

WOMEN IN THE MILITARY: SCHOLASTIC ARGUMENTS AND MEDIEVAL IMAGES OF FEMALE WARRIORS

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Abstract: In their political treatises, the scholastic writers Ptolemy of Lucca (c.1236–1327) and Giles of Rome (1243–1316) discussed the question of whether women should serve in the military. The dispute came in response to Aristotle, who reported in his *Politics* that Plato and Socrates taught that women should receive the same military training as men and take an equal part in fighting. Such a treatment was made possible by a medieval context in which women under certain circumstances could be feudal lords responsible for maintaining a contingent of knights and sometimes commanding them, and in which a large number of medieval stories of women fighters or leaders of knights circulated, some of them mythical but others based on real women. Both Giles and Ptolemy ultimately rejected female participation but, in keeping with the dialectical method, proposed arguments on both sides. These involve historical precedent, the biological and medical differences between men and women, analogies between female animals and women, divinely ordained gender roles, and the benefits of exercise.

In recent years controversy has raged about the role of women and homosexuals in the armed forces. Opposition to equal opportunity ranges from practical to theological, from purported kindness to overt hatred. Even most supporters of widened participation believe that theirs is a new demand, a product of contemporary feminism and gay activism. Thus, I was delighted to find an argument about women in the military in the scholastic Aristotelian writers Ptolemy of Lucca (c.1236–1327) and Giles of Rome (1243–1316). Both reject female participation but, in keeping with their dialectical method, propose arguments on both sides. I will analyse these, after outlining the context from which they emerged: a classical stimulus and medieval mentality which made them conceivable. To this end, I have collected medieval stories of women fighters or leaders of knights. I was surprised to find so many and equally surprised that no one has previously published such a compilation. I have little doubt that there is much more to be discovered and hope that this article will stimulate others to look further.

The starting point for the medieval writers was Plato's *Republic*. Although this was not directly available, Aristotle summarized parts of it in his *Politics*, fully translated into Latin for the first time around 1260, and thereafter a constant source for medieval political thinkers.²

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² The relevant works of Plato were not available to medieval readers in Greek or Latin, so I use a modern translation, Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Richard W. Sterling and William C. Scott (New York, 1985). For Aristotle's *Politics*, I use *Politicorum Libri Octo cum vetusta translatione Guilelmi de Moerbeke*, ed. Franciscus Susemihl (Leipzig,

Plato was not a feminist, although scholars have sometimes portrayed him as one. Along with the relatively positive (though still deeply sexist) views outlined below, Plato made many explicitly misogynist comments. He believed that males were naturally superior and he favoured subordination of women in general, but for pragmatic reasons he argued for their inclusion as guardians in his ideal polity. He explains that although men were generally better at all occupations, some women were fit for all of them, and a few women could even be better in a given field than most men. It would be wasteful to prevent them from using their abilities for the community. Speaking in the persona of Socrates, Plato concludes that women deserve equal educational opportunities:

Do we separate off male and female dogs from one another, or do we expect both to share equally in standing guard and in going out to hunt? Should all activities be shared, or do we expect the females to remain indoors, on the grounds that bearing and nursing the pups incapacitate them for anything else, leaving to the males the exclusive care and guarding of the flocks? . . . Now then, can one get any animal to perform the same functions as another without giving both the same guidance and training? . . . Then, if women are to do the same things as men, we must also teach them the same things.³

Plato thinks that women could participate, albeit rarely as equals, in all fields, specifically mentioning medicine, music, philosophy, government, warfare and athletics: 'All the capabilities with which nature endows us are distributed among men and women alike.' In his *Republic*, 'women will have the rightful opportunity to share in every task, and so will men'.⁴ With regard to the military, he says: 'It is obvious that men and women will take the field together.'⁵

Plato makes one qualification. After affirming the equality of male and female guardians he adds:

Then wearing virtue as a garment, the guardians' wives must go naked [in exercising, like men] and take part alongside their men in war and the other functions of government, and no other duties will be required of them.

1872) (henceforth, *Politics*). This is the 1260 William of Moerbeke Latin translation which, whatever its limitations, was the one used by the medieval writers that I will be discussing.

³ Plato, *Republic*, 5.451d–e. There has been considerable recent discussion of the roles Plato allows women in his ideal state and on Plato's views on women in general. See, for example, Natalie Harris Bluestone, *Women and the Ideal Society: Plato's Republic and Modern Myths of Gender* (Amherst, MA, 1987); *Feminist Interpretations of Plato*, ed. Nancy Tuana (University Park, PA, 1994); and Walter Soffer, 'Socrates' Proposals Concerning Women: Feminism or Fantasy?', *History of Political Thought*, XVI (1995), pp. 157–73.

⁴ Plato, *Republic*, 5.455d–e.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.466e.

Owing to the weakness of their sex, however, they shall perform the less burdensome tasks.⁶

Although there has been much controversy over this qualification, Nancy Tuana seems to be correct in arguing that Plato refers only to physical, and not intellectual, weakness. Thus, 'less burdensome tasks' refers only to matters requiring physical ability and not, for example, to government.⁷ But it is also true that Plato expects only exceptional women to equal or surpass the average man in anything.

What survives of this argument in Aristotle's *Politics* is a short statement made without comment in the context of showing the differences between Plato's *Republic* and his later work, *The Laws*: '[Socrates] certainly thinks that women ought to fight together with the burghers and share in their education.'⁸ A few sentences later Aristotle adds, without specifying women, that the system of education in *The Laws* is the same as that in the *Republic*, and that in the politics described women share in common meals. Aristotle's formulation is ambiguous: did Plato mean that women should share all education or only military training? He meant all education, but he put most emphasis on warfare and athletics, and this is how most medieval writers who commented on this passage took it.

What could they make of it? One might expect them to ignore or reject it out of hand. Even though Aristotle was a great authority in politics, Plato was less so, and surely the idea of women soldiers would seem preposterous to a society dominated by male knights. It would seem even more unlikely in the context of a Christian misogynist tradition recently augmented by Aristotelian views of women as incomplete men.⁹ But in some ways this was less unthinkable for medieval people than for those raised in the West until recently, where nearly all responsible positions outside the home were held by men. In the

⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.457a. I have changed the translator's word from 'gender' to 'sex' to accord better with the meaning.

⁷ *Feminist Interpretations of Plato*, ed. Tuana, pp. 27–9. For the controversy over the meaning of 'weakness', see also Christine Pierce, 'Equality: Republic V', *Monist*, 57 (1973), pp. 1–11; Susan Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought* (Princeton, 1979), appendix to Ch. 2.

⁸ Aristotle, *Politics*, 2.6.1264b.37–39. '... uxores quidem existimat oportere simul bellare et disciplina participare eadem municipibus'. I have chosen to use the word 'burgher' for the more usual 'guardian' since this is closer to the Latin translation. For Aristotle's views on women, see Richard Mulgan, 'Aristotle and the Political Role of Women', *History of Political Thought*, XV (1994), pp. 179–202.

⁹ For a good selection of classical, patristic and medieval texts about women, see *Woman Defamed and Women Defended*, ed. Alcuin Blamires (Oxford, 1992). For classical and medieval views on women as incomplete or defective men, as well as views on many of the other biological and gynecological aspects of gender discussed in this article, see: Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages. Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge, 1993); and Danielle Jacquert and Claude Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1988).

Middle Ages, in the absence of a suitable male heir, a woman could become the lord of a fief and enjoy the rights and powers of that position. In addition, although husbands or other male relatives generally took over the rule of women's fiefs, a woman often ruled when her husband was absent or, in widowhood, on her own behalf or her son's. Male vassals might take advantage of their lord's sex, but they rarely displayed the extreme reluctance of many modern males to have a female superior; and since the essence of the lord-vassal relationship was military service, a female lord would be expected to provide a complement of knights to her lord, even if she herself only infrequently commanded them in battle and even more rarely fought. In part this was because of the belief that fighting was men's business, in part because training for knighthood was so intensive that it had to start in childhood, which was never done for a girl.¹⁰

It was widely believed that some women had fought in the past, although most references were mythical. For example, when Peter the Venerable, abbot of Cluny, wrote to Heloise around 1145, he said in praising her:

it is not altogether exceptional among mortals for women to be in command of men, nor entirely unprecedented for them even to take up arms and accompany men to battle . . . amongst the pagans it is recorded that Penthesilea, queen of the Amazons, often fought at the time of the Trojan War along with her army of Amazons, who were women, not men . . .¹¹

Peter also cited the biblical Deborah for rousing the men of Israel to battle against the Canaanites. Amazons figured most prominently among references to fighting women; one literary example occurs in the late twelfth-century German version of the *Aeneid*, by Heinrich von Veldeke, in which the Amazons and Trojans joust to control the city of Laurentum. Wolfram von Eschenbach, in the thirteenth-century *Willehalm*, mentions the Amazons of von Veldeke's story to contrast their offensive military behaviour unfavourably with the defensive actions of his female character Gibe, who defends the city of Orange in armour with crossbow and missiles and also manages to outwit the enemy.¹²

¹⁰ For a general survey of 'women who ruled', see Margaret Wade Labarge, *A Small Sound of the Trumpet. Women in Medieval Life* (Boston, 1986), pp. 44–97. Jean Elshtain, *Women and War* (New York, 1987), pp. 47–56, 121–35, touches on classical and medieval attitudes towards women and warfare but, as with many general surveys, the coverage of the Middle Ages is quite inadequate.

¹¹ Peter the Venerable, Letter 115, in *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, ed. Betty Radice (New York, 1974), pp. 279–80. This and many other examples come largely from secondary sources, translations and a limited selection of primary material, which seems appropriate to me since this section is meant primarily to be illustrative of medieval images of and attitudes towards such women.

¹² Heinrich von Veldeke, *Enit*, trans. J.W. Thomas, Garland Library of Medieval Literature Series B (New York, 1885), p. 85; Wolfram von Eschenbach, *The Middle High German Poem of Willehalm*, trans. Charles E. Passage (New York, 1977), p. 135; see

There were persistent stories that Germanic women had participated in war in legendary times. The twelfth-century bishop Otto of Freising, in a biography of his nephew, Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, reports that the Lombards got their name (*Longobardi*, or 'long beards') from their practice of drafting women, but twisting their hair around their chin to imitate a manly beard.¹³ Supernatural and legendary military women abound in the Norse myths and heroic sagas, though not in the more contemporary family sagas. In the twelfth-century *Hervarar Saga*, a Gothic woman warrior Hervor and her Viking grandmother of the same name appear. The Viking trained in arms as a child, became an armed robber in the forest, joined a Viking band in male disguise, decapitated a man who dared to draw her sword, and even submitted to the universally-dreaded test of confronting the *draugr* living in a mound of the dead. The Gothic Hervor fought only during an attack of Huns, possibly in 375 CE. Jenny Jochens thinks that the saga author assumed that warrior women were more likely to have lived in earlier times and this is why the author ascribes greater activities to the grandmother; ignorance of chronology allows Vikings to exist before Goths. Jochens also feels that the figure of the Gothic Hervor, which originates in material with a provenance not long after the events, suggests that Germanic women may once have had a military role.¹⁴

There are rare instances of real medieval women reported to have fought or commanded troops. They are often compared to Amazons and are usually mentioned primarily as examples of 'believe-it-or-not' marvels, which fascinated medieval people even more than us. The instances that follow show that the concept, if not the reality, of women in the military was widespread.

The Byzantine princess Anna Comnena mentions the Norman Gaita, who went on campaign with her husband, Robert Guiscard, calling her another Athena, a formidable sight in armour. Once Gaita rushed with a spear at full gallop against some fleeing soldiers and forced them back into the fight.¹⁵ Other Byzantine historians identify women fighting with the crusaders; Nicetas Choniates (c. 1150–1213) relates his impressions of one cadre:

Sarah Westphal-Wihl, 'The Ladies' Tournament: Marriage, Sex, and Honor in Thirteenth-Century Germany', *Signs*, 14 (1989), pp. 371–99; p. 393 n. 67.

¹³ Otto of Freising, *Deeds of Frederick Barbarossa*, trans. Charles Christopher Mierow (New York, 1953), 2.13, p. 127.

¹⁴ Jenny Jochens, *Old Norse Images of Women* (Philadelphia, 1996), pp. 97–100. According to Jochens, Hervor's male role is necessary, at least for a time, since she was the only heir born after the death of twelve brothers, making her a 'ring woman . . . the unmarried daughter of a fatherless, sonless, and brotherless male victim or perpetrator of a homicide, on whom fell the responsibility of receiving or paying the first ring'. In the end she leaves the Viking life and her transvestism, takes up embroidery and marries the husband chosen for her by her grandfather. The restoration of normative gender roles after a transgression of them is a common medieval theme.

¹⁵ Anna Comnena, *Alexiad*, trans. E.R.A. Sewter (Baltimore, 1969), 1.15, p. 66; 4.6, p. 147.

Females were numbered among them, riding horseback in the manner of men, not on coverlets sidesaddle but unashamedly astride, and bearing lances and weapons as men do; dressed in masculine garb, they conveyed a wholly martial appearance, more mannish than the Amazons. One stood out from the rest as another Penthesilea and from the embroidered gold which ran around the hem and fringes of her garment was called Goldfoot.¹⁶

According to legend, Eleanor of Aquitaine and her ladies came to pledge themselves to the Second Crusade at Vézéley in 1147 armed like Amazons and riding white horses. To this day a song of Caucasian nomads refers to her.¹⁷ Amboise praises Christian women who, during the siege of Acre in the Third Crusade, seized Turks on a captured galley by their hair, cut off their heads with knives, and carried off their trophies in triumph.¹⁸

Clearly, many armed women accompanied armies, often as feudal lords, but it is sometimes difficult to tell whether they actually fought. Even in the last example the galley was already captured when the women accomplished their heroic deeds. In comparisons to legendary fighters, unless fighting is specifically mentioned, the reference may be only to dress and the bravery needed to appear with an army. Examples of military women who seem actually to have fought include a certain Eleana, who was said to dress in full armour and wield a lance and battle-axe and Jeanne de Montfort, whom Froissart described as fighting in a war for the succession in Brittany: 'armed all over . . . mounted on a fine courser . . . [she] held a sharp cutting sword upright and fought right well with great courage'.¹⁹ Orderic Vitalis characterizes Isabel of Conches, daughter of Simon de Montfort, who 'rode armed as a knight among the knights', as 'generous, daring, and gay' and compares her bravery to that of several Amazons and the legendary Camilla, who fought as

¹⁶ Nicetas Choniates, *O City of Byzantium, Annals of Nicetas Choniates*, trans. Harry J. Magoulas (Detroit, 1994), 2.1.60, p. 35. Philippe Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, trans. Michael Jones (London, 1985), p. 241, and Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1954), p. 469, identify Goldfoot with Eleanor of Aquitaine, but Nicetas does not say this, and they do not give any source. See Choniates, *O City of Byzantium*, n. 153. Most probably they conflate this and the story given below of Eleanor as an Amazon.

¹⁷ Frederick Heer, *The Medieval World* (Cleveland, 1961), pp. 126–7; Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, p. 241. Maureen Purcell, 'Women Crusaders: A Temporary Canonical Aberration', in *Principalities, Powers and Estates*, ed. L.O. Frappell (Adelaide, 1979), p. 59, suggests that the depiction of Eleanor as an Amazon may stem from later propaganda of the French court during the divorce proceedings of Eleanor and King Louis.

¹⁸ Amboise, *The Crusade of Richard Lion-Heart*, trans. Merton Jerome Hubert (New York, 1941, reprinted 1976), p. 152.

¹⁹ Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, pp. 241–2; Froissart, *Chroniques*, Book 2, chs. 144–6, Book 3, ch. 9.

ally of the Italian king Turnus in the *Aeneid*.²⁰ There are several reports of brave fighters only being exposed as women after death in battle. There are also accounts of low-born women dying in the ranks — especially in cases of rebellions against a king or lord, as in the fourteenth-century uprisings in Flanders.²¹

Many women commanded troops in battle throughout the Middle Ages. In the chaotic period of Germanic dominance in the Early Middle Ages, numerous women were noted for their participation in political and military intrigue. Although their actions were similar to those of their husbands and brothers, male clerical writers tended more frequently to characterize them as scheming, treacherous, deceitful and bloodthirsty. Female as well as male names of this period frequently derived from warfare, such as Gertrude, ‘spear-might’, Clothilda, ‘glorious battle’, Brunhilda, ‘breastplate-battle’, and Matilda, ‘strong for war’.²² Two later Matildas lived up to their names. Matilda of Tuscany (c.1046–1115) supported Pope Gregory VII against the Emperor Henry IV during the Investiture Controversy and Matilda of England (1102–67), the chosen successor of Henry I, led armies against the usurping King Stephen.

There are many other examples. Ermengarde of Narbonne (d. 1192) helped to hold Southern France for Louis VII against the attacks of Matilda’s son, the English king Henry II, and defended her own lands in a number of local conflicts. Guildinild of Catalonia, in 1026, recaptured lands seized from her and then defended them against other lords. Sophia of Bavaria, in 1129, besieged the castle of Falkenstein for her brother Henry the Proud who was busy helping the emperor Lothar take Speyer — defended by another woman, Agnes of Saarbrücken. Women often organized the defence of their own, their

²⁰ Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, ed. Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford, 1973), Vol. 4, Book 8, ch. 14, pp. 212–15. Camilla’s exploits are described in Virgil, *Aeneid*, 11, especially lines 597–915. Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, p. 241, says that it is Countess Helvise of Évreux, the instigator of the war against Isabel, who rode as a knight. There is some ambiguity since Orderic, in a passage about both women, uses only a pronoun to identify the armed woman, but it most reasonably applies to Isabel, as Jean Verdon, ‘Les Sources de l’histoire de la femme en Occident aux Xe–XIIIe siècles’, *Cahiers de Civilisation médiévale*, 20 (1977), p. 229, whom Contamine cites, realizes. Orderic wrote, using ‘audacity’ to describe both Isabel and the armed woman: ‘Ambae mulieres quae talia bella sciebant loquaces et animosae ac forma elegantes erant, suisque maritis imperabant, subditos homines premebant variisque modis terrebant. Magna tamen in eisdem morum diversitas erat. Heluisa quidem sollers erat et facunda, sed atrox et avara. Isabel vero dapsilis et audax atque iocosa, ideoque coessentibus amabilis et grata. In expeditione inter milites ut miles equitabat armata, et loricatis equitibus ac spiculatis satellitibus non minori prestebat audacia quam decus Italiae Turni commaniplularibus virgo Camilla.’

²¹ Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, p. 242.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 15. For a contemporary account of several Frankish queens, see Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth, 1974).

husband's, or their overlord's castle. 'Black Agnes' defended Dunbar Castle in Scotland in 1338 against Edward III. Of her it was written: 'Came the English early/Or came the English late/They always found Black Agnes/A standin' at the gate.' Nichola la Hay held Lincoln Castle for Kings John and Henry III, and Jeanne Hachette defended Beauvais in 1472 against Charles the Bold.²³

Canon lawyers discussed whether a woman's crusader vow was valid. At first it was generally accepted, with the understanding that combat was not involved; the vow being equivalent to that of other unarmed pilgrims. In the later twelfth century regulations began to prevent the unarmed of either sex from accompanying the military expeditions. When they did take the vow, women who were also feudal lords took along a contingent of knights, so forbidding them from taking such a vow deprived the crusades of much-needed forces. A canonistic debate centred around whether women could take the vow and whether the husband's consent was required.²⁴ A number of women did take contingents on crusade, and sometimes directly commanded them, sometimes at the explicit request of a religious authority. In the fourteenth century, for example, Catherine of Siena urged Queen Joanna of Naples to lead an expedition.²⁵

The most famous female military commander was Joan of Arc (1412–31), about whom the knight Thibaud d'Armagnac, bailiff of Chartres, testified:

Apart from the matter of the war she was simple and ignorant. But in the conduct and disposition of armies and in the matter of warfare, in drawing up the army in battle [order] and heartening the soldiers, she behaved as if she had been the shrewdest captain in the world and had all her life been learning [the art of] war.²⁶

Christine de Pizan wrote while Joan still fought: 'Among our men so brave and apt/She's captain over all; such strength/No Hector or Achilles had.'²⁷ Despite the comparison, Joan did not take an active part in combat. She is a

²³ For most of these examples, see Marty Williams and Anne Echols, *Between Pit and Pedestal* (Princeton, 1994), pp. 174–6. The passage about Black Agnes is modified by the Royal Stuart Society from Andrew of Wyntoun, *The Orignal Cronykil of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1872), Vol. 3, p. 430. Many Scottish women figured prominently in Scottish national mythology, as shown by my graduate student Susan Murray in her unpublished seminar paper, 'Standing at the Gate: Women, Myth, and Nationalism in Medieval Scottish Literature' (1999).

²⁴ Purcell, 'Women Crusaders', pp. 59–60.

²⁵ Catherine of Siena, Letter 39, cited in Purcell, 'Women Crusaders', p. 61. The expedition never materialized.

²⁶ As reported in Régine Pernoud, *Joan of Arc. By Herself and Her Witnesses*, trans. Edward Hyams (New York, 1969; reissued 1982), p. 62.

²⁷ Christine de Pizan, *The Poem of Joan of Arc*, trans. Thelma Fenster, stanza 36, in *The Writings of Christine de Pizan*, ed. Charity Cannon Willard (New York, 1993), p. 359.

special case, claiming her authority and abilities from God through the voices of Saints Michael, Catherine and Margaret, like several other medieval women who were able to achieve acceptance outside what was considered proper for their sex by claiming that God was acting through them. In any case, contemporaries were probably more amazed that Joan was a peasant commanding nobles than a woman commanding men.

Finally, in the late thirteenth-century German poem, *The Ladies Tournament*, a group of fictional ladies disputes the relationship of men's and women's honour. The 'daring woman' claims that there is no difference, that women should bear arms and seek fame in war and sport. She convinces the others to take part in a military tournament in which each woman takes the name of a favoured male knight. The males debate how to react: one argues for wife-beating, saying, '[i]f women elect to go jousting/men will have to run the household'. Sarah Westphal-Wihl comments: 'His anxiety comes remarkably close to the realization that the division of labor by sex is not a biological specialization but a social convention dividing men and women into two reversible categories'. The possibility of upsetting the social order explains both the fascination and horror with which medieval writers held the possibility of women in the military.²⁸

Most medieval writing about women was unabashedly misogynist; what defences existed usually centred around religious virtues. Even the extremely positive view of women found in Romance literature portrayed women dependent upon chivalrous knights and serving largely as their inspiration. Nevertheless, there was also a tradition of writing praising famous women. The most comprehensive were written in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, notably Giovanni Boccaccio's *Concerning Famous Women* (1350s), containing examples of both praiseworthy and flawed women, and several of Christine de Pizan's works, especially *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405).²⁹ There were also several examples from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries presenting an ambivalent view of women. Those praised came from classical, biblical and medieval historical sources. Only a few were involved in warfare but many excelled in activities usually closed to women. The biblical Judith was often cited; Marbod of Rennes (c.1035–1133), for example, praises her for beheading the Assyrian ruler Holofernes and then driving the enemy from Israelite cities. In addition to biblical women and Christian martyrs, Marbod commended pagan women who gave their lives to preserve their

²⁸ 'Der vrouwen turnei', in *Gesamtabenteuer: Hundert altdeutsche Erzählungen*, ed. Friederick Heinrich von der Hagen (3 vols., 1850; reprinted Darmstadt, 1961), Vol. 1, pp. 371–82, as reported in Westphal-Wihl, 'The Ladies' Tournament', pp. 377–9, 394. In the poem traditional gender roles are restored after the joust.

²⁹ Giovanni Boccaccio, *Concerning Famous Women*, trans. Guido Guarino (New Brunswick, 1963); Christine de Pisan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. Earl Jeffrey Richards (New York, 1982).

virtue or aid their husbands.³⁰ Albertano of Brescia (c.1193–?1260) also praised Judith.³¹ Boccaccio praised numerous rulers, including the Assyrian Semiramis, several Amazon queens, the Byzantine emperor Irene, Joanna, queen of Sicily and Jerusalem, and the legendary, if nonexistent, Pope Joan, as well as the poet Sappho and the painter Thamyris.³² Christine de Pisan considers most of these and many others, such as the Merovingian queen Fredegund, and a host of women, both real and mythical, whose inventions helped the world.³³

Medieval medical and scientific views of sex and gender were complex and not fully determinate, resisting binary categorization and making possible various combinations of masculine and feminine traits. The fourteenth-century medical writer Jacopo of Forlì used three *indicia* of male and female characteristics: complexion (the balance of qualities, of which more later), disposition and physique. A particular individual might be feminine, masculine, or even indeterminate with respect to any of these. The medical literature is full of speculations about hermaphrodites, and Saint Wilgefortis avoided marriage by growing a beard and moustache.³⁴ The classical figure of the ‘virago’, a positive image of a masculine woman, occurred occasionally throughout the Middle Ages and was revived in the series of writings praising famous women. Although feminine men were rarely praised as such, Caroline Bynum has shown the growing use of ‘Jesus as Mother’ images and other depictions of the feminine nature of Christ from the twelfth century on.³⁵

Taking all this into account, it is perhaps not so surprising that medieval writers would consider arguments for women serving in the military seriously

³⁰ Marbod of Rennes, *The Book with Ten Chapters*, trans. C.W. Marx, Ch. 4, in *Woman Defamed and Women Defended*, ed. Blamires, p. 231.

³¹ Albertano of Brescia, *The Book of Consolation and Advice*, trans. C.W. Marx, Ch. 5, in *Woman Defamed and Women Defended*, ed. Blamires, p. 240; Christine de Pisan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, Part 2, Ch. 31.

³² Boccaccio, *Concerning Famous Women*: Ch. 2 (Semiramis); Chs. 11, 18, 30 (Amazon queens); Ch. 100 (Irene); Ch. 104 (Joanna); Ch. 99 (Joan); Ch. 45 (Sappho); ch. 54 (Thamyris). Irene purposely used the masculine title instead of empress, although Boccaccio does not mention this.

³³ Christine de Pisan, *Book of the City of Ladies*, Part 1: Chs. 13, 23 (Fredegund); Chs. 33–41 (inventors); Ch. 15 (Semiramis); Chs. 16–19 (Amazons); Ch. 30 (Sappho); Ch. 41 (Thamyris).

³⁴ Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*, pp. 203–4, citing Vern L. Bullough, ‘Sex Education in Medieval Christianity’, *Journal of Sex Research*, 13 (1977), p. 190, who also lists other female saints with beards or who were cross-dressers. See also Cary Nederman and Jacqui True, ‘The Third Sex: The Idea of the Hermaphrodite in Twelfth-Century Europe’, *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 6 (1996), pp. 497–517.

³⁵ Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*, pp. 205–7; Caroline Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 1982), Ch. 4; Caroline Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast. The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley, 1987).

if they were advanced by authoritative sources. Of course, their conclusion is predetermined, but their treatment of the issue is interesting and revealing of scholastic attitudes towards sex and gender differences.

Thomas Aquinas (c.1225–74), one of the first to comment on the translation of Aristotle's *Politics*, simply paraphrases Aristotle. His only original comments come when he is considering the chapter immediately before the reference to women soldiers. There, Aristotle questions Socrates' desire to have wives and property in common: 'It is futile to argue from an analogy with the beasts that women ought to be treated the same as men, since beasts do not concern themselves with household management.'³⁶ Thomas tries to explain:

Socrates says that women ought to be treated the same as men — namely that they should cultivate the fields and fight [Aristotle hadn't mentioned this here] — and uses an analogy with the beasts . . . But beasts do not participate in household life, in which women have their own proper work, to which it is important for them to attend and always abstain from civil work.³⁷

As we will see, the gender role of women, particularly in the family, becomes one of the key elements of the rejection of Plato's idea.

A complementary argument is that women are not capable of satisfactory military activity. Thomas's teacher, Albert the Great (c.1193–1280) uses both arguments in his limited remarks: fighting women would go against 'the natural timidity of the feminine sex'. This is all he says about women in the military, although he does call the idea of their being burgers and sharing in rule 'a corruption of the will'. Albert is one of the few to understand that Plato did not intend that men and women share a military education alone, but education in general. He feels this is not reasonable, since people live different lives and have different skills. Women, in particular, must keep out of the political life in order to concentrate on their own necessary work — providing food and other necessities of life.³⁸

³⁶ Aristotle, *Politics*, 2.5.1264b7–9. 'Inconveniens autem et ex bestiis fieri parabolam, quia oportet eadem tractare mulieres viris, quibus oeconomiae nihil attinet.'

³⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *In Libros Politicarum Aristotelis Expositio*, in *Opera Omnia*, ed. R. Busa (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, KG, 1980), 2.5.12. 'Secundo mulieres dicit, quod Socrates dicebat, quod mulieres debebant eadem tractare cum viris, ut scilicet colerent agros et pugnarent, et alia huiusmodi facerent sicut viri: et accipiebat parabolam, id est similitudinem a bestiis, in quibus feminae similia operantur masculis, sed Aristotelis istud dicit esse inconveniens, nec esse simile: quia bestiae nihil participabant de vita oeconomica, in qua quidem vita mulieres habent quaedam propria opera, quibus oportet eas intendere, et abstinere semper ab operibus civilibus.' 2.6.2. '... Socrates existimavit quod oportebat mulieres bellare et alia similia facere viris'.

³⁸ Albertus Magnus, *Commentarium in Octo Libris Politicorum Aristotelis*, in *Opera Omnia* (London, 1651), Vol. 4, Book 2, ch. 3, pp. 78–9. 'Deinde cum dicit "sed uxores quidem, etc." subiungit de imperfecture legum Socratis circa uxores dicens: "sed uxores quidem existimat", Socrates scilicet, oportere simul bellare cum viris, cum tamen hoc sit

Giles of Rome and Ptolemy of Lucca treat this issue more extensively. Like Ptolemy, Giles probably attended Thomas Aquinas's lectures and was a defender of papal power. He was very well known, serving as vicar-general of the Augustinian Hermits. Unlike Ptolemy, he was a supporter of secular monarchy and dedicated his popular and influential *On the Government of Rulers* (*De Regimine Principum*),³⁹ to his former charge, as royal tutor, the French king Philip IV, probably in the late 1280s. He also discussed the biological roles of men and women in *The Formation of the Human Body in the Uterus* (*De Formatione Corporis Humanis in Utero*).⁴⁰

Classical and medieval writers frequently projected onto animals the human social organization and gender roles familiar to them. The reverse was less usual, but many noted that both female and male animals fight, which Giles assumes influenced Plato. Giles even admits that occasionally the female is the more fierce:

If we consider birds that live from rapine, such as sparrow hawks, goshawks, and eagles, the females have larger bodies, bolder hearts, and greater strength than the males. The names of all those birds are feminine and the males are worthless compared to the females. Since we see that among other animals both males and females fight, it would seem that the city would be especially ordained according to nature if both women and men, were ordained to the practice of war, since it seems that this is especially in accord with the natural order, in which both we and the other animals take part.⁴¹

Comparisons of women to animals abound in ancient and medieval writings depicting women as unable to control primal drives that men restrain by reason. It is less common to use such an analogy to favour women, as Giles does. Giles, and later Ptolemy, ascribe this description of birds to Aristotle, but Giles seems to be first to use it to advocate women soldiers although, as we have seen, Plato used the observation that both male and female dogs

contra timiditatem sexus foeminei. Et addit, quod etiam pro lege dedit Socrates, et disciplina participare eadem mulieres municipibus, id est, rectoribus civitatis. Cum tamen in *Ethicis* determinandum sit, quod si mulier principatum obtineat, hoc corruptio voluntatis est.'

³⁹ Giles of Rome, *De Regimine Principum Libri III* (Frankfurt, 1968; reprint of the Rome, 1556 edition).

⁴⁰ See M. Anthony Hewson, *Giles of Rome and the Medieval Theory of Conception: A Study of the 'De formatione corporis humani in utero'*, University of London Historical Studies, 38 (London, 1975).

⁴¹ Giles of Rome, *De Regimine Principum*, 3.1.7, 246v–247r. 'Nam si consideramus aves ipsas viventes ex raptu, maiores corpore et audaciores corde et praestantiores viribus sunt foeminae quam masculi: ut ancipitres et austures et aquilae, sunt omnes foeminae, quarum masculi sunt viliores eis. Quare si in aliis animalibus hoc videmus quod non solum bellant mares sed foeminae, quia maxime videtur esse secundum ordinem naturalem in quo communicamus cum animalibus aliis, videtur civitas maxime naturaliter ordinata si ad opera bellica ordinentur non solum viri sed etiam mulieres.'

hunt and stand guard to argue something similar for humans. Aristotle conceded that most female fish and oviparous quadrupeds are larger and stronger than the male,⁴² but he neither says that female birds are larger, nor even that the females of those species in which the females are larger are better fighters. On the contrary, he says that, except for the bear and leopard, the male is always more courageous, savage and spirited, even among squids.⁴³ Aristotle's preconceptions about gender roles lead him to misinterpret the activities of animals. Most medieval writers follow him, as when they refer to the king bee, usually cited to give natural support to human monarchy, and to male worker bees.⁴⁴ Nevertheless the description of rapacious birds became a medieval commonplace; the influential eleventh-century writer Anselm, for example, mentioned it as a rare exception to the rule that, 'in these natures that have a difference of sex, it belongs to the superior sex to be father or son, and to the inferior to be mother or daughter'.⁴⁵

To refute his positive argument, Giles need only show that unlike some female animals, women are not suited for fighting. He begins by specifying three qualities required by warriors: 'a cautious and foreseeing mind, a virile and spirited heart, and a robust and strong body'.⁴⁶ Elsewhere he lists 'the three kinds of signs by which we can recognize warlike men': those by which courage and boldness are proved, those by which virility and bodily strength are shown, and those by which we are similar to warlike animals. To explain the last he refers to the lion's massive legs and broad breast and, analogously, a warlike person needs vigilant eyes, an erect back, hard flesh, tight sinews and muscles, long legs and a broad breast.⁴⁷

Giles needs to show that women lack the necessary bodies, minds and temperaments for fighting. Aristotle had already argued that, at least for non-

⁴² Aristotle, *History of Animals*, 4.11.538a22 ff., 4.5.540b15–16; Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, 1.16.721a17 ff.

⁴³ Aristotle, *History of Animals*, 8.1.608a35–608b5; 8.1.608b17–20.

⁴⁴ Aristotle, *History of Animals*, 5.21.553a25, Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, 3.10.759b2 ff.

⁴⁵ Anselm, *Monologium*, Ch. 42, in St Anselm, *Basic Writings*, trans. S.N. Deane (La Salle, IL, 1962), p. 105.

⁴⁶ Giles of Rome, *De Regimine Principum*, 3.1.12, 254v. 'Homines enim bellatores decet esse mente cautos et providos, corde viriles et animosos, corpore robustos et fortes.'

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.3.3, 312v–313r. 'Tribus igitur generibus signorum cognoscere possumus bellicosos viros. Primo quidem per signa, secundum quae arguitur animositas et audacia. Secundo vero per signa, secundum quae ostenditur virilitas et fortitudo corporis. Tertio autem per signa, secundum quae conformamus animalibus bellicosus . . . Videmus enim leones animalum fortissimos habere magna brachia et latum pectus. Quando igitur in homine videmus, quod si vigilaris oculis, erectus cervice, durus in carne, compactus in nervis et musculis, habens longa brachia et latum pectus: debemus arguere ipsum esse bellicosum et aptum ad pugnam.'

oviparous animals, the mule excluded, the male is bigger and stronger,⁴⁸ and that, the bear and leopard excluded, the female is always softer in disposition and more nurturing.⁴⁹ Giles simply repeats the commonplace that women have fragile bodies, soft flesh, and lack the bodily strength and massive limbs necessary to use heavy weapons and armour effectively.⁵⁰ He would doubtless have been aware that Isidore of Seville, a standard source for scholastic writers and medieval etymology, derived 'mulier', Latin for 'woman', from 'mollitia', 'softness'.⁵¹

Discrediting women's minds and temperaments is more difficult, but also follows familiar Aristotelian lines. Aristotle believed that women were mentally inferior to men, and illustrated the proper relationship of the sexes analogically: men should rule women just as the intellect rules the desires within the soul.⁵² This implies that independent women would simply follow momentary impulses. Giles maintains that women are deficient in reason, rendering them incapable of foreseeing the future and their counsel worthless. But a warrior must possess these two qualities. Giles quotes the fourth-century Roman writer Vegetius: unlike other actions, actions in war are irreparable, requiring great caution and industry. Giles concludes that their mental deficiencies make women incapable even of learning about war.⁵³

Giles uses another Aristotelian conception of women — that their bodies are excessively cold — to argue that their temperaments are not suited to war. This refers to Aristotelian qualities of objects — moist and dry, cold and warm. These are the components of the four elements and humours; their proportion determines physical properties; their transformation explains physical change. Any organism has its 'complexion', the precise mixture of qualities that characterizes it. Although the qualities can be unbalanced, there is a natural complexion for each species or sex. Women are cold and moist, which conditions all their roles and characteristics, reproduction in particular: 'A

⁴⁸ Aristotle, *History of Animals*, 4.11.538a22 ff., 4.5.540b15–16; Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, 1.16.721a17 ff.

⁴⁹ Aristotle, *History of Animals*, 8.1.608b1–2.

⁵⁰ Giles of Rome, *De Regimine Principum*, 3.1.12, 255v. 'Nam cum bellantes oporteat diu sustinere armorum pondera, et dare magnos ictus, expedit eos habere magnos humeros et renes ad sustinendum armorum gravidinem, et habere fortia brachia ad faciendum percussiones fortes: mulieres igitur eo quod habent carnes molles et deficient a fortitudine corporali, ad opera bellica ordinari non debent.' The point about soft bodies is repeated at 3.3.3, 312.

⁵¹ Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, 9.2.17.

⁵² Aristotle, *Politics*, 1.5.1253b4–15.

⁵³ Giles of Rome, *De Regimine Principum*, 3.1.12, 255r. 'Mulieres ergo, quia habent consilium invalidum, et ab usu rationis deficiunt, nec sunt ita industres et providae sicut viri, non sunt ordinandae ad opera bellica. Nam in bellis magna cautela et industria est adhibenda, quia secundum Vegetius in *De re militari*, si alia male acta recuperari possunt, casus tamen bellorum irremediabiles sunt. Ex ipsa igitur industria, quae requiritur in bellantibus, arguere possumus mulieres instruendas non esse ad opera bellica.'

woman', Aristotle says, 'is as it were an infertile male; the female, in fact, is female on account of inability of a sort, namely that she lacks the power to concoct semen . . . because of the coldness of her nature.'⁵⁴ Menstrual blood, through which women were believed to purge excess moisture, was considered to be especially cold; because of this, a man who had sex with a menstruating woman could become sterile, or develop leprosy or cankers; a resulting child would be weak or a monster.⁵⁵ In his treatise on the fetus, Giles says that the woman's 'semen' is cold and watery and acts as a necessary coolant for and dilutant of the male semen, and that a soft and fluid menstruum, food classified as having 'cold' nutritional value, and the (wet) south wind are conducive to having a girl child.⁵⁶

With regard to military ability, virility requires heat, but coldness yields timidity: 'timidity prepares the way for fear, since it is the nature of cold to constrict and contract, whereas it is the nature of the spirited and virile to expand'.⁵⁷ He compares anyone with a soft heart and a horror of blood to a woman.⁵⁸ It is even dangerous to have women and such womanly men around; if they associate with fighters, they may infect them with their own fears.⁵⁹

Giles has now shown to his own satisfaction that women are unsuited for combat. He concludes by denying that any analogy with animals is valid and

⁵⁴ Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, 1.20.728a17–21.

⁵⁵ Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*, p. 268. In a treatise falsely ascribed to Albert the Great we read: ' . . . women are so full of venom in the time of their menstruation that they poison animals by their glance; they infect children in their cradle; they spot the cleanest mirror; and whenever men have sexual intercourse with them they are made leprous and sometimes cancerous'. See *Women's Secrets: A Translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus' 'De Secretis Mulierum' with Commentaries*, ed. and trans. Helen Rodnite Lemay (Albany, 1992), preface, p. 60. The material cited is not from pseudo-Albert himself, but from a medieval 'Commentator A', whose commentary is included in many manuscripts and printed editions.

⁵⁶ Giles of Rome, *De formatione*, Chs. 7, 24, as cited in Hewson, *Giles of Rome and the Medieval Theory of Conception*, pp. 89–90, 184–5. See also Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, 764 ff.

⁵⁷ Giles of Rome, *De Regimine Principum*, 3.1.12, 255r. 'Opera ergo bellica requirunt hominem inavidum et animosum, eo quod bellantes opponant se periculis mortis: mulieres autem communiter sunt pavidae et inviriles, quod contingit eis tam ex fragilitate corporis quam ex frigiditate complexionis, nam (ut dicebatur supra) frigiditas viam timori praeparet; frigidi enim est constringere et retrahere: animosi vero et virilis est ad alia se extendere; calor enim reddit habentem animosum et virilem, frigiditas vero timidum et pusillanimum.'

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.3.4, 334r. 'Sexto, pugnantes non debent horrere sanguinis effusionem. Nam si, quis cor molle habens, muliebris existens, horreat effundere sanguinem.'

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.1.12, 255r. 'In bellis enim melius est pavidus expellere, quam eos in societate habere. Nam cum humanum sit timere mortem, virilis etiam et animosi trepidant videntes timidos trepidare: ne igitur reddantur bellantes pusillanimes, quos constat esse timidos oportet ab exercitu expelli.'

repeats Aristotle's opinion that since animals don't have to contend with household management, both sexes can pursue the same occupations.⁶⁰ Animals lack reason, which in humans leads to a better division of labour. He concludes:

It is characteristic of humans to order the home and the city according to proper household management and to the proper dispensation, and, therefore, in those things in which they go beyond the reason of beasts, they should not follow the beasts.⁶¹

Giles is the first medieval writer to discuss Plato's idea seriously, but Ptolemy of Lucca wrote most fully about it. He was born around 1236 to a middle-class family of Lucca, a republican city of Tuscany. Joining the Dominican order, he studied under Aquinas, became a prior of his order, worked at the papal court in Avignon, and eventually was appointed bishop of Torcello, near Venice, where he died in 1327. Among his works are a history of the Church and a treatise on the Roman Empire. Most importantly, *On the Government of Rulers* (*De Regimine Principum*), written around 1301, continues a treatise attributed to Aquinas. Ptolemy is the first of his time, or among the first, to state many important ideas, among them that kingship is inherently tyrannical, that ancient Republican Rome was an ideal government, and that different local conditions require different governments.

Ptolemy devotes much attention to the Roman Republic and republican governments described by other, usually classical, authors, including Hippodamus, Pythagoras and Aristotle. While considering Plato and Socrates' polity, he discusses the question of women in the military. He uncharacteristically carries this out in strict scholastic form, with arguments for women fighting followed by arguments against and answers to the arguments for. Unlike Giles, he advances several positive arguments, although he will later either refute them or concede them, but insist that any advantage is overridden by other factors.

After noting Plato's opinion, he supports it with three kinds of evidence: analogy with the natural world, the physical nature of women, and historical practice. As for the natural world, he also points out that among beasts and rapacious birds females are more ferocious and better fighters.⁶²

⁶⁰ Aristotle, *Politics*, 2.5.1264b5–7.

⁶¹ Giles of Rome, *De Regimine Principum*, 3.1.12, 255v. 'Ratio autem quae movet Socratem ad hoc ponendum sumpta a similitudine bestiarum, insufficiens est: quia secundum Philosophum II *Politicorum* bestiis nihil attinet oeconomice, nec participant ratione. Hominis ergo est secundum debitam oeconomicam et secundum debitam dispensationem ordinare domum et civitatem. Quare in iis, in quibus bestiae praeter rationem agunt, eas sequi non debent.'

⁶² Ptolemy of Lucca, *De Regimine Principum*, in Thomas Aquinas, *Opuscula Omnia necnon Opera Minora*, Tomus Primus: *Opuscula Philosophica*, ed. R.P. Joannes Perrier (Paris, 1949), 4.5.1. Paragraph numbers here and in subsequent references are from the recent English translation, Ptolemy of Lucca, *On the Government of Rulers* (*De*

Next, Ptolemy makes two points about women's physical nature. The first concerns exercise. Much medieval medical opinion opposed exertion for women, partially because of women's cold complexion and frailty and the consequent need for rest. Hildegard of Bingen agrees but sees little benefit for men either:

A man who is of sound body is not much harmed if he walks or stays standing for a long time . . . A man who is weak should sit, since if he were to go or stand, he would be harmed. Woman, however, since she is more fragile than man . . . should walk and stand in moderation, but should sit more than she runs around, lest she be harmed.

Others, like Bernard of Gordon, felt that women's lack of exercise contributed to their weaker constitutions, which is why he said that sexual abstinence is more harmful for women than men.⁶³

Ptolemy believes that exercise strengthens women. Relying on experience, he points to female peasants and servants, who are stronger and healthier than other women, who presumably got little exercise. Therefore, he concludes, women should practice warfare: 'If, therefore, feminine virtue is greatly strengthened in gymnasia and in warlike activities, it would seem to be appropriate for the practice of war to pertain to them.'⁶⁴

This makes little sense today, since our concept of virtue is narrower than the scholastic one and refers in usages like this only to moral qualities. For Aristotle, 'Ἀρετή' has a different range of meanings; he characterizes virtue as a habit which 'brings into good condition the thing of which it is an excellence and makes the work of that thing be done well'. In the case of humans it is 'that which makes humans good and makes them do their own work well'.⁶⁵ It refers, then, to any action in accordance with true ends or functions, primarily *Regimine Principum*), with portions attributed to Thomas Aquinas, trans. James M. Blythe (Philadelphia, 1997). 'Quorum argumentum inducit secundum ipsos, quia videmus in avibus rapacibus ferociores esse foeminas et efficacius pugnare: hoc idem et de bestiis liuet, sicut praecipue in ferocibus animalibus est manifestum.'

⁶³ Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*, pp. 172–3, citing Hildegard of Bingen, *Causae et Curae*, ed. Paul Kaiser, Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana (Leipzig, 1903), Book 2, chs. 86–7; and Bernardus de Gordonio, *Practica dicta Lilium*, 7.1, f. 87vb–88ra. Cadden makes the point that the question of whether behaviour causes women's constitution or the reverse did not occur to medieval authors because of the integration of medical and gender ideas and 'of the cultural assumption that the integration was appropriate, requiring no explanation or justification'.

⁶⁴ Ptolemy of Lucca, *De Regimine Principum*, 4.5.2. 'Amplius autem, corporale exercitium confert foeminis quantum ad virtutem corporis et fortitudinem, sicut in ancillis familiarum et mulieribus rusticanis est manifestum, quia fortiores sunt et saniores. Virtutis autem proprium est quod bonum faciat habentem et opus eius bonum reddat. Si ergo in gymnasiis ac rebus bellicis magis confortatur foeminea virtus, congrue opera bellica videntur eisdem competere.'

⁶⁵ Aristotle, *Ethics*, 2.6.1106a15–24.

of the soul, but also of the body. This includes physical wellbeing. Ptolemy's conclusion follows from Aristotle's assumption that the exercise of a virtue is good.

Ptolemy's second point about women's physical nature refers to Aristotelian qualities of objects, which Giles had also addressed. Whereas Giles merely disqualified women from combat for coldness, Ptolemy also treats their moistness positively. According to Aristotle behaviour can modify the qualities somewhat to bring them closer to the optimal balance. Women and boys are excessively moist. Boys outgrow this, but it is permanent for women, whose bodies try to compensate by eliminating moisture through menstruation. Motion, such as exercise, also purges moisture. Female birds and beasts are so fierce largely because they are so active.⁶⁶ As before, Ptolemy concludes that women should take part in war to reduce their moisture and thereby increase their virtue.

Finally, Ptolemy gives historical examples of women fighters, mostly from classical sources: the Amazons, who, he says, founded the strongest kingdom in the East and conquered all Asia, and also the Scythians and the Tartars, among whom women served with the men.⁶⁷

Elsewhere, Ptolemy reports on Tomyris, queen of Scythia. He modifies a story from Herodotus retold by Valerius Maximus and Justin the Spaniard, Roman historians of the early Christian centuries: Tomyris gathered an army to resist the Persian king Cyrus and ambushed him in the mountains, slaughtering 200,000 and capturing Cyrus himself. 'The queen ordered his decapitated head to be sunk in a wineskin full of blood and shouted to him abusively: "You thirst for blood; drink blood," as if', Ptolemy adds, 'to signify that the disgraceful death he suffered was proof of his barbarity.'⁶⁸ Boccaccio

⁶⁶ Ptolemy of Lucca, *De Regimine Principum*, 4.5.3. 'Amplius autem, proportio qualitatū primarum ad hoc idem inducit, ut calidi et humidi, frigidi et sicci, ex quibus ad medium deductis fortificatur mixtum in sua virtute . . . Sic etiam videmus in avibus rapacibus quod foeminae ratione sui motus ut sunt fortioris naturae et majoris corpulentiae. Cum igitur in mulieribus abundet humidum, sicut in pueris, per motum consumatur et venit ad temperamentum, ex quo et vires recipit.' The reluctant twelfth-century abbess Heloise, Letter 5 to Abelard in Radice, 166, applied the theory of female moistness to argue that it prevented nuns from easily becoming drunk, so they should be able to drink more than male monks.

⁶⁷ Ptolemy of Lucca, *De Regimine Principum*, 4.5.4. 'Huius autem argumentum assumitur de regno Amazonum, quod fortissimum fuit in Oriente et quasi totam Asiam tertiam partem orbis subiugaverunt sibi, ut historiae tradunt, quae de Scythia orientalibus traxerunt originem; unde et apud eosdem Scythia, de quibus descenderunt Tartari, mulieres rebus bellicis exponuntur et cum suis militant vires.'

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.8.3. 'Narrat enim historia quod dicta regina [Tomyris] congregavit exercitum contra ipsum [Cyrus], Scythas videlicet et Massegetas et Parthos, et in quibusdam montibus dicta regina insidiis compositis invasit castra eiusdem, et sic impetu armorum absorbit quod ducenta milia fuerunt occisa praefati principis et ipse captus, cui amputato capite regina ipsum in utre sanguine pleno mandavit includi, et sic invective

repeated this story, as did Christine de Pizan, whose changes accentuate women's roles: Thamiris becomes queen of the Amazons, who dropped boulders on Cyrus's army and then ambushed those fleeing.⁶⁹

To summarize Ptolemy's arguments for women in the military: some female animals are better at fighting, the military life is good for women physically and morally, and in several powerful societies women fought successfully.

There are also, says Ptolemy, strong reasons against women fighting, also deriving from classical antecedents. Like Giles and Aristotle, Ptolemy denies that animal analogies are valid, since only humans are civil and domestic animals. Fighting prevents women from nourishing their children properly and preserving household property. Women's bodies were designed to avoid this disaster:

nature disposed women so as to remove the occasion of fighting from them, because, as Aristotle says . . . women have more feeble bodies than men and have less heat, and the only members they have that are thicker than men's are those ordained to the act of generation and bearing, such as the belly, buttocks, and breasts for nourishment. All their other members are more slender and more feeble than men's, and they are less vigorous in those members in which fortitude consists, such as the feet and legs, hands and upper arms, and all other individual members which are the foundation of fortitude, as I said above.⁷⁰

Although Ptolemy's ideas doubtless support male supremacy, he himself would view the proper social order more as a division of responsibilities.

acclamabatur eidem: "Sanguinem sitisti, sanguinem bibe", quasi ipsa mors ignominiosa quam passus est fuerit argumentum suae atrocitatis.' See also Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Deeds and Sayings*, 9.10, ext.1, although he does not cite figures, the peoples involved, or give this quote; M. Junianus Justinus, *Philippian Histories of T. Pompeius Trogus*, Book 1, ch. 8; Herodotus, *Persian Wars*, Book 1, chs. 205–14.

⁶⁹ Boccaccio, *Concerning Famous Women*, Ch. 47; Christine de Pisan, *Book of the City of Ladies*, Part 1, chs. 17, 42–3.

⁷⁰ Ptolemy of Lucca, *De Regimine Principum*, 4.5.6. 'Sed contra hanc politiam rationes sunt fortes, quibus difficile est respondere. Una quidem est Aristotelis in 2 *Politicorum*, quia non est eadem ratio de animalibus et hominibus, eo quod animalia non subjiciuntur dominio oeconomico'; *ibid.*, 4.6.2. '... homo naturaliter est civilis et oeconomicus, et in gubernatione suae familiae proprius actus est mulieris, sive in nutritione filiorum sive in honestate servanda in domo sive in provisione victualium, quae omnia fieri non possent si rebus bellicis intenderent; et propter haec natura ipsam sic disposuit, ut ab ipsa pugnandi occasio tolleretur, quia ut Philosophus . . . mulieres debiliora habent corpora quam viri et sunt minores caloris, et sola illa membra grossiora in eis videmus quae ad actum ordinantur generationis et gestum ut venter et nates, ac ad nutrimentum mammilliae. Omnia autem alia habent subtiliora et debiliora quam viri et minus nervosa in quibus fortitudo consistit, ut sunt pedes et crura, manus et lacerti, et sic de singulis membris ubi fortitudo fundatur, ut dictum est supra.' 'Above' refers to *ibid.*, 4.5.7; the Aristotle reference is *On the Generation of Animals*, 1.19.727a18–20.

Aristotelian writers often made analogies between authority in the home and in government. In the Early Modern period such analogies centred on the absolute authority of the patriarch, but medieval analysis saw similarities to all of the Aristotelian forms of government in the relationships of the paterfamilias with spouse, children and servants, and of the siblings with each other.⁷¹ Ptolemy refers at first not so much to different forms as to the situation that governments distribute duties to various officials. Likewise, a couple's duties are properly distinguished, the man attending to affairs outside the home and the woman to those within. In Ptolemy's mind, this gives women the key role in family government: 'in the governance of their own household the characteristic act is the woman's'.⁷² Through two historical analogies Ptolemy also compares rule in the household with specific forms of civil government and shows that he intends a sharing of powers. The first compares the home to the Roman Republic, which had two consuls, one for war and another for government. Ptolemy often characterizes this Republic as 'political': rule by law depending upon the people. The second analogy compares household rule to the Amazons, who had two queens similar to the two consuls.⁷³

This sounds different to what Ptolemy wrote in *Exameron*. There he also identified the rule of husband and wife as political, although he insisted that the husband was responsible for government:

Aristotle . . . distinguishes in the perfect home four types of person, namely the paterfamilias, the wife, children, and male and female servants. The paterfamilias is in the same position in the home as the ruler in the city, or as the king in a kingdom, although differently, as will become clear below . . . In this governance the paterfamilias is in a different position with respect to the three types already mentioned, since there is conjugal government with respect to the wife, paternal with respect to the children, and dominative with respect to the servants. Conjugal government differs from paternal just as political from regal . . . in the disposition and governance of the home the wife is subject to him; but with respect to the matrimonial goods they are equal, because there is an oath, offspring, and a sacrament.⁷⁴

⁷¹ James Blythe, 'Family, Government, and the Medieval Aristotelians', *History of Political Thought*, X (1989), pp. 1–16.

⁷² Ptolemy of Lucca, *De Regimine Principum*, 4.6.2. ' . . . in gubernatione suae familiae proprius actus est mulieris'.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 4.5.6. ' . . . sicut in politica officia sunt distincta ita et in oeconomia, ut paterfamilias ad extriora negotia, mulieres autem ad intrinsecos actus familiae. Cuius quidem argumentum assumere possumus ex parte Romanae reipublicae quae, ut tradunt historiae, duos habent consules: unus intendebat bellicis rebus, alter rempublicam gubernabat. Hoc idem et de Amozonibus scribitur, in quorum regno seu monarchia duae erant reginae sive monarchae quae sic distinguebantur in officiis sicut de Romanis consulibus est dictum.'

⁷⁴ Ptolemy of Lucca, *Exameron*, ed. T. Masetti (Sienna, 1880), Tractatus 9, Ch. 5, pp. 112–13. 'Distinguit enim Philosophus . . . in ipsa, scilicet domo perfecta, quattuor genera hominum, videlicet Patremfamilias, uxorem, filios, et servos et ancillas. Pater

The difference lies in the different emphases — in *Exameron* on the relationship between spouses, in *On the Government of Rulers* on the wife's function in internal household matters. Ptolemy, and all other medieval political thinkers, accepted the husband's rightful rule over his wife. In *Exameron* Ptolemy limits that power more than some medieval and most early modern writers, denying its absolute character and restricting it to matters implied by the marriage contract and canon law. By calling it political, he denies that the husband can rule by his own will and allows the possibility of the wife running the household on a day-to-day basis, Ptolemy's point in *On the Government of Rulers*. Today, this might not seem much, but in Ptolemy's mind women are destined for important authority, and this is the primary reason to bar them from the military, not because they are incapable.

Elsewhere, as already noted, Ptolemy does deny that women make good soldiers, since men are stronger and woman's limbs are inept for fighting, however suited for bearing and nourishing children. For him, the two things are necessarily opposed. Amazons, previously invoked to show that women could fight, now feature as a cautionary tale, to show how far women must go to overcome their natural limitations. One reason, he says, for keeping women out of the military,

derives from the ineptitude of women's members for fighting. Aristotle distinguishes, in *On the Generation of Animals*, between males and females in this way since a male has stronger members, arms, hands, nerves, and veins (which results in the production of a rougher voice), buttocks, belly, and other more subtle attributes. Women are just the reverse, so they are more suited for the act of generation, and their breasts for nourishing their offspring — but all of these things impede fighting. It is written that, for this reason, Amazon girls cut off their right breasts and press down their left, so as not to be impeded in shooting arrows.⁷⁵

autem familias sic se habet in domo, sicut princeps in civitate, sicut rex in regno, licet differenter, ut inferius patebit . . . in hac gubernatione differenter se habet paterfamilias ad illa tria genera praedicta iam, quoniam ad uxorem coniugali regimine, ad filios paternali, sed ad servos dominativo. Coniugali autem regimen differt a paternali, sicut politicum a regali . . . uxor in dispensatione, et gubernatione domus eidem subiicitur; sed quantum ad matrimonialia pares sunt, quia sunt fides, proles, et sacramentum.' 'Fides' could simply mean 'trust', but in the legalistic context here, and considering common feudal usage, I interpret it as referring to the marriage contract.

⁷⁵ Ptolemy of Lucca, *De Regimine Principum*, 4.5.7. 'Secunda ratio sumitur ex ipsa membrorum muliebrium ineptitudine ad pugnandum. Sic enim Philosophus distinguit *De Gestis Animalium* inter masculum et foeminam, quia masculus habet superiora membra grossiora, brachia, manus, nervos et venas, ex quibus vox grossiora generatur, nates vero et ventrem et alia circumstantia subtiliora, mulieres autem e converso et hoc ut in actu generationis sint aptiores, amplius autem et mamillas ad nutriendam prolem, quae omnia sunt impeditiva pugnae. Unde et de Amizonibus scribitur, quod puellis mamillas amputabant dextras, sinistris autem comprimebant, ne impederentur a sagittando.' Aristotle, *On the Generation of Animals*, 1.19.727a18–20, comments on the greater strength of men, but he does not mention fighting or specific body parts.

Ptolemy also believes that women's minds are unsuitable, repeating the medieval commonplace that a woman is an incomplete or stunted man, whose every characteristic is an inferior version of the man's.⁷⁶ This derived from Aristotle, who also wrote that in conception the mother provides the matter and the father the soul. A medieval commentary on *On the Secrets of Women*, a popular treatise incorrectly ascribed to Albert the Great, adds that this matter will produce a girl only if heat and deficient matter thwart nature — which is why some say that a woman is an inhuman monster by nature.⁷⁷ As mentioned, Aristotle felt that a woman is a woman precisely because of her deformity — the inability to produce the semen necessary to determine the form of a fetus. Just as a deformed parent may give birth to a normal or abnormal child, a female may bear a male or a female, which Aristotle called a natural deformity.⁷⁸

Thomas Aquinas wondered whether the fact that nothing defective should have been created in the beginning implied that God erred in creating woman. He answered that a woman is defective in her particular nature, but not with regard to universal nature, since she was ordained to bear children.⁷⁹ The defect is not merely physical. Thomas contrasts hermaphroditic plants with animals. So long as the only purpose of existence is procreation, active (male) and passive (female) elements can co-exist harmoniously, but, since animals have other purposes, they should come together only for reproduction. Men have an even higher purpose — understanding. Women have their own responsibilities, but were not created to collaborate with the man in any activity except generation.⁸⁰

Earlier, Ptolemy argued that the sexes simply had different functions, but now he insists that women are naturally deficient in both physique and reason. He repeats Giles's argument that, lacking heat, women are timid and fearful.⁸¹ This does not contradict what he said about women becoming stronger through exercise, since, he maintains, strength is not everything, demonstrated by the victory of short Romans over tall Germans: 'fortitude alone

⁷⁶ Ptolemy of Lucca, *De Regimine Principum*, 4.5.8. 'Tradit enim Philosophus *De Gestis Animalium* quod "mulier est masculus occasionatus"'. For the classical and medieval usage of 'masculus [or mas] occasionatus', see Albert Mitterer, 'Mas occasionatus oder zwei Methoden der Thomas-deutung', *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie*, 72 (1950), pp. 80–103.

⁷⁷ *Women's Secrets: A Translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus' 'De Secretis Mulierum' with Commentaries*, ed. H.R. Lemay, p. 106. The material cited is from 'Commentator B'.

⁷⁸ Aristotle, *On the Generation of Animals*, 2.4.738b, 1.19.727b, 2.3.737a, 4.6.775a.

⁷⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1.92.2 ad 1.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.92.2.

⁸¹ Ptolemy of Lucca, *De Regimine Principum*, 4.5.8. '... sicut deficit in complexionis, ita et in ratione. Et inde est quod propter defectum caloris et complexionis sunt pavide et mortis timidae, quod in bellis maxime fugiendum est.'

does not alone suffice for victory in a fight but rather astuteness in making war, which women lack',⁸² from natural deformity. 'Since their reason is defective, women lack astuteness for war, a quality by which fighters often become victors.' Even Amazons were deficient; although they were unbeatable in battle, Alexander the Great's astuteness and flattery overcame them.⁸³ This suggests that women are inconstant and easily swayed by sweet-talking men, yet it is also common for medieval (and modern) misogynists to attribute the opposite characteristics to them — that they are crafty and self-willed, able to bend any man to their will. The contradiction is only apparent; the unifying point is that women are incomplete in another way — their moral sense is also stunted. This renders them amoral and unprincipled, as well as unable correctly to evaluate the moral or rational content of an argument. The same woman can be deadly at one time and an easy prey at another.

Another argument is women's disruptive or corrupting effect:

A fourth reason [why women should not be soldiers] derives from the dangers of commerce with women, since the venereal act corrupts prudent judgment, as Aristotle tells us in *Ethics* 7. It is impossible to understand anything during it, and the result is enervation of the manly spirit. The histories relate that after Julius Caesar decreased the extent of war, he decreed that all delights should be kept away from the camps, especially women. Cyrus, king of the Persians, could not subjugate the Lydians because they were extremely strong and accustomed to labor, and he finally succeeded in taming them, even though they were disposed to virtue and fortitude, only after games and venereal activities enervated them. Vegetius wrote about the ancient Romans at the beginning of his first Book: 'Therefore, they were always perfect in war, because they were not broken by delights or desires for pleasure.' What more is there to say, since even the strongest horses, who otherwise are the boldest fighters and smell war from afar, are distracted from fighting by the presence of a mare. For this reason, as the histories relate, the Amazons accepted no men in their own battle lines.⁸⁴

⁸² *Ibid.*, 4.6.3. 'Quod vero dicitur quod fortitudo augetur in eis per exercitium, hoc est verum; ergo pugnare expedit eis. Ad hoc responderi potest quod sola fortitudo non sufficit ad vincendum in pugna, ut probat Vegetius in principio *De Arte Militari*, sed astutia bellandi qua mulieres carent: "Rudis enim et indocta multitudo exposita est semper ad necem." Sed autem brevis corporum Romanorum adversus Germanorum procertitatem praevaluit, ut ibidem dicitur, et propterea mulieres non debent actibus exponi ex quibus a virtutibus excludantur.'

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 4.5.8. 'Propter vero defectum rationis caret astutiis bellicis, quibus pugnantes ut plurimum sunt victores, sicut Vegetius tradit *De Re Militari*; unde tradunt historiae quod Alexander quibusdam astutiis et blanditiis devicit Amazones magis quam bellandi fortitudine, quarum regnum temporibus eius fortissimum et potentissimum erat in Asia.'

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.5.9. 'Quarta ratio sumitur ex periculoso commercio mulieris, quia actus venereus corrumpit aestimationem prudentiae, ut tradit Philosophus in 7 *Ethica*, et impossibile est in eo aliquid intelligere, ex qua causa virilis animus enervatur; unde ferunt historiae Julium Caesarem, cum bellum immineret, iussisse suas omnes delicias

Nor is it simply a question of distraction. According to medieval misogynist belief, women are inherently lustful and corrupting creatures. According to Isidore of Seville: 'Some think [a woman] is called "female" [*femina*] through the Greek etymology for "burning force" [$\phi\omega\varsigma$] because of the intensity of her desire. For females [*feminas*] are more lustful than males, among women as much as among animals.'⁸⁵ Many writers from patristic times on wrote that all women beginning with Eve continually strive to lead men astray. Thus, it would not suffice to choose virtuous women for the military or impose restrictions on conduct. Likewise, women must be denied any participation in their communities; Ptolemy criticizes the Spartans for not restricting the movements of women, and thus creating 'a snare of lust to a woman'.⁸⁶

These ideas, and the example of Caesar cited above, suggest that Ptolemy might seek to keep women entirely away from soldiers. He questions whether soldiers should even have wives:

The third thing about the Spartans that Aristotle disputes is whether the knights ought to have wives or be otherwise linked with women, which distracts them from fighting. The act of carnal pleasure softens the spirit and makes it less virile, as I said above, and it is Plato's opinion, as Theophrastus reports, that it is not expedient for those who attend to military things to marry. Aristotle, in the passage in Book 2 already mentioned, disagrees with that argument on the grounds that warriors are naturally prone to be lascivious. A certain book, *On Problems*, which the Emperor Frederick translated from the Greek into Latin, explains the reason for this, and in the passage that I just cited Aristotle mentions one of the poet Hesiod's fables, which joined Mars to Venus. If they were to abstain from women, they would approach males sexually, and for this reason Aristotle disagrees with Plato's opinion, since it is less evil to have carnal relations with women than to fall into vile and shameful acts. Thus, Augustine says that a whore acts in the world as the bilge in a ship or the sewer in a palace: 'Remove the sewer, and you will fill the palace with a stench.' Similarly, concerning the bilge, he says: 'Take away whores from the world, and you

separari a castris et praecipue mulieres. Cyrus etiam rex Persarum, cum Lydos subiugare non posset quia fortissimi erant et ad labores assueti, tandem per ludos et usum veneris ibidem constitutos virtute et fortitudine enervatos perdomuit. De ipsis insuper Romanis antiquis sic scribit Vegetius in principio primi libri: "Ideo ipsos perfectos ad bellum semper, quia nullis voluptatibus nullisque deliciis frangebantur." Quid plura? quia etiam equi fortissimi, qui alias sunt audacissimi ad pugnandum et procul odorant bellum, ex praesentia equae distrahuntur a pugna; propter hanc ergo causam ipsae Amazones, ut historiae narrant, nullum virum in sua recipiebant acie.' The Aristotle reference is to *Ethics*, 7.10.1152a6–9; the Vegetius reference to *On the Military*, 1.3, although the quote is not exact; see also Vegetius, *On the Military*, 1.28.

⁸⁵ Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, 11.2.23, in *Woman Defamed and Women Defended*, ed. Blamires, p. 43.

⁸⁶ Ptolemy of Lucca, *De Regimine Principum*, 4.14.5. '... dabatur libertas mulieribus, unde efficiebantur lascivae. De hoc enim a Philosopho reprehenduntur quod suas mulieres non restringebant a discursibus, quod mulieri est laqueus libidinis'.

will fill it with sodomy.’ For this reason Augustine says in *The City of God*, Book 13 that the earthly city made the use of harlots a licit foulness. Aristotle himself says that the vice of sodomy exists because of depraved nature and perverse usage, and with respect to such things one should not even speak in terms of continence or incontinence since they are not in themselves things delectable to human nature, so that one cannot refer to moderate virtue in this case. This agrees with Paul, who in the book of Romans calls such acts ‘passions of ignominy’.⁸⁷

Thus, women are tolerated only as necessary to prevent homosexuality. A consequence of this discussion is the implication that soldiers are naturally effeminate, as defined by Isidore: ‘“effeminate” [*foemineus*] was applied to an excess of love in antiquity’. This sentiment is reflected in Andreas Capellanus’ comment in the twelfth-century *Art of Courtly Love*: ‘Be careful to restrain your passion like a man’ and in John Gower’s fourteenth-century *A Lover’s Confession*: ‘beware especially of such infatuation as would transform the quality of his manhood into effeminacy . . . To see a man lose his

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.14.6. ‘Tertium autem quod Aristoteles disputat de Lacedaemoniorum politia est circa milites: utrum deberent uxores habere vel mulieribus coniungi, quia si hoc est distrahuntur a pugna. Ex actu enim carnalis delectionis mollescit animus et minus virilis redditur, ut dictum est supra: et sententia est Platonis, ut Theophtastus refert, quod militaribus rebus intentis non expedit nubere. Sed Aristoteles istud reprobatur in dicto II libro, quia bellatores naturaliter sunt prони ad luxuriam. Causa autem assignatur in quodam libello *De Problematibus*, translato e graeco in latinum Frederico Imperatore: sed Philosophus ibidem introducit Hesiodi poetae fabulam, qui Martem cum Venere iunxit. Unde si abstineant ab mulieribus, prolabuntur in masculos; et ideo Aristoteles in hoc reprobatur Platonis sententiam, quia minus malum est mulieribus carnaliter commisceri quam in vilia declinare flagitia. Unde Augustinus dicit quod hoc facit meretrix in mundo quod dentina in navi vel cloaca in palatio: “Tolle cloacum, et replebis foetore palatium”; et similiter de sentina: “Tolle meretrices de mundo, et replebis ipsum sodomia.” Propter quam causam idem Augustinus ait in XIII *De Civitate Dei* quod terrena civitas usum scortorum licitam turpitudinem fecit. Hoc etiam vitium sodomiticum ipse Philosophus in VII *Ethicorum* dicit accidere propter vitiosam naturam et perversum consuetudinem, et horum etiam non est continentiam vel incontinentiam assignare cum non sint per se delectabilia humanae naturae, unde medium virtutis ibi esse non potest; et hoc concordat cum Apostolo ad Romanis, qui tales actus *ignominiae passiones* appellat.’ Ptolemy’s references are to *ibid.*, 4.5.9; Aristotle, *Politics*, 2.9.1269b28–9 and Aristotle, *Ethics*, 7.5.1148b28–30; the pseudo-Aristotelian *Problems*, dedicated to Frederick II by its first Latin translator; Augustine, *On Order*, 2.4.12; Augustine, *The City of God*, 14.18 (not Book 13); and Romans 1.26. Although Augustine expresses the sentiments ascribed to him, I could not locate the exact quotations about sewers and whores. *Problems*, 4.7 asks the question why men who continually ride are more inclined to sexual intercourse, but does not specifically mention warriors. The answer ascribes this to the effects of heat and motion stimulating the genitals and motion causing the body to develop large pores, which are conducive to sexual desire. In ancient Greece, soldiers were not generally cavalry, but the medieval knights were.

status because of his effeminate infatuation, abandoning what a man should do, is like seeing stockings outside shoes: an aberration for any man.⁸⁸

All men risk corruption around women, and, apparently, military men more than most. Consequently, Ptolemy argues, nature attempts to protect men by imposing limits on women: an inborn sense of shame, restrictions such as ankle-length clothing, marriage rings and servitude to husbands — all incompatible with military service, Ptolemy says, since international law decrees freedom and privileges for knights. These would be unthinkable for women, since it would leave men unprotected and defy the Bible, as well as woman's passive and obedient nature — the reverse of fighting, the highest action.⁸⁹ Here we recognize the stereotype of the passive female, which contradicts some of Ptolemy's other misogynist arguments.

For all these reasons Ptolemy rejects Plato's position. He reiterates the crucial role of women in the household and the womanly strength that differs from man's. He sincerely believes that, whatever her inherent limitations, a good woman deserves great respect. This was also a patristic and medieval commonplace: since women begin with handicaps, one who overcomes them rises above even saintly men. The Virgin Mary is the supreme example. On a lesser scale, the same applies to any woman who virtuously performs her household duties:

Therefore, I must say simply that a woman ought not to be exposed to matters of war, but ought to live in the home and take care of household matters, as I said above. Solomon at the end of Proverbs commends a woman's fortitude in a song that he composed using each of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, in which he attributes all of her fortitude to domestic action: 'Who will find a strong woman? Her price is far beyond any limits.' He implies that she should be highly revered if she is skilled in the things he mentions. The first is the art of spinning: 'She sought wool and flax, and labored with the counsel of her hands', thus showing that this was a proper part of her offices. As is recorded among his deeds, Charlemagne also mandated that his dearly beloved daughters take up the distaff and spindle and be industrious with them. Further on, Solomon added other womanly acts referring to the domestic home, such as taking care of children, running the household,

⁸⁸ Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, 11.2.23; Andreas Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*, trans. John Jay Parry (New York, 1990), Book 3, p. 197; John Gower, *A Lover's Confession*, 7, trans. Alcuin Blamires. See *Woman Defamed and Women Defended*, ed. Blamires, pp. 43, 43 n. 75, and 248–9.

⁸⁹ Ptolemy of Lucca, *De Regimine Principum*, 4.6.3–4. '... natura mulieri fraena providit, ut est verecundia quae est praecipuum vinculum eius ut Hieronymus scribit ad Cellantiam virginem, talaris vestes, annulus in digito, servitus viri; sic enim Scriptura sacra testatur quoniam sub viri potestate erit. Bellicis autem rebus intendere in republica libertatem meretur, unde et militibus iura gentium speciales apices privilegiorum concedunt ... Et praeterea natura mulieris est a viro pati et non agere; pugnare autem summa est actio, cum sit actus fortitudinis qui solus, si laudabiliter exerceatur, meretur coronam.'

providing for her home, honoring the friends of her husband, and making up for his defects. These are proper things for a wife to do, and they pertain to the good of marriage, as is clear from what is written about Abigail, wife of Nabal of Carmel. Since such solicitude involves many disturbances, as the Lord says in Luke: 'Martha, Martha, you are solicitous and disturbed about many things', and since such things should be the object of virtue and fortitude, the Wise One quoted above calls such a woman strong, not because she shows fortitude toward works of war, but because she patiently guides her household, as I showed above.⁹⁰

Typically, Ptolemy displays deep ambivalence: women are a necessary part of God's creation and capable of the greatest virtue, but are generally weak, prone to sin and a constant threat to men — especially when they cross gender lines and interact directly with men in male occupations. This would be most dangerous in the most manly occupation — warfare. For their own good, the good of their families and men's good they should remain in home or cloister, where their talents direct them.

Unfortunately, no other medieval writers continue this debate; at most they paraphrase Aristotle and dismiss women warriors. This is true even of the normally innovative Nicole Oresme, who lets Plato's position pass without comment.⁹¹ Aristotle does not supply Plato's arguments, and since the regular participation of women seemed absurd, most may have felt no need to refute it, especially considering the pressing issues Aristotle raised for the changing

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.6.5. 'Dicendum est ergo simpliciter mulierem non debere exponi bellicis rebus, sed in domo quiescere, curam genere rei familiaris, ut dictum est supra. Unde et in hoc Salomon in fine Proverbiorum fortitudinem mulieris commendat, speciale de ipsa componens canticum sub litteris hebraici alphabeti, ac totum circa eam ad domesticam referens actionem: "Mulierem", inquit, "fortem quis inveniet? procul et de finibus pretium eius", quasi multum sit reverenda si habeat quae sequuntur; unde primo ponit artem filandi: "Quaesivit", inquit, "lanam et linum, et operata est consilio manuum suarum", per hoc volens ostendere quod istud sit proprium earum officium; propter quod et in gestis Caroli Magni scribitur quod filiabus suis, quas intime dilexit, colo et fuso mandavit insistere et operosas esse. Ulterius Salomon subiungit alios actus mulieris qui referuntur ad domesticam domum, ut est filiorum curam habere, familiam dispensare, suae domui providere, amicos viri sui honorare ac defectus eius supplere, quae sunt propriae operationes coniugis et ad bona matrimonii pertinentes, ut de Abigail uxore Nabal Carmeli scribitur, sicut patet in I Regum. Sed quia talis sollicitudo multas habet perturbationes, ut Dominus dicit in Luca: "Martha", inquit, "Martha, sollicita es et turbaris erga plurima", cum talia sint obiectum virtutis et fortitudinis; ideo dictus Sapiens talem mulierem fortem vocat, non quidem fortitudine ad opera bellica sed ad patienter gubernandam familiam, ut superius est ostensum.' Ptolemy's references are to Proverbs 31.10, 13; Einhard, *Life of Charlemagne*, 19; 1 Kings (1 Samuel) 25; Luke 10.41. Each of the verses in Proverbs 31.10–31 begins with a different Hebrew letter in alphabetical order.

⁹¹ Nicole Oresme, *Le Livre de Politiques d'Aristote*, ed. Albert Douglas Menut, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, n.s., Vol. 60, pt. 6 (1970), Book 2, ch. 9, p. 87.

political and ecclesiological scene of late medieval Europe. What is remarkable is the wide range of arguments, original and from classical sources, that Giles and Ptolemy raised.

Finally, it is noteworthy that similar arguments are still current. On the positive side, although the argument today is usually presented in terms of civil rights and equality, defenders want to make two of the same points as Ptolemy: that women can fight well, as shown by historical example if possible, and that the benefits, if any, of military service accrue to women. On the negative side, conservatives stress proper gender roles — the ‘family values’ of raising children and taking care of the home. Service in the military evokes a similar response from a wider group, as is reflected in numerous media stories about the plight of children whose mothers (never fathers) have been called up in crises. We still hear that women soldiers deny their femininity to act like men, that women are biologically more suited to bear children than to fight, that women and gays would have disruptive or corrupting effects on heterosexual male soldiers, that women aren’t physically hard or strong enough for the military life, and that women are mentally too soft, too maternal, for example, and would be unable to commit violent acts. Curiously, some ‘difference feminists’ find themselves close to several of these positions by insisting on natural female nurturing qualities, by promoting a positive image of housework and by asserting that women inherently do not think in the same analytic way as men, but emotionally or empathetically. The underlying thought of the last is the same as Ptolemy’s: women lack full reason. It is disheartening to hear these echoes of medieval misogyny in our supposedly more enlightened discourse.

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