandslied, might therefore be interpreted as bait for Aude to marry. Charlemagne’s offer equally demonstrates that young women possessed a genealogical value and were therefore meant to remarry. This fails to sway Aude, however, as she will have no other marriage and prays to Christ that she longs to die. After this she turns pale, falls into Charlemagne’s arms and dies.\(^{105}\)

In both the German and French episodes concerning Aude, it is evident that her character, as Oliver’s sister and Roland’s fiancée, is the common link between the two men. Although largely a passive figure, her role demonstrates the importance of women in establishing bonds between families. Through her relation with Roland she is also connected to Charlemagne, who indeed addresses her as family and even suggests that she could remain family by marrying his son Louis.

The difference between the two texts in terms of the drama connected to Aude’s death is that in the Chanson  it is centred around Charlemagne, while in the Rolandslied, it focuses on Aude and her death wish. Only in the Chanson de Roland does Charlemagne have tears in his eyes when Aude appears before him and he pulls his beard in despair. When she falls into his arms, he feels deeply sorry for her and holds her. After she dies he summons four countesses to further care for her body by taking it to a nunnery. Finally, the king makes an extensive endowment to the nunnery where Aude lies buried next to the altar ‘in noble fashion’ (ChdR 3723-3733). Charlemagne’s action can be considered as a gesture to secure the care of her soul. At the same time, it portrays him as an exemplary Christian king performing a task that befits his rank. In the Rolandslied, neither the involvement of other aristocratic ladies nor the king’s largesse is mentioned. Aude is not buried next to the altar, but rather at the graveyard of the nuns. The emphasis is on the description of Aude’s loyalty to Roland and her piety, as expressed by her prayer to the Virgin in the hope that she would be taken to heaven.\(^{106}\)

\(^{104}\) In the Chanson this passage is extended with the announcement that the king at first thinks Aude just has fainted and only notices that she has died as her head falls on his shoulder as he tries to help her get up. See ChdR 3723-3728.

\(^{105}\) Compare RL 8723-8726 and ChdR 3723-3722. ‘la mort de la fiancée de Roland comme une replique feminine de la mort du héros (comme celle d’Iseut dans le Roman de Tristan) et recevant dans la description de cette mort de frappantes ressemblances avec des motifs iconographiques tels que la Pietà (inversée) et la Dormition de la Vierge’. Cited after Heijkant 1997: 639-644.

\(^{106}\) RL 8714-8723.

**Aude and her audience**

It is possible that the twelfth-century audience, whether Anglo-Norman or Saxon, perceived Aude’s rejection of Charlemagne’s proposal with ambiguity. On the one hand, it emphasises the young woman’s love for the dead hero, which is further underscored by her death. It is possible that Aude’s behaviour was considered sympathetically as a ‘romantic’ love, or as the idealisation of marriage. On the other hand, Henry and Matilda, like the majority of the men and women in the audience, were married for political reasons. In their eyes a betrothal was a contractual agreement between two families. To reject such an offer by the emperor could very well have been viewed as passing up an opportunity to marry an influential man. This does not mean that women never refused such a marriage proposal. In fact, some may have refused to (re)-marry at all. Yet it is highly likely that the family of a young woman such as Aude preferred seeing her at the side of a man of influence.\(^{107}\) As Jens Ahlers argued, this was one of the reasons why Henry II married off his eldest daughter, Matilda, to Henry the Lion.\(^{108}\) It is thus possible that the readers or listeners of the Rolandslied viewed Aude as a stubborn young woman, acting irrational by refusing to marry.

Another perspective from which to view Aude in the Rolandslied – and the Chanson – is religious in nature: precisely because of her death, she may be seen as a model of the perfect woman. By refusing a new husband, she chooses to remain a virgin (she does not seem to have shared Roland’s bed). As such, her death resembles that of the many virgin martyrs who likewise rejected the husbands chosen for them by their fathers. While in reality this ideal was virtually unobtainable for most noblewomen, by being chaste they could still aspire to achieve spiritual ‘virginity’.\(^{109}\) Aude thus was able to leverage ‘widowhood’ to stay chaste.

Additionally, she serves as a perfect literary device employed by Konrad to emphasise that the heroic Roland – the man she loved and had lost – was a unique figure with whom no man could compete. Matilda’s appearance in Arnold of Lübeck’s chronicle can be viewed in the same man-

\(^{107}\) Examples of ruling widowed women are Constance († 1184) and Agnès van Loon († 1191). See Eipers 2003: 105-108 and 119-120. French examples in Evergates 2007: 146-147. As example of a cloistered woman is Sophie of Bavaria († 1143) who married twice and then entered a monastery. See Eipers 2003: 77-78. On this topic also Evergates 2007: 141-146; Mitchen-Bakker 2011: 15-24.

\(^{108}\) Ahlers 1987: 41.

ner: her royal descent, her virtues and her offspring were praised to glorify Henry the Lion, who was the hero of Arnold’s chronicle, just as Roland was in Konrad’s Rolandslied. From both Konrad’s ideal portrayal of Aude and Arnold’s laudatory depiction of Matilda one can gather only limited information regarding the actual duties and responsibilities of women. Surprisingly, it is from the one person in the Rolandslied for whom no name is even provided – Ganelon’s wife – that the greatest insight can be obtained.

1.3.2
Ganelon’s wife: mother and regent

When Ganelon addresses Roland with the words ‘your mother is my wife’, a nameless and voiceless woman enters the stage in the Rolandslied.110 Her passive role is underscored by not giving her a voice of her own; she is only spoken about by others. She is first mentioned after her husband is chosen – or rather forced – to act as an ambassador at the court of the pagan king, Marsile. It is Ganelon’s duty to find out whether Marsile really intends to convert to Christianity and submit himself to the emperor. He must also communicate the message that Charlemagne will not retreat before Saragossa is destroyed.111 Ganelon expresses his distrust to Roland. He also points out that Roland’s mother is Ganelon’s wife and that they have a son together, Baldwin, who is Roland’s half-brother:

Now it is evident that you [Roland] have always wanted me dead. Your mother is my wife. My son Baldwin should be your brother. You have forgotten about loyalty.112

The mentioned passage not only informs the audience of the hostility between Ganelon and Roland, but it is also instructive in revealing the family ties that exist among the story’s main characters: Roland, Charlemagne and Ganelon. As Charlemagne’s sister and Roland’s mother, Ganelon’s wife – a very beautiful woman of course – serves as the connection between these men.113 Konrad also relates that she has another son, Baldwin, who is too young to rule in his father’s absence. To see Ganelon’s wife merely as the pivot of the remaining characters, however, is an oversimplified view.114 If this were the case, Konrad would have no reason to return to the nameless wife some sixty lines further, when Ganelon addresses Charlemagne in the hope of gaining his support against Roland:

Ganelon fell on his knees before the emperor. ‘Lord’, he said, ‘if only I could benefit from the fact that your sister is my wife. When I die, Roland will seize all my belongings. He will disown your nephew. What can a woman do to prevent this? Little Baldwin will grow up without property. You will never see me again.’115

Clearly, Ganelon fears that his wife, Baldwin’s mother, will not be able to prevent her older son, Roland, from capturing their estates, thereby leaving Baldwin disinherited. At this stage, the importance of Ganelon’s wife in her role of sister and mother is stressed. Although these roles contribute to her importance, her position is limited: as a woman unable to arm and defend herself, she requires the support of men.

It is not Charlemagne, but Roland himself, who dismisses his ‘stepfather’ Ganelon’s fear by stating that there is no reason for concern. Roland tells Ganelon that he dearly loves Baldwin, who is Ganelon’s son and Roland’s half-brother. Therefore Roland has no desire to take Baldwin’s patrimony. Furthermore, Roland loves his mother and wishes to serve or support her. Finally, he says that his good behaviour is the product of Charlemagne’s education.116

The discussed passages from the Rolandslied present situations that are recognisable to the audience. Moving from one court to another, as Ganelon was expected to do, was indeed a hazardous enterprise. Besides

110 RL 1383.
111 RL 1283-1286 (sending an ambassador). RL 1519-1520 (Charlemagne will not retreat).
112 nî ist ez aller êrist her ûz erbluot, / daz dû mir ie riete an den lîb. / dîn muoter ist mîn wîb. / mîn sun Baldewîn / scholde dîn bruoder sîn. / vergezzen hâst dû der triuwen, RL 1460-1461.
113 dene aler schoenesten wîbe, / die ie deheim man gwan ze sînem lîbe , RL 1460-1461.
114 This is how Matthias Meyere assessed the roles played by Aude and Brunnende. See Meyer 2003: 39.
the risk of injury during the journey, there was also no certainty that the family and property left behind are truly safe. During the lord’s absence, and in the event of his death, the heirs’ succession was less secure and the struggle over his lands was a genuine threat to the family’s security. What means a woman would have in her possession to prevent such a thing is not easy to determine. Recent studies on aristocratic women, however, demonstrate that (some) women were able to maintain the household during their husbands’ absence.117 As a matter of fact, the *Rolandslied* itself provides a clue to how women’s positions as regents could be upheld. When Ganelon addresses his 700 richly adorned and well-equipped ‘loyal men’ (*sinnen mannern*, RL 1670) before departing to the court of the pagan king, Marsile, he states:

> Now I plea to you also, do a final thing out of your honour. When I die in the land of the pagans, tell my beloved wife to take care of my soul. Support her in upholding her position. I entrust her with all my belongings. I leave her many large farmsteads and plenty of treasures.118

Ganelon hereby asks the men in his service to help protect his wife’s position. Equally evident is that he expects his wife to rule and, likewise, expects his vassals to support his son, who is later to rule over his land.119 The text thus suggests that his wife and vassals were supposed to cooperate. Though his wife does not speak, she is given a voice through Ganelon’s references to her person and her rule. The same cannot be said for her character in the French text.

**The Nameless Wife in the *Chanson de Roland*: An Invisible Woman**

The position of the nameless wife in the *Chanson de Roland* is very different to that of her role as just described in the *Rolandslied*. This is made most clear in the episode where Ganelon first addresses Charlemagne. In the *Chanson*, it is Ganelon’s son, Baldwin, who is the heir to his father’s lands and fiefs rather than Ganelon’s wife. Nor is she expected to look after Baldwin, for Ganelon urges that the emperor take care of his son.

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118 RL 1670-1719.
119 RL 1684-1719 where Ganelon’s requests his vassals to protect his son.
120 En Saraaguce sai ben qu’aler m’estoet, / Hom ki la vait / Ensurquetut si ai jo vostre soer, / Sin ai un fil, ja plus bels nen estoet, / Ço est Baldewin, / 66 67 RL 1694-1709 where Ganelon’s requests his vassals to protect his son.
121 Benton 1991 (1979): 161. While loyalty to one’s kin is important, Benton states ‘But towering far above loyalty to kin are a warrior’s loyalties to his companions in arms […]’. See Benton 1991 (1979): 162.
122 Benton 1991 (1979): 161. While loyalty to one’s kin is important, Benton states ‘But towering far above loyalty to kin are a warrior’s loyalties to his companions in arms […]’. See Benton 1991 (1979): 162.
From this perspective, it would be logical to view Charlemagne as the ward to whom Ganelon's son was entrusted, even if Ganelon is not yet dead. The vassals played no role, possibly because they were considered potential usurpers. That no mention is made of the nameless wife could perhaps be seen as proof that she played no actual role in these agreements and had no choice but to accept what was decided. Sue Sheridan Walker concluded that, following the death of a husband, women usually accepted the fact that their feudal lands and their eldest son were held in wardship by (several) lords. Once again, we need to keep in mind the existing restrictions regarding female wardship do not necessarily mean that mothers made no attempt to secure such a wardship.

It thus seems that the positions of the nameless woman in the Rolandslied and Chanson de Roland reflect, to a certain extent, the legislative position held by women in these regions. At the same time, Pfaffe Konrad offered the nameless woman more space to act than his French counterpart. Perhaps he regarded this as a logical consequence of Ganelon's troubled relation with Roland and Charlemagne. It is also possible, however, that Konrad considered Ganelon's wife a suitable ward because, in reality, women were allowed to act as regents for their sons and absent husbands. When turning to the court of Henry the Lion, this is not such a farfetched idea.

**MATILDA RULING IN THE ABSENCE OF A HUSBAND**

Women acting as regents were most likely familiar to the German audience. Both Duke Henry's mother and grandmother acted as regents during his minority. Moreover, during his first marriage to Clementia of Zähringen, he appointed his wife as regent or deputy (Statthalterin), meaning that she deputised for her husband whilst he was away in 1151 and 1154. In 1151, Henry left Lüneburg in order to claim Bavaria. The twelfth-century chronicler, Helmold of Bosau, writes that in preparation for this military campaign the duke assigned count Adolf of Holstein († 1164) as a guard over his lands. In 1151, although he might occasionally have returned to Lüneburg.

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126 Johns 2003: 176.
in politics. But when Helmold tells that in the same year the Abodrite ruler, Niklot, turned to Clementia for help in order to have other Slavic tribes pay their taxes to him, it becomes clear that she was considered the right person to address. She took action by sending count Adolf with Niklot to support him.\footnote{In 1154 Clementia acted again during Henry's absence. The death of the bishop of Oldenburg resulted in the vacancy of this position. It was Clementia who decided that Gerold, her husband's chaplain, should be sent to Oldenburg to occupy the episcopal see.\footnote{The duchess thus exercised the right that was granted to her husband by Frederick Barbarossa.}} In 1172-1173, Matilda seems to have been in a similar situation as Clementia and Ganelon's nameless wife. Like Ganelon, Henry the Lion embarked on a journey leaving Brunswick for the Holy Land, perhaps also as an ambassador, as suggested by the Byzantine chronicler, John Kinnamos.\footnote{According to Arnold of Lübeck, Henry was accompanied by 1200 men, a number that was likely just as fictive as the 700 men Ganelon gathered in the Rolandslied. Yet in both cases, these numbers probably impressed readers.}

In 1172-1173, Matilda seems to have been in a similar situation as Clementia and Ganelon's nameless wife. Like Ganelon, Henry the Lion embarked on a journey leaving Brunswick for the Holy Land, perhaps also as an ambassador, as suggested by the Byzantine chronicler, John Kinnamos.\footnote{According to Arnold of Lübeck, Henry was accompanied by 1200 men, a number that was likely just as fictive as the 700 men Ganelon gathered in the Rolandslied. Yet in both cases, these numbers probably impressed readers.} Just as Ganelon's nameless wife, Matilda remains at home. She is not in the fortunate position of already having a son, but she is with child and hopes to soon bring forth a male heir. In Chapter 2, I will discuss this in greater detail and will argue that it is very likely that Matilda acted as a regent during Henry's absence. Because Matilda could not perform every duty by herself, she was supported by two ministerials. Roland wished to offer to his mother similar support and Ganelon requested that his wife receive his vassals' assistance. When Ganelon pleads with his men to stay with the emperor while he travels to Marsile on his own, he tells the audience that his wife needs their support in maintaining her position. After all, he has left her with all his belongings, comprising many large farmsteads and great treasure.

Regardless of whether Ganelon's wife ultimately did rule by herself or not, this passage from the Rolandslied illustrates that aristocratic women could act as regents, at least until their sons reached the age of majority and were old enough to rule by themselves. Had Ganelon and his wife been actual people living in twelfth-century Germany, they would have proved a valuable case study for Bettina Elpers's book on maternal regents in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Germany.\footnote{While she provides general outlines concerning female regency based on charters and chronicles, she equally demonstrates that each case should be studied individually as well. The nameless wife of Ganelon serves as a good fictional case. On the one hand, the nameless wife acted as a regent-mother for her infant son during Ganelon's absence and death. On the other hand, it is an example that reveals that family members were involved in supporting the mother in maintaining her position and safeguarding her and her family's properties.}

While we can never be completely sure of the medieval author's intentions, the emphasis on women's responsibilities could be regarded as a strategy to draw the audience into the narrative. Considering their horizons of expectations, the reader and/or listener possibly saw (maternal) regency as a reference to Matilda's importance at court. As the duke's consort, she was entrusted with the care of his estates, familia and vassals.

A wife's responsibility to care for the estates while her husband is away and a mother's duty to raise her son were, however, were not the sole tasks that aristocratic women were expected to perform. A passage in the Rolandslied suggests that they were expected to keep the fama and memoria of the husband and family alive as well. One might even suggest that a woman's promotion of fama and memoria became more urgent when her husband was waging war. Her responsibility to care for the 'here and now' as well as the hereafter are discussed next.

\footnotetext[133]{Helmold of Bosau, Chronica Slavorum 136; Ehlers 2008: 77; Elpers 2003: 204.}
\footnotetext[134]{Ehlers 2003: 199-200.}
\footnotetext[135]{\textit{Sô muoz der lüzzele Baldewîn iemer mêre weise sîn}, RL 1450-1451. Mîn lieber sun Baldewîn, der scol iu wol bevolhen sîn. zieht in iu ze êren. zucht scholt ir in lêren , RL 1694-1697.}
\footnotetext[136]{Fried 1998: 112.}
\footnotetext[137]{\textit{Fried 1998: 122; Ehlers 2008: 205 and 210-211.}}
\footnotetext[138]{Elpers 2003.}
\footnotetext[139]{RL means \textit{Reichslexikon} (\textit{Reichslesebuch}) weise.}
I.3.3
Ganelon’s wife: taking care of the hereafter

After Ganelon asks his men to support his wife and son, he requests them to bring his wife a ring and to remind her of her religious responsibilities.

Bring her this ring. If God permits, I will return to her with great joy. And remind her constantly, because of her virtue, to have religious prayers for me when I don’t return. Oh, I will never set my eyes on her again.140

When reading these words, Ganelon’s request to bring ditze vingelîn (this ring) to his wife has been overlooked.141 Nevertheless, this tiny object, which is absent from the French text, is fascinating. Its meaning can be established in several ways.142 The audience perhaps interpreted the ring as the one item that confirms for the nameless wife that the message was indeed sent by her husband, Ganelon, as she will recognise it as his. In this manner, the ring is a token of his identity. Perhaps giving it to her also constitutes the transferal of his authority to her. Bestowing authority on someone was frequently signalled by investing that person with insignia. The sceptre, like the crown serves as an everlasting reminder of her husband. Accordingly, Ganelon’s ring is ultimately an object bestowed in fear in order to not be forgotten by his wife and son. Friedrich Ohly labels this as a human primal fear (‘menschliche Urangst’) that can be compensated by objects left behind. These helped people to remember, thereby protecting the said individual’s life.143 To the wife, the ring would be a precious memento of her loving husband and her child’s father, whose fame should not be forgotten.

The twelfth-century readers and listeners of the Rolandsslied may have noticed the ring in the moments when it was absent, there is no reference at all to the care for the hereafter. Ganelon only refers to the present and the temporal future when he urges his knights to be his son’s vassals. His wife is neither asked to preserve her husband’s memory, nor to take care of his liturgical commemoration. Of course this does not mean that both aspects did not matter to the French audience, but it does not seem to have mattered in this particular poem.

Since the ring was also a symbol of the everlasting bond between a husband and wife, Ganelon’s act can be seen as repeating the ritual of the ring’s conferral during the wedding ceremony, which signals the married couple’s commitment.144 The importance of the ring was emphasised by medieval theologians. According to Bishop Ivo of Chartres (r. 1090–1115/1116), a wedding ring was one of the components of a legitimate marriage.145 Half a century later, Rolandas of Bologna viewed the ring as a symbol of the eternal faithfulness between husband and wife, because of its unbroken shape.146 It is thus evident that the ring was not just a precious object, but that it also strongly emphasised the bond between two people.147 For the audience, which was accustomed to rituals and the objects associated with them, the ring’s symbolic meanings were probably efficient in their ambiguity. That Ganelon reminds the reader or listener several times that he is convinced he will never return, that his son will be an orphan and his wife a widow, only added to the dramatic meaning of the ring.148

At the same time, Ganelon expresses his hope to ‘return to her with great joy’. These words follow directly after he commands his vassals to bring his wife the ring. The ring may therefore also be viewed as an object that can restore the bond between a husband and wife if Ganelon is indeed so fortunate to return. Ganelon indeed returns safely, but only to be put to death in reprisal for his treason — never to see his wife again.149 Whether seen as an object revealing the messenger’s identity or as a token of the everlasting bond between a husband and wife, the ring is the most personal possession the nameless wife has of Ganelon after his death. It therefore serves as an everlasting reminder of her husband. Accordingly, Ganelon’s ring is ultimately an object bestowed in fear in order to not be forgotten by his wife and son. Friedrich Ohly labels this as a human primal fear (‘menschliche Urangst’) that can be compensated by objects left behind. These helped people to remember, thereby protecting the said individual’s life.143 To the wife, the ring would be a precious memento of her loving husband and her child’s father, whose fame should not be forgotten.

The blessing and conferral seems to have been part of the wedding ceremony since the ninth century. See Reynolds 2007: 22 ff. The ring also plays an important role in the late medieval legendary story of Henry the Lion travelling to unknown countries. When he departs from his wife he presents her the half of a golden ring, so that she will recognise him when he returns. See Metzger 1995, vol. 3: 16-19. Metzger considers the picture on the epitaph from around 1425, where Wladislaus holds a ring, to be the first reference to the legend of Henry the Lion. In his right hand Henry supposedly holds a box which contained the ring.

Brandenburg 1999: 189. The other elements indicating a legitimate marriage were: a public exchange of vows, marriage gifts, and blessing by the priest.

140 bringet eu ditze vingelîn. / vostette eu o'm trechtîn. / onb gesaunte eu a hir gerne. / unswe manet eu a verwe / durch eir bapet Ô a alhe. / dur eu guote stle eir onb stich lîhe / nûch ditze zwîvellîchen ânderkeine. / ëb eu guote ich ei / leader neuer sten. RL 1720-1727. Kartschoke has translated ‘guote lîhe’ with ‘Klosterleute’ which I have translated with religious people, either monks or nuns.

141 Kartschoke 2007: 876 (1713 ff.). He does not comment on the ring in the Charon de Roland, where the ring is absent, there is no reference at all to the care for the hereafter. Ganelon only refers to the present and the


143 Ferguson O’Meale 2001: 12 (coronation of kings) 158 (coronation of queens).


145 The blessing and conferral seems to have been part of the wedding ceremony since the ninth century. See Reynolds 2007: 22 ff. The ring also plays an important role in the late medieval legendary story of Henry the Lion travelling to unknown countries. When he departs from his wife he presents her the half of a golden ring, so that she will recognise him when he returns. See Metzger 1995, vol. 3: 16-19. Metzger considers the picture on the epitaph from around 1425, where Wladislaus holds a ring, to be the first reference to the legend of Henry the Lion. In his right hand Henry supposedly holds a box which contained the ring.

146 Brandenburg 1999: 189. The other elements indicating a legitimate marriage were: a public exchange of vows, marriage gifts, and blessing by the priest.

147 Wiegand 1981: 50.


149 Friedrich Ohly labels this as a human primal fear (‘menschliche Urangst’) that can be compensated by objects left behind. These helped people to remember, thereby protecting the said individual’s life. To the wife, the ring would be a precious memento of her loving husband and her child’s father, whose fame should not be forgotten.

150 She is mentioned when Ganelon’s clan tries to persuade Charlemagne to show mercy on Ganelon out of honour for his sister, RL 8765-8766.

have thought of the ring in a similar manner, but it is also possible that this highly symbolic object was regarded as a negative reminder that Ganelon's departure from Charlemagne's court ultimately resulted in Roland's death. Whatever the audience's response might have been, the fear of being forgotten and the efforts taken to prevent its occurring are found nowhere in the French text.

A WAY TO REMEMBER: LITURGICAL COMMEMORATION

Ganelon orders his vassals to inform his wife that religious men should pray for him if he does not return alive. This arrangement concerning liturgical commemoration, also labelled memoria, was without doubt familiar to the twelfth-century audience. A religious community was asked – in exchange for the donation of money, costly crafted objects or materials such as wax, lead or wood – to pray for the dead in order to stimulate the spiritual welfare of the deceased. Mentioning a deceased person's name in prayers was done not only to invoke God's commemoration of the dead, but also to ensure that the memory of that person remained alive within the community of the living. This was important because the living hoped that the dead would act as intercessors with the saints. At the same time, the dead were a reminder of the family's status. After all, ancestors were part of the community of the living family members through blood ties. This meant that the dead were connected to the titles and territories held by their living heirs. As such, they were critical to enhancing the power and prestige of the living. Caring for the hereafter was therefore linked to the here and now and was not merely religious. Gerhard Otto Oexle labelled memoria as an 'all-embracing phenomenon'. In his view, memoria are a part of the social interaction that connect the living with the dead – involving religious, political, judicial and economic aspects. Memoria can therefore be seen as a means to propagate beliefs and convictions, and a way to remember the achievements of the commemorated persons. Similarly, donations to religious institutions were to be made in order to stimulate the liturgical commemoration. Of course this does not mean that both aspects did not matter to the French audience, but it does not seem to have mattered in this particular poem.

memoration. Against this background, the ring Ganelon gives to his wife might also be considered as an object that was to be donated to those benevolent individuals, i.e. monks and nuns, who were responsible for commemorating Ganelon.

In the passage of the Rolandslied that concerns Ganelon's preparations before leaving his family, friends and followers, the medieval audience witnessed an 'all-embracing social event'. On the assumption that Ganelon would die, he organised his house by appointing his wife as regent, his vassals as her supporters and taking measures to ensure that the care for his eternal well-being was in order. While the Rolandslied concerns perhaps a fictional story, such memorial arrangements would by no means have sounded unrealistic to a medieval audience.

FAMA AND MEMORIA AT THE COURT OF HENRY AND MATILDA

Medieval people knew from experience that it was important to keep the fame and memory of relatives alive. Consequently, these aspects may have been added to the Rolandslied as a technique to engage the audience in the story. One way to preserve the memory of next of kin was to commission ‘histories’: narrations that established the potentially fictional origin and fame of a dynasty. Such histories were therefore also highly suitable for lauding contemporary rulers. Both the Anglo-Norman rulers and the members of the Welf dynasty were eager to commission such texts.

152 unde manet si vile verre / durch ire tugentlîche site, / daz si guote liute umbe mich bite , RL 1723-1725. In the Chanson de Roland there is no reference at all to the care for the husband's memory, nor to take care of his liturgical commemoration. Of course this does not mean that both aspects did not matter to the French audience, but it does not seem to have mattered in this particular poem.

153 Only 184: 15.

154 Oexle 1964: 394.


157 The Anglo-Saxon Alfred, widow of Brighnoth, gave the monks of Ely a tapestry and a golden ring in memory of her husband’s courageous fighting against the Vikings in which he died during the battle of Maldon in 991. See Van Houts 1999: 106.

158 For this idea I am indebted to Oexle’s discussion of the Codex Falsensteinensis: in this case the estates belonging to the counts of Neuburg-Falsenstein are written down. See Oexle 1984: 422. For the value of this document to say something about the material culture at the twelfth-century court, see Bonne 1989: 15-16.

159 Gabrièle Spiegel argues that the ring was a way to remember the living: it was a way to remember the living: it was a way to remember the living: it is a way to remember the living: it is a way to remember the living: "fama and memoria at the court of Henry and Matilda"...
While we do not know if Henry and Matilda as well stimulated the writing of such texts, by hailing its patrons and linking them to important historical figures of the past, the Rolandslied shares a number of characteristics with these histories. In this manner, Henry and Matilda’s fame, like that of the kings of England, is sung and preserved through a chanson de geste.

Reminders of ancestors’ fame and that of living family members were not confined to written texts. Gerhard Otto Oexle regards the gigantic bronze lion Henry commissioned around 1166 at Brunswick as an object of ‘profane memoria’. The lion represents and commemorates the duke’s rule and his right to administer justice. Additionally, it directly refers to the bronze statue’s patron, who was nicknamed ‘the Lion’. It has also been observed in relation to Henry’s descent from the Welf dynasty, since ‘Welf’ was also the word for a young lion cub.\(^{[161]}\) The bronze lion is therefore an embodiment of Henry’s presence and fame. The importance Henry and Matilda attached to fame is also evident when looking at the coronation miniature in the Gospel Book of Henry and Matilda (ill. 3.3). Here they are depicted together with their parents and grandparents who can be identified by the aid of inscriptions. The miniature, which will be discussed extensively in Chapter 3, emphasises their royal descent and is a constant reminder of it as well. Henry and Matilda’s fame is like that of the other nobles interwoven with their lineage, because family descent was a crucial way of legitimising the power rulers were eager to hold.\(^{[162]}\)

At the same time, it cannot be denied that the coronation miniature also communicates the idea of liturgical commemoration, the second way to preserve one’s memory. Henry and Matilda are presented with the crowns of heaven. The scroll held by Christ addresses them directly, requesting that they follow him in order to obtain eternal life. This is witnessed and stimulated by the saints (John the Evangelist, John the Baptist, Blaise, George, Peter, Bartholomew, Gregory and Thomas Becket) flanking Christ on either side. The miniature is found in the gospel book presented by Henry and Matilda to the Church of St Blaise, with the intention that it be used for the spiritual benefit of their souls, which the canons of this church were expected to safeguard.

Objects, whether written or visual, were thus suitable instruments to preserve someone’s \textit{fama} and \textit{memoria}.\(^{[163]}\) Written source material is far from overwhelming with regards to Matilda’s care for the present and future well-being of her family. Studies by Elisabeth van Houts and others point out that women employed both means to guarantee the memory of past family members. One could therefore imagine that the same was expected of Matilda.\(^{[164]}\) Arnold of Lübeck’s statement that the duchess was very devout, prayed with great zeal and frequently attended mass could be considered as a first clue to her involvement in religious patronage.\(^{[165]}\) From the thirteenth-century inventory in the \textit{Obdientiet et reditus ecclesie Hildesemnis in variis locis} we know that Matilda donated several objects to the Cathedral of Hildesheim.\(^{[166]}\) This inventory of acquired assets and revenues is part of the cathedral’s Chapter Book (\textit{Liber capitularis}) and mentions among the donated objects by Matilda two shrines, several ecclesiastical vestments and a censer in the shape of a Greek cross. The Hildesheim inventory does not mention why this specific donation is made, but the fact that gift-giving was an act of reciprocity suggests that the gifts were presented in the hope that the donors would be absolved of their sins and be remembered eternally.\(^{[167]}\) Of course, the donation may perhaps have been politically motivated as well. Another source informing us about the importance of the care for the hereafter is a charter issued by Henry and Matilda’s son, Henry Count Palatine (1223). It not only credits Matilda with donating the Altar of the Virgin to the Church of St Blaise, but it also explains that she made the donation ‘for the sake of their devout spirit and in their loving memory’.\(^{[168]}\)

So far we have seen that the duties of Ganelon’s wife – ruling in his absence and ensuring the care of his fame and \textit{memoria} – correspond with the responsibilities of actual noblewomen in the twelfth century. In Chapter 2, I will argue that it is possible that Matilda acted as Henry’s regent in 1172-1173. The gift to Hildesheim and Matilda’s donation of the Altar of the Virgin at St Blaise suggest that she also was responsible for the care of

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{[161]} Oexle 1984: 412-413.  \\
[163] Arnold of Lübeck, Chronica Danorum: 11.  \\
[164] Methilid diccius ecclesie nostra devotissime aue cum marite aue Henrico ducce dutce ducenti ecclesiæ opus ante - menta auro et aurifragio aurei: castanum castanam, casu - lar robam, stolam auream, castanam vasa auro textum, scrina duo et sandalia ad ministe - rium episcopale, MGH UU HdL: 179, no. 122. The Chapter Book is in Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Cod. Guelf. 83.30 Aug. 2. 29 x 18 cm, 204 fols. The donation is mentioned on fol. 183r.  \\
[165] The hope to be absolved was expressed by Henry the Lion in a charter concerning the donation of three eternal burning lamps to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, [...] pro remissionis poneo passio et reditum et celebratio in remissioni peccatorum. [MHU UU HdL: 179, no. 122. The Chapter Book is in Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Cod. Guelf. 83.30 Aug. 2. 29 x 18 cm, 204 fols. The donation is mentioned on fol. 183r.  \\
[167] This inventory of acquired assets and revenues is part of the cathedral’s Chapter Book (\textit{Liber capitularis}) and mentions among the donated objects by Matilda two shrines, several ecclesiastical vestments and a censer in the shape of a Greek cross. The Hildesheim inventory does not mention why this specific donation is made, but the fact that gift-giving was an act of reciprocity suggests that the gifts were presented in the hope that the donors would be absolved of their sins and be remembered eternally. Of course, the donation may perhaps have been politically motivated as well. Another source informing us about the importance of the care for the hereafter is a charter issued by Henry and Matilda’s son, Henry Count Palatine (1223). It not only credits Matilda with donating the Altar of the Virgin to the Church of St Blaise, but it also explains that she made the donation ‘for the sake of their devout spirit and in their loving memory’.}
Queen Bramimonde: women as mediators and advisors

As the woman who appears most frequently both in the *Rolandslied* and *Chanson de Roland*, Queen Bramimonde has received ample scholarly attention. Because she is a pagan queen and therefore a problematic role model, she might not seem the most obvious person to study when discussing the responsibilities of women.\(^{169}\) There are, however, several reasons for discussing Bramimonde's duties and actions. For one thing, many aspects of the Christian and pagan court are mirrored in both texts, suggesting that the author's notions regarding noble behaviour did not vary significantly for either of the two courts.\(^{170}\) There is no reason to assume that this applied to the male characters only. Moreover, the pagan queen is no different from the male characters only. Moreover, the pagan queen is no different from the male characters only. Perhaps this is the reason Konrad does not attribute Bramimonde with more negative qualities than the other women. Moreover, it is evident that Bramimonde will convert to Christianity and this makes her less pagan. A parallel emerges between Bramimonde and Gyburg, the wife of Willehalm (formerly known as Arabel), in Wolfram of Eschenbach's *Willehalm* (1210-1220). She is credited with much the same characteristics as Bramimonde (wise advisor, prepared to fight, courtly hostess), but plays a more prominent role in the story. She, for example, argues that Christians and pagans are both created by God.\(^{171}\) It is possible that the character of Gyburg evolved from the hereafter. This is what the Gospel Book, to be discussed in Chapter 3, was also meant to communicate. The second woman appearing in the *Rolandslied*, the pagan queen, Bramimonde, cannot be credited with caring for the *memoria*. When it comes to the pagans, this theme is entirely absent. What Bramimonde does care for, however, is the here and now.

1.3.4

Bramimonde. Based on this brief analysis of Bramimonde, we are now able to discuss the pagan queen's actions in light of the responsibilities medieval Christian women had at their courts.

The first time the reader or listener encounters Bramimonde in the *Rolandslied* is when Ganelon is rewarded for instructing Marsile as to when and by what means Roland's army should be attacked. Out of gratitude for Ganelon's support, King Marsile offers him a kiss on the mouth and endows him with many precious objects.\(^{172}\) Next, Valdabrun (Valdebrun) presents Ganelon with a sword and Climborim (Oliboris) gives him a helmet – all in an effort to have Roland brought to them.\(^{173}\) Neither of the two men kisses Ganelon. After this, Bramimonde comes forward and addresses Ganelon:

Queen Bramimonde stood up. She kissed him, gave him a piece of jewellery and spoke: 'Bring this to your wife. Charlemagne is a powerful king, but he never owned such a piece. Nor was there ever made a similar piece on earth. I will show you my friendship. Try to bring me Roland. If I could kill him with my own hands, I would give people and land for it.'\(^{174}\)

In the *Chanson de Roland*, Bramimonde is also introduced after Marsile, Valdabrun and Climborim have presented their gifts. Here too Marsile kisses Ganelon (on the neck), but contrary to what happens in the *Rolandslied*, he is not the only figure involved in the act of kissing. In the *Chanson*, Valdabrun and Ganelon kiss each other on the face and chin; Climborim and Ganelon exchange kisses on the mouth and face.\(^{175}\) Subsequently, Queen Bramimonde comes forward and says: 'I care very much for you sir'. She then presents her gift to Ganelon, but she does not kiss him. In both texts, Bramimonde offers a gift to Ganelon, but it is only in the *Rolandslied* that she kisses him (it is unclear whether this is on the mouth or cheek). In what way are all of these kisses, and especially that of Bramimonde, to be interpreted?

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\(^{169}\) Harrison 1981: 678.

\(^{170}\) Kinoshita 2001: 78-111 who argues that the resemblances between both courts demonstrate the crisis in differentiation.

\(^{171}\) Buresk 2004: 298, 303 and 337.

\(^{172}\) RL 2474 (or Aaut in an de mûst) and RL 2480-2516 (gifts). The gifts included: many golden rings (probably diadems), diadems, goblets adorned with jewels, precious fabrics, with gold thread decorated blankets, an ermine cape with sable and gemstones, perfect horses, priceless hounds, camels and mules and pack animals. It is noteworthy that Gerd Althoff in his book concerned with family, friends and followers and rituals establishing and communicating bonds between these groups does not use fictional sources as evidence for the way relations are constructed and the way relationships are used. See Althoff 2004.

\(^{173}\) RL 2517-2542 (Valdebrun), RL 2543-2560 (Oliboris).


\(^{175}\) Bumke 2004: 337.
A pact sealed with a queenly kiss

The kiss was a meaningful gesture to the medieval audience, because this non-verbal act was an important part of public ritual. But like many gestures, the kiss was ambiguous and therefore difficult to interpret, if only because some people made a distinction among various kinds of kisses. In his *De spirituali amicitia* (On spiritual friendship), the twelfth-century English monk Aelred of Rievaulx cites four kinds of physical kisses that he considered to be natural: a kiss that reconciles enemies; a kiss that signifies peace (e.g. given in church after mass); a kiss based on love between a husband and wife or between friends after a long separation; and a kiss ‘as a sign of catholic unity’, for instance, when a guest is received. Of course, the context in which the kisses are exchanged contributes to the meaning of the kiss and provides us with some idea about its degree of appropriateness.

While the episode where Ganelon receives Marsile’s kiss on the mouth does not entail the entire ritual of vassalage, this kiss does seem to reflect the ceremony of homage and fealty (osculum feodale). It could also very well have been a kiss of friendship (amicitia) as part of a treaty. The kiss is the first part of the ratification of their agreement that Ganelon will betray Roland – this Ganelon swears he will do. The second part consists of the gift-giving, what might be considered as a definitive action that seals their deal. The same help is requested, or maybe even reinforced, by Valdabrun and Climborin and is ensured by Ganelon as well. Although the kisses of Valdabrun and Climborin are absent from the *Rolandslied*, it is evident that the gifts these two men present to Ganelon are also meant to seal the pact. Not only does Ganelon accept the gifts as a token that the deal was indeed clinched, but he also expresses his alliance by saying *ich gemache dir Ruolanten wen* (RL 2538) and *ich gemache dir Ruolanter* (RL 2562).

The kisses suggest equality among the men, because even though the Saracens took the initiative, each performed virtually the same physical act reciprocally. In the story of Roland, however, such reciprocity does not necessarily mean that these kisses are to be viewed in a positive light. After all, such an act also bears strong connotations with betrayal. Not without reason, Ganelon is described as ungetriuwe herzoge (RL 2535). He does not betray the one he kisses, and yet, his kiss still resembles that of Judas. While kisses exchanged between men in a relationship of fealty were normal, one may question how appropriate it was for Bramimonde to perform this same gesture as it occurs in the *Rolandslied*.

In his article on depictions of the kiss as a gesture, Michael Camille discusses the legal kiss (among others) and remarks that women did not engage in this ritual because it was considered indecent. Le Goff, by contrast, is not convinced that ‘decency’ had anything to do with the exclusion of women from the kiss. Women were allowed to participate in the ritual of homage that signified the inequality between lord and vassal, but were expelled from the bond of fealty symbolised by the kiss because it marked the phase of equality between the partners. As women were not considered equals due to their sex, they could not take part in the ritual kiss. Le Goff adds that, in reality, this rule was probably not followed strictly, particularly when women in possession of royal authority were involved. Bramimonde might also have been such an exception. This would fit her character, as she acts as an ‘independent and active participant’ who is capable of performing political duties in all of the passages in the *Rolandslied*. The audience’s view of Bramimonde’s kiss as appropriate or inappropriate would perhaps have depended on whether they interpreted the act as following that of her husband’s or as an act taken without her husband’s consent. In addition, the audience’s reading was also likely to be affected by the fact that Bramimonde’s kiss went hand in hand with the gift that she had just presented to Ganelon as a token of their friendship and their agreement to destroy Roland. Regardless of the exact (emotional) response triggered by the gestures of the kiss and gift, they provide some indication that a queen, like Bramimonde, was allowed to be actively involved in the political affairs of their husbands. The next question to be addressed is in what way we are to interpret the jewellery that Bramimonde presents to Ganelon as gifts to his wife.

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176 Stift 2010: 147-164.  
177 Kissing is difficult to study due to the absence of formal recording or public observation. Moreover, the sources which mention kisses do not seem to reflect reality. See Frijhoff 1991: 210-211. 
178 Burrow 2004: 50.  
179 Fröhlich 1991: 312 with an overview of the variables involved in kissing, such as the social sphere (public or private), age, gender and social status.  
180 Le Goff 1980: 240 ff. For the general outlines of such a ceremony, see Burrow 2004: 12. For the idea of friendship as part of a treaty see Fröhlich 2004: 71.  
181 The investiture of the fief, symbolised by offering a material counter-gift, seals the vassalage. See Le Goff 1980: 253.  
182 Burrow 2004: 32.  
184 Le Goff 1980: 281. He gives Dona Urraca (r. 1109-1126) as example. Theresa Martin gives for a more detailed account of her rule and the way art and architecture functioned as dynastic propaganda. See Martin 2005: 1134-1171.  
185 Harrison 1981: 674.
In the *Rolandslied*, the exchange of kisses is followed by the gift giving. The costly gifts Marsile bestowed upon Ganelon are named. Such an overview is absent from the *Chanson de Roland*. In imitation of her husband and the two dukes, Bramimonde presents jewellery to Ganelon (*si gab ime ain gesmâe, RL 2571*) and adds that he should give it to his wife (*nu bringez disem wilbe, RL 2572*). While there are no clues regarding the exact kind of jewellery given, we are told twice that it is a unique piece, and from this, we may probably also conclude that it was quite costly. As the jewellery is not meant to be worn or used by Ganelon, but is intended for his wife, it is likely to be a piece especially suited for a woman. The gender-specific character of the jewellery is also underscored in both texts by the fact that Valdabrun and Climborin present military gifts (helmet and sword) generally used by males only.

Why would Bramimonde offer Ganelon jewels for his wife? That a woman would present a feminine object to another woman provides probably only part of the answer. As gift-giving was always reciprocal, the main reason for such a gesture was that it would not only implicate Ganelon in the scheme of killing Roland, but likewise the rest of his family. This made the alliance stronger. Although it is not explicitly stated that he accepts the gift, it was probably evident to the audience that he did. The piece of jewellery served as a confirmation of his agreement with the pagans. Moreover, the object also served as a visual reminder of the deal to Ganelon and his wife. Ganelon’s reply, however, is less gallant than when the men presented him with their gifts. This has nothing to do with his appreciation for the jewels, but rather concerns the belligerent words that accompanied Bramimonde’s gift giving; that she would like to kill Roland herself. Ganelon finds her arrogant behaviour offensive (*ir hëchwart mëit mich vil sêre, RL 2584*). In all likelihood, Konrad added Ganelon’s reaction – which is not found in the *Chanson de Roland* – not only to demonstrate that the warlike Saracen queen overstepped social boundaries as fighting was reserved for men, but also that pagan society was inferior to the Christian one, because apparently they allowed their women to fight.¹⁸⁸

This episode of Bramimonde’s gift giving differs slightly from that in the *Chanson de Roland*. Here Bramimonde tells Ganelon that ‘Because my lord and all his men hold you in high esteem I will send two brooches to your wife. They are wrought with much gold, amethysts, and jacinth. And are worth more than all the riches of Rome. Your Emperor never had such fine ones’ (*ChdR 636-641*).¹⁸⁹ Ganelon receives the brooches because Bramimonde trusts the judgement of her husband, Marsile, that Ganelon will prove to be reliable ally. In this case, Ganelon’s acceptance of the gift is stated explicitly, as the author tells us that he takes the brooches and sticks them in his boot.¹⁹⁰ The acceptance and subsequent concealing of the jewellery is not described in the *Rolandslied*, but the same emphasis is placed on their unique and costly nature. Here as well, Charlemagne has never owned such fine specimens.

While in the German text, Ganelon is offered such precious objects because the queen wishes to demonstrate and consolidate her friendship (*ich hän din gerne mine, RL 2577*) in order to capture Roland, Ganelon receives the brooches in the *Chanson* as the result of the high esteem in which he is held by Bramimonde’s husband and his men.¹⁹¹ In both texts, it is evident that the queen wants to tie Ganelon to the Saracens by means of gift giving. However, the relation in the *Rolandslied* seems more direct and personal than in the Old French text. In the latter, Bramimonde is a mediator acting on behalf of her husband, with no explicit mention of her expectation that Ganelon should bring Roland to her.¹⁹²

The gift giving tells us something about the strategies deployed by women to construct alliances.¹⁹³ I do not wish to suggest that Bramimonde’s gift giving is straightforward evidence that women acted as mediators and advisors on behalf of their husbands and the courts. Nevertheless,

¹⁸⁸ Elżbieta van Heusden states that the giving of precious metals was gendered. From with it is evident that jewellery which be worn by women or by daughters or sisters, while decorated drinking horns and cups were passed on to sons or grandsons. See Van Heusden 1999: 108. It must be noted that these gifts stay within the family and are therefore of a different kind than gifts to vassals and friends.

¹⁸⁷ Kartschoke also remarks that these words are odd, but for a different reason. He finds it strange that the pact between Ganelon and the Saracens only concerns the death of Roland and now also involved the death of all the people the whole army? All of the Christians? See Kartschoke 2007: 685-686.


¹⁹¹ Marsile asks Ganelon how he can kill Roland. Valdabrun presents Ganelon with a sword on the matter of killing Roland. Bramimonde requests none of these things.

¹⁹² Kay 1993: 225.
Bramimonde’s actions were not unfamiliar to the medieval audience. There are numerous examples of women engaged in gift giving in order to consolidate ties, two of which will be discussed next.

**The gifts presented by Matilda and her mother Eleanor of Aquitaine**

Once again, Arnold of Lübeck informs us of Matilda’s involvement in her husband’s affairs. When on 23 September 1179, Henry burned down Halberstadt, and with the city its churches, he also imprisoned its bishop, Ulrich. Arnold writes:

> [Duke Henry] did not release the bishop straight away, but had him [Ulrich] taken to Hertenburg [Artlenburg], commanding that he, although imprisoned, would be treated honourably. The very devout Duchess Matilda cared so much for him that she, out of reverence for his sacred office, gave him plenty of good vestments and with great dedication she took care of all his needs, so that according to his position he would lack nothing.  

The turmoil in Saxony in 1178-1180, caused by the ongoing conflict between Henry the Lion and his opponents, forced Henry to transfer his family from Brunswick – at the centre of the turmoil – to Artlenburg. Opposition to Henry was fierce. It not only included the bishop of Halberstadt, but also the archbishops, Philip of Cologne, Wichmann of Magdeburg and Siegfried of Brandenburg. Margrave Otto of Meissen, Count Bernhard of Aschersleben, Landgrave Louis III of Thuringia and others joined this alliance against the duke. Once Henry had taken Bishop Ulrich as his captive, he brought him to Artlenburg Castle. There the duchess was charged with the care of her husband’s important prisoner. Perhaps Arnold introduced Matilda as loving and caring towards Bishop Ulrich to emphasise that Henry the Lion regretted that the cathedral in Halberstadt had gone up in flames. It was, however, not necessary to stage Matilda in this scene just for this reason, as just a few lines before, Arnold had already stated quite explicitly that the duke deplored what had happened. It is more likely that Arnold wished to demonstrate that Ulrich was looked after properly in accordance with his rank. To what degree Matilda’s care for the bishop was personally motivated is immaterial in this context. Of greater interest is that Arnold’s description of Matilda – that she ‘cared so much for’ Ulrich – resembles that of Konrad’s words with regards to Bramimonde’s presentation of precious jewellery to Ganelon: ich hän dîn gerne minne (RL 2577). As argued above, Bramimonde’s gift was meant to seal the bond between Ganelon and Marsile. One could imagine that Matilda’s gift to Bishop Ulrich was also politically motivated. In order to compensate Ulrich for taking his freedom, he was offered costly vestments (and probably more). According to Arnold of Lübeck, Matilda was perfectly capable of performing this duty, because, as he had stated before, she was a devout and virtuous woman. Moreover, this was not the only occasion on which Matilda is known to have bestowed such a gift. Before her death in 1189, she and Henry donated several liturgical vestments and liturgical vessels (casa sacra) to St Mary’s Cathedral in Hildesheim. It should be noted that Matilda is mentioned prior to her husband. In addition, she is designated as ecclesie nostre devotissima (dedicated to our church) a point that led Colette Bowie in her study of Eleanor of Aquitaine and her daughters to conclude that Matilda may have been regarded as the church’s matron. Matilda was considered capable of handling such affairs. Undoubtedly, she was acquainted with the importance of gift giving from an early age. Sybille Schröder extensively studied Henry II’s practice of gift giving. It was an important strategy that manifested his rank and rule and therefore legitimised his rulership. But it also firmly defined relationships, established hierarchy and solved conflicts. Textiles were commonly used as payments for services, but wine and objects crafted in gold and silver were also

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195. A map with the military campaigns between 1178-1181 in Ehlers 2008: 327. In September 1180 Henry had withdrawn to Halberstadt, because due to the loss of East Saxony the territory at the north of the river Elbe was his main support and at Christmas the same year the former duke and his family stayed at Lüneburg. See Ehlers 2008: 339-340. Henry, however, also had to give up this territory in June 1181, after he had lost Bamberger, the Artlenburg and Lübeck. See Ehlers 2008: 341.


197. Artlenburg is also known as Ertheneburg, located at the northern bank of the Elbe and not far from Lüneburg. It was a strategic position for expansion to the north. Henry inherited the castle through Lothar III, used it for several diets and had it burned down in 1181 when waging war against Frederick Barbarossa. See Ehlers 2008: 235.


199. MGH UU HdL: 179, no. 122.


201. Schröder 2004: 21, 23 and esp. chapter 4 on the practice of gift giving at Henry’s court.
given.  

Schröder’s study is of interest, because it demonstrates that, contrary to what we might expect, the bestowal of textiles as gifts was by no means limited to women. Interpreting gifts as gender specific, both from the giving and receiving party’s point of view, must be done with due caution.

Matilda’s mother, Eleanor of Aquitaine, also presented gifts. Most of these were to religious institutes, but secular beneficiaries also received land, money and privileges.  

Eleanor does not seem to have presented many material gifts, but it is more than likely that the written sources are incomplete or simply do not mention such gifts. One exception does exist, however: a ring that she gave to a certain Richard Animal. A present of this sort is of a more personal nature somewhat similar to the precious jewels given by Bramimonde. It was Matthew Paris who recorded in his Liber Additamentorum (Book of Additions, 1250-54) that Richard later donated the ring to St Albans. In his text, he writes that the ring bears an intensely coloured sapphire. This eye-catching blue stone is clearly visible in Matthew’s drawing [ill. 1.3]. According to him the ring was decorated with the initials ‘R’ and ‘A’, referring to Ricardo and Animal respectively. The initials were each inscribed on one side, as can also be seen in the drawing. Was Matthew correct in concluding that the letter ‘A’ stands for Richard’s surname, Animal? He specifically states that the gem formerly belonged to

Eleanor. Accordingly, the letter ‘A’ could also very well have stood for Alienor, as opposed to Animal, in which case the initials would then have referred to the donor and receiver and, consequently, their relationship. Matthew relates that Richard and Eleanor had first met during their studies and that they were fond of one another. The ring might therefore be considered as a token of friendship. The text accompanying Matthew Paris’s drawing indicates that the monks of St Albans were not merely interested in the value of the ring as a jewel, but also in its origin and its royal connection with Queen Eleanor. According to Elisabeth van Houts, they cherished or cultivated this relation by means of the drawing.

As we shall see in Chapter 3, Abbot Suger applied a similar strategy after having received a crystal vase from King Louis VII intended for the Abbey of St Denis. At this point, it should be evident that giving was an action that should be reciprocated, in the vein ‘I give so that you might give’ (do ut des). Bonds between people or groups were established and maintained through exchange. Gifts – be it money, candles or lands – could be given to churches in order to obtain prayers and liturgical commemoration, but they also served to forge political ties. Whether secular or religious, such exchanges not only concerned men, but involved women just as well.

Although I have only mentioned gifts bestowed by Matilda and Eleanor, there are many women – e.g. Empress Matilda and Queen Melisende, just to name a few – who are also known to have presented gifts to religious institutions.

Admittedly, Bramimonde’s gift to Ganelon can easily be seen as a treacherous act. The audience, a diverse group of people, perhaps viewed a pagan queen as a fitting example of a dangerous woman. On the other hand, a reading of the text in relation to social reality, as I have done in this section, reveals that gift giving was by no means confined to men, and at the same time, that women acted as mediators at their (husbands’) courts. While the relationship between fiction and reality is never straightforward, the actions of the women discussed so far affirm that the Rolandslied can offer us a number of insights in terms of noblewomen’s responsibilities.
BRAMIMONDE AND THE UNHEARD OPINIONS AND ADVICE OF A WOMAN

The other instances in which we encounter Bramimonde in the Rolandslied are after Roland is killed and Charlemagne decides to avenge his death and that of the others. The first passage is when Marsile has escaped to his palace in Saragossa after Charlemagne had killed the pagans near the Ebro. During the fight Marsile had lost his arm.218 Although we do not know the audience’s response to this episode, the scene describing a one-armed soldier-king was designed to generate irony.

Bramimonde grieves over this lost battle and although it is not explicitly stated it seems that she and other pagans go to their temple and have the images of their gods destroyed.219 They blame their gods (Apollo, Mohammed, Tervagant) for not having prevented the loss of Marsile’s arm and the defeat of their army. In the Chanson de Roland this episode is depicted in similar fashion, although with more eye for Marsile who dismounts under an olive tree and gives up all his signs of a warrior (sword, helmet and byrnie). He swoons with pain from his bleeding arm because he has lost his right hand completely.220 Bramimonde and more than twenty thousand men curse France and its emperor and they blame Apollo for their loss and abuse his image.221

In both texts the defeat of the Saracens is connected to the failure of their gods. In the eyes of the Christian writer and his audience this was to be expected and was justified exactly because of their trust in their gods. Many examples from the Old Testament support the idea that the Christian God condemns idolatry.214 At the same time the smashing of the idols and the vanishing of the pagan’s faith, as supported and even initiated by Bramimonde, seem to be a prelude to the conversion of Bramimonde at the end of the story. An audience that was already familiar with the Rolandslied might have considered this evident.

The Caliph, or Emir, Baligant has received the message that the Saracens had been defeated at the Ebro. He sends two messengers to Marsile and says that their gods will support the king. In the Rolandslied Marsile reacts bitterly and denies that the gods have any power or else they would not have lost the battle. In the same episode in the Chanson it is Bramimonde who blames the gods for abandoning them. Her analysis of the battle and the gods’ part in it is highly dramatized by her crying out that it is a pity that there is no one there to kill her (ChdR 2722). In reaction Bramimonde has to face Clarien’s taunt ‘not to talk so much’ (ChdR 2724). While this incident is absent from the Rolandslied, a similar lashing out at the queen can be found when Ganelon is annoyed by her words that she would like to kill Roland herself (‘If God had wanted that you had defeated them all, it would please me. Your pride deeply offends me’, RL 2581-2584). Clearly women are not supposed to talk too much and certainly not when it concerns combat, a domain dominated by males. Bramimonde, however, remains deaf to this opinion. In both the Rolandslied and Chanson de Roland the queen considers the vassal’s message that Baligant will defeat Charlemagne as nonsense because Charles fears nobody and prefers death over defeat or retreat. Only in the Rolandslied Bramimonde quickly adds that the messengers should not misunderstand her; of course she would like to see Baligant conquer, but this is simply not attainable (Man verstehe mich nicht falsch: Die Ebre meines Herrn ist mir lieber, als daß ich sie irgendeinem andern gönnte, RL 7321-7323).

We have seen that after Marsile is wounded Bramimonde remains at his side as his queen in both texts. In the Chanson de Roland her role is most prominent where it concerns the pagan gods falling from grace. Although she also seems to be involved in the smashing of the idols in the Rolandslied, the emphasis is more on her warnings towards Baligant’s vassals that the caliph will lose the battle against Charlemagne. Finally she meets Baligant and throws herself at his feet, either out of esteem or out of despair because her husband has been vanquished (ChdR 2825 and RL 7381) and no other man has survived (RL 7389). In reaction, in the Rolandslied, the caliph drapes his mantle over her shoulder as a sign of protection and he tries to comfort her.

The three episodes discussed here (the wounded Marsile, the messengers reaching the palace and Baligant’s arrival) clearly depict Bramimonde as dedicated to her husband and as a sharp-tongued woman. That her warning words concerning the power and force of Charlemagne’s army are

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210 The loss of his arm becomes evident only after reading about the blaming of the pagan gods, RL 7142-7145, RL 7281.
211 RL 7150–7147.
212 ChdR 2570-2575.
213 ChdR 2580-2581.
214 Moses warns the people of Israel against idolatry by reminding them that God killed the people following Baal, Deut. 4: 3-4; 12: 28-31. See also Kings I 18:25-40 and 2 Chronicles 33: 1-13.
not taken seriously by Emir Baligant, for they come from a woman, and will cost him dearly. If we consider the story to reflect social reality to a certain extent, the responses to Bramimonde’s actions reveal the double standard towards women. Due to their volatile nature women should not interfere too much and cannot always be trusted. And at the same time, if they are wise and loyal, they can offer invaluable advice. We will see that Bramimonde’s advice is not always taken for granted.

**Bramimonde as an Exemplary Wise Queen**

Baligant and his men are defeated by Charlemagne, and in the *Rolandslied*, Marsile is struck dead upon witnessing this. Then Charlemagne arrives at the city of Saragossa, whereupon Bramimonde decides to open the gates to let the emperor enter. She kneels before him and confesses that she has been following the wrong gods, but now has the opportunity to change to the true faith. She immediately wishes to be baptised (RL 8622-8630). After all the pagans – Bramimonde is not explicitly mentioned – have been baptised, Charlemagne and his vassals take Bramimonde to Aachen. There she observes how Charlemagne mourns extensively over his dead men. As a consolation, the queen turns to the emperor and tells him that according to her faith – her new Christian faith – his men died for truth, and for this reason, they will live eternally. Referring to Charlemagne’s own words, she states that it is not the righteous, but rather the ungodly, who should be lamented because their death is irrevocable. This passage from the *Rolandslied* is not found in the *Chanson de Roland*.

Bramimonde’s opening of the gates signals the triumph of Christianity. The importance of this moment was emphasised visually: the kneeling Bramimonde awaits Charlemagne and his men (ill. 1.1). What is more, this victory is even more strongly underscored by Bramimonde’s conversion and her understanding that only her new faith will bring eternal life. However, her prudence cannot be attributed only to her conversion. Throughout the story, she is portrayed as a queen supporting her husband. It is she who warns the pagans that Roland’s death, though it might seem a victory, ultimately signals the Saracen’s defeat. She knows that Charlemagne is too weak an opponent because of his infinite wisdom and the support he receives from God.

Sharon Kinoshita has pointed out that many episodes in the *Chanson de Roland* reveal similarities between Marsile and Charlemagne in terms of their respective courts and customs. Bramimonde and Aude are therefore critical figures, because they highlight the fact that there were indeed dissimilarities between pagans and Christians. Bramimonde’s mutable behaviour, resulting in her conversion, may have given proof that pagan society was collapsing, while Aude epitomizes the steadiness of a feudal Christian order. As Kinoshita observed, issues of identity and otherness were certainly acknowledged, at least by those members of twelfth-century society who were engaged in the Crusades and active in territorial expansion. It is therefore possible that Bramimonde was interpreted as a symbol of the triumph of Christianity.

Admittedly, the pagan queen is an obvious ‘other’, not only because she is a Saracen, but also because she is a woman, like Matilda. Yet this does not mean that an audience would be unable to recognise her responsibilities as queen and wife. Bramimonde’s behaviour may very well have resulted in her being rebuked when she tried to enter a male world dominated by violence. In this way, she also resembles medieval women who, on occasion, were viewed negatively by men because they talked too much and were unable to keep secrets. Based on this social reality – and the likely situation that the audience’s response was anything but uniform – Bramimonde could be considered an exemplary queen. This did, however, not mean that women refrained from politics or that they never engaged in fighting in one form or another. After all, Bramimonde, subjugated by the Christian army, adapts herself according to Christian standards established by men. The *Rolandslied* is a text inhabited by heroic men fighting for their overlord, their brothers and God. There was no place for women on this battlefield. This is not to say that women played no part in politics or that they never engaged in fighting in one form or another. Matilda is not known to have ever taken up the sword, but it does appear that she advised her husband at the Saxon court.

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215 Rösener 1990: 217. In the *Chöfr Marsile* Marsile says after hearing Bramimonde saying that the Emir has been slain, Chöfr 3630–3647.

216 In the *Chöfr Bramimonde* does not express this wish when Charlemagne enters, but only converts in Aachen.


220 Countess Richilde of Hainaut (r. 1040–† 1051) took part in the battle against the count of Flanders by encouraging her hired army in person. See Rösener 1990: 186. Some women joined their husbands on crusade and some even went to war. See Andrea 2003: 332–334.
In Arnold of Lübeck’s praise for the ducal family, we find no references to Matilda in terms of what Arnold – and other male readers – might have considered as ‘inappropriate’ conduct. Nowhere is she criticised for interfering in Henry’s affairs or giving unsolicited advice. On the contrary, Arnold lauds her behaviour by employing various topoi. With the exception of her care for Ulrich of Halberstadt, there is little information to go on when attempting to reconstruct the political influence Matilda might have exercised on her husband and the manner in which she dealt with the embassies. The dedication text in the Gospel Book of Henry and Matilda, to be discussed in Chapter 3, sheds some light on her involvement in her husband’s affairs. The dedication text in the Gospel Book credits them both with enhancing the fame of Brunswick and Saxony by building a city wall and churches and by embellishing these churches with reliquaries [ill. 3.1]. Matilda can therefore be seen as a supporter of Henry’s politics. In Chapter 2, I will argue that her greatest opportunities to participate actively were presented in the year following Henry’s departure for the Holy Land in January 1172.

### Conclusion: almost all the world is playing a part

In this chapter, I have proposed that the late twelfth-century Rolandslied, nowadays known to us as manuscript P from the University Library of Heidelberg, offers material with which to critically investigate the topic of literary patronage. By reassessing the famous epilogue written by Konrad, I have argued that it is too limiting to regard Henry the Lion as the sole patron of the Rolandslied. The words des gerte diu edele herzoginne, aines rîchen küniges barn testify that Henry approached Konrad with a request to translate the French text into German upon the duchess’s express wishes, suggesting Matilda’s patronage. It was at her instigation that the text was translated, and though it cannot be proven, it is likewise possible that she also influenced its content.

Specifically, it is my contention that this fictional text is related to its social context. By way of tracing its audience’s horizon of expectations the Rolandslied can be used as a source that sheds light on the responsibilities of medieval noblewomen. We can expect the writer to make an effort to draw his intended audience into the world of heroes and their deeds. To this end, dialogues, emotional outbursts or evocations were added. Moreover, men and women are portrayed in the various stages of their lives. In addition, gender-specific elements, such as armour and jewellery, but also gender-related behaviour, were included in the story. By examining a variety of interpretations when studying the duties of the women in the Rolandslied, I have suggested that the readers and/or listeners of these texts were a heterogeneous group consisting of men and women, as well in various stages of their lives. Each responded differently to the responsibilities and consequent actions of women, according to their beliefs, experiences and gender. After all, the intended audience did not merely consist of Matilda and Henry. The Rolandslied was read or performed at their court and probably included an audience of counts, ministerials, noble ladies, children and clerics. One could argue that by presenting fictional examples of three different women in distinct phases of their lives, each possessing their own responsibilities, the noble ladies in the audience could themselves identify with the story. Whether deemed as negative or positive, the female characters of the Rolandslied very likely served as models. These models could either be followed by the female audience or not. It is the same manner in which Charlemagne’s paladins and Marsile’s pagan warriors served as models for actual knights living at court.

The Rolandslied is a testimony to the fact that ‘almost all the world is playing a part’. John of Salisbury applies these words in a moralistic sense: yes, everybody is playing his part, or incorporating that of someone else, often ignorant of the reality surrounding them until the wheel of fortune turns their lives into a tragedy. Of course, he was right, but only to a degree. What he failed to mention is that people were often forced into a role. The study of the Rolandslied presented here has shed light on the actions of fictional women whose role in life, like men’s, was often derived from changing circumstances and expected behaviour. This was by no means restricted to fictional women, as will become evident in the next chapter in which I will argue that changing circumstances offered Matilda the opportunity to exercise authority.