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Poison, Power, and Perception:
A Biography of Mabel of Bellême (1030-1082)

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation is a biography of an eleventh-century Norman noblewoman named Mabel of Bellême. This study tells how the first lords of Bellême came to power in the ninth century, rose to be masters of the southern and western frontier of Normandy, and how implausible stories about Mabel came to be included in Orderic Vitalis's twelfth century history of the Norman church. My thesis is that Mabel relied upon the Bellême power initially created in the ninth century by her great-grandfather, Yves, and consolidated Bellême force with Montgomery influence through marriage in c.1050. The Bellême process of fortifying the Norman frontier resulted from the construction of fortresses and churches that maximized influence over the fluid and ill-defined border region. These efforts not only made the region defensible but enabled Mabel and her family to isolate and take control of lands and fortifications held by adversaries along the frontier. Mabel's actions were likely a combination of overwhelming power, ruthless aggression, and acts of terror- including poisoning of perceived enemies. Using these techniques Mabel came to control a vast region of southwestern Normandy and northeastern Maine. Her reputation and methods were so harsh that, years after her murder, a chronicle writer in St. Évrôul embellished her reputation by alleging she envenomed a stranger's child with her own breastmilk.

Mabel did not build her power *ex novo*. Rather, her ancestors had come to control the region generations earlier through a combination of ducal service and statecraft.

Indeed Fulcuin (c.890-c.940), Yves de Creil (c.940-980), and Yves de Bellême (c.965-1005), Mabel's great-great-grandfather, great-grandfather and grandfather, respectively, played a substantial role in developing the resources that made Mabel's success possible. Mabel's father, William II of Bellême, created the fearsome and unpredictable nature of the Bellême that would become the hallmark of their legacy. Of equal importance, however, was timing and geography. The Bellême family was useful to the Norman dukes for holding a volatile frontier against Frankish and Maine aggressors, but, once established in the area, the Bellême became a virtually autonomous and obdurate rulers, annexing their neighbors and creating hostilities that threatened ducal power. Through a marriage alliance with the Norman duke's kin, Mabel was able to pass her ancestral methods of aggressive state building to her heirs.

Mabel's methods were so embedded in her heirs that her son became the largest landholder in the Anglo-Norman world. He was also the most pernicious. The family power declined after several violent and costly rebellions and wars. Mabel's family reputation, once synonymous with awesome and terrible power, was almost completely snuffed out by dukes and kings, eager to create grand narratives of their own might. The erasure of the Bellême was almost complete, save a twelfth-century chronicle of the Norman church, written by a monk born in Bellême -Montgomery English lands but exiled for an education in Normandy. His writings about Mabel are the only primary account of Mabel and her family's actions. Through a close reading of his words, we catch glimpses of how Mabel may have used all types of power. We can also guess about Orderic's worldviews, motivations, and interests. By telling Mabel's story, this

dissertation intends to reconstruct and recover the story of a powerful eleventh century Norman woman.

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This was the most difficult task I have ever undertaken, but I hope this project serves as a reminder that we have to remain adamant in our pursuit of fulfillment.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	x
LIST OF TABLES	xii
ABBREVIATIONS	xiii
CHAPTER 1: ELEVENTH-CENTURY ANGLO-NORMAN WOMEN: WHAT THE SOURCES SAY.....	1
CHAPTER 2: BELLÊME GENEALOGY	31
CHAPTER 3: THE LIFE OF MABEL OF BELLÊME	97
CHAPTER 4: MARRIAGE, MOTHERHOOD, AND MURDER: PRESERVING AND EXPANDING POWER.....	152
CHAPTER 5: CONTEXTUALIZING MABEL: A CLOSER LOOK AT THE <i>ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY</i>	190
CHAPTER 6: AFTER LIFE: THE DEATH AND LEGACY OF MABEL OF BELLÊME	231
CONCLUSION : AN ORDINARY OR EXTRAORDINARY WOMAN?.....	265
APPENDICES	269
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	299

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1. Map of Bellême fortresses along border.	34
Figure 2.2. Lords of Bellême (first five generations).	45
Figure 2.3. First generation holdings of Bellême lordship, early ninth century.	49
Figure 2.4. Three-dimensional model of Vieux Bellême with city walls c.1026.	56
Figure 2.5. Village of Vieux Bellême with castle and city walls.	57
Figure 2.6. Church of the Virgin in Bellême.	58
Figure 2.7. Church of the St. Martin in Vieux Bellême.	59
Figure 2.8. Bellême fortresses at the end of the tenth century.	62
Figure 2.9. Cloister Garden at Ruin of Notre Dame du Séez.	65
Figure 2.10. Diagram of Early Bellême.	68
Figure 2.11. Signature page from <i>Cartulaire de l'Abbayette</i> , no. 1.	72
Figure 2.12. The Church of St. Santin de Bellême with burial crypt of Yves and Godhelde.	75
Figure 2.13. Burial crypt of Yves and Godhelde.	76
Figure 3.1. Dukes of Normandy.	102
Figure 3.2. Ruin at Neufchâtel-en-Saosnois.	104
Figure 3.3. Fortresses along southern border with Maine, c.1050.	105
Figure 3.4. Church of St. Martin, Séez.	125
Figure 3.5. A seal of manuscript H927.	126
Figure 3.6. A seal of manuscript H938.	127
Figure 3.7. The “signature” of Mabel of Bellême from a donation charter to the Abbey of St. Martin.	128
Figure 3.8. Ruin of St. Martin at Séez.	131
Figure 3.9. The Abbey Church of Notre Dame, Lonlay.	134

Figure 3.10. Mabel’s monastic endowments to 1080.	137
Figure 3.11. Castle Ruin at Domfront.....	138
Figure 3.12. Mabel’s fortresses on the frontier by 1080.....	141
Figure 3.13. Mabel’s sacred and secular holdings throughout the lordship to 1080.	142
Figure 3.14. Donation of Mabel’s English lands from the “Liber Albus” (The White Book).	144
Figure 4.1. Welsh Marches controlled by Bellême lords, c.1086.....	165
Figure 4.2. Overview of twelfth-century Bellême family holdings in England.	186
Figure 5.1 A tenth-century drawing of the human body used by barber-surgeons in England.....	204
Figure 5.2 <i>Lactatio Bernardi</i> , reproduced from MS 264 in Bodleian Library.....	216
Figure 5.3 Ruin of St. Évroul.....	241
Figure 5.4 Ruin of St. Évroul.....	242
Figure 5.5 Ruin of St. Évroul.....	243
Figure 6.1. Map of territory controlled by Mabel of Bellême, from <i>La Seigneurie de Bellême, II: 22</i>	232
Figure 6.2. Ruin of the Abbey of St. Martin.....	234
Figure 6.3. Ruin of Troarn Abbey.	238
Figure 6.4. Ruin of Troarn Abbey.	239
Figure 6.5. Undated drawing of Mabel’s tomb.....	240
Figure 6.6. Shrewsbury Abbey.	243
Figure 6.7. Earl Roger’s tomb and effigy.	244
Figure 6.8. Lordships controlled by noblewomen, c.1040 –c.1140.....	261

Unless indicated, maps were created and photos were taken by the author and are the property of the author.

LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1. Earl Roger's English holdings	164
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ABBREVIATIONS

- AB *Annals of St. Bertin: Ninth-century histories*. Translated and annotated by Judith N. Nelson. Vol. 1. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991.
- Bart, *Recueil* Léonard Bart, *Recueil des Antiquités du Perche: Comtes et seigneurs de la dicte province ensemble les fondations, bâtiments des monastères et choses notables du dict. païs* (Mortagne: L. Daupeley, 1890).
- Bates, *Normandy* David Bates, *Normandy Before 1066* (London: Longman, 1982).
- CDF *Calendar of Documents Preserved in Francia*. Edited by J. Horace Hound. Vol. 1. London: Rolls, 1899.
- CMP *Cartulaire de Marmoutier pour le Perche*. Edited by Abbé Barret. Mortagne: Georges Meaux, 1894.
- Complete Peerage* *The Complete Peerage of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, ed. G.E. C. (12 volumes, London, 1919-1959), Cited by volume and page.
- Dudo, *Historia* Dudo of St. Quentin, *Historia Normannorum*. Translated by Eric Christensen. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998.
- Du Motey, *Origines* Henri Renault du Motey, *Origines de la Normandie et du duché d'Alençon*. Paris: Picard, 1920.
- Ecclesiastical History* Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History*, 6 vols. Translated by Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969-1983).
- Fauroux *Recueil des actes de ducs de Normandie (911–1066)*. Edited by Marie Fauroux. Caen: Société des Antiquaires de Normandie, 1961.
- Gesta Guillelmi* William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*. Edited by R.H.C. Davis and Marjorie Chibnall. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Gesta Normannorum Ducum* *Gesta Normannorum Ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis, and Robert of Torigni*, 2 vols.

- Translated by Elisabeth M.C. Van Houts. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Historia Anglorum* Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*. Edited and Translated by Diana Greenway. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.
- Historia Francorum* Gregory of Tours, *Historia Francorum*. Translated by Lewis Thorpe. London: Penguin UK, 1974.
- Louise, *La Seigneurie* Gérard Louise, *La Seigneurie de Bellême Xe-XIIIe siècles*. 2 vols. Flers: Cercle Généalogique, 1990.
- RRA (Bates) *Regesta Regum Anglo- Normannorum: The Acta of William I (1066–1154)*. Edited by David Bates. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.
- Torigni, *Chronicles* Robert of Torigni, *The Chronicles of Robert de Monte*. Translated by Joseph Stevenson. Somerset: Llanerch Press, 1991.
- TRHS *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*
- White, “First House” Geoffrey White, “First House of Bellême,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 22 (1940): 67–99.

CHAPTER 1: ELEVENTH-CENTURY ANGLO-NORMAN WOMEN: WHAT THE SOURCES SAY

During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Anglo-Norman writers composed histories of Normandy, a large and powerful duchy. The writers described the inhabitants of the Norman realm, who crossed the Channel in 1066 from Francia¹ to conquer England. The Conquest of England changed Europe, and the conquering Normans further expanded their influence throughout the Mediterranean into Sicily and southern Italy. Norman writers were eager to write the history of the expanding “Norman world”. Although many of the chronicle writers included details about women’s lives, modern writers have shown little interest in these women and their actions until the late twentieth century.

The following dissertation focuses on the activities of a particular woman, Mabel of Bellême (1030-1082) in an effort to place women more centrally within the medieval historical narrative of the Anglo-Norman world. Through a careful discussion of the chronicles, especially the *Ecclesiastical History* by Orderic Vitalis, the study of Mabel of Bellême highlights the ways in which eleventh-century Anglo-Norman women might have secured their families and their lands.

This study is an analysis of gender and power. Although told primarily from the point of view of Orderic Vitalis (1075-1142), it adds to the medieval master narrative by seeking the motivations for Orderic’s accounts of Mabel’s life. Although this dissertation

¹ Francia was the medieval derivation of the modern country of France. Normandy was the powerful duchy in the northwestern portion of Francia, which was named for the Norsemen (Northmen) who settled there after the Treaty of Saint Clair sur Epte in 911 between Charles the Simple and the Viking leader, Rollo. Throughout this dissertation, “Francia” is used in place of the modern name of France, which will be used sparingly.

does not seek to vilify Orderic and is not an encomium for the murderous Mabel, a primary aim is to understand the genesis of Orderic's tale of Mabel poisoning a stranger's child and how Mabel's other poisonings became a part of Orderic's history of the Norman church. While the poisoning of the Sowsnose child will be analyzed closely, I will talk about the other poisonings² more fully in chapter 3.

Several overarching questions guide this study: Was Mabel of Bellême a "typical" eleventh-century noble woman? Did she rule in a similar manner to her peers in the Anglo-Norman realm? What was the importance of the Bellême region and the family in building and maintaining both Normandy and the Anglo-Norman realm? How can Mabel's story help create a more complete picture of women in medieval Normandy? What is the legacy of Mabel of Bellême? Does her story alter the narrative of eleventh-century Normandy? Answers to these questions require new types of evidence and new methodologies and in turn enable this research to look at structures of power in eleventh-century Normandy, the role of noblewomen, the social and political influence along the frontier,³ and the medieval mind of sacred and secular thinkers, among other topics. Each chapter will present detailed historical queries and answers to meet these objectives.

To date, only two texts have been written about the lordship of Bellême.⁴

² These other poisonings involved the use of wine and were politically motivated, as we will see in chapter 3.

³ The concept and importance of the frontier in this biography will be analyzed more fully on pp.22-24, below.

⁴ Jacques Boussard, "La seigneurie de Bellême aux Xe et XIe siècles," In *Mélanges d'histoire du moyen âge dédiés à la mémoire de Louis Halphen* ed. and trans. Charles-Edmond Perrin (Paris: Presses Universitaires de Francia, 1951): 43-54; and Gérard Louise, *Le Pays Bas-Normand : La Seigneurie de Bellême Xe-XIIIe siècle dévolution des pouvoirs territoriaux et construction d'une seigneurie de frontière aux confins de la Normandie et du Maine*. (Flers: Cercle Généalogique, 1990).

Historians dispute her family's genealogy. Further, no one has analyzed the massive power and wealth that she held and then passed on to her children. This dissertation recreates her family's genealogy from the late ninth century. Mabel's life will be reconstructed and her motivations analyzed. Evaluating Mabel's exercise of power facilitates a fuller understanding of the ways in which eleventh-century Norman women gained, held, and exercised power within their families, through their charitable endeavors, and across their realms.

Finally this dissertation will analyze how Mabel's family fell from power. In the end questions will be raised about political motivations and ambitions, but the answers may come down to an unfortunate crossroads of time and place. Mabel lived in a chaotic time and place. The duke of Normandy was expanding his influence throughout England while maintaining the power of semi-autonomous lords within the duchy of Normandy. The Bellême were one of many families who sought to rise in political power by causing havoc on their neighbors and expanding their influence in the region. Bellême was positioned at a critical position on two Norman frontiers,⁵ so the lords who ruled here had to be fierce and devastating. Eleventh- and twelfth-century people witnessed changes across the political and ecclesiastical landscapes, so we must seek to understand how these changes affected the outlook of Orderic.

Mabel's actions illuminate how eleventh-century women employed power through the course of their lives. Mabel of Bellême was the *domina* of an important lordship on the critical but ill-defined and fluid southern and western frontiers of the

⁵ The Bellême lands extend to Domfront, which does not reach into the frontier region between Normandy and Brittany.

duchy of Normandy. Mabel poisoned people, deprived neighbors of their homes and livelihoods, and died a violent death in her bedchamber. Orderic Vitalis provides the main account of her actions, and he was hostile toward the Bellême family. This study investigates potential causes for his derision.

The Medieval Mind: Norman and Anglo-Norman Chroniclers

This research involves use of the writings of eleventh-century Anglo-Norman monastic chroniclers, each of whom held a unique perspective. Before the words of the monks are analyzed, the reader must gain a sense of the purpose and worldviews of the chroniclers and the contexts in which they wrote. This study engages with the following historical questions regarding chronicle writers: How can historians use eleventh and twelfth-century sources in new ways to answer historical questions posed by twenty-first century audiences? What theories enable readers to draw new conclusions from Anglo-Norman sources?

These valuable questions warrant consideration in order to illuminate the mind of medieval man and his relationship to his female neighbors. Investigating the medieval monastic worldview is essential to continue to correct the assumption, common until the waning years of the twentieth century, that the Anglo-Norman sources were overwhelmingly misogynistic.⁶ In fact, women actively participated in building the

⁶ Alcuin Blamires, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991) and R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). These books are the genesis of the writing against the widespread notion of medieval misogyny, which is at the heart of medieval feminist study. This study of Mabel of Bellême is a continuation of works such as these. This dissertation uses Bloch's definition of misogyny, "a speech act in which woman is the subject of the sentence and the predicate a more general term": *Medieval Misogyny*, 5.

Anglo-Norman world during the eleventh century, and their stories should be included in order to have a more complete picture of the eleventh century. Noblewomen like Mabel of Bellême enable historians to simultaneously question women's power and the worldview of medieval monastics.

The medieval writers shared several commonalities. Most of the chronicle writers were churchmen.⁷ As ecclesiastics, the monks benefited from the best educations offered in their day. The *horarium*⁸ provided the monastic writers with both the time to devote to writing and the purpose for the work. Chroniclers wrote as devotion to God and as a way to record historical events. Tangentially, the chronicles might also have served a political function, depending upon the patron of the work. Although most of the Norman writers of the eleventh century resided in monasteries, they came into contact with women as well as with stories of women. Sometimes females appear in the narrative. It is these anecdotes this dissertation hopes to elucidate.

The analysis of the historiography of Anglo-Norman chroniclers begins with Orderic Vitalis, the most valuable source for the reconstruction of Mabel's life. The analysis proceeds chronologically through the eleventh and twelfth centuries. As the main chronicle source on Mabel of Bellême, a discussion of Orderic must be included. In

⁷ Monastic chroniclers include such men as Wace, William of Jumièges (c.1025-c.1090), Dudo of St. Quentin (965-d.c.1043), Guy of Amiens (1014-1075), William of Poitiers (c.1020-1090), William of Malmesbury (1080-1143), and Robert of Torigni (c.1110-1186). Most of these writers were monks and their inclusion of women vary. Wace was not a monk. Dudo of St. Quentin was not a monk. Guy of Amiens was a bishop. Orderic Vitalis is unusual in his inclusion of a number of women within his chronicle, which show that he was unusual among his peers for his interest in the lives of women.

⁸ The *horarium* was the daily schedule for monastic jobs in a monastery. Monasteries encouraged scholarly study alongside prayer and manual labor.

addition, the work of Marjorie Chibnall on Orderic was crucial; her prolific writings on the man, his work, and his worldview proved invaluable throughout this study.

Orderic Vitalis

Orderic wrote the *Ecclesiastical History*,⁹ a critical work of history organized in six modern volumes. Orderic's father was a French priest, and his mother was an Englishwoman.¹⁰ He was born in 1075 and baptized at Atcham in Shropshire. Orderic's church history, which he wrote from 1123 to 1141, included the only narrative of Mabel of Bellême. Orderic spent fifty-six years in the monastery of Saint Évrout in southern Normandy. His father enjoyed close ties to the Bellême family in England, where Orderic was born. In fact, Orderic may have harbored some resentment toward the Bellême lords¹¹ because his father, Odelerius of Orléans, did not offer him as a child oblate to the Bellême-Montgomery monastery in Shrewsbury.¹² After having persuaded Earl Roger to build the monastery in Shrewsbury in 1083,¹³ Odelerius offered his second son, Benedict, to that monastic house.¹⁴ Although Orderic had been educated for the cloister in

⁹ Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, 6 vols., edited and translated by Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969-1983).

¹⁰ Marjorie Chibnall, Introduction to *Ecclesiastical History*, III: xiii.

¹¹ I discuss Orderic's motivations toward the lords of Bellême in chapter 5.

¹² Daniel Roach and Charles C. Rozier, "Interpreting Orderic Vitalis," In *Orderic Vitalis: Life, Works, and Interpretations*, ed. Charles C. Rozier, Daniel Roach, Giles E.M. Gasper, and Elisabeth Van Houts (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2016), 20; Marjorie Chibnall, *The World of Orderic Vitalis: Norman Monks and Norman Knights* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1984), 14.

¹³ *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 142-147. Orderic includes a moving speech that he imagines his father might have said to Earl Roger that goes on for several pages and, according to Chibnall, follows the style of sermons of its day which were composed to glorify the monastic life, p.143 n.4.

¹⁴ Roach and Rozier, "Interpreting Orderic Vitalis," 20.

Shrewsbury since he was five years old,¹⁵ Odelerius sent his son, Orderic, abroad to Normandy where he grew up in a monastic community that was patronized by a rival family to the nearby Bellême.¹⁶

Orderic was the pupil of John of Reims (d.c1077), a learned monk who composed poetry and allegorical catalogs of animals, among other writings, including *A Life of St. Évrout*,¹⁷ now lost.¹⁸ Orderic's teacher, John of Reims, was trained at the school of Reims, which had a strong historical connection to both Flodoard and Richer of St. Rémi, the latter being the more poetic, aesthetic historian. From his teacher, Orderic may have acquired a love of the poetic, as he copied poems into blank pages of some texts, such as the three poems found at the end of the Book of Ezekiel in MS 1 at the municipal library of Alençon.¹⁹ Orderic served as sub deacon, deacon, and priest during his career at St. Évrout, and he became one of "the finest calligraphers of his day".²⁰

Orderic had access to most of the literary and historical sources of the day, widely using William of Poitiers, William of Jumièges, Guy of Amiens, Florence of Worcester, Sigebert of Gembloux, Geoffrey Malaterra, William of Apulia, and Amatus of Montecassino.²¹ Orderic worked in the scriptorium at St. Évrout as a scribe, archivist,

¹⁵ Chibnall, Introduction to *Ecclesiastical History*, III: xiii.

¹⁶ Chibnall, *The World of Orderic Vitalis*, 15.

¹⁷ Van Houts, Introduction to *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, I: lxxvii.

¹⁸ Chibnall, Introduction to *Ecclesiastical History*, I: 21.

¹⁹ See the *Catalogue générale des MSS. des départements*, II : 1. Also described in Chibnall, Appendix to *Ecclesiastical History* I: 202.

²⁰ Chibnall, Introduction to *Ecclesiastical History*, III: xiv.

²¹ In her introduction to her translation, Chibnall states this fact. Dr. Chibnall is the authority regarding Orderic Vitalis. See *Ecclesiastical History*, III: xxi-xxiii.

librarian, and historian.²² At about 1095, he wrote *The Annals of Saint-Évroult* and completed other annotations and shorter works.²³ Sometime before 1109, Orderic set to work interpolating the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* of William of Jumièges before receiving the task of writing the history of St. Évroul from Abbot Roger of Le Sap (1094-1123).²⁴ Over the course of his *Ecclesiastical History*, Orderic commented on the variety of social, ecclesiastical, and political events that he saw or heard about. His work at St. Évroul meant that he rarely left the monastery, but he visited nearby monasteries such as Fécamp and Cluny. Orderic is a frequently cited chronicle writer. His narrative texts of the history of Normandy have become a trove for historians working on themes that include the house of St. Évroul and its patrons, Norman church power, violence against women, Christ and Scripture, vengeance, emotions, power, historical memory, and the Crusades.²⁵ In addition to addressing several of these themes, this study provides an understanding of Orderic's frame of mind, his familiarity with ancient sources regarding woman, his familiarity with the feudal families in the duchy, and his knowledge of the female body and medicine²⁶—all of these factors are relevant and underappreciated aspects of Orderic's discussions of Mabel.

In order to illuminate the worldview of the chronicler whose narrative supplies most of the knowledge of Mabel of Bellême, this dissertation seeks to know the world as

²² Van Houts, Introduction to *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, I: lxvii.

²³ Van Houts, Introduction to *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, I: lxvii.

²⁴ Chibnall, Introduction to *Ecclesiastical History*, III: xiv.

²⁵ Roach and Rozier, "Interpreting Orderic Vitalis," 3-4. The editors indicate that more study is needed of his life, his process of writing history, and his nonwriting activities. This dissertation contributes to further understanding on these three topics.

²⁶ Orderic's worldview, education, and background as the topics of chapters 5.

Orderic knew it. This necessitated an understanding of how Orderic developed his concepts of people, places, and things. Chapter 5 contextualizes Orderic's chronicle through an examination of his education and worldviews. By carefully analyzing Orderic's worldview, this study elucidates a new understanding of the increasing importance of women in eleventh- and twelfth-century Normandy and within the Church.

Orderic's education and patronage is also under consideration. Careful understanding of monastic education and reflection of the library at St. Évrroul will show what Orderic learned about the world and the sources from which he learned it. The patrons of Orderic's monastery also factor into the discussion about Orderic's understanding of power within the Duchy. Mabel's father was the originator of a feud with the patron family of St. Évrroul. Reviewing this blood feud,²⁷ started by Mabel's father, is crucial to illustrate the bias that Orderic Vitalis had toward the Bellême family. Orderic provides the most numerous glimpses into Mabel's life.

Reconsidering Women in the Anglo-Norman Sources

None of the medieval sources are women's words, but medieval writers engaged with women in their communities, and their lives intersected with the lives of women in several ways. First, not all the writers were monks whose precepts restricted male-to-female interactions. Second, although these monks remained unmarried, their lives included female relatives, especially mothers, with whom they spent a portion of their lives. Other churchmen spent time with sisters, female cousins, and spiritual women from

²⁷ The difference between "feud" and "blood feud" has recently caught the notice of historians and is discussed at greater length in chapter 2.

nearby monastic communities. Finally, the monks were not secluded from the men and women of their secular neighborhoods. Women entered the men's monastic houses for prayers, and women patronized monastic communities as a part of their religious piety. Sometimes women and men joined monastic communities together as husbands and wives or as entire family units.²⁸ The monks depended on the charity and patronage of these women.

Medieval monks neither lived in a vacuum nor learned in a vacuum. Literature of every genre filled the monastic libraries. Pagan themes filled the shelves of medieval monastic libraries, where one could find widely circulated works by Suetonius, Valerius Maximus, and Sallust.²⁹ Far from being a hindrance to the quality of their spiritual works and sermons, a rich background in literature enabled monks to practice with narrative style. Other literary innovation was on the horizon in the twelfth century, which Jay Rubenstein has called the “articulation of thinking about the individual”³⁰ after the “individual” was “discovered” by Collin Morris.³¹ Such an interest accounts for the rise in the production of hagiography and biographical works.³²

²⁸ Selected cartularies from the double monastery of Coyroux and Obazine, founded in the twelfth century, are published in Constance H. Berman, *Women and Monasticism in Medieval Europe: Sisters and Patrons of the Cistercian Reform* (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 2002): 79-80. These charters record when Ademar Berengar and his wife Almodis give their entire properties and their hereditary claims to lands to the monasteries “renouncing the world for a happier existence in the celestial fields.”

²⁹ David Bates, Julia Crick, and Sarah Hamilton, Introduction to *Writing Medieval Biography, Essays in Honour of Frank Barlow* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2006), 3. A list of major works at several Norman monastic libraries is included in Appendix C.

³⁰ Jay Rubenstein, “Biography and Autobiography in the Middle Ages,” in *Writing Medieval History: Theory and Practice for the Post-Traditional Middle Ages*, ed. Nancy Partner. (London: Arnold, 2005), 53–69.

³¹ See Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual: 1050-1200*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987).

³² Bates, Crick, and Hamilton, Introduction to *Writing Medieval Biography*, 5.

Other Types of Primary Evidence

While chronicles from the medieval world serve as the basis for most medieval studies, other sources are also useful in order to better understand the Norman world. These include archaeological sources, individual charters and collections of charters (medieval collections of charters are called cartularies), numismology, and geolocation of medieval spaces.

Mary Bateson began to uncover references to women in medieval archives at the turn of the twentieth century.³³ Progress in identifying medieval women was deemed so slow that Carolyn Walker Bynum lamented the lack of women in medieval histories as recently as 1990.³⁴ A rare memoir, written by an abbot of Nogent-sous-Coucy in 1115, lavishes praise on the character and actions of his mother, an unnamed woman of noble French heritage, who had difficulty conceiving, almost died in childbirth, was widowed with a six month old baby.³⁵ Finding other types of evidence could help create the fullest account of the medieval lives of women and the power they possessed in the eleventh century. Archaeological evidence is scarce in Normandy; however, this dissertation comprises a careful evaluation of remaining visual sources such as ruins, memorial monuments, and cultural fragments. Because sources such as these are exiguous, they are footnoted with applicable background information and translated as accurately as possible.

³³ S. Mosher Stuard, "The Chase after Theory: Considering Medieval Women." *Gender and History* 4 (1992): 136.

³⁴ Stuard, "The Chase after Theory," 138.

³⁵ *A Monk's Confession: The Memoirs of Guibert of Nogent*, edited by Paul J. Archambault (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997). Guibert's mother raised him with the best masters, nurses and teachers she could hire, then retired to a monastery when Guibert was twelve years old.

Although this dissertation is based mainly on the *Ecclesiastical History*, charters and cartularies- collections of medieval charters usually kept by an institution such as a church or abbey- were also accessed. During the Anglo-Norman period, charters recorded transfers of property from one party to another. Women created and assented to property transfers. Mabel of Bellême was a woman with large landholdings along the Norman border and in western post-Conquest England. In addition to the legal necessity and utility of Anglo-Norman charters, these documents sometimes include narrative about the parties within their legal text. Because of the legal nature of the charters, they generally contain information about women who might otherwise have remained unnamed in a chronicle. In addition, charters provide valuable information about the number and types of properties that an individual woman owned, the property that she gained upon marriage, and details about the property that she willed to heirs or gifted to the church. Some of the existing cartularies consulted in this dissertation included the *Cartulaire de l'abbaye du Troarn*, the *Cartulaire de Saint-Michel de l'Abbayette*, and the *Cartulaire de Marmoutier pour le Perche*. Archival research conducted for this study yielded relevant charters written in the name of Mabel's husband containing Mabel's signature. The inclusion of her assent is axiomatic by both the wording of the charter and the position of her signature upon the page. Signatories signed³⁶ the charter in order of importance. Each foundation cartulary documents the founding of and subsequent donations to a monastic house over the course of its existence. Most ecclesiastical houses (monasteries, parish

³⁶ "Signatures" were sometimes made by making a sign or mark next to the person's name.

churches, and cathedrals) have some documents such as these, even if the house itself is in ruin, as are most of the Bellême houses.

Although undoubtedly the majority of these handwritten legal texts are lost to history, some collections of ducal charters were helpful to this dissertation research. One of the most important of these was the Fauroux collection, which covers Normandy from 911 to 1066.³⁷ Horace Round compiled another important collection of charters of medieval Francia.³⁸ It would be difficult to overemphasize the value of these works, for without such collections, primary research would be nearly impossible. In addition, the charters of all of the Anglo-Norman rulers of England from the time of the Conqueror to the reign of King Stephen have been collected in the *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum*.³⁹ Another source for this dissertation was the *Domesday Book*.⁴⁰ The *Domesday* survey was prepared to provide the Conqueror with a detailed account of the landholdings in England and their valuation. This source showed how both men and women held lands in England and revealed patterns of lands held pre- and post-Conquest.

³⁷ *Recueil des actes des ducs de Normandie (911-1066)*, edited by Marie Fauroux (Caen: Société des Antiquaires de Normandie, 1961).

³⁸ *Calendar of documents preserved in France, illustrative of the history of Great Britain and Ireland. Vol 1. A.D. 918-1206*, edited by J. Horace Round (London: Public Records Office, 1899).

³⁹ David Bates, ed., *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum: The Acta of William I (1066-1087)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998). Previous volumes of these charters include *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum, 1066-1154, Vol. 1: Regesta Willelmi Conquestoris et Willelmi Rufi, 1066-1100*, edited by H.W. Carless Davis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum, 1066-1154, Vol. 2: Regesta Henrici Primi, 1100-1135*, edited by Charles Johnson and H.A. Cronne (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956), *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum, 1066-1154, Vol. 3: Regesta regis Stephani ac Mathildis Imperatricis ac Gaufridi et Henrici ducum Normannorum, 1135-1154*, edited by Henry Alfred Cronne (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum, 1066-1154, Vol. 4: Facsimilies of original charters and writs of King Stephen, the empress Matilda, and Dukes Geoffrey and Henry, 1135-1154*, edited by H.A. Cronne and R.H.C. Davis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969). The Bates edition expands on the first two mentioned volumes by including more charters and providing Latin with full English introductions and other improvements for ease of researchers.

⁴⁰ John Morris, ed. and trans., *Domesday Book* (Chichester: Phillimore Press, 1975).

Archaeological Evidence and Geolocation Technology

French archaeologists have not seemed eager to conduct archaeological research since World War II⁴¹, when connections to a Germanic past linked French history to Germanic history and the Nazi Party. Some archaeological work is currently being conducted in the region, but writings about the findings are yet to be published, and the scope of the work is circumscribed to periods of recent history, such as the Allied invasions during WWII. For this dissertation, articles on recent coin hoards are mentioned, however their conclusions are preliminary, as more work will be conducted in the region. Subsequent studies of the life of Mabel of Bellême should focus upon conducting archaeological investigations of her building program throughout lower Normandy because many ruins and earthen fortifications have not been definitively located.⁴²

Geolocation and mapping software technologies were used to pinpoint locations of fortifications and monastic houses throughout the Duchy of Normandy. Most of the monuments are ruinous, but in many cases, the ruins are visible. Mapping these buildings allows for a visualization of the territory of Bellême, which was expansive and stretched well beyond the modest town that today bears the name. Although the frontier of Normandy was tenuous and fluctuated over the medieval period, the modern boundary of

⁴¹ There is a small number of pre-World War II archaeological information about Normandy, but, according to the National Institute of Archeological Research (INRAP), archaeology was not a professional discipline until 1880 and not scientific until 1920s and 1930s. Therefore, this early archaeology would have been proto-archeological at best. Archaeology was not well- established in France at the end of the 19th century according to INRAP. INRAP was established in 2002 but even today is centered on locating ancient and eastern artifacts.

⁴² See Appendix E for a list of Bellême structures.

Normandy was used to help visualize the expanse of the Bellême holdings, which crossed boundaries into neighboring counties. By constructing maps of locations of the fortifications through time, one can see when and where power was challenged and where it was concentrated during the lordship of Bellême, which lasted for almost 250 years.

Twentieth-Century Historians of Anglo-Norman Women

The Anglo-Norman world has fascinated scholars in Europe and the United States, especially since the millennial celebration of the Battle of Hastings in 1911. Through time, scholars on both sides of the Channel have tried to either integrate or separate Normandy and England. Since the feminist movement in the last half of the twentieth century, scholars have been increasingly interested in including the lives of women in the story of the Anglo-Norman realm. However, the inclusion of women has occurred incrementally and only in the last sixty years or so.⁴³ Studies that focus on the lives and power of secular Anglo-Norman women are not yet commonplace. Scholars are not yet accustomed to thinking of power at the micro level, hence their tendency to look only at the members of the highest ranks of nobility. To date, not one journal article has focused on Mabel of Bellême. Most of the secondary sources on medieval women have dealt with women in broad terms or focused on one extraordinary woman, such as a queen.

⁴³ Stuard, "The Chase after Theory," 139-141.

The first monograph introducing Anglo-Norman women as historical figures was Strickland's 1840 *Lives of the Queens of England from the Norman Conquest*.⁴⁴ This work was a patchwork of biographies that introduced the world to the queens of England with the intention of glorifying Queen Victoria. Strickland was a pioneer; history was a new discipline,⁴⁵ and women were not a subject of study except for a handful of romantic writers.⁴⁶ This book was path breaking in the late nineteenth century, although it does not stand up to the historical measures of current scholarship.⁴⁷ By the twentieth century, historians like Eileen Power and Doris Mary Stenton, influenced by the suffrage movement in England and America, began to investigate the history of women.⁴⁸ Power served as the framework that later feminist historians used to explain women's lives, a framework that provided a type of "informal equality" between premodern men and women and led to the development of the idea of the medieval period as a "golden age for women."⁴⁹ Other scholars have shown interest in the personal and public lives of the

⁴⁴ Agnes Strickland, *Lives of the Queens of England from the Norman Conquest*. 8 vols. (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1840).

⁴⁵ Charlotte Newman Goldy and Amy Livingstone, eds., *Writing Medieval Women's Lives* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 2: History "emerged as a discrete discipline" about 1820.

⁴⁶ Goldy and Livingstone, *Writing Medieval Women's Lives*, 2.

⁴⁷ Strickland's work lacks footnotes to allow historians to retrace her research steps in order to separate fact from fiction. It is also important to mention that Eileen Power's *Medieval People* (London: Dover Publications, 2000) used fictional characters to demonstrate the realities of medieval women in much the same way that Chaucer or Dickens amalgamated real experiences into fictional characters to describe real life.

⁴⁸ Eileen Power, *Medieval English Nunneries c.1275-1535* Reprinted edition. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). This book was originally published in 1922, which is a nod to its continued importance as an early and foundational work of women's history. Power, *Medieval People* was originally published in 1928 and has been reprinted numerous times. See also Eileen Power, "The Position of Women," in *The Legacy of the Middle Ages*, eds. G.C. Crump and E.F. Jacob (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1926), 401-433; and *Medieval Women*, ed. M.M. Postan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976) as well as Doris Mary Stenton, *The English Woman in History* (London: Allen and Unwin Press, 1957).

⁴⁹ Goldy and Livingstone, *Writing Medieval Women's Lives*, 2.

queens of England⁵⁰ and aristocratic women of Francia,⁵¹ but these works are limited to a handful of women at the highest reaches of aristocracy. In addition to the compilations of medieval women's lives or medieval queenship, recent authors have researched the particulars of one or another female aristocrat,⁵² effectively using the "great man" narrative by telling the extraordinary lives of a "great woman." Both Kimberly LoPrete and Ralph V. Turner have successfully upended the narrative in this way, focusing recent monographs of great value on Adela of Blois and Eleanor of Aquitaine, respectively.⁵³

Other historians have studied medieval women's participation in history over the course of centuries. These works, though valuable, show that most medieval women's

⁵⁰ See a number of collections, such as Norah Lofts, *Queens of England* (New York: Doubleday, 1977); Edward Black, *Royal Brides: Queens of England in the Middle Ages* (Sussex: The Book Guild, 1987); Pauline Stafford, "Emma: The Powers of the Queen in the Eleventh Century" in *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe*, ed. Anne Duggan (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1997), 3-26; or Petronelle Cook, *Queen Consorts of England: The Power Behind the Throne* (New York: Facts on File, 1993). Many books on medieval queenship extend far beyond the chronology of the medieval period.

⁵¹ See Theodore Evergates, *Aristocratic Women in Medieval Francia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

⁵² See for example the work of Marjorie Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda: Queen Consort, Queen Mother, and Lady of the English* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1991); Pauline Stafford, "The Portrayal of Royal Women in England, Mid-Tenth to Mid-Twelfth Centuries" in *Medieval Queenship*, ed. John Carmi Parson (Stroud: Sutton, 1994), 143-167; Judith A. Green, *The Aristocracy of Norman England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Pauline Stafford, *Queen Edith & Queen Emma: Queenship and Women's Power in Eleventh and Twelfth-Century England* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001); Lois Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland: A Study in Medieval Queenship* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003); Bonnie Wheeler and John Carmi Parsons, eds., *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Lord and Lady* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003); Susan M. Johns, *Noblewomen, Aristocracy and Power in the Anglo-Norman Realm* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003); Pauline Stafford, "Writing the Biography of Eleventh-Century English Queens" in *Writing Medieval Biography 750-1250: Essays in Honour of Professor Frank Barlow*, eds. David Bates, Julia Crick, and Sarah Hamilton (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006), 99-109; Kimberly LoPrete, "Women, Gender and Lordship in Francia c.1050-1250," in *History Compass* 5/6 (2007): 1921-1941; Anne Somerset, *Queen Anne: The Politics of Passion* (New York: Knopf, 2013).

⁵³ Kimberly LoPrete, *Adela of Blois, Countess and Lord, c.1067-1137* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007) and Ralph V. Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine, Queen of Francia, Queen of England* (New York: Yale University Press, 2009).

stories did not make it onto the pages of history.⁵⁴ In the last decades of the twentieth century, the women's studies movement motivated scholars to think about females in more complex ways. Women's studies and the incorporation of gender studies in history have enabled women to become more prominent historical actors.⁵⁵ Prominent historians such as Janet Nelson have discussed women as the writers of works like the *Annales Mettenses Priores* and the *Liber Historiae Francorum* which had been known as anonymous works.⁵⁶ Elisabeth Van Houts argues for more female inclusivity in historical writings, as the inclusion of women allow modern readers to get a clearer sense of "the descriptions of women, their deeds, and most important of all to the motivations of their actions."⁵⁷ Van Houts also advocates for the discussion of women as "transmitters of information, as carriers of tradition...and as commissioners and dedicatees of historical works."⁵⁸ Her reconstruction of the tenth century nun Hrotsvitha's *Gesta Ottonis* and the *Primordia coenobii Gandersheimensis*, highlight the value of nuns

⁵⁴ Of these types of women's histories, see Susan Mosher Stuard, *Women in Medieval Society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976), Francis and Joseph Gies, *Women in the Middle Ages* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1978), Francis and Joseph Gies, *Marriage and Family in the Middle Ages* (New York: Harper Collins, 1987), Henrietta Leyser, *Medieval Women: A Social History of England, 450-1500* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995); Vicki Leon, *Uppity Women of Medieval Times* (Berkeley: Conari Press, 1997); Jennifer Ward, *Women in England in the Middle Ages* (London: Hambledon Press, 2006); or Helen Jewell, *Women in Dark Age and Early Medieval Europe, c.500-1200* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007).

⁵⁵ Some important examples of gender studies include David Herlihy, *Women, Family and Society in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Bergahan Books, 1995); Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski, *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); and Shulamit Shahar, *The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2003).

⁵⁶ Janet Nelson, "Perceptions du pouvoir chez les historiennes du Haut Moyen Age" in *Les Femmes au Moyen Age*, M. Rouche, ed. (Maubeuge, France: Publication de la ville de Maubeuge, 1990), 77-85.

⁵⁷ Elisabeth Van Houts, "Women and the Writing of History in the Early Middle Ages: The Case of Abbess Matilda of Essen and Aethelweard" in *Early medieval Europe* 1(1992): 53.

⁵⁸ Van Houts, "Woman and the Writing of History": 54.

whose Rule required praying for the deceased and, because of the prayers for the dead, the creation of history.⁵⁹ By exploring ways that medieval women wielded power, scholars are beginning to recognize the power of some otherwise infrequently mentioned female members of the household.⁶⁰

Methodologies to Consider: New Ways to See the Medieval World

The historical narrative has focused on one or two elite women, women over the span of centuries, or the “exceptional” woman, thus seeming to provide evidence that powerful women in the medieval period were rare, or became queens, or both. A biography of Mabel of Bellême upends the trend of only considering exceptional women. Her story provides an excellent opportunity to look at the everyday power a medieval noblewoman could exercise.⁶¹ Storytellers in the nineteenth century were somewhat more familiar with Mabel of Bellême, as she became a minor legend in drama and poetry, where she was known as “The Wolf of Alençon” (*La Louve d’Alençon*).⁶² Her story

⁵⁹ Van Houts, “Woman and the Writing of History”: 55.

⁶⁰ Some recent and notable scholars have written about the connection between women in land or women and patronage. For article literature see Jean Scrammel, “Freedom and Marriage in Medieval England,” *The Economic History Review*, new series 27, no. 4 (November 1974): 523-537; Eleanor Searle, “Freedom and Marriage in Medieval England: An Alternative Hypothesis,” *The Economic History Review*, new series 29, no. 3 (August 1976): 482-486; Paul A. Brand, Paul A. Hyams, and Rosamond Faith, “Seigneurial Control of Woman’s Marriage,” *Past and Present*, no. 99 (May 1983): 123-148; Jo Ann McNamara and Suzanne Wemple, “The Power of Women in the Family, 500-1000,” *Feminist Studies* 1 (1973): 126-142. Eleanor Searle also looks at women’s connections to power, *Predatory Kinship and the Creation of Norman Power, c.840-1066*; or see Johns, *Noblewomen, Aristocracy, and Power*.

⁶¹ In writing Mabel’s biography, this dissertation practices the gendered work of recovery and reconstruction of women into the historical narrative.

⁶² The play was Henri Augu and Paul Delair, *La Louve d’Alençon, Roman historique, tire des chroniques de la Normandie et de la Bretagne* (Alençon: Marchand-Saillant, 1880); the poem was written by Louis Duval, the first librarian of the city of Alençon, titled *La louve d’Alençon: Mabilie de Bellême dans le roman et dans l’histoire* (Alençon: Marchand-Saillant, 1876).

provides an interesting way to incorporate diverse historical methodologies, theories, and perspectives.

This dissertation benefits from a variety of methodological approaches, the first of which was microhistory. Microhistory is a form of historical analysis and writing that takes “a single ... historical ‘moment’ and uses it to shine light on a broader world.”⁶³ This form of historical interpretation was a reaction to the “large-scale” methods of the Annales School, which attempted to capture the complete history (*histoire totale*) over the long term (*longue-durée*), which is the opposite of the Microhistorical approach.⁶⁴ Using microhistory, the lived experiences of ordinary people, such as Mabel of Bellême, can be reconstructed.

This dissertation incorporates the anthropological and social theories of Stephen D. White, who has compiled twenty-five years of research on violence in the feudal period⁶⁵ that previous generations of historians have “skirted or ignored.”⁶⁶ The focused review of violence and emotion in the “long” eleventh century⁶⁷ was necessary in this study to provide a social, political, and cultural context for the actions of Mabel of

⁶³ Steven Bednarski, *A Poisoned Past: The Life and Times of Margarida de Portu, a Fourteenth-Century Accused Poisoner* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 2.

⁶⁴ Bednarski, *A Poisoned Past*, 3. Microhistorical methods were born out of macro historical approaches, which necessitated new ways of thinking about what can be used as evidence in historical analysis but augmented traditional historical tools with the social theory of Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu as well as with the literary criticism methods of Jacques Derrida and the deconstructionists.

⁶⁵ Stephen D. White, *Feuding and Peace-Making in Eleventh-Century Francia* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

⁶⁶ White, *Feuding and Peace-Making*, vii.

⁶⁷ Marc Bloch describes the “long eleventh century” as beginning in the middle of the tenth century following a feudal revolution c.1000 and lasting into the twelfth. See Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961).

Bellême. Contextualizing the language used by Orderic to describe Mabel's actions necessitated borrowing from White's methodology.⁶⁸

At first glance, frontier theory, an American idea first asserted by Fredrick Jackson Turner in 1893,⁶⁹ might not seem to apply to the medieval duchy of Normandy. Turner's theory is that the frontier is a special place defined by a lack of central government, a unique culture that is markedly different from surrounding culture, and increased incidences of violence. The frontier is a physical space where the unique amalgamation where a culture forms that is unlike surrounding areas because of both the absence of ducal authority and the combining of disparate peoples. Turner elaborates about the results of these factors, which are embodied in the Bellême lords: a lack of central government, where everyone the chance to gain control results in regional, semi-independent rule;⁷⁰ a new culture, where society evolves and its members are a part of something new;⁷¹ and violence, where people seek to control nature and each other and conflicts between people and government result in rebellion.⁷²

⁶⁸ White, *Feuding and Peace-Making*, 131. White's argument borrows from and then disproves Bloch's notions regarding emotion. Here he also discusses the foundation for his argument on emotion and political acumen.

⁶⁹ Frederick J. Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1921). Available online at www.gutenberg.org.

⁷⁰ Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, 78. Turner, using American history as his reference, uses words like egalitarian and self-government, but we will see that this also describes the region when the first Bellême lords move into the region in the 9th century and as they struggle to maintain control over their neighbors throughout the lordship.

⁷¹ Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, 27-28, 61, 99-100, 111. Frontier people move in, then, as the frontier moves, people move with it; this constant evolution of the membership means culture evolves. Turner sees this culture as one with an undercurrent of conflict as people release some things of the old style while holding on to others. Turner also discusses the development of towns, which is expected in Bellême lands around fortresses and the people necessary to maintain them.

⁷² Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, 30, 110, 286. Turner's violence is comprised of three factors: the violence of people over nature, the violence between people seeking control in the region, and

While not specifically mentioning frontier theory, David Bates's work⁷³ on the creation of a "new feudalism" echo Turner's characteristics⁷⁴ and are analyzed more closely in connection to the actions of the lords of Bellême in Chapter 3. Just out of reach of ducal authority, the position of the Norman frontier⁷⁵ allows local lords to rise up and dominate their neighbors, creating localized authority. Men with political connection, such as the first lord of Bellême, who was granted lands for military service, or men of political influence, such as Mabel's husband Roger of Montgomery, who was a kinsmen of the duke, benefit from their connections.⁷⁶ Noble families build regional influence and power and then acquire dependencies to maintain it, creating the violent character that marks the frontier. Mabel's father brutally attack his own vassals and Mabel's sons come into open conflict with their lords, rising in rebellion on several occasions.

Scholars have integrated the idea of medieval frontier in all manner of ways, as evidenced by presentations at the 2016 International Medieval Conference (IMC) in Leeds, England.⁷⁷ For example, Leonie Hicks applied frontier theory in a paper entitled

the violence between central authority and frontier authority as central authority is eroded because of distance.

⁷³ David Bates, *Normandy Before 1066* (London: Addison- Wesley Longman, 1982).

⁷⁴ Bates discusses the political, economic, and social changes taking place in Normandy.

⁷⁵ Note that the Norman frontier is vast, with Normandy bordering Flanders, Francia, Chartres, Maine, and Brittany.

⁷⁶ Turner, *The Frontier in American History*, 55.

⁷⁷ Historiography on the medieval frontier is recent and began with conceptions of the frontier of Christendom. See Robert Bartlett and Angus McKay, eds. *Medieval Frontier Societies* (Clarendon: Oxford, 1989); more recently, historiographies began looking at geographical frontiers, but still constrained the idea of "frontier" to the religious separation between Christians and Jews, pagans, etc.; see David Abulafia and Nora Berend, eds. *Medieval Frontiers: Concepts and Practices* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2002). At the 2016 IMC in Leeds, England, participants presented several sessions in the Digital Humanities where ideas of frontier were discussed. See Alexander Pucker, "Beyond the Google Map Marker: Visualizing Space and Time in a Historical Context", Markus Breier, "Cartographic Representation of Spatial and Temporal Uncertainty of Historical Data", and Christof Rauchenberger and Alexander Watzinger, "Relational Modeling of Historical Data: A Technical Perspective". The notion has now evolved to the experience of

“Landscapes of the Normans,”⁷⁸ in which she described people (including women), spatial acts, and ways of seeing in order to analyze the physical control of the space through the construction of buildings, a task the Bellême lords undertook. The Norman frontier during the tenure of the Bellême lords also involved new types of people moving in, bringing with them their own ways of living. The first lords of Bellême will be discussed more completely in chapter 2, but these were “new” men, meaning men who had made a name for themselves in military service and therefore were granted lands along the border because of their physical strength not because of their birth into a noble family.

We will also see in later chapters that, during both Mabel and her father’s lifetimes, the absence of ducal authority may have been exploited along the frontier region in order to build and then expand the regional power of families like the Bellême. Mabel may have been able to take more license than was normally allowed to women because of the geographical position along the southern and western frontiers of Normandy, a place that was somewhat out of reach of other, superior authorities of the French king or the Norman duke. Perceptions of the “frontier” in the medieval period helped lords decide who might be capable enough to hold the March between Normandy and its neighbors, as the boundary was only as solid as the opposing families on each side. The near-constant threat of outsiders moving in would have likely played a part in the daily life of the nobles along the frontier.⁷⁹ Further, the frontier of medieval

the medieval people who lived on and maintained the frontier, which is where this dissertation focuses along with the changing frontier lines and notions of where the geographical frontier should be located.

⁷⁸ IMC Leeds session, 2016.

⁷⁹ Searle, *Predatory Kinship and the Creation of Anglo-Norman Power*, 27.

Normandy was fluid, chaotic, and ill defined. The unique position of the frontier created a culture that was dominated by powerful families like the Bellême. Frontier culture was more violent than Norman culture, as demonstrated by the gruesome and terrible acts of violence committed by the Bellême lords, especially Mabel's father, Mabel, and her sons. The lordship of Bellême helped to determine the location of Norman boundaries. Using geolocation and digital maps of the lordship of Bellême, one can clearly see where Mabel stretched the Bellême lands into neighboring duchies, and with them, she expanded Normandy. Based on the construction of several fortresses just across the territorial frontier, it seems possible Mabel was trying to expand the reach of her lordship.⁸⁰

By considering the proximity in both time and place between the chronicle writer Orderic Vitalis and Mabel of Bellême, we may better understand the gendered nuances⁸¹ of monastic places in the twelfth century and the intrusion of Mabel of Bellême upon the hospitable monks of the monastery of St. Évrour. Although the monastic grounds were not necessarily open to all, one might be surprised to think of sacred spaces as being fluid and graduated—in fact, some spaces of the church were open to all and less sacred than

⁸⁰ Here my findings about the lordship of Bellême conflict with Norman historian David Bates, who understands Bellême as aggressively infringing upon the Norman frontier from outside of Normandy only after being repelled by Count Herbert in Maine, see Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 62-63, 68-69. Instead, my research finds that the Bellême had become Norman during the tenure of Yves in the tenth century, well before the disruptions in the 1020s (during the tenure of Mabel's father, William) and were aggressively seeking to expand Norman influence into the surrounding counties. Nevertheless, either position clearly demonstrates the flexible, chaotic, and fluid boundary of the Norman frontier, especially before Duke William in the last half of the eleventh century, just before the Conquest of England. Retracing the settlement of the first Bellême lords is an objective in Chapter 2.

⁸¹ See a historiography of this new theory of gender and space in Leonie Hicks, *Religious Life in Normandy, 1050-1300: Space, Gender and Social Pressure* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2007), 2-3 or Tim Cresswell, *In Place/Out of Place: Geography, Ideology and Transgression* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

other, more holy spaces such as the church altar.⁸² Some monasteries allowed women to enter and live. While not typical, the abbey of St. Martin of Tournai admitted women to help during its rebuilding and restoration during the last decade of the eleventh century.⁸³ Further upending the antiquated notions of monasteries being men-only spaces, women sometimes served as “spiritual mothers” to the male monastics. Monks regarded the widows, such as the Empress Matilda, who served the Bec monks in affectionate terms.⁸⁴ Women were buried in monasteries as a demonstration of sacred devotion, as a sign of wealth, and as a symbol of power;⁸⁵ these were usually women who had provided financial support to the house during their lifetimes.⁸⁶ Patrick J. Geary uses Dhuoda as an example of how one such gift linked wealth and influence across the living, the dead, and future generations of a family.⁸⁷ Leonie V. Hicks talks about the gifts in another way, saying that, “...burial within monasteries was considered as being inextricably linked...In this way the living and the dead were brought into closer fellowship and the

⁸² B. Hanawalt and M. Kobialka, eds. *Medieval Practice of Space* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), ix, x.

⁸³ Sally N. Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God: A Study of Anselm's Correspondence with Women* (Turnout: Brepols, 2003), 99.

⁸⁴ Sally N. Vaughn, “St. Anselm and Women,” *Haskins Society Journal* 2 (1990): 88-91; and Hicks, *Religious Life in Normandy, 1050-1300*, 140-141. See Chibnall, *Empress Matilda* and Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God*.

⁸⁵ This was particularly important as a sign of social stability in particularly chaotic times or places, see Natalie Zemon Davis, “Ghosts, Kin, and Progeny: Some Features of Family Life in Early Modern France” *Daedalus* 106(1977), 92

⁸⁶ Empress Matilda was buried at the monastery at Bec. Chibnall, *Empress Matilda*, 190. For an overview of some of the women who gifted lands in exchange for burial in monasteries, see Constance H. Berman, “Women as Donors and Patrons to Southern French Monasteries in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries” in *The Worlds of Medieval Women: Creativity, Influence, and Imagination*. Constance H. Berman, Charles W. Connell, and Judith Rice Rothschild, eds (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 1985): 53-68.

⁸⁷ Patrick J. Geary, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 79-82. Dhuoda lived in ninth century Francia.

ties between sacred and secular, heavenly and earthly space were strengthened.”⁸⁸ Susan Johns draws a firm correlation between foundation charters and noblewomen’s wills in the twelfth century: Countess Hawise of Gloucester founded Durford Abbey and was buried within;⁸⁹ Alice de St. Quintin was buried in a Cistercian priory at Appleton;⁹⁰ Matilda of Percy countess of Warwick was interred at Fountains Abbey;⁹¹ and Countess Petronella of Leicester chose to be buried within Leicester Abbey.⁹² Mabel was buried in Troarn Abbey, which she founded. A minor noble named Alamanda of Gassias and at least eleven other women made donations in exchange for being buried “in Cistercian garb” at the abbey church of St. Martin of Berdoues.⁹³ Constance Berman charts forty-seven women who were buried in Cistercian Abbeys between 1160 and 1239;⁹⁴ undoubtedly there were others. Female family members of St. Évroul’s patrons were buried within the chapter house, including Adeliza, the wife of Hugh of Grandmesnil.⁹⁵

⁸⁸ Hicks, *Religious Life in Normandy*, 145. Patrick J. Geary expands on this thought from early medieval times, that “the dead constitute an age class that continued to have a role and to exercise rights in society.” See Geary, *Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages*, 35-36.

⁸⁹ *Earldom of Gloucester Charters: The Charters and Scribes of the Earls and Countesses of Gloucester to A.D. 1217*. Edited by Robert B. Patterson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973): no. 67. Countess Hawise died in 1217.

⁹⁰ *Early Yorkshire Charters: Being a Collection of Documents Anterior to the Thirteenth Century Made From the Public Records, Monastic Chartularies, Roger Dodsworth's Manuscripts And Other Available Sources*. Edited by William Farrer (Edinburgh: Ballantyne, Hanson & Co., 1914) I: no. 543. Alice de St. Quintin died in 1186.

⁹¹ *Early Yorkshire Charters*, XI: no. 52. Countess Matilda died c.1204.

⁹² *Jordan Fantosme's Chronicle*, edited by R.C. Johnston (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 78-9. Countess Petronella died in 1212.

⁹³ Berman, “Women as Donors and Patrons to Southern French Monasteries in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries”: 56 Berman cites *Cartulaire de Berdoues* nos. 411, 297, 455, 624, 546, 490, 779, 59, 505, and 443 which date from 1186 until 1251.

⁹⁴ Berman, “Women as Donors and Patrons to Southern French Monasteries in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries”: 59.

⁹⁵ Orderic tells us that Adeliza was buried in a place of honor, at the right-hand side of Abbot Mainer, see *Ecclesiastical History*, IV: 338-339.

Images of spiritual motherhood echo in the writings of monks like Anselm.⁹⁶ During Anselm's time at Bec (1079-1093) several women served Bec as spiritual mothers, including Basilia and her niece Amfrid, Eva de Montfort, and the founder of Bec's mother, Heloise.⁹⁷ These women lived and worked at monasteries, helping ensure the success of the monastery through hard work, patronage, and gifts of land, money, books,⁹⁸ furniture, and relics;⁹⁹ sometimes their children became patrons of the monastery and continued to care for and protect the monks.¹⁰⁰ Anselm's writings include praise for a mother's gifts (wisdom, compassion, care) and equate these virtues to male leaders such as Jesus and Paul.¹⁰¹ We will see how women such as these played a part in creating Orderic's worldview, which included numerous women, including Mabel of Bellême.

Chapter Objectives

The Bellême family was an integral part of eleventh-century Normandy, and the Bellême lords helped expand Norman influence across the Channel. Understanding how, when, and why the family was established is central to understanding both the rise and fall of this family. Chapter 2 begins with a review of the evolution of Bellême power, followed by an exploration of the patriarch's concentration of lands and titles. One aim of

⁹⁶ Anselm called the women who supported monastic houses "mothers", and his writings are littered with references to the labor, service, and financial work of women such as these; see Sally N. Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God*, eadem esp. 68-69, 74-76, 80, 82, 87-115.

⁹⁷ Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God*, 69, 73, 91.

⁹⁸ Meta Harrsen, "The countess Judith of Flanders and the library of Weingarten Abbey", *Papers of the Bibliographic Society of America* 24(1930): 1-13.

⁹⁹ *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 240-241.

¹⁰⁰ Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God*, 95, 97.

¹⁰¹ Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God*, 87, 89.

the chapter is to ascertain how Mabel came to be the heir to the Talvas lands, as she had two living brothers upon her father's death. This chapter also provides the genesis of the feud that developed between the Talvas (Bellême) and Giroie families and the effect of this feud upon Orderic Vitalis's narrative.

Mabel of Bellême continued her family's legacy of regional power and control through a building campaign along the Norman frontier. Chapter 3 traces the foundations of the monastic houses that Mabel helped establish and then patronized. Mabel's brutal murder, which occurred in her own home at the hands of several men, will also be detailed. In this chapter, key questions about genealogy, inheritance, and marriage question the eighteenth-century image of Mabel as the "Wolf of Alençon". Through careful analysis of her public actions, a more pious image of Mabel emerges.

Land acquisition and the power accumulated through Mabel's marriage constitute the starting point for Chapter 4. The status of her husband, Roger of Montgomery, is an important consideration. Roger was a confidante of the Conqueror and thus was granted lands in Shrewsbury, England, after the Norman victory. From charter evidence, it is clear that Mabel received English lands in her own name; however, her English holdings were not recorded in *Domesday* and cannot be located precisely in the *Domesday Gazetteer* or in similar *Domesday* companion texts. Geolocation and data visualization software provide visual evidence of expansion of the Bellême lordship. Each abbey, church, fortress, and "town" has been located and digitally mapped and is available in an interactive online format to users with interest and permission.¹⁰² Through digitally

¹⁰² <http://public.tableau.com/profile/crescida.jacobs#!vizhome/LordshipofBelleme/dashboard1>. Access to interactive features granted by entering "1066" in response to ID.

created maps, the expansion of Mabel's holdings both within Normandy and in England can be traced. In this chapter, her position as a female lord will be carefully considered.

Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the most salacious parts of Mabel's story, once again from the perspective of Orderic Vitalis. In the recounting of Mabel "the Poisoner" and all the methods of venom she deployed, a unique opportunity emerges to explore medieval ideas of gender. This chapter traces the rise of the trope of women poisoners in ancient literature with which Orderic may have been familiar. Reading the *Ecclesiastical History* with a new lens enables this dissertation to see Mabel as Orderic and her contemporaries would have seen her. The changes occurring in the medieval church are a critical part of Chapter 5, in which the mentalities of chronicle writers such as Orderic Vitalis are discussed. How the cult of the Virgin and the cult of the Magdalene aroused interest in women's roles among the church members is investigated. These subtle changes were sometimes reflected in twelfth and thirteenth century images of Jesus that depicted a more fluid gender.

Finally, in chapter 6 the end of Mabel's life, her burial, and her descendants are detailed, thus revealing a family whose power passed through the women of the family. Mabel's eleventh-century female peers are described briefly for comparative purposes. By the conclusion, we can answer the central questions of this dissertation: Was Mabel of Bellême an ordinary or an extraordinary eleventh-century woman? The implications of this question lead to more questions. For example, if she was an ordinary noblewoman, why do historical narrative lack stories of Mabel and women like her? This study ends with a call for future investigation into Mabel's castle-building program throughout lower

Normandy as a way to get closer to the actual lived experiences of Mabel and the people in her realm.

While Orderic Vitalis is the primary chronicle source for Mabel of Bellême, to answer the questions advanced throughout this research, other sources will provide context, new ways of reading these primary sources must be engaged, and new types of evidence and methods will be deployed. Using a wide array of techniques enables this dissertation to fill in historiographical gaps and provides the most well rounded and complete depiction of the lives and power of Mabel and the lords of Bellême. While it would be absurd to suggest that Orderic's characterization of Mabel was veracious, equally it would be false to suggest that he spuriously disparaged Mabel.

CHAPTER 2: BELLÊME GENEALOGY

The genealogy of this family is complex. The confusions and errors of preceding authors add to this difficulty. The different searches conducted so far have established a genealogical basis, that without being false are inaccurate and incomplete. It is therefore necessary to present all the work in detail, with great precision and the most extreme caution.

—Gérard Louise, *La Seigneurie de Bellême Xe-XIIIe siècles*.¹

The Bellême lordship was integral to eleventh-century Normandy. The lords of Bellême preserved the boundaries of the duchy, helped expand Norman influence across the Channel into the Anglo-Norman world, and held the western border in Anglo-Norman England. Understanding how, why, and when the family was established is central to understanding both the family's rise and fall and its historical erasure. To contextualize Mabel and the first lords of Bellême, this chapter is polyvalent: to correct the historical questions around the patriarch of the family, to determine how the family rose to power, and to discuss how the family gained influence with the leaders of the Norman duchy up to and throughout Mabel's lifetime. The analysis of the family requires definitive answers to questions including: Who was the founding father and patriarch of the Bellême, and how did he acquire the southwestern Norman frontier? What roles did genealogy and geography play in the family's rise to prominence along the border? How did the family gain control of land in southern Normandy and accumulate enough power to influence Norman dukes in the tenth and eleventh centuries? The answers to these

¹ Louise, *La Seigneurie*, II: 119. 'La généalogie de cette famille est complexe. Les confusions et les erreurs des auteurs précédents s'ajoutent à cette difficulté. Les différentes recherches menées jusqu'à présent ont établi une base généalogique qui, sans être fautive est inexacte et incomplète au départ. Il est donc nécessaire de reprendre l'ensemble du travail en détail, avec la plus grande précision et la plus extrême prudence.'

questions will necessitate the use of a wide array of tools including digital maps, genealogies, medieval chronicle sources, numismology, and scientific methods.

The Origins of Bellême

Norman historians such as Gérard Louise, Henri Prentout, Léonard Bart, Geoffrey White, and Katherine S. B. Keats-Rohan offer glimpses into the origins of Bellême lands.² Prentout reports that Bellême is an ancient place name, derived from the Celtic *Belisama*, goddess of fire,³ and Bart asserts that the *maison* de Bellême was created between 900 and 1000,⁴ and the southern and western boundaries of Bellême were established in 945.⁵ According to Keats-Rohan, Bellême was an independent lordship from 933 or earlier,⁶ and Louise writes romantically of how the fortified castle built by the first lord of Bellême sat high on an ancient cliff so that it dominated the picturesque valley and dense forests below.⁷ The medieval lordship of Bellême was of tremendous importance because of its frontier position separating Normandy from Maine on the west and Francia⁸ on the south. Historians debate the origins of the family, but this dissertation

² White is the first of these to specifically analyze the Bellême family in English. See Geoffrey H. White, "The First House of Bellême," in *TRHS* 22 (1940): 67-99.

³ Henri Prentout, *Études sur quelques points d'Histoire de Normandie* (Caen: Lanier, 1926), 39.

⁴ Léonard Bart, *Recueil des Antiquités du Perche: Comtes et seigneurs de la dicte province ensemble les fondations, bâtiments des monastaires et choses notables du dict païs* (Mortagne: L. Daupeley, 1890), 12.

⁵ See Figure 2.1.

⁶ Katherine S. B. Keats-Rohan, "Two Studies in North French Prosopography" in *Journal of Medieval History* 20 (1994), 11.

⁷ Louise, *La Seigneurie*, I: 15. "Terres dures, froides et ingrates."

⁸ Francia was the name for the Kingdom of the Franks and was not given the modern name "Francia" until after the Capetian dukes held land after 987. However, it is still known as Francia in Latin, Spanish, and Italian and is referred to as Francia to distinguish it from the Île de Francia, the section of land controlled by the king of Francia.

attempts to connect generations through charter evidence in order to accurately reconstruct the family and its power, which coincided with the Norse invasions of the ninth century, relocated to the frontier during the tenth century, and reached their pinnacle in the eleventh century during the life of Mabel, the fifth lord of Bellême.

Figure 2.1 illustrates the proximity of the earliest Bellême fortresses along the tenuous and fluid frontier with Maine. Historians assert that the patriarch, Yves, donated the chapel of Bellême shortly after this boundary was established, about 945.⁹ Bellême lands comprised a total of 120,575 square kilometers, which is 21.88 percent of the total area of modern Francia.¹⁰ Through Bellême lands passed the most important routes between Normandy and Anjou.

⁹ Prentout, *Études sur quelques points d'Histoire de Normandie*, 36. See also Henry Jacques Renault Du Motey, *Origines de la Normandie et du Duché d'Alençon de l'An 850 à l'An 1085*. (Paris: Picard, 1920), 76, for a range of dates beginning in 945. Because this is the year of Yves's relocation and because he was a strong and capable leader for the frontier, I agree with Prentout that this cannot be coincidental; thus, the year was likely 945.

¹⁰ Calculated by square kilometers of area, provided by Louise, *Le Pays Bas-Normand*, 29.

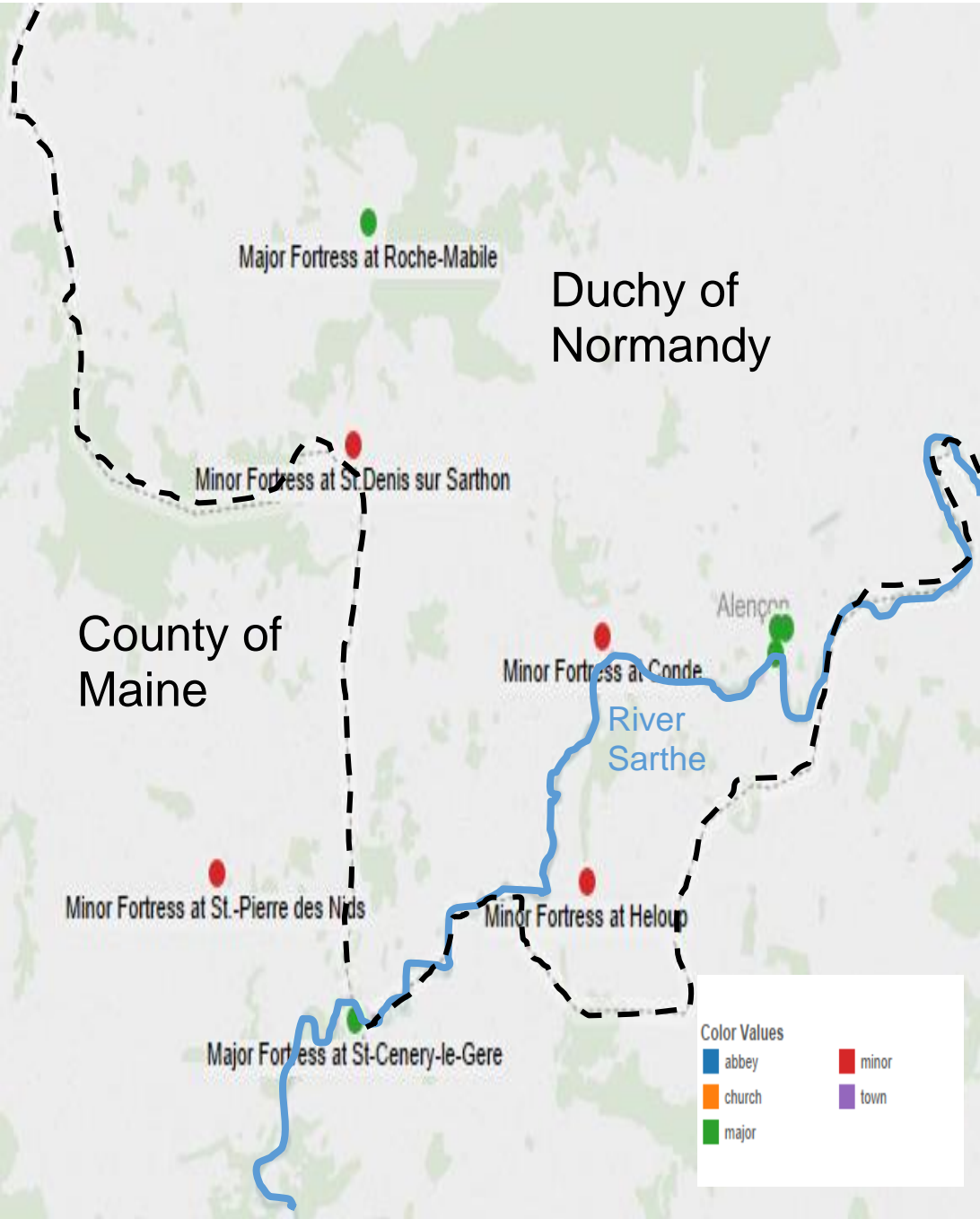


Figure 2.1. Map of Bellême fortresses along border.

The Significance of Bellême in the Norman World

With territory partly in Francia, partly in Maine, and partly in Normandy but mostly ill defined, Bellême lords divided allegiances between lords in Francia and dukes of Normandy. In addition, because of its remoteness and the rugged terrain, the lords of Bellême exercised virtual independence in the region.¹¹ However, the importance of the territory and the lords who held the land has been largely overlooked by historians. A few historians have written about the lordship, and this chapter will question their findings. For example, Henri Prentout and Henry Jacques Renault Du Motey, both French historians, gathered evidence about the lordship in the early decades of the twentieth century. Each published a monograph about the establishment of the lordship. Prentout's *Essai sur les origines et la fondation du duché Normandie* was published in 1911¹², and Du Motey's *Origines de la Normandie et du Duché d'Alençon de l'An 850 à l'An 1085* was published in 1920. Prentout's charter evidence has become the starting place for others studying the region, and Du Motey's work highlighted the findings of Prentout. Of note, both historians consolidated the first two Bellême lords named Yves into one person. Geoffrey H. White was the first historian to mention a second generation of Yves (de Bellême), in 1940. Because White's article was the first in English for the historiography, subsequent historians usually cite his research.

French historian Jacques Boussard published an article about the lords of Bellême in 1951. However, he gave no agency to Mabel of Bellême. Further, he did not add new

¹¹ John Le Patourel, *Norman Barons*. (London: The Historical Association, 1971), 17. See also John Le Patourel, *Feudal Empires: Norman and Plantagenet* (London: Hambledon Press, 1984), VI 16.

¹² Henri Prentout, *Essai sur les origines et la fondation du duché de Normandie* (Caen: Academie de Caen, 1911).

evidence to the historiography of the family. He rejected the association between Yves I of Bellême and his ancestor, Yves de Creil. Further confusing the genealogy of the lords of Bellême, Boussard proposed that the Bellême family originated from the Manceaux family from the Sonnois region.¹³ Four decades later, Keats-Rohan hypothesized that the Bellême lords “represented a dismemberment of the Carolingian *pagus* and the county of Corbon, itself a dismemberment of the Hiémois, and further, that the Bellême family were descendants of the Carolingian counts of the Corbannais.”¹⁴ However, as will be demonstrated, the Bellême lords were “new men” who faithfully served the Duke of Normandy and earned their reward in the form of Bellême lands. John Le Patourel’s 1976 and 1984 works on the Norman Empire included the lords of Bellême, but his findings on the family are open to question. He was most concerned with the last lord of Bellême, Mabel’s son, Robert (c.1056–c.1130).

The most recent historian to conduct research on the family in English was Kathleen Thompson, whose dissertation in 1983 focused on Roger’s holdings in England but failed to include Mabel’s holdings in England.¹⁵ In addition, Thompson wrote an article in 1985 and a monograph in 2013, both of which focused on the family.¹⁶ Her research uncovered important charter evidence not previously included, but she omitted

¹³ Boussard. “Les seigneuries de Bellême”, 46-47; and Jacques Boussard, “Le comte du Mortain au IX^e siècle,” *Le Moyen Age* 58 (1952), 273.

¹⁴ Katherine S.B. Keats-Rohan, “Two Studies in North French Prosopography.” *Journal of Medieval History* (20) 1994: 11.

¹⁵ Kathleen Thompson, “The Cross-Channel Estates of the Montgomery-Bellême Family c.1050-1112 (Masters Dissertation. University of Wales, 1983).

¹⁶ Kathleen Thompson, “Family and Influence to the South of Normandy in the Eleventh-Century: The Lordship of Bellême.” *Journal of Medieval History* (11) 1985: 215-226; Kathleen Thompson, *Power and Border Lordship in Medieval Francia* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2013).

the importance of the only female lord, Mabel. Additionally, her work avoided the debate between White and Le Patourel over the first lords; she obviated Yves de Creil, the founder of the family. Recently, a French historian has attempted to untangle the genealogy of the lordship, but his work *La Seigneurie de Bellême*¹⁷ omitted the first two (and most confusing) generations of the lordship. Gérard Louise began his work with Yves de Bellême in the eleventh century.

This chapter investigates available primary source material in order to provide the most accurate and comprehensive outline of the lords of Bellême as possible. Most of this material was not included or was not accessible for earlier historians but has recently been made available through digital technology. Also included are other pieces of charter evidence that have previously been underutilized. Most important, all five generations of lords are studied, including the founder, Yves de Creil, and the discussion focuses on the apex of power held in the hands of the only female lord, Mabel. As Mabel is the focus of this dissertation, clearly and accurately constructing her genealogy is central to understanding her rise to power and her use of force to control her lordship.

It is difficult to appreciate the character of the lords of Bellême without an understanding of whence they came. Although Scandinavians eventually settled throughout the river valleys that flowed through Bellême, the oldest place names seem to point to the original inhabitants of Bellême being Gallo-Latin, Germano-Latin, or Germano-Roman.¹⁸ These Gallic farmers were the original inhabitants of Francia.¹⁹ They

¹⁷ Louise, *La Seigneurie*.

¹⁸ See map of Gallo-Latin place names in Louise, *Le Seigneurie*, I: 48, 55. Place names with strongest Scandinavian etymologies tend to be in upper Normandy, according to Louise.

¹⁹ Searle, *Predatory Kinship and the Creation of Norman Power*, 2.

eventually intermarried with the Scandinavians who invaded the area in the ninth and tenth centuries, but the Scandinavians were a people whose livelihood depended upon water travel, so their holdings remained concentrated along the coast of Normandy and their influence was strongest in the north. An overview of the exploits of the Scandinavians in Normandy is necessary to ascertain the current state of Norman-Scandinavian study as well as to gauge the level of connection between Bellême and Scandinavia.

Norsemen, Northmen, Norman: The evolution of the Earliest Norman People

The earliest Bellême lords may have been descended from intermarriages between Gallic and Scandinavian²⁰ people. The first Viking ships plundered the coastal lands at the mouth of the Loire in the Frankish empire in the early years of the ninth century, during the reign of Louis the Pious (778–840).²¹ According to the *Annals of St. Bertin*, the raiders attacked Francia almost every autumn from before 836 to 876.²² The Viking raiders sometimes made encampments in monasteries, such as St. Maur des Fossés, or on islands, like Betuwe, over the winter or for months at a time.²³ Coin hoards excavated in

²⁰ In this chapter, the people from Scandinavia will be referred to as “Scandinavians,” and although some Scandinavians went *fara í vyking* and are also now called “Vikings,” this term cannot be simplified or broadened to include all people from Scandinavia.

²¹ T.D. Kendrick, *A History of the Vikings*. (New York: Fall River Press, 2013), 170.

²² *The Annals of St. Bertin: Ninth-century histories*. Vol 1. Translated and annotated by Janet N. Nelson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 35 indicates that Horic, king of the Danes, had sent envoys to the Emperor Charles the Bald, but the envoy was slaughtered. More Viking raids are documented in the *AB* in 837 (p.37), 839 (p.47), 842 (p.53), 843 (p.55-56), 844 (p.59), 845 (p.60-61), 846 (p.62), 847 (p.64, 65), 849 (p.68), 850 (p.69), 852 (p.74, 75), 853 (pp.75-77), 854 (p.79-80), 855 (p.80, 81), 856 (82), 857 (83, 84), 857 (pp.84-85), 858 (p.86-87), 859 (p.89, 90-91), 860 (pp.92-93), 861 (p.94-96), 863 (104, 111), 864 (p.111, 118), 865 (p. 122, 127, 128), 866 (p.129-130, 131, 135)

²³ *AB*: 64, 64, 69, 83, 84, 90-91, 94-96. These encampments served as bases from which Northmen would raid and plunder and camps to which they retreated after attacks.

the Seine Valley (Le Mans) in 2007 and 2013²⁴ indicate a large and successful Scandinavian settlement in the lands that would soon be held by Bellême lords. A large Viking fleet under the command of the chieftain Asgeir attacked from the River Seine and “plundered...with pillage, fire and sword” Rouen, “slaughtered or took captive” the monks of the abbey of St. Ouen, and the monastery at Jumièges in May of 841.²⁵ Similar raids devastated Carolivenna (now called Chaussey) in 845, where Charles the Bald watched helplessly from the Abbey of St. Denis (about nine miles away) as the infamous Viking Ragnar Lodbrok and his fleet of 120 ships wreaked havoc and destruction on the Franks and even attacked Paris on Easter Sunday.²⁶ Vikings marshaled additional raids on two safe havens in coastal Francia in the following years. A late ninth-century Frankish antiphonary reveals the despair of the Franks: “O God, deliver us from the cruel Norman people who lay waste our kingdoms, so that our bodies and goods may be preserved by divine grace. For they butcher young men and old alike, and a multitude of girls and boys. Drive all these evils from us, we pray Thee.”²⁷ The oft quoted “From the

²⁴ Simon Armstrong, “Carolingian Coin Hoards and the Impact of Viking Raids in the Ninth Century,” *The Numismatic Chronicle* 158 (1998): 131-164; Simon Coupland, “Carolingian Single Finds and the Economy of the Early Ninth Century,” *The Numismatic Chronicle* 2010 (170): 287-319; Simon Coupland, “A Checklist of Carolingian Coin Hoards, 751-987,” *The Numismatic Chronicle* 171 (2011): 203-256; Éric Vandebossche and Simon Coupland, “Une Travaillerie de Deniers Carolingiens dans la Région de Bray-sur-Seine: La Région de Bray-sur-Seine (Seine et Marne),” *The Numismatic Chronicle* 172 (2012): 307-321; article forthcoming on latest finds at Le Mans, per Neal Price.

²⁵ *AB*: 50. Note that attacks from the Seine are also documented by Richer of St. Rémi, *The Historia of Richer of Saint-Rémi*, Trans. By Justin Lake (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2011), I: 18-19, ‘Recipiuntur vero cum his omnibus secus Sequanam loco qui Giuoldi fossa nuncupatur.’ The Seine valley is less than 100 miles from Bellême lands.

²⁶ *AB*: 60-62. The year 845 was particularly brutal for the Franks, as the *AB* records Northmen on the Garonne at the end of 844, on the Seine at the start of 845, then six hundred Viking ships bound for Germany, a terrible famine, Viking raids on coastal villages, Danes in Saintonge, and Charles leading an attack on the Bretons; the start of 846 finds Vikings in Frisia. Many years in the *AB* are bookended with Viking raids.

²⁷ Paris, BN MS 17436, fol. 24; ‘Prière pour obtenir la grâce d’être délivré des invasions normands,’ Quoted in Léopold Delisle, *Instructions adressées par le comité des travaux historiques et*

fury of the Northmen, O Lord deliver us” (*A furore normannorum, libera nos Domine*) is likely apocryphal because its source is unidentified.²⁸

At the start of the Viking raids, Gallic farmers populated most of rural Francia. The Vikings sacked and burned towns and monasteries. The Franks bought peace with silver and gold, but it was always temporary; eventually, the Vikings returned to the rich lands to raid and plunder.²⁹ Thus, the narrative ensued from one decade to the next. The early tenth century began a new period of Viking settlement under the leadership of Rollo. The *Annals* of Flodoard of Reims describes the struggle to propitiate the “Northmen” operating on the river Loire in the 920s who “began to take up the faith of Christ”, but who still represented a serious threat to authority in the region.³⁰ Between 930 and 980 settlement and assimilation became the normal behavior for Vikings.³¹ The territory of Bellême was established within this period of Viking assimilation, in about 945.³² By this time, Vikings ships carried messages, transported passengers, and brought

scientifiques aux correspondants du Ministère de l’instruction publique et des beaux-arts (Paris: Leroux, 1890), 50.

²⁸ See Albert d’Haenens, *Les invasions normandes en Belgique au IXe siècle* (Université de Louvain, 1967), 196-197.

²⁸ Searle, *Predatory Kinship and the Creation of Norman Power*, 2.

²⁹ Generally, peace in the lands of the Franks simply meant that the Vikings were on raid and plunder in other places, but there seem to have been brief periods when the raiders were content to leave the world unmolested for months at a time. See Kendrick, *A History of the Vikings*, 170-200.

³⁰ *The Annals of Flodoard of Reims: 919-966*, ed. and trans. Steven Fanning and Bernard S. Bachrach (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 5. Flodoard states that two years later, in 923, “Northmen raided Aquitaine and the Auvergne... and 12,000 of the Northmen were killed there”, while, in the same year, he reports violent clashes between regional rulers and Northmen encamped on the river Oise: 7-10.

³¹ Once the Viking bands stopped raiding and started forming permanent settlements, they are more correctly referred to as “Scandinavian.” Once their settlements in Normandy became populated, they are more properly called “Normans,” a corruption of their historical name “Northmen” and the land in which Rollo was given the grant, the land of the Northmen, or “Normandy.”

³² See Figure 2.1 for the earliest Bellême boundary.

Scandinavian goods to local markets throughout what was starting to be called Normandy.³³ Once the Norse settled, they were not simply absorbed into Frankish society, but coalesced to form something new, the Norman *gens*.³⁴ That is to say, the Norman *gens* was not a “single blood,” but with the help of Dudo’s image of fierce birds as an incarnation of *gens*, they became a united people with a single culture who exerted power throughout the region.³⁵ This new Norman *gens* was neither entirely Frankish nor Viking, but something new. This cultural hybridity accounts for many of the unanswered questions connected to the ancestry of the lords of Bellême.

Emily Albu connects Norman savagery to the violence of the Vikings: “If Normans were not alone among medieval peoples in displaying violence or treachery, Northmen and the first Normans were ahead of the curve.”³⁶ She demonstrates how the connection to the Scandinavians was manifest in the early Norman *gens* when Vikings and tales of Vikings were still present in the early Norman worldview as “characters and themes from Ireland and Scandinavia mingled with Carolingian learning, whose origins reached back to classical antiquity. All of these elements entered Norman culture as it was developing in the tenth and early eleventh centuries.”³⁷

It is possible that the men and women who settled around Bellême came on or around the time of Rollo (c.911). Prentout asserts that the establishment of this region

³³ Neal Price, “The Viking Phenomenon,” article in progress, accessed November 7, 2015, via Academia.edu with author’s permission.

³⁴ Searle, *Predatory Kinship and the Creation of Norman Power*, 2.

³⁵ Searle, *Predatory Kinship and the Creation of Norman Power*, 2.

³⁶ Emily Albu, *Normans in their Histories: Propaganda, Myth, and Subversion* (Rochester: Boydell and Brewer, 2001), 5.

³⁷ Albu, *Normans in their Histories: Propaganda, Myth, and Subversion*, 50.

occurred “*en même temps l’histoire des origines de la Normandie*,”³⁸ but no evidence exists for such an assertion. The parents of the first lord of Bellême were Fulcuin and Rothais,³⁹ and their son, Yves, was born around 940. Connecting one’s ancestry to the Vikings was important in some families in medieval Normandy, but the ancestry of Yves’s parents is unknown.⁴⁰ For example, the Montgomery family, into which Mabel of Bellême married in 1050, was eager to trace their lineage to the Viking raiders who dominated Norman towns in previous centuries.⁴¹ The family relied upon oral traditions and legends circulating during the life of Roger II, Mabel’s husband, to draft a genealogical table, which they presented to Henry I c.1100.⁴² This genealogy was likely constructed to provide the new lords with ancestors who were more prominent and therefore give them a more ancient connection to their lands. By 1022 in the foundation charter at Troarn, Roger II designated himself *Rogerus ex Northmannis Northmannus*,

³⁸ Prentout, *Études sur quelques points d’Histoire de Normandie*, 26.

³⁹ These names do not denote a specific heritage, as they could be either Germanic or Scandinavian in origin.

⁴⁰ One genealogy made in 1909 by J. Depoin relied heavily on the writing of Orderic Vitalis and traced Yves de Bellême to Charlemagne. This would be evidence of Frankish roots for the family, but it is little more than speculation. See Louise, *La Seigneurie*, Appendix I: 144.

⁴¹ Louise, *La Seigneurie*, II: 218-221 citing the 1082-1083 donation charter for St. Martin of Troarn in R.N. Sauvage. *L’abbaye de Saint-Martin de Troarn au diocèse de Bayeux, des origines au XVI^e siècle* (Caen: Henri Delesques, 1911).

⁴² Louise, *La Seigneurie*, II: 218-221. The family devised two subsequent genealogical tables in the twelfth and sixteenth centuries to display their heritage. Neither were viewed for this dissertation, but Louise describes a twelfth century genealogy by Yves of Chartres in the *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 162, no.261 and the a sixteenth century genealogy is in the French manuscripts at the Bibliothèque Nationale, MS 5480, f.1.

Roger, a Norseman among the Norsemen.⁴³ Historians have continued to legitimize the legendary and possibly invented Scandinavian ancestry of the Montgomery family.⁴⁴

The connection between Scandinavia and Normandy continues to intrigue Norman scholars, and they employ a variety of methodologies to find evidence for the links. Although it was not conducted in Bellême, a genetic study conducted by the University of Leicester, the University of Caen, and the Centre for Archaeological Research in 2016 examined eighty-nine men; the findings yielded a strong Norman-Scandinavian DNA link in eleven participants and a likely link in fifty-two other participants.⁴⁵ Studies such as this highlight the continued interest in proving a direct ancestral link between Normandy and Scandinavia. It is tempting to try to link Mabel to possible Scandinavian ancestors, but clear evidence for a familial connection has not yet been found. It seems likely that science will continue to investigate the effect of the Viking diaspora, but further speculation about the origins of the Bellême is futile.

Archaeology and numismology support the strong Norman-Scandinavian connection in the lands near Bellême. Coin hoards from tenth-century Norman mints in

⁴³ *Cartulaire de l'abbaye de Troarn*, MS 10086: 'Ego Rogerius, ex Northmannis Northmannus...'. See also *RRA* (Bates), no. 281. See also Edward Baines, *The History of the County Palatine and the Duchy of Lancaster I* (London: John Heywood, 1888), 44. Louise, *La Seigneurie*, I: 219, refers to the continued designation that Roger was fond of using (this charter from 1082-1083).

⁴⁴ Some examples of the research of this family include J.F.A. Mason, "Roger de Montgomery and his sons (1067- 1101)," *TRHS*, 5th ser., xiii (1963), 1-28; L.W. Breese, "The Persistence of Scandinavian Connection in Normandy in the 10th and early 11th Centuries," *Viator VIII* (1977): 50-54; and Kathleen Thompson, "The Pre-Conquest Aristocracy in Normandy: The Example of the Montgomeries," *Historical Research* 60 (1987): 252-253.

⁴⁵ "Viking DNA Project," Accessed February 12, 2016, http://www.normandescendants.org/vikings_dna_results_normandy/.

Rouen and Bayeux in the name of Hugh the Dane and Richard I have been found along Norwegian trade routes in Scotland, England, Denmark, Poland, and Russia.⁴⁶

The relationship between feudal lords and their vassals would be tested throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries. While connected to their ducal lord during Mabel's lifetime by her marriage to a kinsman of the Conqueror, sometimes the house of Bellême tested the limits of subordination through aggressive expansion of the territory and then outright rebellion after Mabel's death. Continuing numismatic and archaeological investigation near Bellême is necessary in order to make definitive claims about the ancestry of the lords of Bellême. This dissertation traces the origins of Bellême genealogy from Fulcuin, its first lord, to Mabel, its fifth lord. Figure 2.2 depicts the first five generations of the Bellême family.

⁴⁶ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 28.

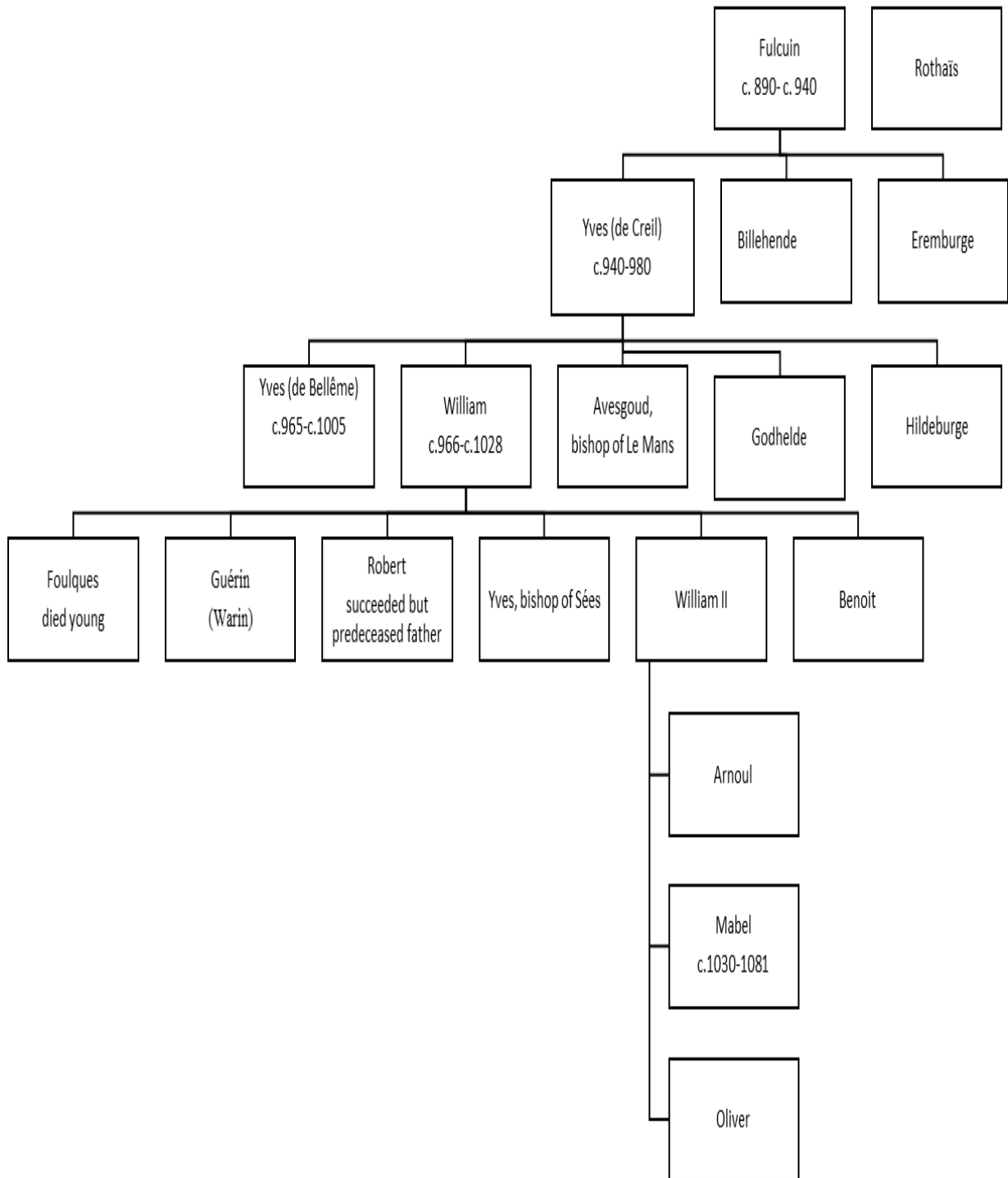


Figure 2.2. Lords of Bellême (first five generations).

The Lords of Creil: Fulcuin and Yves

Medieval genealogies can be difficult to establish because names repeat through subsequent generations, particularly for first-born children who were often given their parents' names. Such a conundrum occurs early in the lordship of Bellême, with Yves. Genealogical errors occur in medieval chronicles because of the passage of time, the lack of eyewitnesses, and naming practices spanning several generations. Scholars have tried to untangle these earliest Bellême lords using charter evidence, which is problematic because years are sometimes misidentified, and signatures not secured. Such mistakes have been made by notable historians such as Vicomte Henry Renault Du Motey, whose *Origines de la Normandie et du duché d'Alençon*⁴⁷ has Yves de Creil living to the advanced age of ninety. The date of his birth varies according to several historians by twenty-five years, and his death is given as 1005 or 1055, a gap of fifty years. These discrepancies easily could be the result of generational naming, with the first Yves born c.940 and living until 1005, and the later Yves, son of the former Yves, being born in 965 and living until 1055. This is where scholarly debate regarding the family is centered, and where this study must begin. However, it is possible the patriarch, Fulcuin, was in his forties when his heir was born. Most scholars do not debate the genealogy because of the dearth of evidence from early tenth-century Francia.

The earliest known member of the Bellême family to hold lands in Francia was Fulcuin. Likely of Frankish origins, Fulcuin's birth (c.890) predated widespread Norse settlement in the region. Hrólfr (Rollo) and other Viking settlers concentrated on the

⁴⁷ Du Motey, *Origines*, 116.

coasts at this time, but the Siege of Paris (885–886) would have created pressure for the kings to appoint or create lords to hold the coastal territories against the threat of Vikings. The *Annales* of Flodoard describe the warfare at the turn of the tenth century between Vikings and Bretons in the Neustrian marches as well as feuds among Carolingians, Robertines, and “other aspiring territorial rulers.”⁴⁸ Territorial feuds among leading families could have added to the chaos of the time, but it would have created a dynamic nobility as leaders won or lost the hold on their lands. Historians have sometimes called this type of violence “vengeance”, as it is different from ordinary acts of violence and characterized it as another part of political state building happening in the medieval period.⁴⁹ This would have been similar to the strategy King Charles the Simple deployed with the Treaty of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte in 911. Vikings used the river lanes in Francia, and Fulcuin’s lands were in Creil, an area about 67 kilometers north of Paris on the River Oise, one such documented river lane exploited by Viking raiders.⁵⁰ By the dawn of the tenth century, when Fulcuin was born, Creil would have been familiar with Viking raiders because it was situated on the River Oise almost halfway between Paris and another rich, important, and frequently raided city, Soissons.⁵¹ Viking incursions were frequent around Bellême lands in the second half of the ninth century.⁵² The Sarthe flows

⁴⁸ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 5.

⁴⁹ See Thomas Roche, “The Way Vengeance Comes: Rancorous Deeds and Words in the World of Orderic Vitalis,” In *Vengeance in the Middle Ages: Emotion, Religion and Feud* (2010), 117-118.

⁵⁰ Gwyn Jones, *A History of the Vikings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 224.

⁵¹ Google Earth indicates the distance from Paris to Creil is 66.9 km and from Creil to Soissons another 74.4 km along the River Oise.

⁵² Jones, *A History of the Vikings*, 224. The first siege of Paris occurred in 845, with three subsequent attacks in the 860s. The final siege of Paris commenced in 885 and lasted for a year. The raids on Soissons likely occurred in 886 as Vikings used the River Aisne as a highway. See Neil S. Price, *The Vikings of Brittany* (London: University College, 1989).

into the heart of Bellême lands, as noted on the maps throughout Chapter 2, into the Loire, which empties into the Bay of Biscay and the Celtic Sea. Viking raids in the Low Countries of Francia along the river lanes occurred during a peak of activity lasting fourteen years, from 878 until 892,⁵³ when Fulcuin was a young man.

Fulcuin held “many fiefs,”⁵⁴ so it is reasonable that he was a respected and capable Frank whose leadership was needed to buttress the town against potential raids, which occurred in river valleys throughout Francia. His wife was Rothaïs. The origin of the Bellême lords coincides with the time when inhabitants of Normandy became Norman. Fulcuin, a Frank, and his wife lived at the moment of Normanization, which might have been a time of cultural and political upheaval as “new men” made their way in the new world. Since Fulcuin obtained much land, it seems that he and his wife knew how to succeed at this crucial time in Norman history. That their newly gained lands were located on the frontier of the region lends credence to the notion that Fulcuin had proven himself as loyal, capable, and strong. Although charter evidence does not exist before 965,⁵⁵ Figure 2.3 illustrates the holdings of the first lord of Bellême.⁵⁶

⁵³ Jones, *A History of the Vikings*, 224.

⁵⁴ Du Motey, *Origines*, 12.

⁵⁵ Emily Zack Tabuteau, *Transfers of Property in Eleventh-Century Norman Law* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 7-8, 231. The number of charters steadily increased, rising decade by decade, and became numerous by 1030 when monastic foundations by aristocracy swelled. This timing coincides with the lordship of William Talvas but is not directly helpful in providing evidence of the earliest lords.

⁵⁶ The earliest churches include the Church of St. Martin in Livet-en-Saosnois, which was founded in the tenth century, and the church of St. Martin of Vieux Bellême. See *Cartulaire de Marmoutier pour le Perche* (Mortafne: Georges Meaux, 1894), no 1; *Cartulaire de l'Abbayette de Saint Michel, prière de l'abbaye du Mont-Saint-Michel* (Paris: A. Picard et fils, 1894), no.1. Portions of the Latin have been translated into French by Du Motey, see *Origines*, 11 n.7, 12 n.1. Signature page from *Cartulaire de l'Abbayette de Saint Michel* is shown in Figure 2.11, below.

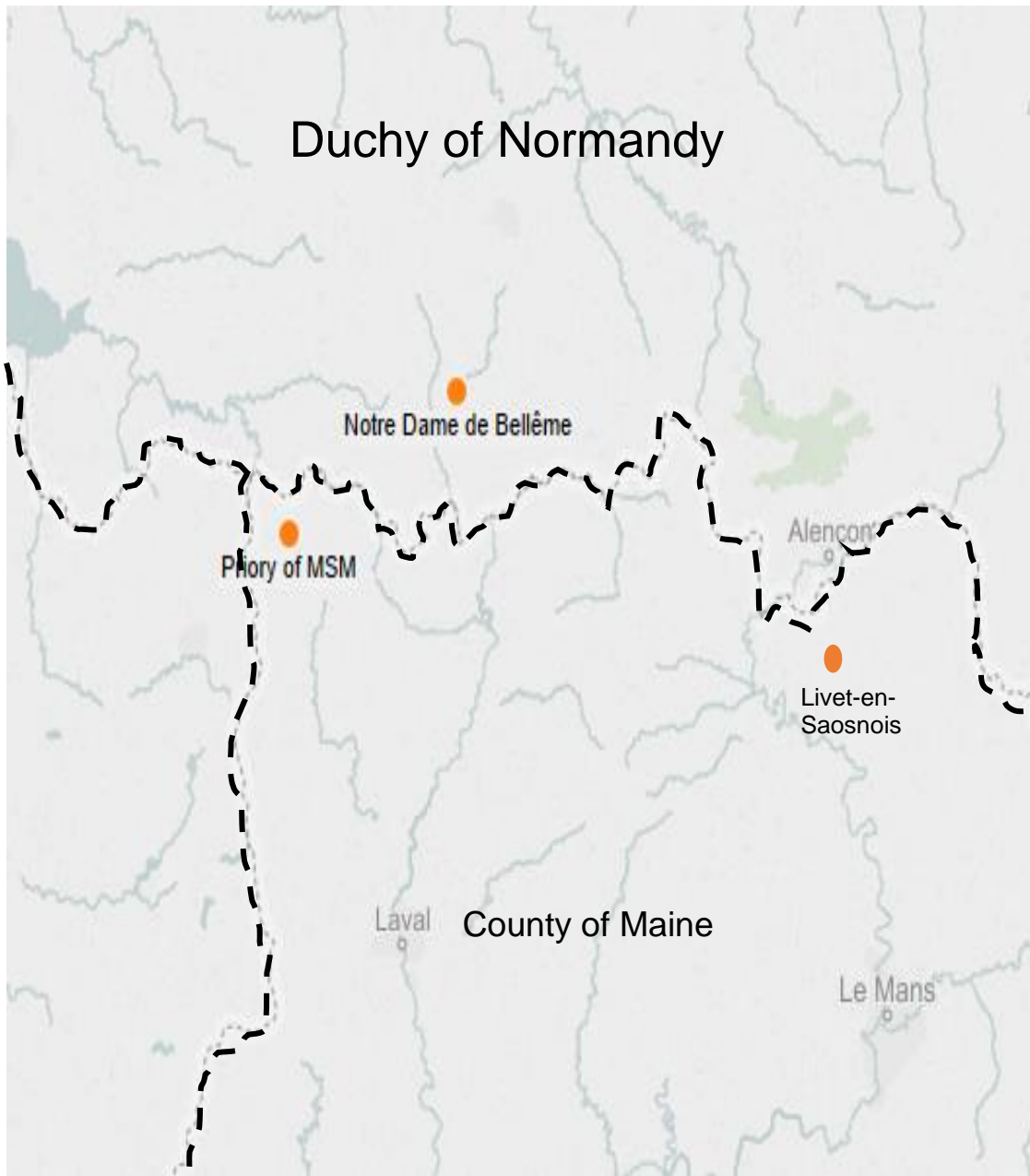


Figure 2.3. First generation holdings of Bellême lordship, early ninth century.

The historian Gérard Louise believes that the lords of Bellême were “Capetian protégés.”⁵⁷ A link to the Franks could exist from Fulcuin and his son who were allied with the French through the reign of King Louis IV (r. 936–954). Most French historians support the “continuity model”⁵⁸ that extends the family tree from the Carolingians through the Norse, then from the Normans to the Capetians. Kathleen Turner asserts that the Bellême were a “new family” in the tenth century, which would have been true in the Bellémois, but this study finds the family established first by Fulcuin in tenth-century Creil. The family’s characteristics, however, are consistent with what some historians have referred to as the “discontinuity model,” which holds that Rollo’s successors converted themselves into territorial princes and created an amalgamated rule using combined elements of Norse chieftains or Carolingian princes, whichever was least disruptive.⁵⁹ This means that the Norman aristocracy in 1066 was made up of “new men,” and this seems to be the case with both the lords of Bellême and the lords of Hiémois, whose houses were joined together by a marriage alliance c.1050. Recruiting immigrants and “new men” was an ingenious method of cementing control, as these outsiders had no other loyalties except to their duke.⁶⁰ These Frankish “new men” needed a strong political basis for the power until the power of the family could be cemented over time. Emily Tabuteau asserts that even until c.1025, Bellême lords were subject to the count of Anjou, the king of France, and the duke of Normandy.⁶¹ However, William of Bellême used his

⁵⁷ Louise, *Le Seigneurie*, II: 152.

⁵⁸ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 16.

⁵⁹ Searle, *Predatory Kinship and the Creation of Norman Power*, 4.

⁶⁰ Searle, *Predatory Kinship and the Creation of Norman Power*, 5.

⁶¹ Tabuteau, *Transfers of Property in Eleventh-Century Norman Law*, 374 n.145.

own seal on the foundation charter of Lonlay in c.1020, a sign of his own authority.⁶² It took the Bellême less than one generation to build religious houses and castles and to begin to garner both allies and enemies in neighboring lands.

Fulcuin and Rothaïs had one son, Yves, who was born about 945, and two daughters, Billehende and Eremburge, neither of whom married.⁶³ Yves was born very soon shortly after Fulcuin died,⁶⁴ and he was the sole inheritor. One of his own charters attests to his heritage: “*Pro salute animae atique patria mei Fulconii et matris meae Rothaïs*” (For the salvation of the soul of my father, Fulcuin and my mother, Rothaïs).⁶⁵ The Abbayette of Mont-Saint-Michel, a priory located along the road between Landivy and Dorée,⁶⁶ was built about forty miles from Mont-Saint-Michel to provide respite for travelers to and from the priory of Mont-Saint-Michel. Richard II refounded the nearby abbey of Mont-Saint-Michel in 966 to demonstrate his authority in the “far Wester[ern] part of the region.”⁶⁷ In the Abbayette charter, Yves stated that he was re-granting the lands in Mayenne. Because this land was already his by right, and because he included female relatives, this could be evidence that the Mayenne lands were held by his mother, Rothaïs, or possibly were a part of her dowry. Historians believe that this grant of land was lost in the tenth century around the time of the Norman invasions or perhaps during a

⁶² Tabuteau, *Transfers of Property in Eleventh-Century Norman Law*, 389 n.73.

⁶³ Du Motey, *Origines*, 25, 113.

⁶⁴ My genealogy chart reflects current research on the family which gives the date for Fulcuin’s death and his son’s birth as c.940.

⁶⁵ *Cartulaire de l’Abbayette de Saint Michel*, no. 1.

⁶⁶ Prentout, *Études sur quelques points d’Histoire de Normandie*, 31.

⁶⁷ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 25-26.

Norse invasion.⁶⁸ No matter the circumstances of the original grant, this re-grant establishes Yves's familial connection to this territory as both long-standing and hereditary.⁶⁹ This study introduces another theory for this connection to the lands of Bellême, which also explains the hostilities of nearby families.

Yves de Creil (b. pre-940–980)⁷⁰ was a young man at a time when hostilities between Hugh the Great and Louis IV were increasing in the region.⁷¹ In the year 943, Count Arnulf of Flanders had killed Duke William (Longsword). At this time, Louis IV brought an army into Normandy and kidnapped the young duke, Richard.⁷² According to Du Motey, Yves had already established himself as “an extraordinary man”⁷³ who was “powerful and wise.”⁷⁴ He was an engineer who excelled at the art of construction and was especially knowledgeable about the defense and offense of strongholds.⁷⁵ His

⁶⁸ Keats-Rohan, “Two Studies in North French Prosopography,” 15. See also Du Motey, *Origines*, 75.

⁶⁹ Louise, *La Seigneurie*, I: 352-367. The familial connection could account for the eleventh-century hostilities that would erupt between the families. This struggle was mainly between the counts of Maine and Avesgaud of Bellême, the bishop of Le Mans (997–1036). This struggle lasted until 1055. However, this dissertation introduces a new origin for these political hostilities, which connected to Yves and the young Duke Richard.

⁷⁰ *The Annals of Flodoard of Reims*, 30. The year of his death has been fixed as 980 because the “auteur de l’histoire des grands fiefs” wrote about it. Most historians skip discussion of his death, but there is no reason to doubt 980 is as correct as medieval dates tend to be. For this information, see Prentout, *Études sur quelques points d’Histoire de Normandie*, 29.

⁷¹ Jim Bradbury, *The Capetians: The History of a Dynasty* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2007), 37.

⁷² *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 306-307.

⁷³ Du Motey, *Origines*, 68, ‘an homme extraordinaire.’ Du Motey cites Abbé Barret, *Normandie Monumentale*, vol. de l’Orne, p. 282, but this reference is not correct. See digitized full text of Abbé Barret at <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5457245s/texteBrut>

⁷⁴ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 264, ‘potens et sapiens.’

⁷⁵ Du Motey, *Origines*, 68. The viscount Du Motey was a premier historian in 1920 who, in the style of his day, did not always provide sources for his statements.

military skills allowed him to serve as “*regis balistarium agnoui*”⁷⁶ However, he may have shown his political allegiance when he “took pity on the fate of the captive child” (Duke Richard of Normandy) and made himself valuable to the young prisoner who was held by Louis IV in Laon Castle.⁷⁷ Louis had “promise[d] the Normans under oath that he would bring him [Duke Richard] up as his own son and educate him for government in the royal palace . . . but . . . [Louis] resolved either to kill the boy or maim him so weak that he could never again bear arms.”⁷⁸

However, Yves ruined Louis’ plan to murder the young heir by convincing the young duke to feign an illness. Yves informed Osmund, the tutor⁷⁹ of the young duke, of the plot against the boy, so that at night Osmund wrapped the young duke in a bundle of horse fodder and extract him to the safety of his uncle’s castle at Coucy.⁸⁰ Du Motey believed this event was a turning point in Norman history, noting Yves “*avait sauvé Richard de Normandie, et la Normandie elle-même*” (having saved Richard of Normandy, [Yves] saved Normandy itself).⁸¹ Whether this episode points to Yves’s kindness or pity toward the captive child or was a political move cannot be known with

⁷⁶ *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 306-307, “master of the royal seige train”.

⁷⁷ Du Motey, *Origines*, 68. In Dudo’s version of events only Richard needs Osmund’s help, see Dudo, *Historia* IV, 106.

⁷⁸ *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 306-307, ‘Ludouicus rex Francorum . . . puerumque ducem secum fraudulenter Laudunum duxit, sub jure iureiurando Normannis promittens quod eum ueluti filium suum educaret, ac ad refendam rempublicam in aula regali erudiret....enim rex instinctu Arnulfi proditoris decreuit prefatum puerum occidere, uel amputatis membris ita debilitare ut non posset ulterius arma gestare.’

⁷⁹ According to the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 264-265, Osmund was the squire of Duke Richard; nevertheless, Osmund was acting upon the advice of Yves.

⁸⁰ *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 308-309. This anecdote is also in *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 264-265.

⁸¹ Du Motey, *Origines*, 70.

certainty, but it seems likely that the result of this interaction would be beneficial to Yves, probably through new lands. It would also earn him some enemies, including the nearby counts of Maine. The hostilities between the counts of Maine and the bishop of Le Mans, a member of the Bellême family lasted from c.971 until 1055.⁸² Rival territorial interest in the frontier would spark such hostility.

Soon after the escape of Richard in 943, Yves relocated to Bellême.⁸³ Yves had been the master of the royal siege train⁸⁴ and a high-ranking officer in the army of King Louis. However, in helping save the life of the young duke, Yves was acting as a traitor to his king. One might question where his truest loyalties lay and what motivated Yves to betray the king in favor of the duke. In an eleventh century charter that refers to the founding of the church of Notre Dame de Bellême, William stated that his father Yves held the land of Bellême in the name of Louis, the King of Francia where he built the new basilica *a novo construxi* of Bellême.⁸⁵ The timeliness of his move to the region along with his explicit statement that he holds land in both the names of his direct lord (the duke of Normandy), and of his duke's lord (the king of Francia), could publicly

⁸² Louise, *La Seigneurie*, I: 352-367.

⁸³ I agree with historians of the Perche region who attest to Yves being awarded the Bellême lands in 944 or 945 for his outstanding service to Richard, as the timing of his landholding coincides with his rescue of the young duke. See also Prentout, *Études sur quelques points d'Histoire de Normandie*, 37. Vicomte Du Motey speciously suggested that Yves was awarded the land in 940; see Prentout, *Études sur quelques points d'Histoire de Normandie*, 38.

⁸⁴ As mentioned on page 55.

⁸⁵ *CMP*, no. 1. The Latin reads 'Quamobrem, ego Ivo, in Dei nomine, labentis evi deceptiones considerans, meorumque peccaminum enormitatem perpendens, atque districti examinis debitas injurias metuens, futurorum quoque bonorum gaudia adipisci desiderans, in castro meo Belismo, in honore sanctae Dei genetricis Mariae, et sancti Petri atque aliorum apostolorum et omnium sanctorum veneratione basilicam a novo construxi, et pro anime meae conjugisque meae Godehildis, sive filiis meis vel genitoribus meis remedio, secundum canonicae auctoritatis institutionem, prefatam basilicam per nostram auctoritatem de beneficio et de alodo dotaremus...in manus nostras, annuente Deo accepimus, manibusque bonorum virorum in consecratione hujus aeclesiae adfirmare curavimus...'

demonstrate that Yves is a vassal to both lords and, consequently, has the permission of both to display his personal authority in the region. Here Yves built and restored several castles. He also built and endowed the church of Saint Martin,⁸⁶ which he dedicated to the Virgin Mary,⁸⁷ and the church of Vieux Bellême,⁸⁸ perhaps using his gift from William Longsword for saving the young duke or for his military service.⁸⁹ Figures 2.4 through 2.7 show the early village and photographs of these churches.

⁸⁶ The cult of St. Martin was well established in Normandy through the seventh and eighth centuries, and St. Martin was represented in 21.2 percent of parish names by the year 1000. Interestingly, Évroul, another common saint within Bellême lands, was one of the last of the local Merovingian saints. St. Evroult died c.706 ; see Louise, *La Seigneurie*, II: 64-65.

⁸⁷ This charter can be found in *CMP*, no.1. Cited above, see note 85. In a later charter (no. 2 from c.1000), by his son to reconfirm the gift, the language is “Post obitum autem Yvesnis, ego Willelmus et Godehildis mater mea, cupientes ad... ecclesie sancte Dei Genitricis Marie....”

⁸⁸ *CMP*, the first charter in this collection, states the church was founded between 940 and 977.

⁸⁹ Prentout asserts that the principality of Bellême was created for Yves as payment for the services he rendered to the Duke. Although he gave no evidence for such an assertion, it is logical and chronological, and therefore, I agree with him.



Figure 2.4. Three-dimensional model of Vieux Bellême with city walls c.1026.
Image provided by Office Départementale de la Culture du l'Orne.
Photo taken by Crescida Jacobs.

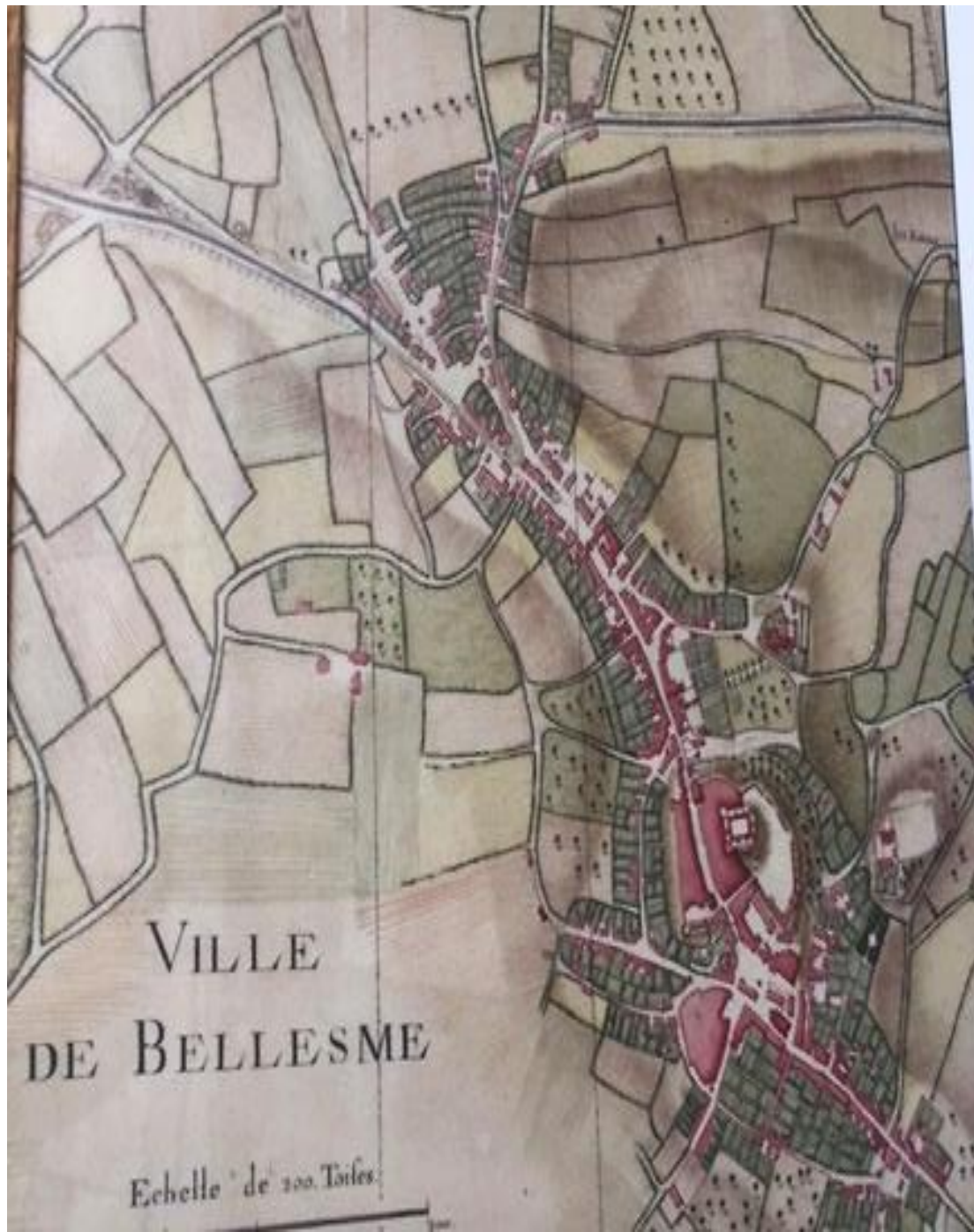


Figure 2.5. Village of Vieux Bellême with castle and city walls.
Image provided by Office Départementale de la Culture du l'Orne.
Photo taken by Crescida Jacobs.



Figure 2.6. Church of the Virgin in Bellême⁹⁰.
Photo taken by Crescida Jacobs.

⁹⁰ According to its foundation charter, the original structure was built here between 943-977. In subsequent periods, additions and renovations sometimes obscure the original building or original structures are torn down and new structures built on the site. The building pictured here was built c.960, but parts were damaged or destroyed during the Hundred Years War and again by fire in the seventeenth century.



Figure 2.7. Church of the St. Martin in Vieux Bellême.⁹¹
Photo taken by Crescida Jacobs.

⁹¹ Founded c.940. Charter found in *CMP*, no. 1.

According to White, in addition to these structures Yves built and endowed three other churches and established two villages in the Hiémois.⁹² Norman historians connect ecclesiastical patronage to politics throughout the Anglo-Norman period; Marjorie Chibnall provides a succinct summation of the process, writing, “the use of monastic patronage to initiate or consolidate political control in disputed territory was a long-established practice...”⁹³ By establishing both a fortress and a church, Yves was connecting to the social-spiritual-political impulse of the Norman people. Eventually, his descendants occupied important leadership roles in the Church, thereby extending the family’s tree so that it shadowed the spiritual lives of people as well as the fortress on the hill. Yves de Creil was the first *comte* of Bellême, a principality created by the Duke after the episode of 944; however, the region had already been important in the Passais,⁹⁴ where, according to White, Yves gave Magny-le-Désert to Gauzlin, the abbot of Fleury.⁹⁵ Charter evidence demonstrates that Yves and his wife⁹⁶ also made a gift of ten manse of

⁹² White, “The First House of Bellême,” 73. The churches are named Saint Jean de la Forêt, St. Martin de Berd’hius, and Dancé according to Du Motey, *Origines*, 76.

⁹³ Marjorie Chibnall, “The Empress Matilda and Church Reform,” *TRHS* 38(1988), 109. Other Anglo-Norman historians have explored the connection between religion and political power. See Victoria Chandler, “Politics and Piety: Influences on Charitable Donations during the Anglo-Norman Period,” *Revue Bénédictine* 90(1980): 63-71; Emma Mason, “*Pro statu incolumnitate regni mei*: Royal Monastic Patronage, 1066-1154” *Studies in Church History* 18(1982), 99-117.

⁹⁴ Prentout, *Études sur quelques points d’Histoire de Normandie*, 26.

⁹⁵ White, “First House,” 73. ‘Yves Belesmensis...hujus dilecti dei Gauzlin, haudquaquam immemor extitit, Magniacum cedendo illi...’

⁹⁶ William Mendel Newman, Theodore Evergates, and Giles Constable, eds. *The Cartulary and Charters of Notre-Dame of Homblières* (Cambridge: Medieval Academy of America, 1990), no. 15 ‘accesserunt ad Hivonem, fidelem nostrum, et venerabilem coniugem eius Geilam, interpellantes eos super quadam terra ex beneficio eius quae in praedicto pago iacet in villa scilicet quae dicitur Cauviniacus ut illam sub censu constituto ad predictum monasterium daret...’

brush lands from Yves's benefice in the village of Cugny to the abbey of Homblières.⁹⁷ By the end of the tenth century, the fortresses within Yves's purview included Bellême, Alençon, and Domfront,⁹⁸ but he held on to lands west of the Sonnois in the Marcher region just inside the County of Maine, perhaps to cement the boundary of the new lordship.⁹⁹ Figure 2.8 shows the placement of fortresses at the end of the second generation, about the time of the death of Yves de Creil in 980.

⁹⁷ Newman, Evergates, and Constable, eds. *The Cartulary and Charters of Notre-Dame of Homblières* no. 15, 57-59.

⁹⁸ Prentout, *Études sur quelques points d'Histoire de Normandie*, 26. Bart des Boulais, who created a collection of charters for the region of Perche, *Des Antiquités du Perche* (Mortagne: Daupeley, 1890), said that nothing could be known of the castle at Bellême before 980. Even the historian of Alençon, Odolant-Desnos, who wrote at the end of the nineteenth century, 'Yves de Creil, maître des arbalétriers de Francia, eut le Bellesmois au partage de la succession du comte de Corbonnais son père, le Saonnois et plusieurs autres terres. Il prit le nom de Bellême qu'il laisse à sa postérité.' This is a slight misinterpretation, because Yves kept "de Creil" and left his son to take "de Bellême."

⁹⁹ White, "First House," 73. Yves's son William claimed hereditary lands in this part of Maine, and Bellême fortresses were built on lands that lay within the boundary of the County of Maine.

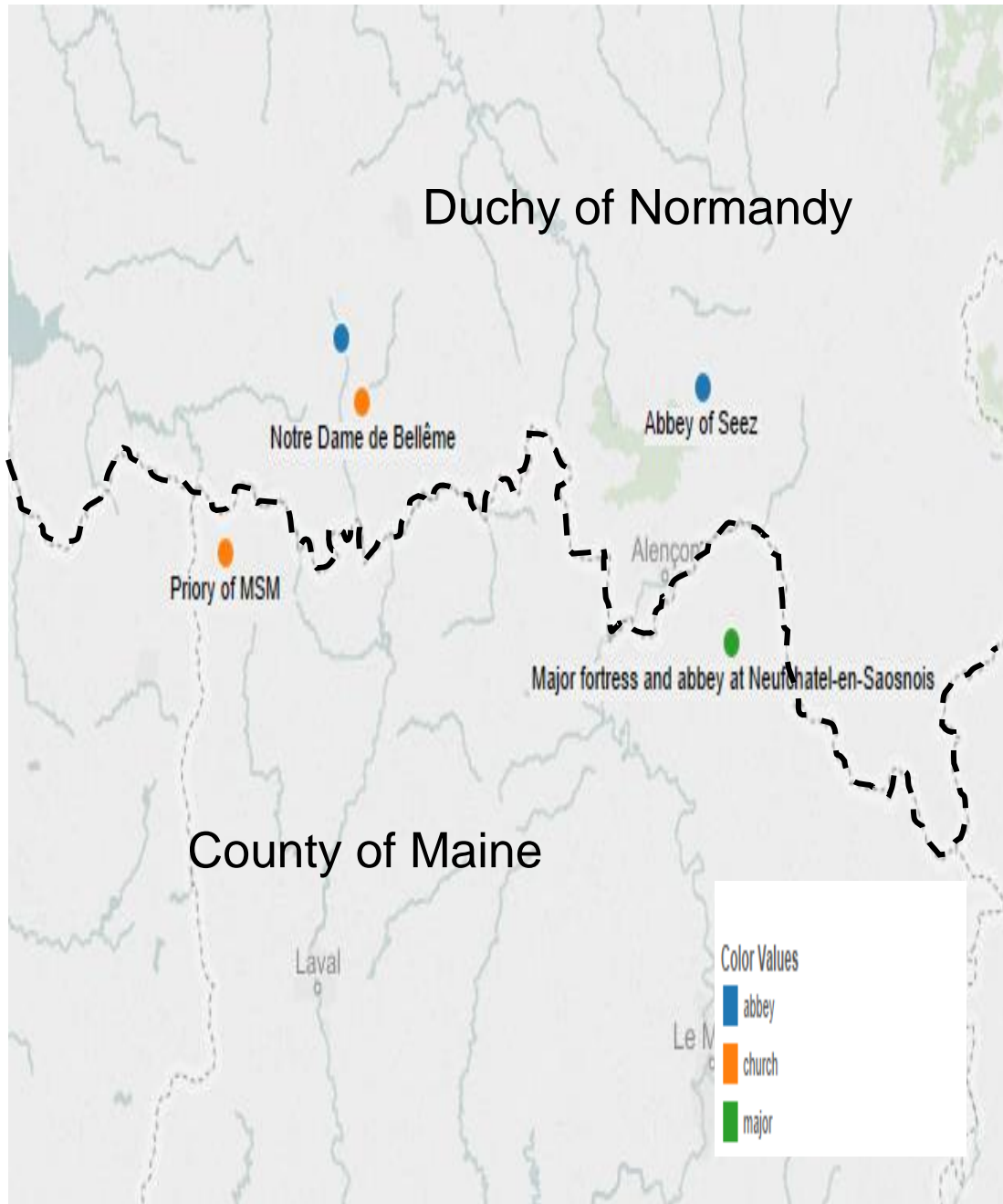


Figure 2.8. Bellême fortresses at the end of the tenth century.

In this region, which would become Bellême, Yves married Geile and began his family. The couple had at least five children: Yves, William, Avesgout, Godhelde, and Hildeburge.¹⁰⁰ The eldest son and namesake predeceased his father, so the patrimony went to William. The legacy was well established through the elder Yves's monastic gifts before his death c.1005, as charters attest. A charter, *Actum Belismo Castro*, in the archives of the Orne (H 2150), delineates the endowments and gifts made by Yves. The Latin reads,¹⁰¹

Quamobrem, ego Ivo, in Dei nomine, labentis evi deceptiones considerans, meorumque peccaminum enormitatem perpendens, atque districti examinis debitas injurias metuens, futurorum quoque bonorum gaudia adipisci desiderans, in castro meo Belismo, in honore sanctae Dei genetricis Marię, et sancti Petri atque aliorum apostolorum et omnium sanctorum veneratione basilicam a novo construxi, et pro anime meae, conjugisque meae Godehildis, sive filiis meis vel genitoribus meis remedio, secundum canonicae auctoritatis institutionem, prefatam basilicam per nostram auctoritatem de beneficio et de alodo dotaremus, hoc est; in pago Cenomannico, in vicaria Sagonense, aeclesia in honore sancti Martini, sita in villa que dicitur Ivo, et pago Oximense, post obitum hodie tenentium aeclesia nobiliter edificata in villa que nuncupatur a circummanentibus Vetus Belismo, itemque aeclesia alia in honore sancti Johannis Baptistae, in silva que vocatur bodolensis, nuper aedificata ab amore mei desiderii. Similiter aetiam in villa quae dicitur berzillis aeclesia in honore sancti Martini, supra fluvium qui vocatur Edra, simili tenore. Trado denique ad prefatum locum jam nominatum, post heredum possidentium, in ipsa vicaria, super fluviolum supranominatum, in villa Domcaico, aeclesiam in honore sancti Jovini dedicatam. Cedo etiam tibi, o sancta aeclesia jure perpetuitatis, villam quae dicitur Curtiolt et

¹⁰⁰ There is some debate among historians if the second Yves existed or if Orderic Vitalis merely confused the son with the father because they had the same name. Because there was an Yves (de Bellême) who was born c.965 but died c.1005, this dissertation follows Geoffrey White's assertion that this son predeceased his father but had no heirs. White's theory is also accepted by "all the French writers," according to White, "First House," 70-71.

¹⁰¹ This charter begins unlike most eleventh century charters because the function seems to be to delineate the properties already endowed and to reinforce their purpose, which was to pray for Yves and his family as well as to help the population in times of poverty. Here Yves is not making any new endowments but is restating prior gifts. This may have been the chance for Yves to introduce himself to his new neighbors in Bellême. In this paragraph, Yves says 'I Yves (Yves) in this castle by God's grace...well aged in honor of God and the saints and apostles and of the Virgin Mary I have newly constructed a church (Notre Dame) for the salvation of my soul and the souls of my wife and family.' Thanks to Richard Armstrong for help paraphrasing this Latin text.

aliam que vocatur Curte Perpedum cum appenditiis eorum, id est terries, pratis, silvis, exitibus et regressibus, cum omnibus ad id pertinentibus. Omnia nominata prefate aeclesiae perpetualiter trado ad opus clericorum ibi Domino militantium ut jugiter pro me exorare illis delectet et pro uxore vel filiis meis, nemoque ex illis, pro his omnibus a me datis, aliquod servitium exigat nisi quod canonum sanctorum partum sancxit auctoritas. Ut autem hoc nostre auctoritatis testamentum per omnia tempora inviolabiliter ab omnibus conservetur veriusque credatur; in manus nostras, annuente Deo accepimus, manibusque bonorum virorum in consecratione hujus aeclesiae adfirmare curavimus et inpressione anuli regis nostri subter insigniri desideramus. Si autem aliquis fuerit homo, aut ego, aut ex filiis meis, vel ex parentibus meis seu ex alienigenis, instigante diabolo, qui huic facto mercedis nostrae aliquod scrupulum inferre voluerit, iram omnipotentis Dei incurrat et cum Dathan et Abiron et Juda traditore Domini, demergatur in profundum inferni. Et juxta legem seculi, auri libras centum, argenti pondera totidem coactus exsolvat, et ejus repetitio nihil valeat, sed omnimodis scissa et frustata permaneat. Actum Belismo castro.

The charter indicates that a well-aged Yves holds Bellême by God's grace, and in this place he wishes to build a new church for the salvation of his family's souls. He also mentions other churches in the region he has built, such as the church of St. Martin and the churches in the village of Oxumense, on which he constructed new edifices to resemble the edifice of the Old Bellême church. In the woods (possibly the extensive Bellême Forest) he also built a church in honor of St. John the Baptist; in the village of Berzilis he constructed another church in honor of St. Martin; and in the village of Danciaco he erected a church in honor of St. Jouin.

The charter ends with a prayer of blessing for the poor and sick in the town of Bellême and for perpetual prayer by three pious men for Yves, his parents, and his wife and children. Because the charter begins with Yves's comment that the village has his name, it is possible that he built this town and endowed it with his name. This charter will be mentioned again during the lordship of Yves's great-great grandson, Robert, who asks

for damages incurred when the churches in the area (which had been created free by “the order of the blessed pope Leo”¹⁰²) were caught up in an economic conundrum. Figure 2.9 shows a cloister garden at the ruin of Notre Dame that Yves endowed. Figure 2.10 is the exterior of the beautiful church of St. Jouin at Dancé, which was embellished and expanded in the fifteenth century and is still used as a village church to this day.



Figure 2.9. Cloister Garden at Ruin of Notre Dame du Séez.
Photo taken by Crescida Jacobs.

¹⁰² MS H2156 at the Archives of the Orne. The Latin of this text (no.29) is in the *RRAN*, 183-187.



Figure 2.10. Church of St. Jouin at Dance.
Photo taken by Crescida Jacobs.

This charter dates to around 953, which Du Motey asserts was Yves's midlife. This would also be the time after his service as *maître des balistes* (Master of Arms) for the king, even though it has been suggested by White¹⁰³ that Yves de Creil was the same brave warrior who challenged and slew a gigantic German for the safety and security of

¹⁰³ This anecdote is mentioned in White, "First House," 71. See Ferdinand Lot, *Les Derniers Carolingiens* (Paris: E. Bouillon, 1891), 101. 'Ergo de pluribus unus electus Yves, congressus procedit...Vir fortis præmium petiit et accepit.' (One was chosen out of many... therefore Yves the brave won the pitched battle he asked for and received the reward).

Paris.¹⁰⁴ Although there is no other direct evidence that this was the same Yves of Creil, his reputation and military service could have enabled such a feat. Such an event would also have supported the generous gift of the Bellême.

Du Motey wrote that Yves had become melancholic and disillusioned with life as he aged,¹⁰⁵ but no evidence exists to support such assertions. On the contrary, it seems that Yves rose to great importance during his youth and young adulthood and then retired to the country to live off his land and start a family. During this time Yves practiced generosity toward the church and established the independence of his territory on an important section of the Norman frontier. Bellême was a growing village with gardens, fields, numerous roads, and an upper and lower valley, as depicted in Figure 2.11.

¹⁰⁴ Richer of St. Rémi included this story in the *Historiae*, which was composed during the tenth century. See *The Historia of Richer of Saint-Rémi*: III, 76 but Yves is an unnamed “leading man” and “brave man” as, “Ergo de pluribus unus electus, congressurus procedit.”

¹⁰⁵ Du Motey, *Origines*, 76-77 ‘Yves, en effet, n’est plus alors de première jeunesse. Il considère avec mélancolie les désillusions de la vie.’

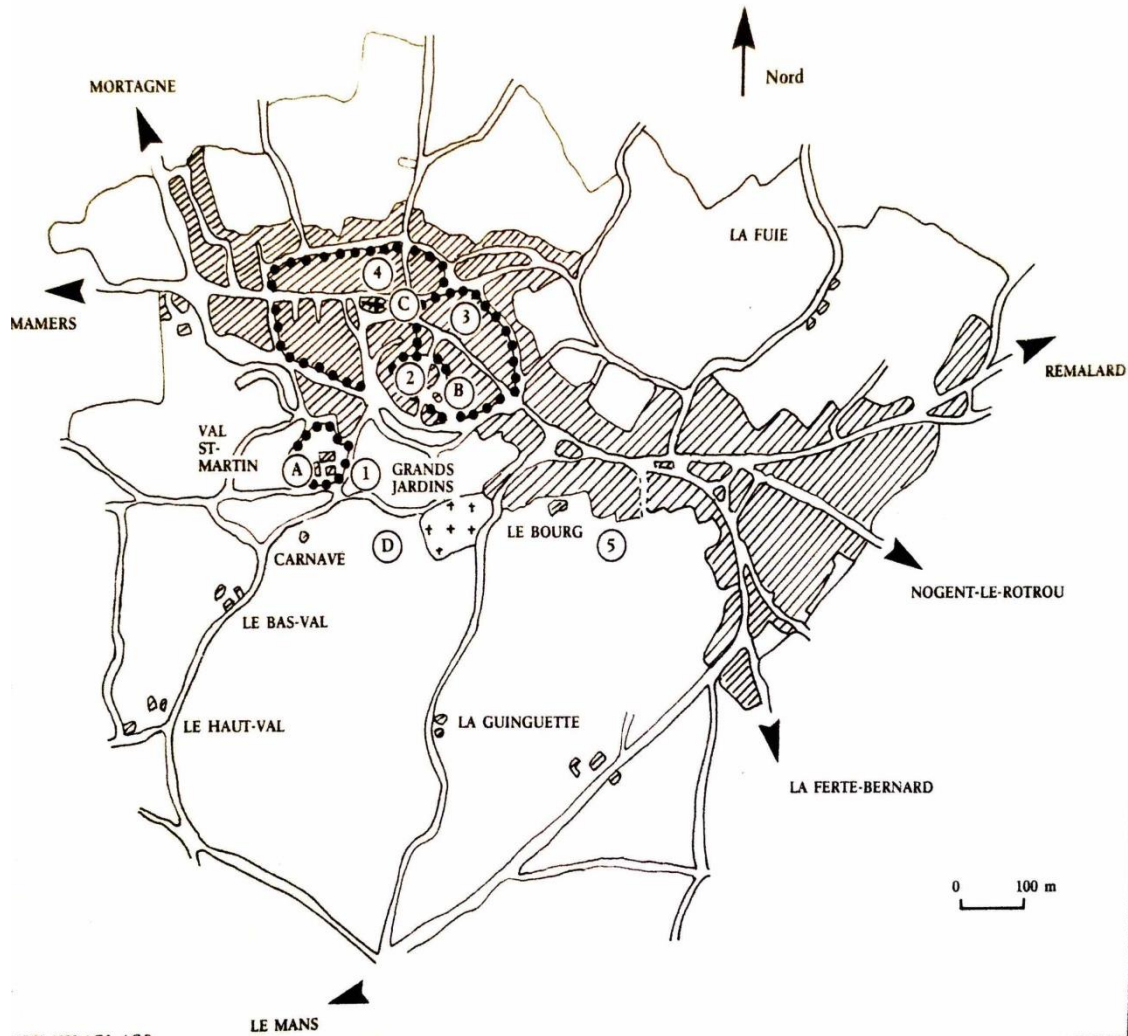


Figure 2.10. Diagram of Early Bellême.
 Awaiting permission from Gérard Louise, *La Seigneurie de Bellême*, II: 59.

Retirement was not a passive time on the Norman frontier, and it seems Yves remained active. White believes that he might have been the same Yves *signum Yvesnis* who witnessed a diploma of Richard I of Normandy for St. Denis in the spring of 968.¹⁰⁶ The elder Yves brought his son and heir, Yves de Bellême, a young man in his late teens

¹⁰⁶ White, "First House," 71.

or early twenties, when he signed a charter between the archbishop of Rouen and the Abbot of St. Germain-des-Près as *S. Yvesnis. S. alterius* (another) *Yvesnis* c.968–978.¹⁰⁷ A couple of years later, according to Du Motey, Yves witnessed a charter for the Abbey of St. Julian of Tours.¹⁰⁸ Within two generations, Bellême had surpassed the Hiémois in importance. Eventually the two territories were united by the marriage of Yves’s great granddaughter, Mabel, to Roger, a count of the Hiémois. Subsequently, Mabel’s son and heir ruled over this combined region, which made him the largest and richest landholder in the Anglo-Norman world. Well before these events, Yves founded many abbeys in and near Bellême.

Southern Normandy was a dangerous place in the tenth century. Yves must have been a powerful and important man to hold such a dangerous territory. The abbot Fret, citing a now lost sixteenth-century manuscript, wrote that the territory was given to Yves because of his experience so that the border would safely protect the interior of Normandy.¹⁰⁹ Yves founded the priory of Villarenton,¹¹⁰ at Mont-Saint-Michel in order to cement the family’s authority in the region. A charter from the establishment of the Abbaye of Mont-Saint-Michel, which is on the border between Brittany and Normandy

¹⁰⁷ Charter is dated to a period of eleven years by Prentout and mentioned by White, “First House,” 72.

¹⁰⁸ See Du Motey, *Origines*, 116. Du Motey dates this charter to 970 or 971.

¹⁰⁹ Abbé L. Joseph Fret, ed. *Antiquités et chroniques percheronnes :ou recherches sur l’histoire civile, religieuse, monumentale, politique et littéraire de l’ancienne province du Perche, et pays limitrophes* (Mortagne: Glaçon, 1838), 285. ‘En outre du Bellemois, Richard donna encore à Yves, Alençon et les terres qui en dépendaient, la ville et le pays de Sées et plusieurs autres possessions en Normandie sur la frontière du Maine, a la charge de lui en faire hommage et de veiller de ce côté a la sureté de ses Etats.’ Translated by me as “Furthermore in the Bellemois, Richard gave Alençon and the land around it in the country of Sées as well as many other possessions in Normandy on the Maine border to Yves with the responsibility of making homage and safeguarding security of his estates.”

¹¹⁰ Keats-Rohan, “Two Studies in North French Prosopography,” 3-37.

about three kilometers from the parish of Dorée in Bellême territory, contains the following,

Yves, for the souls of Fulk my father and Rotaïs my mother, with the consent of my sisters, Billeheudis and Eremburgis and my uncles, Bishop Sigefroi and William, and my cousins, William the clerk, Robert Suhard, and William the laity, give to Mont-St.-Michel eight villages situated in Main on the frontier of Avranchin....¹¹¹

Toward the end of his life, Yves may have been securing his paternal dynasty in various places throughout the duchy, as his name appeared in several charters in the last decades of the tenth century. Yves signed a charter for the Abbey of Homblières in the Vermandois a region north of Paris in 981.¹¹² The Vermandois is about 95 kilometers from Creil, his father's birthplace.

Another charter of Yves was signed in 997,¹¹³ noting that his ancestors gave the lands for the salvation of their souls in Maine so that the Abbayette near Mont-Saint-Michel could be built,¹¹⁴ but that the "infestation of Normans" (*irruente Normannorum*

¹¹¹ This is my translation from French. Prentout, *Études sur quelques points d'Histoire de Normandie*, 32. 'Yves, pour les âmes de Foulques son père et de Rothaïs sa mère, avec le consentement de ses sœurs, Billeheudis et Eremburgis, celui de ses oncles, Sigefroi évêque et Guillaume, celui de ses cousins, Guillaume clerc, Robert Suhanrd et Guillaume le laïc restitue au Mont-Saint-Michel huit villas situées dans la Maine sur les frontières de l'Avranchin....' (Yves, for the souls of Fulk his father and Rothaïs his mother, with the consent of her sisters, Billeheudis and Eremburgis, one of his uncles, Siegfried Bishop and William, one of his cousins, William clerk, Robert Suhanrd and William the secular restores to Mont-Saint-Michel eight villas located in Maine on the frontiers of Avranchin). The Latin text appears in *Cartulaire de l'Abbayette*, no.1. Prentout believes the date of October 12, 997 could be erroneous, but he has no evidence to prove his assertion. Regardless of the precise year, the charter is dated October 12 and was signed at Fresnay after Robert ascended to the Frnech throne, which happened in 996.

¹¹² A seventeenth century copy of this cartulary is in the Bibliothèque Nationale, MS 13911, f.14. The entire Latin text can be found in Ferdinand Lot, *Les Derniers Carolingiens*, 402-404.

¹¹³ *Cartulaire de Saint-Michel de l'Abbayette*, no. 1.

¹¹⁴ 'mei antecessores pro suarum salure animarium jam olim loco ejusdem Sancti Michaelis donaverant'

infestation), had destroyed the abbey and displaced many monks.¹¹⁵ This year would have been among the very last of Yves's life. The charter could establish Yves's motives for cementing his descendants' power throughout Normandy, as he includes this living parent, his two sisters, his two uncles, and all of his relatives to assent to the gift¹¹⁶ of the entire territory including "the cultivated and uncultivated lands, the woods, and the water" within the region.¹¹⁷ Yves ends with a curse upon any who would do injury to the monks at the Abbayette.¹¹⁸ The timing of the charter supports this assertion it was the end of the elder Yves (de Creil)'s life, but his son and heir, Yves (de Bellême), was already wed to Godhelde who also signed the charter,¹¹⁹ so this would have been an important time for the dynasty to reassert its power.

The distance between the lands in these final charters is 300 miles, and they form a triangle with Paris in the middle. He signed this charter as a vassal of Hugh of Francia, and he indicated his wife Geile and his son and heir. Perhaps in his twilight years, he was connecting his paternal lands to his own holdings; however, he might have included his wife because she was born in the region near Creil, and this charter linked Yves's paternal lands to his wife's natal family as a sign of his unified power throughout

¹¹⁵ 'locus ipse per multorum curricula annorum amiserat, eidem loco fratribusque ibi Deo sanctoque archangel servientibus'

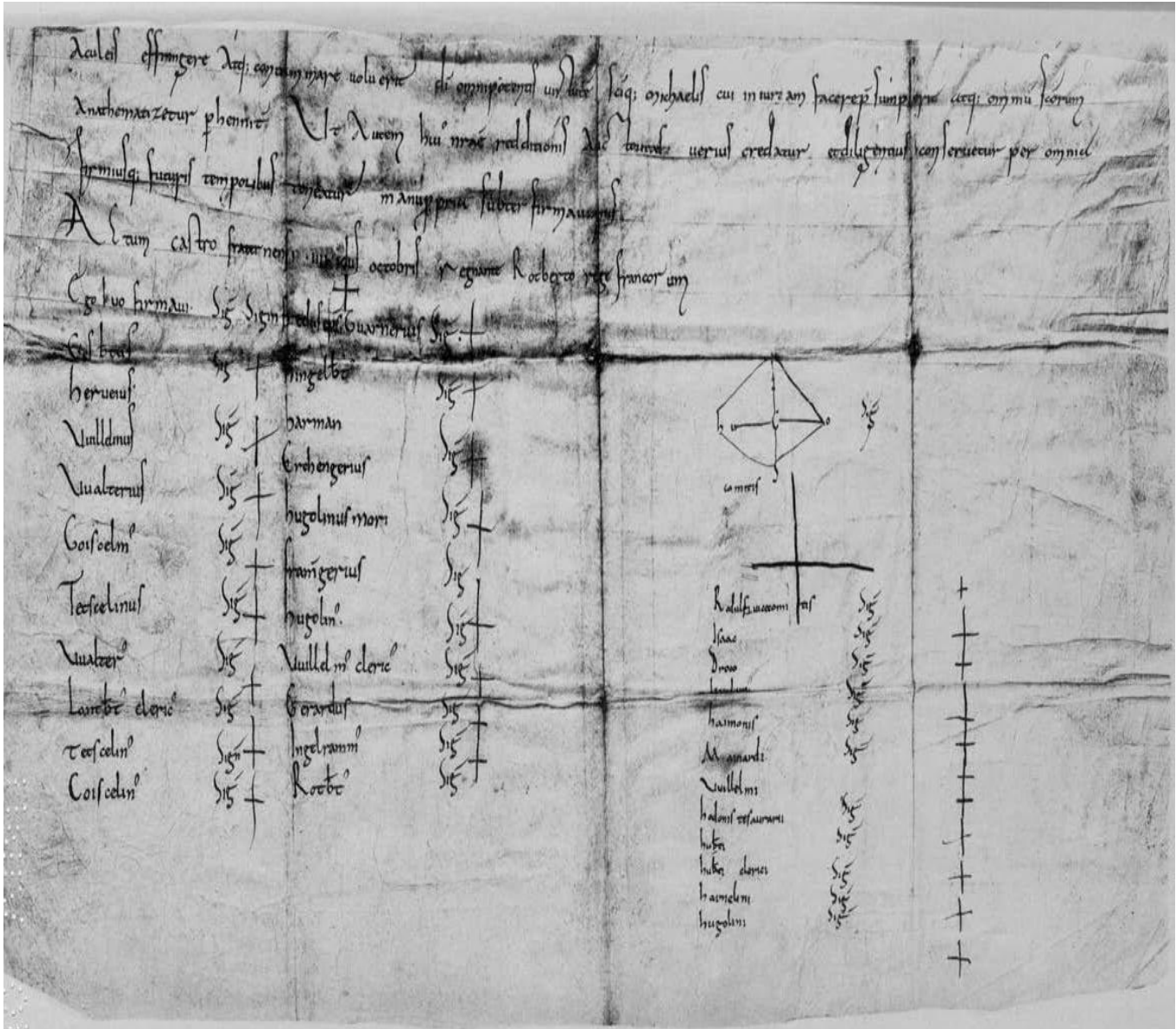
¹¹⁶ 'cum consensus et voluntate meorum parentum, duarum videlicet sororum mearum: Billehendis atque Erenburgis, necnon duorum avunculorum: Seinfredi episcopi et Guillelmi, atque cognatorum: Guillelmi clerici, Roberti Sutsardi rursusque Guillelmi'

¹¹⁷ 'cum terres cultis et incultis, cum silvis, cum aquis'

¹¹⁸ 'Quod si quis hujuscemodi testamentum diabolicæ pravitatis stimulates aculeis, effringere atque contaminare voluerit, Dei omnipotentis virtute sanctique Michaelis cui injuriam facere presumpserit atque omnium sanctorum, anathematizetur perhenniter. Ut autem hujus nostra redditimis auctoritas verius credatur et diligentius conservetur per omnia firmitusque futuris temporibus teneatur, monu propria subter firmavimus.'

¹¹⁹ 997 would mean that Yves de Bellême would have been in his late twenties or early thirties.

Normandy. His son, Yves (de Bellême) and his son's wife, Godhelde, also acted as witnesses to the charter.



Phototypie Berthaud, Paris

997, 12 octobre, FRESNAY. — Charte d'Yves pour l'Abbayette (original, Archives de la Manche), dimensions 49 sur 59.

Figure 2.11. Signature page from *Cartulaire de l'Abbayette*, no. 1.

The southern and western Norman frontier was created in 945 by an agreement between the Normans and Hugh the Great.¹²⁰ Before 945, Normandy did not have a southern or western endpoint, but Charles the Simple had granted the region to Rollo, who held whatever territory could be held. Rollo was then Count of Rouen and the borders of the territory were at best ambiguous. In the west, this extended to Maine, but generally there was much less precision regarding boundaries west of the Seine.¹²¹ The tenth- and eleventh-century County of Maine was weak because of its geographical location between Normandy, Brittany, Anjou, and Blois, and because of the hostilities among the families in the region, which were actively seeking to “advance their own interests and tame their enemies.”¹²² Throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries, Maine was a Marcher region that served as a buffer against Brittany and the protector of Aquitaine as well as a barrier against Viking incursions.¹²³ By giving lands around the region to abbeys that he founded or endowed, Yves was holding onto the territory and asserting control over the land which would become the Norman frontier. The aristocracies along the frontier were referred to as “Marcher” lords.¹²⁴ These Marcher lords were put in place as a line of defense, as seems to be the case with the lords of Bellême. Even through the eleventh century, Normandy’s southern and western borders

¹²⁰ Prentout, *Études sur quelques points d’Histoire de Normandie*, 36.

¹²¹ For a brief summation about borders and boundaries in Normandy, see Prentout, *Études sur quelques points d’Histoire de Normandie*, 36-38.

¹²² Keats-Rohan, “Two Studies in North French Prosopography,” 5.

¹²³ Keats-Rohan, “Two Studies in North French Prosopography,” 5.

¹²⁴ Daniel Power, *The Norman Frontier in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 17.

remained somewhat ill defined, which only added to the anxieties of families holding the territory.¹²⁵ Charter evidence already discussed for that Abbayette shows that all eight villas were near Villarenton in the Mayenne Department.¹²⁶

The lands in this region were as treacherous as they were ecologically diverse. Du Motey, in early twentieth-century romantic language, visualized Bellême as a “mountainous, rocky . . . fully forested . . . picturesquely wild” wedge that cut into nearby Séez and Avranches to form a literal wedge characterized by “steep hills” that served as a buffer between Normandy and Maine.¹²⁷ In this terrain, Yves and his wife Geile had two sons within two years and three daughters in subsequent years.¹²⁸ Yves was building the power base of his family in the rugged, politically contested frontier region, establishing a strong base for his lineage’s development as a powerful force in the area. William de Bellême was born c.966, and the patrimony passed to him c.1005 when his eldest brother died.

Lords of Bellême: William I and William II

By 1005, the family was in control of the southwestern frontier of Normandy and had installed a son in a Church office, as was common among noble families in the

¹²⁵ For an early history of the county of Maine, see Keats-Rohan, “Two Studies in Northern French Prosopography,” 7-9.

¹²⁶ *Cartulaire de Saint-Michel de l’Abbayette*, no. 1. The villages listed are Villa Arunton, Cantapis, Val Andrein, Lacerins, Montgulfon, Cardun, Lar celloso, Genter, which are situated in the boundaries of Avranches.

¹²⁷ Du Motey, *Origines*, 80.

¹²⁸ Here is again where the issue of a second Yves could exist. Although it is possible that a son, Yves, was born c.965, it is unlikely that he would have outlived his father and younger brother to die at c.1030 but not be the heir or that he died the same year of his father, c.1005. Either way, he did not inherit, so participating in the debate is futile.

medieval period. From c. 997, Yves's third son, Avesgout, was bishop of Le Mans and his eldest son, Yves, along with his wife Godhelde, founded Notre-Dame de Bellême.¹²⁹ Yves and Godhelde had no children, so when Yves died in 1005, the lordship passed to his younger brother, William. Yves and Godhelde were buried at St. Santin, where their crypt remains intact. (see Figures 2.13 and 2.14)



Figure 2.12. The Church of St. Santin de Bellême with burial crypt of Yves and Godhelde.
Photo taken by Crescida Jacobs.

¹²⁹ Prentout, *Études sur quelques points d'Histoire de Normandie*, 35.



Figure 2.13. Burial crypt of Yves and Godhelde.
Photo taken by Crescida Jacobs.

William of Bellême (c.966–c.1028) was the second of five children, and although the genealogy became less complicated as time passed, White managed to confuse even

some of the siblings and in-laws of William.¹³⁰ Some also confuse this William with his son and heir, William II. Bishop Avesgout of Le Mans was the brother of William I and Yves of Bellême; there were also two sisters, Godhelde and Hildeburge. Hildeburge married Seinfroy, Bishop of Le Mans, so late in life that it was impossible for him to impregnate her.¹³¹ However, the family connection remained after Avesgout's death, when his nephew, Gervaise, grandson of Yves I of Bellême, became the next Bishop of Le Mans.¹³² These ties to the church were important to ruling families because they helped cement their rule over the territory.

At this time in the Bellême family, the activities of Bellême women also became significant. Hildeburge's marriage to the bishop helped secure the family. The bishopric of Le Mans is poorly understood before the Bellême era.¹³³ Yves of Bellême's widow began to participate in gifting the churches of Bellême.¹³⁴ In addition, Yves's sisters were active in monastic life in Bellême through the legacy of children as well as various gifts and foundations. Hildeburge married Haimon of Château-du-Loir, and her son, Gervais, eventually became bishop of Le Mans. Eventually, Godehilde married, and her son, Albert (of Micy), succeeded his uncle as bishop of Le Mans before his appointment as

¹³⁰ See White, "First House," 74-75.

¹³¹ Jean Mabillion, *Vetera Analecta*. Vol 3 (Rome: National Library of Rome, 1682), 298, 'Ad cumulum damnationis suae accepit mulierem nomine Hildeburgam in senectute.' White makes this connection overly problematic on pages 74-75. Seinfroy was not the brother of Yves but the brother-in-law.

¹³² Keats-Rohan, "Two Studies in North French Prosopography," 22.

¹³³ Steven Fanning, *A Bishop and his World: Before the Gregorian Reform: Hubert of Angers, 1006-1047* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1988), 32.

¹³⁴ White, "First House," 75.

archbishop of Reims in 1057.¹³⁵ William's wife, Maud, may have held lands around Lonlay as part of her dowry as she assented to the founding of the abbey there when her husband was in old age.¹³⁶

William's activities began before he took control in 1005. In the year 1000, William traveled with the king of Francia and served as the marshal of the troops, much like his father had served in the mid-tenth century.¹³⁷ However, after the death of his brother Yves in 1005, William returned to Bellême to maintain control of the region, and he and his mother made important monastic grants there. They secured the financial footing for the chapel Yves founded within the Bellême castle grounds, the church of Boëcé, as well as two chapels in the town of Bellême.¹³⁸ In addition, William restored Magny-le-Désert, donated two silver candelabras, and sent his youngest son, Benoît, with the Abbot Gauzlin to take holy orders.¹³⁹ Within the next few years, William gave the church of St. Gauberge-de-la-Coudre to a monk called Bonneval for the foundation of a monastery there.¹⁴⁰ William gifted La Saute-Cochère to the canons of Saint-Barbe-en-Auge and made other gifts to Cerisy, Lessay, Savigny, Montebourge, St. Sauveur-le-Vicomte, St. Évroul, Tiron, St. Vincent du Mans, La Chaise-Dieu-du-Theil, as well as

¹³⁵ White, "First House," 76. From here, White goes on a bit of a tangent naming as many relatives as he can. None of these is important to the genealogy of the lordship, but they do demonstrate a common way for noblewomen to secure important marriages as a way to aid the power of the family in the region.

¹³⁶ H2150, 'Guillelmus Bellismensis, provinciæ principatum gerens... et Mathildis uxor ejus.' Latin of charter appears in Du Motey, *Origines*, 131, and *CDF*, 247.

¹³⁷ *Historia Francorum*, X: 347, 'Contigit Guillelmum Belesmensem, castra metendi causa, curtam superius nominatam Villae-Abbatis sibi deligere.' quoted in White, "First House," 76.

¹³⁸ *CMP*, no. 1, and White, "First House," 76.

¹³⁹ Du Motey, *Origines*, 122; citing H2150, 'Gemina candlebra argenteæ massæ ingentia monachorum summo direxit habenda.' Gifts were a typical way to enrich the monastery and were generally given in conjunction with admission of oblates.

¹⁴⁰ Du Motey, *Origines*, 122.

making donations to the Templars and Hospitallers.¹⁴¹ Even though Bellême lands appeared firmly situated by the works of the first lords and the monastic endowments of William I, he had to contend with regional hostilities thus demonstrating the danger of holding an ill-defined Norman border.

William was a veteran with military experience, which was necessary during the early eleventh century.¹⁴² William commenced erecting fortresses to secure Bellême; he also built abbeys- stone buildings which Cassandra Potts remind us, “transformed readily into fortresses in which to garrison soldiers.”¹⁴³ He built a new castle at Bellême and the Church of St. Martin as well as castles and abbeys along the border in Domfront and Alençon.¹⁴⁴ At some time in this period, William also built the Church of St. Leonard of

¹⁴¹ Kathleen Thompson, “William Talvas, count of Ponthieu, and the politics of the Anglo-Norman realm” in *England and Normandy in the Middle Ages*, ed. David Bates and Anne Curry (London: Hambledon, 1994): 173-174, 177-178 citing charters from *Recueil des actes des comtes de Ponthieu: 1026-1279*, ed. Clois Brunel (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1930), nos. 27, 32, 73. It may be interesting to note that the Benedictine abbey of Lessay was founded by a woman, Emma, and her husband Richard, lord of La Haye-du-Puits in either 1056 or 1064, per Bernard Beck, *Recherches sur les salles capitulaires Normandie et notamment dans les diocèses d’Avranches et Coutances* (Caen: Bulletin de la Société des Antiquaires de Normandie) 58(1965-1966): 18-19.

¹⁴² Du Motey, *Origines*, 122; citing MS H2150, ‘Quo (Yves) tamen de functo, Willelmuis, ejus filius, juvenilis anoni cupiditate inlectus, cunctas paternæ traditionis elemosinas sibi sua vindicavit potentia.’

¹⁴³ Cassandra Potts, *Monastic Revival and Regional Identity in Early Normandy* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1997), 105-106. Potts and David Bates both draw a connection between the construction of monastic buildings and the breakdown of royal control, especially on the southern frontier, after 1030, which is precisely when William begins his building campaign in the region. See Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 120-121.

¹⁴⁴ Both the French king and the Norman duke, Richard II, approved the construction of castles along the southern frontier. See Du Motey, *Origines*, 123, quoting MS H462, which I have not evaluated. See also *Gesta Guillelmi*, 23 n.5, which addressed the historiographical issues with dating events during this time on the contentious frontier. Further confusing the dating of events here are the use of sieges which took months, the ability for many sieges to occur simultaneously because of their protracted nature, and the dispute regarding dates in the primary sources. However, no one disputes that William built or inhabited the frontier castles at Domfront and Alençon.

Bellême, and Pope Leo made this church free from monetary control of the Bishop of Séez.¹⁴⁵ William founded abbeys at Saint-André-en-Gouffern and Perseigne.¹⁴⁶

William had to take up arms against Herbert, the Count of Maine, in 1020.¹⁴⁷ Eventually the Bellême lords prevailed, and peace was restored, but such outbursts highlight the harsh reality of medieval frontier life. In fact, construction of siege-castles along the frontier was a critical component of the ducal plan to secure the borders of Normandy. Life here was so chaotic that prominent Norman historians David Douglas and David Bates debate campaigns for Alençon and Domfront from 1048-1049 and 1051-1052.¹⁴⁸

Bates uses the Norman frontier to denote the most obvious shift in ducal authority: when the duke set out to delineate the Norman frontier beginning in 1020, with “a pronounced turning-point in the period between 1025 and 1050 when the duchy turned in on itself, and out of which an even firmer definition of the frontiers and more intensely ‘Norman’ attitudes emerged.”¹⁴⁹ According to Bates, one of Duke Robert’s first actions

¹⁴⁵ The issue of St. Leonard of Bellême (which is not known to exist or have ruins but was apparently built near the River Orne, which flows through Bellême), being a free church, is only known through the charter evidence that describes an incident between Earl Roger and the Bishop of Séez, who was taken to Rouen to plead before Duke William and Duchess Matilda c.1070. This charter is H 2156 in the Orne archives.

¹⁴⁶ Daniel Power, *The Norman Frontier in the Twelfth and Early Thirteenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 320 refers to Thompson, “William Talvas, count of Ponthieu, and the politics of the Anglo-Norman realm”, 173-174, 177-178. These historians are discussing charters from *Receuil des actes des comtes de Ponthieu*, nos. 27, 32, 73 but neither quote them.

¹⁴⁷ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 22-23. Chibnall dates this conflict to c.1020, II: 23, n 2.

¹⁴⁸ William held castles here before Duke William’s campaign, but the summary of the debate for the timing and the explanation of Duke William’s use of siege-castles along the frontier are found in *Gesta Guillelmi*. Edited by R.H.C. Davis and Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 23 n.5.

¹⁴⁹ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 58, 68-69. Bates seems to say that Duke William’s first objective was to assert his authority along the frontier, before he turned his attention to the conquest of England in 1066.

was to check the power of William of Bellême by first depriving him of the castle of Alençon and then allowing him to possess it once more after he demonstrated proper subjugation.¹⁵⁰

According to Du Motey, Duke Richard granted William the titular rank of *princeps*, which distinguished him from a simple *seigneur*.¹⁵¹ Such a title was extremely rare in Normandy, and it pointed to the rising importance of the family. It seemed that the family was bound for the long and positive trajectory into the annals of Norman history. Just as the Bellême family bolstered their control of the border between Normandy and Francia, Duke Richard III suddenly *décèdent...a mundane principautés culmine et régna, ut credimus, uranica scandente*¹⁵² (left the worldly pinnacle of princely rule and . . . ascended to the heavenly kingdom).

William and other *proborum uero*¹⁵³ (wicked men) rebelled against Duke Robert, accusing the duke of cowardice and *animositatem eius audens attemptare*¹⁵⁴ (dared to test the duke's courage). In an attempt to assert his authority along the Norman frontier, William fortified Alençon, which he held of the duke, and started a rebellion.¹⁵⁵ The duke

¹⁵⁰ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 68-69.

¹⁵¹ Du Motey, *Origines*, 123, quoting from H 462 manuscript from the Orne department: 'Willelmus Belissmensis pracinæ principadare gerens...Willemus princeps.....', which he translated into the following French: 'Le rang social de Guillaume est nettement caractérisé par la qualification honorifique de prince qui distinguait alors les principaux feudataires d'illustre origine, qu'ils fussent ducs comtes ou châtelains, des simples seigneurs.' (The social rank of Guillaume is clearly characterized by the honorary qualification prince who then distinguished the main illustres feudal origin, they were dukes or earls lords, simple lords)

¹⁵² *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 46-47.

¹⁵³ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 48-49.

¹⁵⁴ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 48-49.

¹⁵⁵ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 48-51.

sent men to Alençon to besiege the fortress, and they put down the rebellion and peace seemed to be restored in the region for a time.¹⁵⁶ This treachery against their lord may have been the origin for Orderic Vitalis's description of William (and his heirs) as cruel and ambitious.¹⁵⁷ The rebellion may have been an attempt to usurp ducal power in the region while William of Bellême was trying to build an independent lordship;¹⁵⁸ whatever the motivation, the rebellion disrupted life in the region.

After the initial siege of the Bellême at Alençon, William of Bellême surrendered *nudis uestigiis*¹⁵⁹ (on bare feet) and “carry[ing] his horse's saddle on his shoulders” in submission to the duke.¹⁶⁰ However, this surrender was a ruse, and the rebellion was soon boiling over once more. Furthermore, William enlisted the help of his four sons in his treachery. During this uprising, his son Warin, inexplicably decapitated Gonthier of Bellême, “a good and friendly soldier who had not suspected any harm but on the contrary had smiled at him and greeted him in a friendly fashion.”¹⁶¹ By the time the dust settled a year later, William and two of his sons, Warin and Fulk, were dead,¹⁶² and another son, Robert, was badly wounded.¹⁶³ Warin died not because of wounds sustained

¹⁵⁶ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 48-51; Wace, III: 2427-2500. The incident is also recorded in Bart, *Recueil*, 72.

¹⁵⁷ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 50-51, ‘Multum quippe crudelis et cupidus erat...’

¹⁵⁸ William of Malmesbury describes the rebellion as beginning over fealty owed by the Bellêmes for the fortress at Alençon; Marjorie Chibnall asserts this power struggle along the border was the result of Bellême creation of independence in the area, *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 48-49, 49 n.4.

¹⁵⁹ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 50-51.

¹⁶⁰ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 50-51, ‘donec eius clementiam expeteret equestrem sellam ad satisfaciendum ferens humeris.’

¹⁶¹ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 50-51.

¹⁶² *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 50-51. Fulk died in battle and William, already seriously ill, died shortly after. Robert was barely able to escape from the battlefield but nearly all his men were killed.

¹⁶³ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 50-51.

during the rebellion, but because of divine retribution; Warin was “possessed by a demon and choked to death.”¹⁶⁴

William I’s (of Bellême) badly wounded heir, Robert, was able to take control of his father’s lands after the revolt against the Duke collapsed. Robert’s health was restored as several years later. As “the heir to William of Bellême’s [his father] power and to his cruelty,”¹⁶⁵ he began harassing his neighbors and invading into Maine¹⁶⁶ and was taken prisoner in a castle at Ballon.¹⁶⁷ He spent two years imprisoned before William Giroie and his other vassals assembled an army and invaded Maine. They “provoked the count of Maine to join battle, fought doughtily, and put him to flight.”¹⁶⁸ In the aftermath, the men captured “an outstanding soldier” (*egregium militem*) named Walter Sor with two of his sons. The group hanged the men.¹⁶⁹ Nearby were three other sons of Walter Sor who became “greatly angered and broke violently into the prison, where they inflicted a miserable death on Robert of Bellême by shattering his head with axes.”¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁴ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* II: 50-51, ‘postquam Gunherium de Belismo militem bonum et amabilem, qui nil mali suspicabatur, sed potius ei ridens ut amico congratulabatur, sine causa capite crudeliter priuauerat.’

¹⁶⁵ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 56-57, ‘Rodbertus, Willelmi Belesmensis potestatis heres et crudelitatis.’

¹⁶⁶ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 56-57. “Beyond the Sarthe” could indicate Robert’s expedition breeched his neighbor’s territory. Ballon Castle, Sarthe, would have been located in northwestern Maine.

¹⁶⁷ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 56-57.

¹⁶⁸ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 56-57, ‘proceres aexercitum congregant et Cenomannis comitem ad purgnam prouocant, et uiriliter preliantes e bello effugant.’

¹⁶⁹ The *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* says “hanged him”, but then describes the surviving sons as hearing of the violent death of their father and brothers (*patris et fratrum mortem*).

¹⁷⁰ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 56-57, ‘uehementer irati carcerem uiolenter irrumpunt, et Rodbertum de Belesmo, securibus capite eius ibidem contrito, miserabiliter occidunt.’ Robert’s murder is also mentioned *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 108-109. According to the Elisabeth Van Houts, the editor of the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, Walter Sor and his sons were the vassal of Robert of Montgomery, who would marry into the Bellême family in 1050, see *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 114 n.1.

The House of Giroie

The Giroie clan had served as important and powerful vassals to the Bellême lords.¹⁷¹ However, for reasons the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* does not explicitly state, the relationship became acrimonious. This seems likely to reflect the dynamics of how power was built and displayed along the Norman frontier during this time.¹⁷² Whatever the hostility of the Bellême toward the Giroie, Orderic relates that it was one sided and the only member of the Giroie family who suspected any harm was a learned monk called Ralph the Ill-Tonsured, who warned his brother not to attend.¹⁷³ William went to the feast, was placed under arrest, and then was blinded and castrated¹⁷⁴ by order of his lord, William of Bellême. This instance of unprovoked violence created a blood feud between these two families that lasted until the exile and demise of William of Bellême. Three years after the mutilation, William Giroie entered the monastery at Bec.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 26-27, 'Sepe memoratus uir a ducibus Normannorum Ricardo et Rotberto diligebatur, pro fide quam dominis suis Rotberto Belesmensi, et Taluacio, et Goisfredo, aliisque uel eris uel amicis seruabat, plurima detrimenta et pericula patiebatur.' (This same man [William of Giroie] earned the affection of the Norman dukes Richard and Robert, and suffered many losses and perils for the loyalty that he always showed to his lords Robert of Bellême and Talvas and Geoffrey and other lords and friends. Also Giroie vassalage to Bellême is demonstrated in *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 28-29, 'Postquam autem Goisfredus de uinculis Taluacii euasit Geroiano baroni pro magna fide quam in reppererat, castrum sancti Serenici super Sartam ei erexit.' (Once Geoffrey was free from the clutches of Talvas he rewarded his faithful vassal, Giroie's son, by building a castle at St. Céneri-sur-Sarthe for him.)

¹⁷² David Bates provides a useful and detailed analysis of the politics and social situation along the Norman frontier in *Normandy Before 1066*. His arguments will be incorporated into this dissertation more fully in chapter 3.

¹⁷³ Ralph Giroie "Ill-Tonsured" had the gift of prophesy and warned his brother, but William ignored his brother the learned monk, *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 108-109.

¹⁷⁴ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 110-111 says that Giroie was mutilated by having his nose and ears cut off.

¹⁷⁵ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 110-111, 'Geroianus autem Willelmus post tres annos uenerabilem Herluinum abbatem adiit, in Beccensi cenobio...monachus factus est'

According to Orderic, the patriarch of the Giroie family was “son of Arnold the Fat of Courceraut, son of Abbo the Breton...a member of one of the best families in France and Brittany.”¹⁷⁶ Orderic also tells of his sister, Hildiard, who bore fourteen children: three sons and eleven daughters.¹⁷⁷ This man married Gisla, the daughter of Thurstan de Bastembourg, and the couple had eleven children who survived infancy.

Historians of the family have not reached consensus about the motives of the family’s expansion; their findings are worth recording here, as they show another example of the operation within and among powerful frontier families. According to David Bates, in the years of the tenth century,¹⁷⁸ the Giroie immigrated into Normandy with the approval of Duke Richard II,¹⁷⁹ and immediately threatened the interests of Count Gilbert of Brionne, a cousin of Duke Robert, near Orbec.¹⁸⁰ The Giroie acquired estates at Montreuil and Echauffour c.1020.¹⁸¹ However, Eleanor Searle says that Count Gilbert did not have conflict over Montreuil-l’Argillé until the death of the elder Giroie.¹⁸² Upon their father’s death, the Giroie siblings bonded together with “a strong company of kinsmen and dependents,”¹⁸³ successfully defended Montreuil against an aggressive Count Gilbert, and then counterattacked and took the town of Le Sap from

¹⁷⁶ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 22-23, ‘De Geroio Ernaldi Grossi de Corte Sedaldi Abonii Britonis...Hic ex magna nobilitate Francorum et Britonum processit.’

¹⁷⁷ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 22-23, ‘Hildiardi uero sorori eius tres filii et undecim filiae fuerunt....’

¹⁷⁸ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 242.

¹⁷⁹ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 72.

¹⁸⁰ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 101.

¹⁸¹ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 22-23.

¹⁸² Searle, *Predatory Kinship*, 179.

¹⁸³ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 24-25, ‘autem aggregate cognatorum et satellitum caterua’.

Count Gilbert, which was very close to the stronghold of Ralph, the son of Archbishop Robert.¹⁸⁴ Montreuil became the family stronghold, and many of the sons lived here for many years.¹⁸⁵

When Giroie died, he had two grown sons in addition to five young sons and four daughters.¹⁸⁶ His eldest son, Arnold, received his father's inheritance, while William received the lands his father had acquired; however, Arnold died c.1041, and William consolidated his territory with his brother's.¹⁸⁷ Four of the Giroie sons died in combat or training, and one entered the monastery at Marmoutiers.¹⁸⁸ The Giroie heir, William, married Hiltrude, the daughter of his neighbor, whose castle was located at l'Aigle.¹⁸⁹ William's sisters made marriage matches at locations surrounding Le Sap, including Pont-Échanfray, Merlerault, and Sablé; another sister, Hawise,¹⁹⁰ married into the family of Grandmesnil, another powerful family in the marcher region between Normandy and Maine.¹⁹¹ However, these alliances meant that the Giroie also created enemies. Among these was their former lord, the Bellême. Eleanor Searle ends her discussion of the family

¹⁸⁴ Searle, *Predatory Kingship*, 180. This conflict between Count Gilbert and the Giroie men is also recorded by Orderic in *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 24-25.

¹⁸⁵ Searle, *Predatory Kingship*, 181.

¹⁸⁶ Searle, *Predatory Kinship*, 179.

¹⁸⁷ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 118.

¹⁸⁸ Searle, *Predatory Kinship*, 181. According to Searle, one son died from broken ribs sustained while wrestling, another killed by a lance while playing, one died on his way home from a "boyish raid on the lands of the church of Lisieux, and one died in an ambush.

¹⁸⁹ Searle, *Predatory Kingship*, 181.

¹⁹⁰ When her husband was slain in the anarchy of the 1030's, Hawise was married to William, the son of Archbishop Robert. Her son, Robert, became the abbot of St. Évrout, and she donated a great psalter to St. Évrout that had once belonged to Queen Emma. See *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 2-3, 20-21, 42-43.

¹⁹¹ Searle, *Predatory Kinship*, 181-182.

by saying they were marked for ruin; by 1060, the Giroie had been completely displaced from Normandy and emigrated to Italy.¹⁹²

While the hostility of the Bellême family against their lords and neighbors likely colored Orderic Vitalis’s view of the family, their displays of power during this period would secure their reputation in the region. While Orderic is a hostile source whose words about the Bellême family must be used cautiously, his account shows the significance of the lords of Bellême and their deep involvement in land holding, politics, and war in the region. Both Orderic’s hostility toward the family and the ambition of the family would reach climax during the lordship of Mabel of Bellême. Instead of the deaths and injuries of many Bellême lords causing the shrinking of familial territory, by the time of William’s death c.1028, Bellême lands stretched well beyond the Norman duchy.¹⁹³

Robert had no legitimate heirs, so the lordship passed in 1035 to his brother Yves, the future Bishop of Séez.¹⁹⁴ This may be the same time that Sigfreid of Bellême was taken as a canon of Séez Cathedral. According to evidence from Notre-Dame de Bellême, “*post mortem autem Rotberti, filii Wililmi, Yves suus avunculus, succedens hereditati....*”¹⁹⁵ Yves seemed to be mindful of the importance of monastic endowments, which, Bates tells us, was becoming an increasingly popular way to display power in

¹⁹² Searle, *Predatory Kinship*, 182.

¹⁹³ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 69.

¹⁹⁴ White dates the start of Bishop Yves tenure at 1035, but David Spear, *The Personnel of the Norman Cathedrals during the Ducal Period, 911-1204* (London: University of London, 2006), 272 disagrees and thinks White’s dating is based on “tradition” and a “loose reading” of the foundation charter of St. Maritin of Bellême. Following Barret, Spears dates the beginning of Bishop Yves’s tenure to no earlier than 1050. Note the differentiation in the spellings; Séez is the diocese, while Séés is the spelling of the secular town. See Thomas Stapleton, *Magni rotuli scaccarii Normanniæ sub regibus Angliæ* (London: Sumptibus Soc. Antiq, 1840): xlii.

¹⁹⁵ *CMP*, 4. “After the death of Robert, brother of William, Yves his uncle succeeds him.”

Normandy, after the despoliation of church property which was rampant during the reign of Robert I.¹⁹⁶ In his few years as lord of Bellême, he contributed to several monastic houses, including Marmoutier, St. Vincent of Le Mans, and St.-Père-de-Chartres for the souls of his father and brothers.¹⁹⁷ He also reaffirmed his vassalage to the King of Francia. It is likely that he also confirmed his allegiance to the Norman duke, although this is not recorded. Of all the members of the house of Bellême, this Yves is the only person described in positive terms by Orderic Vitalis. Perhaps because he is a fellow churchman, Orderic calls him learned, shrewd, and eloquent, witty and never at a loss for a jest.¹⁹⁸ Orderic also appreciates that Yves was a loving bishop, “As a father loves his children, so he loved his clerks and monks; and he counted Abbot Thierry among his special friends. They often enjoyed each other’s company, for Sééz is only seven leagues away from St. Évroul.”¹⁹⁹ Later, as bishop, Yves attested another charter with his young nephew, Arnoul.²⁰⁰ Because this document is dated 1048, perhaps it represented the wishes of Bishop Yves that his nephew be the heir of William II, but that was not to be, as will become apparent. It may be that some of the Bellême lands were divided around the time that Yves was lord. Prominent scholars such as White and Chibnall have

¹⁹⁶ See Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 100, 115-116. Waves of church building began in earnest in the 1030’s, and increased in popularity through the 1070’s.

¹⁹⁷ *Cartulaire de l’abbaye de Saint-Père de Chartres*. (Paris: De l’imprimerie de Craplet, 1840): 115-156.

¹⁹⁸ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 46-47, ‘Hic erat litterarum peritus...sagax et facundus, facetus, multumque iocundus.’

¹⁹⁹ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 46-47, ‘Clericos et monachos ut pater filios amabat, et inter præcipuos amicos abbatem Teodericum uenerabiliter colebat. Sepe conueniebat ad priuata colloquia nam Sagiorum urbs septem solummodo leugis distat ab Vticensi abbatial.’

²⁰⁰ Fauroux, 115.

suggested this. Such a division would reflect the Norman practice of “partible inheritance”²⁰¹ and would represent the growing importance of the region and the danger of one person holding so large a territory that he or she represented a threat to the Duke. This theory is supported by subsequent heirs whose nomenclature situated them within a region of the Bellêmois, such as Warin de Domfront and Robert de Alençon. Although the Bellêmois and Alençon holdings were joined under William II between 1048 and 1052,²⁰² another Bellême female eventually became the heir of the Domfront lands.²⁰³

The lordship of Bellême passed to Yves’s younger brother, William II (c.1000–c.1070). This second William earned the nickname “Talvas,” which meant “shield” or “protection,” although historians differ as to the reason for the nickname. Orderic Vitalis associates William Talvas with his hardness and callousness; Prevost associates the name with William’s military service. Stapleton says it was because of the shape of his military shield, and Du Motey believes it was a metaphor for Bellême as the “shield of Normandy.”²⁰⁴ Even though the nickname bears little weight in this study of the lordship, it is most congruous with early descriptions of the frontier lordship as the shield or buffer between Normandy and the often-hostile lands to the south and west. These frontiers were ill defined in the eleventh century, and by the mid-twelfth century, when sources became more diversified,²⁰⁵ the power of the Bellême lords antagonized the Norman

²⁰¹ Thompson, “Family and Influence to the south of Normandy in the eleventh-century”, 219.

²⁰² Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 76, 79.

²⁰³ Adeliza de Domfront, first cousin of Mabel of Bellême, shared similar characteristics of her cousin. I discuss Adeliza in greater detail in Chapter 7.

²⁰⁴ Reasons stated succinctly in White, “First House,” 82, and Du Motey, *Origines*, 121.

²⁰⁵ Power, *The Norman Frontier in the Twelfth and Early Thirteenth Centuries*, 18. By the mid-twelfth-century, there were new genres of writings that did not exist in the eleventh-century.

dukes, rose in open rebellion, and consequently, was dismantled. The Bellême fortress was lost in 1113,²⁰⁶ and Normandy was lost to the King of Francia in 1203.²⁰⁷ This region was especially difficult to maintain for the lords of Bellême because of its geography and because it was a double frontier, with borders along both the southern and western frontiers.

Bellême lands existed through sheer force by the time that William Talvas, most infamous of eleventh-century lords, became the shield of Normandy. William of Bellême restored the bishopric at Sées and acquired the castle at Alençon in 1025, during the reign of Richard II.²⁰⁸ At Sées, he replaced all the canons and appointed Sigfreid of Bellême bishop (c.1017-c.1025).²⁰⁹ The changes along the border regions may have been a way for the Norman dukes to fortify their authority over the southern border region. Regardless of the political maneuvering, it was fortuitous for the lords of Bellême because the dukes also solidified their authority through the grant of the *pagus* of the Hiémois—land that became united to Bellême through the marriage of Mabel and Roger c.1050. Eventually, Mabel’s heir would hold the entirety of southern Normandy and northern Maine.

²⁰⁶ Thompson, *Power and Border Lordship in Medieval Francia*, 70. Bellême lands were partially subsumed into neighboring territories after Robert of Bellême revolted. The later years of Bellême control are discussed in Chapter 6, “The Legacy of Mabel of Bellême”.

²⁰⁷ Power, *The Norman Frontier in the Twelfth and Early Thirteenth Centuries*, 19-20.

²⁰⁸ *Gesta Guillelmi*, 42.

²⁰⁹ Bates, *Normandy before 1066*, 69; see also *La Seigneurie*, I: 151.

William Talvas married Hildeburge, and the couple had two children, Arnulf and Mabel.²¹⁰ William also had a son, Oliver, who may have been the son of his second wife.²¹¹ The writings of Orderic Vitalis helped make William infamous, but Wace describes how William Talvas cursed a young Conqueror as he lay in his cradle, saying, “A curse on you, a curse on you!, A curse on you! For through you and your lineage mine will be much debased and through you and your lineage my heirs will be greatly harmed.” Wace reported that Talvas would have physically harmed the infant William, and therefore William was cursed from his earliest days.²¹²

Geoffrey White asserts that William Talvas “was never lord of Bellême,” but this was not true.²¹³ After Robert and his cousin, Rotrou, came to open battle over the boundaries of their territories, Robert was “butchered like a pig with axes in the dungeon” (*securibus apud Balaum in carcere ut porcum mactauerant*) at Ballon castle c.1033,²¹⁴ William Talvas was serving as lord of Bellême when he attacked William Giroie at Montaigu castle c. 1044.²¹⁵ This episode illustrates the precarious position of lesser nobles and the jealous nature of families who must guard their lands, even against

²¹⁰ From this point forward, my genealogy corresponds to Chibnall’s Appendix I in *Ecclesiastical History* II, “The Descendants of the Lords of Bellême” but contains more details concerning Mabel and her descendants.

²¹¹ He may have also been illegitimate according to Judith Green, *The Aristocracy of Norman England*, 373; Kathleen Thompson, “Family and Influence,” 215; and White, “First House”, 85; however, historians offer no evidence for their statement regarding the bastardization of Oliver; regardless, Oliver, a monk at Bec, inherited nothing upon William’s death.

²¹² Wace *The History of the Norman People: Wace’s Roman de Rou*, Trans. By Glen S. Burgess (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2004), III: 2867-2922. Wace is cited by line numbers in this dissertation.

²¹³ White, “First House,” 83.

²¹⁴ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 396-399.

²¹⁵ *Ecclesiastical History* II: 26-29: ‘pro fide quam dominis suis Rotberto Belesmensi, et Talauacio...’

their own kinsmen. William Giroie was the vassal of both the lords of Bellême and Geoffrey de Mayenne and the counts of Maine. Orderic tells us that in c.1044, William of Bellême attacked a Maine castle called Montaigu, which was being guarded by his vassal, William Giroie.²¹⁶ William of Bellême proceeded to take his vassal's other lord, Geoffrey of Mayenne, prisoner, and he held him until William of Giroie agreed to destroy his other lord's castle.²¹⁷ William Giroie set the castle ablaze and also destroyed his own castle, as a sign of regret. The episode concludes with Geoffrey of Mayenne rewarding his vassal, William Giroie, with a castle at St. Céneri-sur-Sarthe, but this episode of jealousy and hostility was the beginning of the end for the Bellême-Giroie relationship. Wace writes of Talvas's notoriety and his ability to harbor resentment in the *Roman de Rou*: "This was William Talvas: if anyone was unfortunate enough to fall into his snares, he could not extricate himself with any joy unless he could slip away furtively. This one [Talvas] surpassed his whole family in evil and cruelty."²¹⁸ William exacted his revenge ten-fold upon his vassal at the most unexpected time.

William's first wife, Hildeburge, was overly pious; thus, according to Orderic Vitalis, William had her strangled by two of his assassins on her way to church.²¹⁹ His second wife was the daughter of Rodulf of Beaumont, and she may have been the mother of Oliver. During the celebration of his second wedding, a serious personal conflict arose

²¹⁶ *Ecclesiastical History* II: 28-29.

²¹⁷ *Ecclesiastical History* II: 28-29.

²¹⁸ Wace, III: 2501-2520. Note: Even if Du Motey were correct in the patrimony being divided after the murder of Robert, Bishop Yves and William would have each been lords of their respective territories.

²¹⁹ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 108-109.

between the Bellême lords and the patrons of St. Évroul. William Giroie had served as a vassal of William Talvas, but Giroie had a second lord because of the lands he held in Maine. Orderic believes that Talvas grew envious of Giroie's fidelity to his other master, which was the antecedent of the incident of the attack upon the person of Giroie.

The feud began when William Talvas remarried after he arranged the murder of his first wife, Mabel's mother, Hildeburge. William's second wife was the daughter of Rodulf, Vicomte of Beaumont.²²⁰ According to Orderic, the wedding, a splendid affair, was held at Alençon, and William invited the nobles from throughout southern Normandy to attend the wedding feast. Among the nobles who accepted the invitation was William Giroie, a family friend and close neighbor. Abruptly, in the middle of enjoying the feast, Mabel's father, William Talvas, ordered his men to seize and blind Giroie and cut off his nose and ears²²¹ while he went out on a hunt with members of his wedding party.²²² This feud was likely reflective of the ambitions of the house of Bellême to dominate the territory in the tenth and eleventh centuries. This action is a clear example of what historians now would classify as a blood feud "unrestrained and unavoidably bloody"²²³ as well as politically motivated, as choosing the location for the monastery at St. Évroul, the Giroie family was intentionally diluting the power of the Bellême and the bishopric of Séez.²²⁴ Further, this act of violence sets up revenge-style

²²⁰ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 109.

²²¹ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 110-111, 'heu pro dolor, oculis priuarunt, nariumque summitatibus et aurium abscisis deturparunt.'

²²² *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 14-15. Orderic tells that Giroie was blinded and castrated.

²²³ Roche, "The Way Vengeance Comes," 117.

²²⁴ Chibnall, Introduction to *Ecclesiastical History*, I: 6-7. Chibnall explains that the original site for the monastery had been Norrey, but upon later consideration of the area and persuasion from William Giroie, the Grandmesnil family decided upon the forests of Ouche, firmly in Bellême territory. When

vengeance against the family, vengeance, which will finally wane, with the execution of Mabel of Bellême. These events taint Orderic Vitalis's view of the Bellême lords against the Giroie, patrons of his monastic house.

Feuds with rival families were common as lords sought to increase their political and economic strength in the region and before their lord. Orderic Vitalis mentions several feuds between rival families in his chronicle,²²⁵ but none was as close to his heart as the feud between the Bellême and the Giroie, the great benefactors of his monastery, St. Évroul.

Orderic describes motivations for the choice of the location, he discusses the wilderness and humble piety of the monks here as well as the location in proximity to water and wood, *Ecclesiastical History* II: 14-17.

²²⁵ Most Norman feuds from the period are only documented by Orderic Vitalis. See Roche, "The Way Vengeance Comes," 115.

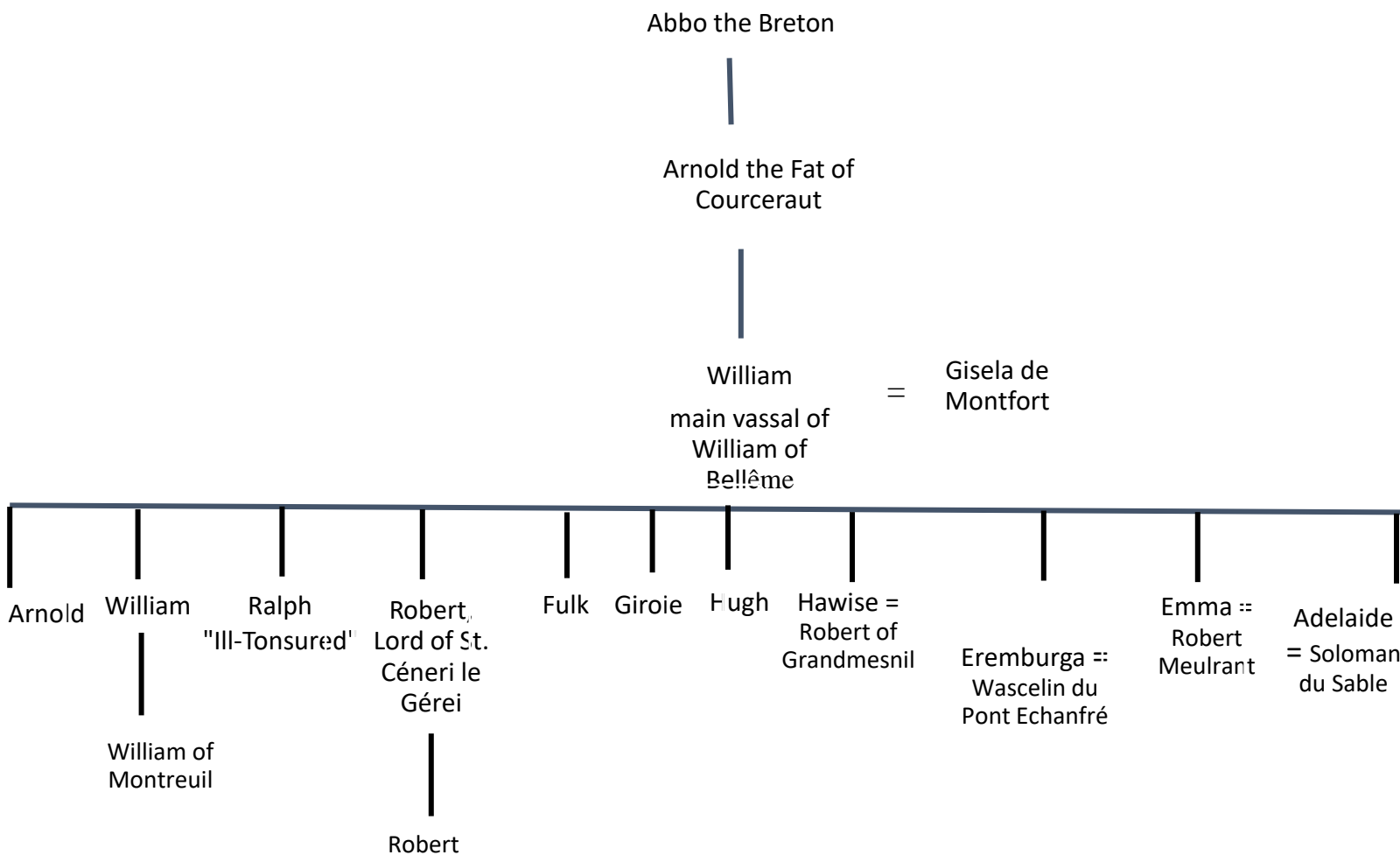


Figure 2.14 Giroie Family²²⁶

²²⁶ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 94-95, 108-111, 152-153; *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 30, 60-64, III: 26-28. For subsequent generations of the family, see Power, *The Norman Frontier in the Twelfth and Early Thirteenth Centuries*, 514-515.

Because of this unprovoked aggression, Giroie's relatives attacked Talvas lands "with sword and fire," but Talvas left²²⁷ his castle to preclude conflict. During his exile, Talvas spent time in the Hiémois, appointed his daughter Mabel as his heir,²²⁸ and offered his daughter's hand in marriage to a powerful man from this region named Roger of Montgomery.²²⁹ The outcome of these events are the topics of the remainder of this dissertation.

This chapter intended to accurately describe the origins of the dynastic family, visualize the growing size of the territory, and detail its connection to ducal and regnal power. Fulcuin and Rothais benefitted from the chaos of the Viking raids along the river lanes north of Paris during the tenth century. They built their holdings until Fulcuin held "many fiefs." Their son, Yves, proved himself useful to the Norman dukes by military skill and cunning. Through this relationship, Yves was likely granted the strategic lands along the Norman frontier. Yves began establishing ecclesiastical buildings, and likely arranged for two of his sons to take the cloth. William I and William II of Bellême built on this strong base of power established by their forefathers; they continued to erect castles and churches to cement their control in the region. Understanding the origin of the family, how it acquired lands, and how it gained influence in Normandy allows historians to better understand social, economic, and political environment of the eleventh century and contextualize the role of the fifth lord of Bellême, Mabel.

²²⁷ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 110-111, indicates that William was driven from his land by his son.

²²⁸ Mabel became the heir during the time of her father's exile, immediately preceding her marriage contract with Roger. See White, "First House," 67, 70.

²²⁹ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 119.

CHAPTER 3: THE LIFE OF MABEL OF BELLÊME

Mabel of Bellême continued her family’s legacy of regional power and control, and she was an important lord in a crucial region on the Norman border. Although this is not an encomium, understanding how she built, maintained, and grew her influence is central to understanding power and lordship in the Anglo-Norman world. Important questions to address regarding the life of Mabel include How did Mabel become lord of Bellême over the claims of her two living brothers? How did she build and maintain control throughout the region? Did being a woman affect her power in any way? How did she become the “wolf of Alençon” by the eighteenth century? The answer to these questions comes from her ancestors and the structures in place as she came of age to be married, a look at eleventh century Norman inheritance practices, Norman marriage customs, and the specifics of her building program.

Like most medieval women, Mabel of Bellême remains largely hidden from history. Here and there, a glimpse of Mabel appears, and from these historical threads, her story can be woven. It is important to keep in mind that Orderic Vitalis, the chronicler who relates almost everything that can be known about Mabel’s life, lived and worked in a neighboring monastery patronized by the Giroie family—rivals and enemies of the Bellême lords. However, other chronicle writers wrote about the lives of women; their writings should provide a sense of the historicity of Orderic Vitalis.

Another objective of this chapter is to explore the ways in which Mabel used her power as the lord of Bellême¹ from c.1050 until her death in 1082. One common method

¹ While there is no direct evidence calling Mabel “lord” of Bellême, she exercised power through the ways other lords of Bellême had done, she left lands to her son and heir, and Norman historians such as Bates, *Normandy Before 1066* refers to her “succession to Bellême” as though she was the lord. Many of

among the noble classes was to establish, construct, and enrich monastic houses. Financial ties to monastic houses were critical for maintaining regional power. Married women sometimes joined their husbands in foundations, as happened in numerous instances throughout Normandy such as the Ardenne Abbey,² Blanchelande Abbey,³ and Mondaye Abbey.⁴ Sometimes women founded houses on their own, as occurred in 1112 when Adeline, the sister of St. Vital, founded Blanche Abbey as a sister house to her brother's monastery at Savigny⁵ or when the Empress Matilda founded the abbey at Notre-Dame-du Vœu in 1145.⁶ Monastic foundations and patronage are an important component of Mabel's story and provide insight into how she understood her place in the world and how she wielded power throughout the region.⁷

The Life of Mabel of Bellême

Mabel was born in the fortified castle of Bellême on the Norman frontier c. 1030. Her father, William Talvas, was the fourth lord of Bellême.⁸ Young Mabel would have

the charters which bear her signature show her attesting to gifts with her husband, so it seems she was *at least* the co-ruler of the lands, and in the absence of her husband, sole ruler.

² Founded in 1138 by Asseline and Ayoul du Marché, per Beck, *Recherches sur les salles capitulaires Normandie*: 34-35. Ardenne Abbey is located in the Calvados region of Normandy.

³ Beck, *Recherches sur les salles capitulaires Normandie*, 30-53. Blanchelande Abbey is located in Neufmesnil in the Manche region of Normandy.

⁴ Beck, *Recherches sur les salles capitulaires Normandie*, 54. Mondaye Abbey is located in the Calvados region of Normandy.

⁵ Beck, *Recherches sur les salles capitulaires Normandie*, 30-31. Blanche Abbey is located in the Manche department of Normandy.

⁶ Beck, *Recherches sur les salles capitulaires Normandie*, 38. Notre-Dame-du Vœu is located in the Manche department of Normandy.

⁷ For an excellent discussion of the multiple considerations regarding the motivations of medieval lords, see Victoria Chandler, "Lordship, Prestige and Piety: Charitable Donations of the Anglo-Norman Aristocracy" (Ph.D. diss, University of Virginia, 1979), 90-124.

⁸ See genealogy as reconstructed in chapter 2.

learned a great deal from her parents, William and Hildeburge, or from the adults charged with her care.⁹ Her father was a capable manager. He oversaw castles and other types of fortifications.¹⁰ Elisabeth Van Houts asserts that medieval aristocratic women were the founts of historical knowledge, and they served their families by keeping information and passing valuable information to their children.¹¹ We can tell from primary sources that Mabel's mother was killed and her father remarried sometime between the years 1048 and 1062;¹² this means Mabel grew up under her mother's influence, which would have lasted from 1030 until at least 1048. From her noble mother Mabel may have learned of

⁹ It is possible that Mabel may have been partially educated. Although no material evidence yet exists to prove that Mabel was literate, there is circumstantial evidence: her son was well-educated, and she might have served as his teacher. There is evidence that some medieval noble women owned books. See Susan Groag Bell, "Medieval Women Book Owners: Arbiters of Lay Piety and Ambassadors of Culture," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 7.4 (1982): 742-768. Twelfth-century women, particularly aristocratic women, could be taught to read and write, as evidenced by the writings of Heloise with Abelard. Ninth century artwork exists of female literacy, see the frontispiece titled "Isidore of Seville presents his work to Florentina, his sister" from c.800; image available in the public domain at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8426784k>. Bernard Bachrach tells us that in the eleventh century Count Fulk le Réchin was educated by his grandmother, Countess Hildegarde, see Bernard S. Bachrach, *Fulk Nerra: the Neo-Roman Consul, 987-1040* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993): 19.

¹⁰ While strongholds and other types of buildings used for defense of a town might now be called "castles," charter evidence describes buildings with more specificity, for example, calling them "minor fortifications" and "major fortifications" and sometimes "strongholds." No matter what scholars imagine when they imagine these buildings, they were eleventh-century castles, which generally mean motte-and-bailey type earthen buildings. A research trip to Normandy for this project showed that for numerous ruins, only the earthen swells remain where the "castle" strongholds once stood.

¹¹ Elisabeth Van Houts, *Les femmes dans l'histoire du duché du Normandie* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 19-20. Van Houts includes evidence of women playing a role in the creation of medieval chronicles, such as the Duchess Gunnor playing a role in Dudo's work and the Empress Matilda in the writings of Robert of Torigni.

¹² *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 112 n.2 indicates that Mabel's brother, Arnulf, died c.1048 which was well before William's second wedding feast; according to the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 109 n.7, William was remarried before 1062 because he invited Giroie to the second wedding feast during the life of Ralph "Ill-Tonsured" Giroie, who died in 1062. There is also a charter in the *Cartulaire du Saint. Aubin d'Angers*, II: 421-423 that refers to Oliver, the son of William and his second wife, being alive. By the birth of her step-brother, Mabel is already married to Roger of Montgomery and has her own infant, Robert. See *Cartulaire du Saint. Aubin d'Angers*. 2 vols. Edited by Bertrande de Broussillon. (Angers: Lachèse, 1899). Mabel's brother, Arnulf, dying in 1048 before her wedding c.1050 would point to why Mabel inherited her father's lands and why her father's marriage contract with Roger of Montgomery was so valuable to the continuation of the family.

the start of the lordship in 945 and of the methods through which the family's holdings kept growing. It is possible that she would have heard stories of the important events that had transpired over the century. Hildeburge may have also served as a model noblewoman for her young daughter. Perhaps she would have carried Mabel to church and taught her to pray. Hildeburge was a very religious woman; so devout, in fact, that her husband killed her for it. Mabel was most likely a grown woman when her father had her mother strangled to death on her way to church,¹³ but such an act of violence must have had great impact upon Mabel, who would grow into a *domina* notorious for her violent tendencies and known for her generosity to the church. It seems probable that Mabel's emotional strength resulted from her mother's guidance, and she inherited her calculated use of force from her father. Mabel became a perfect synthesis of both, and she funneled her knowledge of the political acumen to her oldest son.

Bellême was positioned on the tenuous boundaries that separated Normandy from Maine on the south and Brittany on the west. Mabel was the sole heir to the vast Bellême lordship in the 1050s, overcoming the claim of one or two brothers¹⁴. Her marriage to Roger II, Vicomte of the Hiémois,¹⁵ occurred around the year 1050. She founded an

¹³ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 109, 'Sed quoniam mulier predicta bene morigerata erat, et Deum ferventer amabat, diris mariti factionibus non consentiebat, Quapropter ipse eam abominatas est uehementer. Denique quodam mane, dum ipsa ecclesiam adiret Deum deprecari, a duobus parasitis suis in uia fecit eam subito strangulari.' (But since the woman was well-mannered and fervently loved God, her husband loathed her vehemently. In fact, that morning, when she went to the church of God to pray, he sent two assassins to strangle her.)

¹⁴ One of Mabel's brothers had served as lord of Bellême before entering the monastery, while another had been killed; see above. One may have been a half-sibling, as discussed below.

¹⁵ The first charter that acknowledges Roger as "Vicomte" and Mabel as "Vicomtesse" comes from March 1051. The charter is from Yves, Bishop of Sées for a grant of the church of St. Ouen of Villiers (Sarthe) together with two villages on the River Sarthe to St. Aubin of Angers. Vicomte Roger and Vicomtesse Mabel sign this charter. It is included in the Bibliothèque Nationale MS17060 and a copy is provided in *Cartulaire de l'abbaye de Saint Aubin d'Angers*, II: 153-154.

abbey on her own and another with her husband. She also poisoned at least three people before she was murdered during a bath in her home in 1082.¹⁶

Mabel was born in the middle of Duke Robert I's reign (1027–1035). William of Jumièges writes that the Duke was embroiled in civil wars to cement and maintain his authority over Normandy. Ducal hostilities usually resulted in either displays of power or fealty from local lords. Bellême sided with Duke Robert in these wars and kept their lands. Several prominent historians have evaluated this fractious period, and their expertise is incorporated here. Figure 3.1 shows the dukes of Normandy from Rollo, the Viking who gained the land via treaty with Charles the Simple in 911, to Duke William, who conquered England in 1066. This figure is provided here to familiarize the reader with the chronology of Norman dukes.

¹⁶ Scholars have used Orderic's dating for Mabel's death in 1077. However, the *Liber Albus*, written in 1086 states that she died in 1082. Horace Round's notations in Earl Roger's charter at Troarn also gives the date of her assassination as 2 December 1082, see *CDF*, no. 465. This research follows Round and the *Liber Albus* to date Mabel's death to 1082.

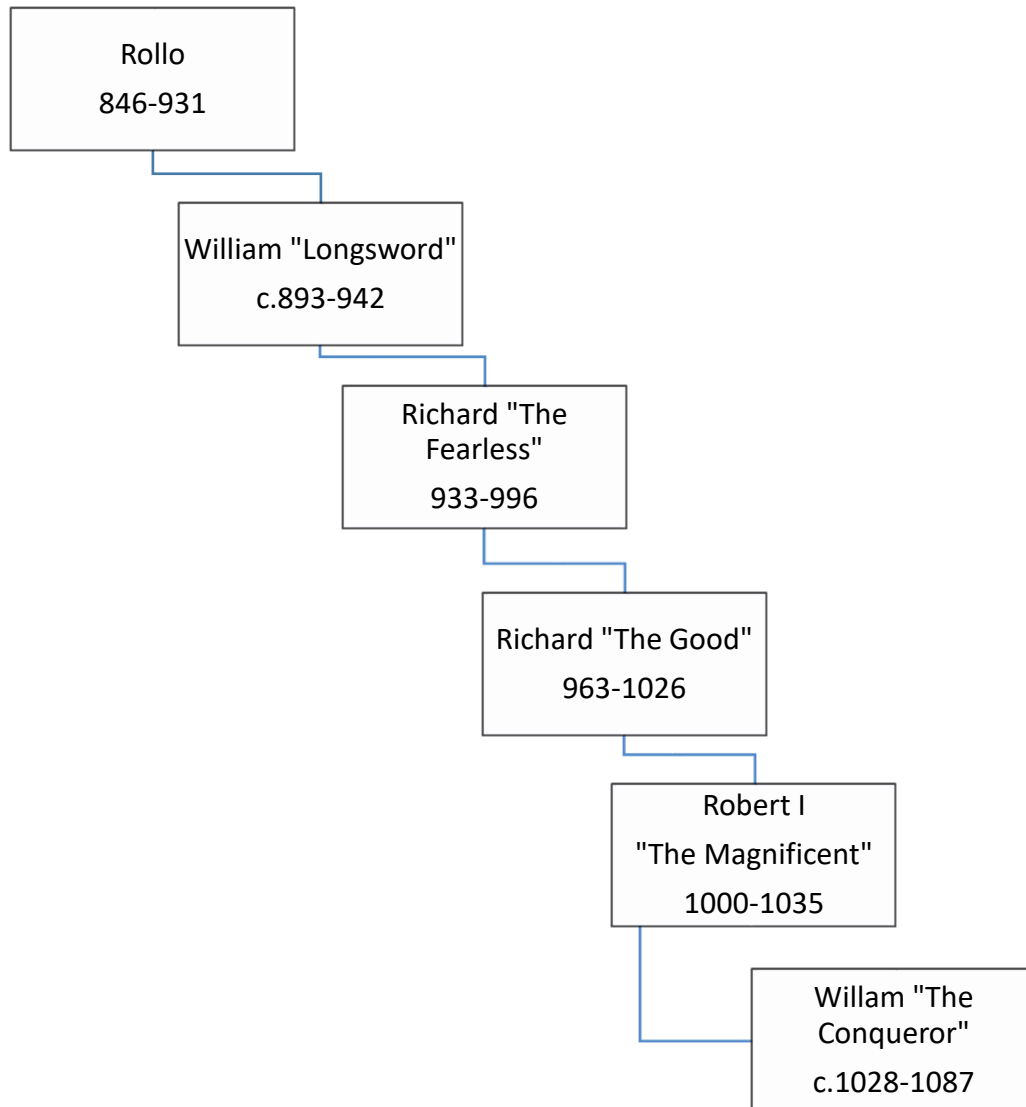


Figure 3.1. Dukes of Normandy.

David C. Douglas makes it clear that William Talvas, almost all of whose lands lay outside of the borders of Normandy, knew how to take advantage of his position during the instability brought on by the war between the brothers and ducal rivals, Richard III and Robert.¹⁷ During this politically unstable period, William especially exerted his authority over his neighbors in Maine.¹⁸ William's brother, Avesgout, was the Bishop of Le Mans. Bishop Avesgout became involved in ongoing battles with Herbert I, Count of Maine (1017–1035). At least once, in 1025, the Bishop had to flee from his castle at Duneau to the protection of his brother William in Bellême because of the aggressions of Count Herbert.¹⁹ During this period of exile, Bishop Avesgout excommunicated Count Herbert, but a temporary peace settled between them.²⁰ Eventually the lords of Bellême reached southward into northern Maine and built a minor fortress at Heloup, a major fortress at Memers, and a fortress and abbey at Neufchâtel-en-Saosnois. Figure 3.2 shows the abbey ruin at Neufchâtel-en-Saosnois. Figure 3.3 is a map showing the fortresses constructed by William and Mabel to hold the frontier. Note that many fortresses were located within the County of Maine, well beyond the fluctuating Norman frontier.

¹⁷ David C. Douglas, *William the Conqueror: The Norman Impact Upon England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), 32.

¹⁸ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 68-69.

¹⁹ Richard E. Barton, *Lordship in the County of Maine, c.890-1160* (Berkeley: Boydell Press, 2004), 47.

²⁰ Barton, *Lordship in the County of Maine*, 47.



Figure 3.2. Ruin at Neufchâtel-en-Saosnois.
Photo taken by Crescida Jacobs.

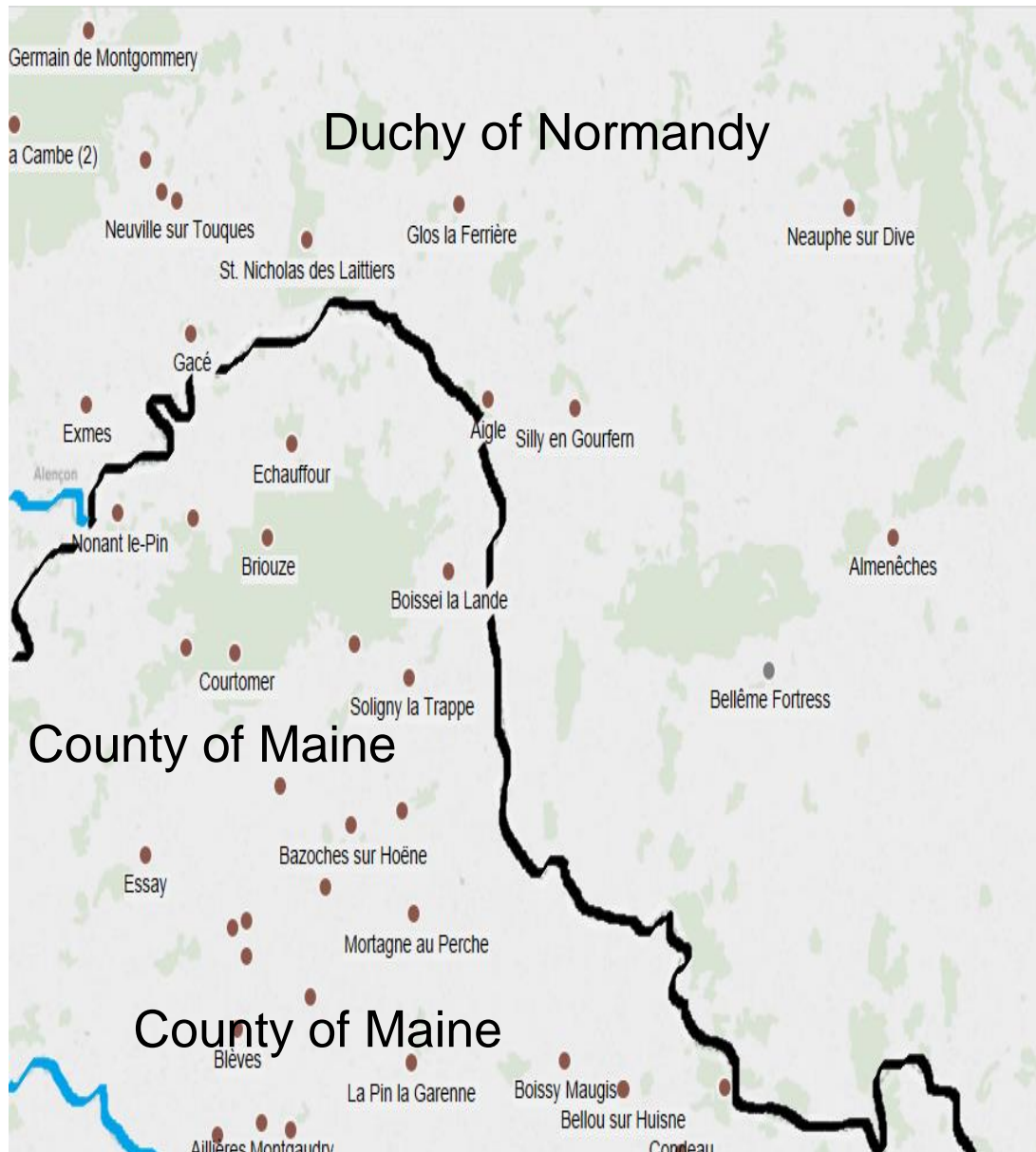


Figure 3.3. Fortresses along southern border with Maine, c.1050.
For a list of castles, see Appendix E.

At the time of Mabel's birth, the Bellême family was vital to the Norman duke's campaign to consolidate his power along the gaps along the frontier.²¹ By the death of Duke Robert and the accession in 1035 of his son and heir, eight-year old William II, lands belonging to the lords of Bellême plugged the holes along the penetrable southern and western Norman frontier. By the time of the battle of Val-ès-Dunes in 1047, when Duke William's power solidified, the Bellême family was on the verge of another great expansion, consolidated through matrimony. Mabel was the sole heir to the vast Bellême lordship in the 1050s, surviving her brothers²². Her marriage to Roger II, Vicomte of the Hiémois, occurred around the year 1050.

During Mabel's lifetime, she would have watched her family gain power and influence across the frontier. Her uncle, Yves de Bellême, became Bishop of Sées c.1035.²³ This was an important position for Yves and the entire Bellême clan, for the connection between church authority and state power was important. Yves's appointment helped consolidate the family's southernmost territory.

However, the bickering and fighting among the families in the region once again pitted family against family. The Sors family, which had previously decapitated Robert of Bellême in prison after the disruptions in the reign of Duke Robert, were also vassals of the Montgomery family in the nearby region of Hiémois. Following the death of Mabel's father, her uncle Yves held a significant portion of Bellême. During Yves's bishopric, according to the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, three sons of William Sor, "summoned a

²¹ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 72.

²² See chapter 3.

²³ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 78.

gang of criminals and without remorse ravaged the whole country of Sééz... invaded the church of St. Gervais, which they used for storage space for their booty...and so transformed the house of prayer into a robbers' den and a stable for horses."²⁴ In order to save the house of God from these "madmen" (*suis ita insanire*), Bishop Yves laid siege to the monastery in order to drive out the Sors who were using the sacred space as a "pit of thieves and a brothel for prostitutes."²⁵ Following the fire that burned down the church and many of the houses in the area, Bates reports that a papal council met in Reims in 1049 to censure Yves.²⁶

Mabel also witnessed the inter-family blood feud between her father and brother, a feud that would result in her brother driving her father into exile²⁷ and eventually to her becoming the heir to her family's territory in spite of having living male relatives.²⁸ If Eleanor Searle is correct in these living male relatives, it seems likely that Mabel's husband, a kinsman of the duke, ensured that Mabel would inherit so that the duke could maintain control of the frontier region of the Bellême. This theory provides political background to the anecdote from Chapter 2 that details William fleeing his castle, for William found an advantageous marriage match for his daughter among the nearby noble

²⁴ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 112-115.

²⁵ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 114-115.

²⁶ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 78.

²⁷ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 112-113.

²⁸ Eleanor Searle, "Women and the Legitimization of Succession at the Norman Conquest" *Proceedings of the Battle Conference on Anglo-Norman Studies* 3 (1980): 160, asserts that Mabel was the chosen heir over her brothers because the boys "were disloyal and unacceptable as heirs." This seems to be evidenced by the fact that none of her surviving male relatives objected to her inheritance of the entire patrimony. However, other possibilities exist, such as the possibility that one of her brothers was illegitimate and the other had already entered into the monastery. Bates believes that both of her brothers became monks, but Mabel also had nephews who could have succeeded her, see Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 81.

families, who in turn gained a great deal of territory in southern Normandy and who were kinsmen to the duke, who then might then more solidly control the region.

Throughout the 1050s as Mabel's father, William Talvas, was securing his domains against enemies within and outside of Normandy, prominent Norman lords joined his endeavors. Bellême men must have been within the fighting forces that defeated William Talvas's uncle Count William of Arques, his brother-in-law Count Enguerrand II of Ponthieu, and even his one-time friend and defender, Henry I of Francia.²⁹ However, toward the end of his life, William turned cowardly, according to the writers of the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, which relate the struggle between the once-friendly neighboring families of the Giroie and the Bellême that ended in the mutilation of Giroie at the wedding feast.³⁰ When members of the Giroie family sought revenge for the unprovoked crime inflicted upon their kinsman, William Talvas hid himself in his stronghold. For this act of cowardice, the Giroie family mocked William for the rest of his days.³¹

²⁹ See Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 99, 75-6.

³⁰ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 109-113.

³¹ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 110-113, 'Igitur, postquam Willelmus Talauatius Willilimum, qui etate et sensu in Geroiana progenie sullimior erat...tam truculenter dehonestaerat, Rodbertus et Rodulfus... cum fratribus et cognatis uiriliter insurgent, et damnosam fratris sui iniuriam unificare moliti sunt. Omnem itaque terram Talauacii predis et incendiis deuastabant, et usque ad portas munitioinum eius, nullo resistente, armati ueniebant, ipsumque ut exirer et comminus certaret audacter prouocabant. At ille quia timidus et in militia nullarum uirium erat, cum lacescentibus inimicis in campo confligere non audebat. Sic a Geroicis sepe deludebantur.' (After William Talvas had so cruelly and jealously dishonored William, who was the patriarch of the Giroie family, his kin...bravely took up arms in order to avenge the damnable crime inflicted upon their brother. By plunder and fire they devastated all the lands of Talvas, and without meeting any resistance, came in arms to the gates of his stronghold and boldly challenged him to appear in person and to fight man to man. But because Talvas was afraid and not at all a brave fighter, he did not have the courage to fight openly with his enemies for all their insults. And thus he was often mocked by the Giroie family.)

This ignominious episode ended when Mabel's brother Arnulf threw their father, William Talvas, out of the family stronghold³² and forced him to live the remaining days of his miserable life in exile. The period of exile turned out to be fortuitous for Mabel. While her father was wandering around from neighbor to neighbor, he happened upon the lands belonging to Roger of Montgomery.³³ It seems that a marriage was negotiated between William's only daughter, Mabel, and Roger.³⁴ The writers of the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* tell of William Talvas living the remainder of his days in the household of his future son-in-law.³⁵

Mabel's brother Arnulf, like his father, had a mean streak. The writers of the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* continue the story of the culminating events in his life: Arnulf was wicked and gluttonous. One day he was out with his men, and he robbed a nun of her pig. The nun begged and pleaded for the pig, which she had raised from its earliest days, but Arnulf's cruelty and appetite did not ebb. He ordered his cook to kill the pig and dress it for his dinner, and then he devoured the pig for his meal. That same night, Arnulf was strangled while he slept. The *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* presents the theory of his death was fratricide—that his brother Oliver strangled him, but they “absolutely refuse to believe it.”³⁶ The brother, Oliver, was a man with an “honorable military career” (*longo post tempore in militia honorifice*) who entered the entered the

³² *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 112-113.

³³ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 119.

³⁴ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 119, ‘Quod Willelmus Talauatis frater Iuonis episcopi filiam suam Mabilian Rogerio de Monte Gumerii cum terra sua dedit.’

³⁵ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 119.

³⁶ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 112-113, ‘Nos uero de tali uiro tantum nefas non solum non astruimus, uerum etiam credere penitus recusamus.’

Abbey of Bec after fighting in the wars,³⁷ died at an old age, and was blessed by God.³⁸ At the death of Mabel's brother, secular and sacred powers merge, just as in previous generations. The next book of the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* begins with the death of Arnulf when William's brother and Mabel's uncle, Yves, takes control of the castle of Bellême. Yves was the Bishop of Séez. The Bishop Yves, who was "sharp-minded, handsome, friendly, and very good humoured,"³⁹ held the castle and repaired the tattered relationship with the nearby Giroie family before his death.

Orderic breaks his timeline abruptly to "tell a true story of Mabel."⁴⁰ While others describe Mabel as "a small woman, a gossip inclined to do harm, shrewd and witty, as well as very cruel and audacious,"⁴¹ Orderic writes, "This woman so hated the founders of the monastery (the Giroie family) that she devised nefarious ways of injuring the monks."⁴² However, "since her husband Roger of Montgomery loved and protected the monks⁴³ she dared not do them any open harm, but frequently descended upon the monastery with a great retinue of knights, demanding hospitality: in this way she brought the monks, who were struggling to wring a living from the barren soil, to the verge of

³⁷ Chibnall, Appendix to *The Ecclesiastical History*, II: 362-365; and *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 112-113.

³⁸ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 113.

³⁹ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 112-113, 'Sagax enim eidem erat ac decorus, et affabilis multumque iocosus, ac serene pacis cupidus.'

⁴⁰ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 54-55, 'Quid tunc temporis contigerit ... ueraciter explicabo licet præpostero ordine.'

⁴¹ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 119, 'Prefata uero mulier erat corpore parua multumque loquax, ad malum satis prompta, et sagax atque faceta, nimiumque crudelis et audax.'

⁴² *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 54-55, 'propter odium quod erga fundatores illius cœnobii ferebat, plures molestias nequiter excogitatas eidem loco inherebat.'

⁴³ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 54-55. Later in III: 134-135. Earl Roger "showed himself hostile to the monks in many ways", which Orderic blames on Mabel's "instigation."

ruin.”⁴⁴ Although Orderic may be exaggerating the toll of Mabel’s visits upon St. Évroul, it seems likely that hosting and feeding visiting nobles and their entourages, as custom dictated, would have cost a great sum. Eventually, Mabel’s methods of exhausting the monastery resulted in a confrontation. Orderic writes,

Once when she was staying there with a hundred knights Abbot Thierry asked her why she must come with such worldly pomp to a poor monastery and warned her to restrain her vanity; whereat she flew into a rage and replied, “Next time I will bring even more knights with me.” The abbot replied, “Believe me, unless you depart from this wickedness, you will suffer it.” And indeed, she did. For the very next night she fell sick and suffered great agony. Hastily she commanded her attendants to take her away. As she was fleeing in terror from the lands of St. Évroul she passed by the house of a certain townsman called Roger Sowsnose and compelled his infant child to suck the nipple which was causing her most pain. The child sucked and forthwith died; but the woman recovered and returned home.⁴⁵

Although such a story seems wildly fictitious, it must be considered in the social and cultural context in which it was written, as detailed in chapter 5. Historians have hypothesized what may have occurred here. G.H. White suggests Abbot Thierry put something in Mabel’s food that caused a reaction,⁴⁶ but this seems contrary to both his nature and his affection for Mabel. Du Motey suggests that the episode was a fatal

⁴⁴ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 54-55, ‘Vnde quia Rogerius de Monte Gomerici uir eius monachos amabat et honorabat, nec ipsa eis aperta malacia nocere audebat crebrius cum multitudine militum quasi hospitandi gratia ad monasterium diuertebat, sicque monachos qui paupertate in sterili rure affligebantur grauabat.’

⁴⁵ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 54-55, ‘Quondam cum ibidem cum centum militibus hospicaretur, et a domno Teoderico abbate redargueretur, cur cum tanta ambitione ad pauperes cœnobitas uenisset, eamque admoneret ut ad hac stulticia se coherceret illa inflammata respondit, ‘Maiorem numerum militum adducam de cætero quam adduxi.’ Ad hæc abbas ait, ‘Crede michi nisi ad hac improbitate resipueris.’ Quod noles patieris. ‘Quod et ita contigit. Nam in subsequenti nocte passio illam inuasit et fortiter uexare coepit. At illa mox inde sese iussit efferri. Quæ dum fugere de terra sancti Ebrulfi territa festinaret, et ante domum cuiusdam burgensis nomine Rogerii Suisnarii transiret inde quandam infantulam lactantem assume præcepit, orique eius mamillam suam in qua maxima pars infirmitatis collecta erat ad suggendum tradidit. Infans itaque suxit, et paulo post mortua est mulier uero conualescens ad propria reuersa est.’

⁴⁶ White, “First House,” 87, n.1.

coincidence. According to Du Motey's calculations,⁴⁷ Mabel was nursing a one-year-old baby at the time of this argument with Abbot Thierry in 1057, but she did not bring the child with her.⁴⁸ The pain and inflammation is attributed neither to Thierry's curse or Mabel's vile nature but was because of engorgement of her milk glands. The death of the Sowsnose child was merely a coincidence, according to Du Motey.

Chibnall, while calling attention to White's and Du Motey's theories, notes that this angry episode "must have become so distorted and improved by wishful thinking that the element of truth in it remains a matter of pure speculation."⁴⁹ Further, monks who had lived in fear of her and had spent many years embellishing stories of her cruelty and power wrote the story of Mabel poisoning the Sowsnose child years after Mabel's death. It is interesting to consider that historians interpret the story differently through the years. G.H. White suggests that Abbot Thierry doctored her supper in order to cause Mabel to flee from the monastery in the night,⁵⁰ and Du Motey sought to restore Mabel's character by making her a victim of the men around her.⁵¹ Marjorie Chibnall believes "that the element of truth in it remains a matter of pure speculation."⁵² This dissertation situates

⁴⁷ Du Motey, *Origines*, 223, n.7. Du Motey subtracts Mabel's age from the year that she died to determine her age and the "precise date" of this trip. There are several problems with his theory: Orderic does not give an exact year, the year of Mabel's death is speculated through charter evidence, the years of her children's births are not precise, and there is no indication that she nursed her children and if so, why she would have left a nursing babe for an extended trip. Although his theory acquits Mabel of wrongdoing, it is merely speculation.

⁴⁸ Du Motey, *Origines*, 223.

⁴⁹ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 54, n.1.

⁵⁰ White, "First House," 87. This is the least likely scenario, because Mabel loved Abbot Thierry, and he loved her. In addition, the poisoning of food would not generally be a part of an abbot's character or within his scope of knowledge.

⁵¹ Du Motey, *Origines*, 223.

⁵² *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 54, n.1.

this story within the peculiar intersection of twelfth-century political and religious culture and scientific intellect.

A Peculiar Century

To place Mabel in the context in which she lived, some of the changes taking place in the eleventh century should be traced. These fluctuations include political upheaval, social changes, economic changes, inheritance customs, and ecclesiastical reforms.⁵³ Fortunately, several well-regarded Norman historians have addressed these issues, and their findings are integrated here in order to provide context for the life of Mabel of Bellême.

Numerous overlapping vicissitudes were occurring in Normandy in the early eleventh century, including the changing of political power structures. Tenth century Normandy witnessed two major shifts: the end of Scandinavian contacts and the devolution of Capetian power into smaller, localized power.⁵⁴ These alterations meant that the eleventh century was a time of significant political paradigm shifts. Most advantageous for the lords of Bellême was the breakdown of central authority into local and regional power. Duke Robert I died in 1035, and his heir, William, was only eight years old. Duke Robert had failed to propitiate the turmoil rising across the duchy, so that his son inherited a state in disarray.⁵⁵ As frontier regions were highly chaotic, lords along Norman frontiers were able to expand into neighboring regions with few managed

⁵³ Ecclesiastical reforms are discussed at length in chapter 5.

⁵⁴ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 46-47.

⁵⁵ Several monographs document the reign of Duke Robert, but Bates provides an excellent summation of the state of the duchy in 1035, see *Normandy Before 1066*, passim, but see especially 72-76.

checks on their growth. In his discussion about the fragmentation of power at this time, David Bates singles out some of the most aggressive border lords: the counts of Blois-Chartres and the counts of Anjou in the north, and the counts of Maine and the lords of Bellême in the south.⁵⁶ Fortunately for the Bellême family, power was maintained by the families that held the castles in the region- and the family had been prolific at building and taking castles since for several generations. Bates discusses how the *pagus* was replaced by the *castellanry*, especially in the border regions and how royal rights devolved into family *consuetines* (customs).⁵⁷ Bates declares, “the castellanry became the highest level of political power; the dominant group in society was a military élite, unchecked by any superior notions of public peace or by any judicial authority greater than that which could be maintained by force.”⁵⁸ The Bellême demonstrate this theory, especially with the rise of William Talvas, Mabel’s father, and during the activities of her rebellious sons.

The need to patrol and maintain a private and somewhat independent region also necessitated social changes. The most obvious was the creation of a military class to maintain control of castles, which then expanded the interdependence of nobles and their neighbors. Bates calls this a “new feudalism,”⁵⁹ as nobles brought families into their sphere of influence as their relied-on knights and guards to protect their expanding territories from neighbors, who were likewise looking to expand. This clash of power was

⁵⁶ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 47-48.

⁵⁷ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 50.

⁵⁸ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 50. Bates is using familiar ideas first brought forth by esteemed historian George Duby in several works about Norman society.

⁵⁹ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 51.

most severe along the borders of Normandy, where power had fragmented from the ducal authority and regional lords looked to defend and counterattack to maintain or build their territories. Numerous clashes between the Bellême and their neighbors and relatives, all looking to expand their influence in the same region, are included within this dissertation as evidence of “new feudalism” in action. Along the frontier region, ducal control was further denigrated by the expansion of regional lords, such as the Bellême, into territories outside of Normandy.⁶⁰ Whether this was done intentionally to eliminate the overlordship of the duke or to exert its own power into another county (such as Maine), cannot be known with certainty; however, the fragmentation of ducal power which results from inter-territorial expansion is the same no matter the intention.⁶¹ Other social changes that resulted from regional control included the judicial authority of noble families, and their ability to tax and collect tolls within their territory.⁶² As a result of these variations, the Bellême lords created a “near-independent lineage”⁶³ by 1100, which would be checked by ducal authority.⁶⁴ This conflict would bring the Bellême to heel during the tenure of Mabel’s son, Robert.

⁶⁰ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 58-59, 62-64. Bates also discusses that cross-border estate building was not always ruinous to ducal authority, but his examples are the result of marriages between nobles, which would have necessitated the consent of the duke and are not usually cases of Norman aggression, as depicted by the Bellême into Maine.

⁶¹ The intent of the Bellême lords can only be surmised. Regardless of their motivation for expanding into neighboring counties, once Duke William has the money and the men to fight back against his vassals, he will wage war with men such as Robert of Bellême.

⁶² Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 50-53.

⁶³ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 53-54.

⁶⁴ Duke William gaining control of the frontier coincides with two key events in Bellême: first, the approval of the marriage between his kinsman, Roger of Montgomery and Mabel in 1050, and second, with his seizure of the lands of Mabel’s son and heir, Robert of Bellême in the early years of the twelfth century. For these reasons, the Bellême lordship provides an excellent case study of the peculiarities of the Norman frontier.

The economy of Normandy was polyvalent throughout the eleventh century. Normandy. Bates notes three periods of social and economic change during the 1000s that include relative stability to 1026, disorder through the minority of Duke William, and stability after 1047.⁶⁵ Normandy benefited from a high population density, relative to the rest of Western Europe.⁶⁶ Norman lords retained their feudal institutions, described by Bates as “associated with the spread of well-formed institutions of lordship and vassalage within a dominant military élite,”⁶⁷ of which Mabel is a clear example. The Duchy also controlled a highly developed money economy,⁶⁸ which enabled the powerful nobles to accumulate wealth in a variety of varied and ingenious ways. For example, Roger of Montgomery diverted Roman roads through his lands to generate tolls for himself.⁶⁹ Watermills and toll roads became an efficient and profitable method for aristocrats to create reliable income from their lands.⁷⁰ The Orne River, which flows through the heart of Bellême lands from near Sées northward into the Channel, might have served as an important river lane for travelers. The castle at Bures, where Mabel would be killed, was situated at the confluence of two rivers⁷¹ in order to generate tolls. A port was built here for increased profit.⁷² In addition, Normandy benefited as a reliable station to liquidate

⁶⁵ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 94.

⁶⁶ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 98.

⁶⁷ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 95.

⁶⁸ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 96.

⁶⁹ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 96; also Pascale Louvet, *Troarn et sa région: des origines à la fin du Moyen Âge* (Charles Corlet: Condé-sur-Noireau, 2004), 53.

⁷⁰ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 102.

⁷¹ The river Dives and the river Muance.

⁷² Louvet, *Troarn et sa région*, 53.

Viking booty.⁷³ If she ever had access to portable wealth such as coins, this might have allowed Mabel to procure poisons for which she became associated. A period of increasing economic gains also enabled her to participate in church construction and other building programs throughout her adult life. Castle construction boomed from c.1030 to 1066 across Normandy.⁷⁴ Overall eleventh-century Normandy enjoyed a period of economic prosperity that enabled it to become one of the wealthiest regions of Western Europe,⁷⁵ and Mabel of Bellême likely participated in all aspects of these vagaries. Her power was visible in the construction of castles and churches in the region.

Inheritance patterns in pre-Conquest Normandy were not strictly enforced, but the nobility generally followed some discernable patterns. Although primogeniture⁷⁶ had likely become the inheritance custom of England, parage customs prevailed in Normandy. Parage customs allowed the eldest son to inherit the patrimony while the younger children received shares and performed homage to the eldest brother.⁷⁷ Immediately predating the Conquest of England, noble female children's inheritance patterns were also evolving in Normandy. These changes seemed to follow patterns of their own: Noblewomen inherited lands from their natal family in the form of dower, and husbands swore to obviate their widows' destitution; women might also inherit the family

⁷³ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 98.

⁷⁴ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 114-115.

⁷⁵ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 97.

⁷⁶ Primogeniture dictates that the oldest male heir inherits the patrimony and the remainder of the inheritance (usually moveable goods and animals) is divided among the remaining heirs.

⁷⁷ Marjorie Chibnall, *The Debate on the Norman Conquest* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 102. Chibnall specifically uses sons as inheritors in the parage system. I have substituted "younger children" for her use of "younger son" because of the evidence of so many variations on parage.

patrimony if “male heirs failed.”⁷⁸ Upon the failure of the male heir, further inheritance options existed—for example, a single daughter could inherit the entire patrimony, or all daughters shared the wealth in some manner.⁷⁹ Interestingly, if the male heir failed and an older daughter was an heir, she might hold the inheritance and divide some parts among her younger sisters, who would then perform homage to her, as younger brothers might do for their heir.⁸⁰ It seems then that in Normandy, this “flexible family custom”⁸¹ among great families was less dependent upon the gender of the heirs than it was upon making the best decision for the family in the long term.⁸² Historians debate how soon after the Conquest shifts in inheritance customs occurred,⁸³ as “Norman customs were not written down until the end of the twelfth century...” and inheritance customs not recorded in writing until thirteenth century,⁸⁴ but Mabel provides evidence that the evolution began before the Conquest and was more flexible than even Chibnall suggests.

Even though Georges Duby argues for inheritance through the custom of primogeniture,⁸⁵ this inheritance pattern did not emerge in Francia until the High Middle

⁷⁸ Chibnall, *The Debate on the Norman Conquest*, 103. Here “fail” could mean a variety of things: death, mental defect, illegitimacy, and absence among the possibilities.

⁷⁹ Chibnall, *The Debate on the Norman Conquest*, 103.

⁸⁰ Chibnall, *The Debate on the Norman Conquest*, 103.

⁸¹ Chibnall, *The Debate on the Norman Conquest*, 103.

⁸² Searle, *Predatory Kinship*, 170. Here I agree with Eleanor Searle, who calls this “customary practice” and describes it as “fluid and often inconsistent” because the inheritance in Bellême lands supports this flexibility with inheritance customs.

⁸³ J.C. Holt, “Politics and Property in Early Medieval England,” *Past and Present* 57 (1972): 3-52; Green, *The Aristocracy of Norman England*, 335-337. Holt says the changes occurred within a generation, and Judith Green says the changes occurred by the twelfth century. See Chibnall, *Debate on the Norman Conquest*, 98-99, 103, n.34.

⁸⁴ Chibnall, *Debate on the Norman Conquest*, 97-98.

⁸⁵ See Georges Duby, *The Chivalrous Society*, trans. Cynthia Postan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977, passim, but see especially 134-148. Duby’s notion of primogeniture fits into his (and other’s) conception of the organization of medieval society. However, while Duby remains an

Ages,⁸⁶ as recent scholarship suggests, including this study of Mabel of Bellême. Primogeniture was certainly not the case in Bellême—Mabel had at least one brother who lost his position to Mabel when their father made a marriage contract for her with a wealthy neighbor.⁸⁷ Mabel’s brother, Oliver, was a monk at Bec, while another brother, Arnulf⁸⁸ died by strangulation. Instead of illustrating primogeniture, Bellême inheritance seems to follow *parage*, or the family customs, which divides family land among inheritors. Marjorie Chibnall and J.C. Holt have written particularly about Norman inheritance customs and the way in which they evolved before Conquest and gradually became Anglo-Norman law.⁸⁹

Women in Eleventh-Century Chronicles

Even though women were not usually the focus of monastic writing, Norman writers mentioned women within the realm and corresponded with female acquaintances. Although a non-Norman, Peter Abelard (1079-1142) extolled the dignity afforded to

esteemed scholar, more recent scholarship points to a multiplicity of inheritance patterns, especially in the former Carolingian parts of Europe. See Theodore Evergates, “Nobles and Knights in Twelfth-century Francia,” in Thomas N. Bisson, *Cultures of Power: Lordship, Status, and Process in Twelfth-century Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 17-28; and Constance Bouchard, “Family Structure and Family Consciousness among the French Aristocracy in the Ninth through the Eleventh Centuries” *Francia* 14 (1986): 639-658.

⁸⁶ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 118-119.

⁸⁷ White, “First House,” 85. See also Thompson, “The Pre-Conquest Aristocracy in Normandy: The Example of the Montgomeries.”

⁸⁸ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 112-113. Orderic used *germanus*, which mostly like means “half brother” to indicate that Mabel and Arnulf were half siblings.

⁸⁹ Chibnall, *Debate on the Norman Conquest*, 97, 101-102; J.C. Holt, “Feudal society and the family in early medieval England: The Heiress and the Alien”, *TRHS*, 5th series (1985): 1-28.

women by Christ and discusses women's penchant for prophecy.⁹⁰ Although no record of Orderic's correspondence exists, Orderic Vitalis peoples his history with nearly a thousand women.⁹¹ Orderic especially appreciated women who dedicated their lives to the service of God, such as Isabel of Tosney and Adela of Blois.⁹²

Other Sources to Consider: Chronicles, Churches, and Charters

A sense of familiarity that cannot be gained by reading letters between monks and women might be gleaned through other types of primary sources in eleventh-century Normandy. Even though William of Poitiers was interested in the affairs in Maine and Poitou, which means he should have been familiar with the Bellême family, he does not mention any of the Bellême lords in the *Gesta Guillelmi*. As the likely chaplain of the Conqueror at the Conquest of England,⁹³ William of Poitiers should have been quite familiar with Roger of Montgomery, husband of Mabel of Bellême. However, the editor of *The Deeds of Duke William* asserts that Roger did not accompany his friend in 1066, but "remained in Normandy to assist Queen Matilda."⁹⁴ When Roger traveled across the Channel to see his friend and kinsman, he received Chichester, Arundel, and Shropshire.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Alcuin Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 20.

⁹¹ Amy O'Neal, "Pragmatism, Patronage, Piety, and Participation: Women in the Anglo-Norman Chronicles," (unpub. PhD dissertation: University of Houston, 2008), 4.

⁹² Chibnall, *The World of Orderic Vitalis*, 41-43. Details provided by Orderic are discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

⁹³ Marjorie Chibnall, introduction to the *Gesta Guillelmi*, xvii.

⁹⁴ Marjorie Chibnall, introduction to the *Gesta Guillelmi*, xxxvii.

⁹⁵ Chibnall, introduction to the *Gesta Guillelmi*, xxxvii; also in Orderic Vitalis's account of the relationship between Earl Roger and Duke William, *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 210, 'Rex in illa

The earliest source for the Bellême family is the writing of William, monk of Jumièges, first writer of the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*. William of Jumièges wrote in the late 1050s, so his life was contemporary with Mabel. In Book Seven, William of Jumièges describes encountering the Bellême lords: “William, named Talvas regained his father’s lands [and] . . . followed in the footsteps of his perfidious ancestors. He was married to Hildeburge, daughter of Arnulf, a nobleman; she bore him Arnulf and Mabel, later to be the mother of most cruel offspring”⁹⁶ Several chapters later in the same book, William of Jumièges continues the story: “In the meantime the miserable and despicable William Talvas went to see Roger of Montgomery to whom he offered his daughter Mabel as wife with all the honour granted to him. . . . In the years that followed she gave birth to five sons and four daughters.”⁹⁷

As William of Jumièges demonstrates, monastic writers were most concerned with the male lords of Bellême. Mabel’s role is limited to being a daughter and a mother. Interestingly, William of Jumièges highlights the cruel nature of the lords of Bellême both before and after Mabel, but Mabel may have served as a conduit for the legacy of cruelty and the innovation of sinister ideas. Mabel, as a woman, may well have been the keeper of history within her family, a role that women typically played in families.

transfretatione Rogerium de Monte-Gomerici quem tutorem Normanniæ dum ad bellum transmarinum proficisceretur cum sua coniuge dimiserat secum minavit eique primo Cicestram et Arundellum ac post aliquot tempus Scrobesburiensem comitatum donavit.’

⁹⁶ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 109, ‘Willelmi filii Geroii omnem patris sui fundum adeptus est. Hic uero a parentum suorum perfidia nequaquam sua retorsit uestigia, Hildeburgam quippe, filiam Arnulfi cuiusdam noblissimi uiri, in coniugio habuit, ex qua Arnulfum et Mabiliam, crudelissime sobolis postea matrem, genuit.’

⁹⁷ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 119, ‘Interea Willelmus Talauacius... ad extremum Rogerium de Monte Gumeri expetiit, eique filiam suam nomine Mabiliam sponte optulit omnem, quem ipse pro newuitia segniciaque...que succedenti tempore quinque filios et quatuor filias peperit....’.

Further, as a woman, there was no clear precedent for Mabel's inheritance. Although, as previously discussed, upper Normandy loosely followed primogeniture inheritance patterns, lower Norman inheritance patterns were, like the border, ill defined.⁹⁸ Judith Green described Mabel's inheritance as being "one of the most important disputed successions of the mid-eleventh-century;"⁹⁹ while this is an exaggeration, Mabel's inheritance demonstrate the fluidity of inheritance patterns in the region at this time.

It is interesting to read that the writers of the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* focus on the cruelty of Mabel's father (*de crudelitate Willelmi Talauatii*) and her brother, but her role was limited in this work to her marriage alliance,¹⁰⁰ which appears quite advantageous for the Montgomery family. The amalgamation of power from this marriage, which occurred c.1050, is discussed in detail in the next chapter; however, from the perspective of Mabel, she was neither a passive actor in the marriage scheme nor without gains for herself and her descendants.

The obscure eleventh-century ecclesiastical writer Durandus of Troarn¹⁰¹ (c.1012–c.1089), the first abbot of Saint Martin of Troarn, was interested in the life and

⁹⁸ Holt, "Politics and Property in Early Medieval England," 10.

⁹⁹ Green, *Aristocracy of Norman England*, 336. Green gives no evidence for this assertion. Further, she claims on page 336 that Mabel was given priority over her two brothers. Later, on pages 372-373, she only discusses Mabel and her brother, Oliver whose birth was "perhaps...not legitimate or his claim was passed over." Green is including Mabel's inheritance to demonstrate the lack of firm inheritance patterns.

¹⁰⁰ This is an interesting observation because, although Orderic Vitalis wrote portions of the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, this work does not mention Mabel's exploits except to discuss the marriage to Roger. Additionally, the writers of the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* are more concerned with the cruelty of the Bellême men; Orderic mentions the cruelty of Mabel's other family members as well, especially focuses on her sons.

¹⁰¹ The first abbot of St. Martin of Troarn came from the important house of Fécamp; see Sally N. Vaughn, *Anselm of Bec and Robert of Meulan: The Innocence of the Dove and the Wisdom of the Serpent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 29.

premature death of the Countess Mabel, the founder of the abbey he served. Durandus was the abbot when Mabel was murdered as well as when Anselm witnessed the foundation charter at Troarn¹⁰² that was also witnessed by the king, the queen, and “almost all the great men of Normandy, lay and ecclesiastic.”¹⁰³ The Norman foundation of the church is still visible from the exterior, as seen in Figure 3.4, below. Durandus wrote a couple of religious texts that are printed in the *Patrologia Latina*,¹⁰⁴ and Orderic Vitalis profusely praises Durandus as a learned abbot¹⁰⁵ and composer of sacred music.¹⁰⁶ He also wrote a moving epitaph for the Countess Mabel, chief benefactor of the abbey he served:

Here lies the great Countess Mabel who is ranked first among elite women, as shone in the world by her merit. In a fiery spirit of vigilance, and in the action of her execution, she joined in a persuasive eloquence, and prudence accompanied his designs. She was of small stature but was great in virtue. She loved luxurious and elegant clothing, but she was nevertheless the shield of her country and of Normandy and she was known to be loved or feared by its neighbors.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² *CDF*, no. 465. Round dates the charter to between 1079- 1082, but the charter states that Earl Roger seeks “redemption of the soul ...of his wife Mabel, lately deceased”, and then notes that her assassination occurred 2 Dec. 1082.

¹⁰³ Sally N. Vaughn, *The Abbey of Bec and the Anglo-Norman State 1034-1136* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1981), 37. Such a prestigious group came together for great occasions, David Bates, “Les chartes de confirmation et les pancartes normandes du règne de Guillaume le Conquérant” in *Pancartes monastiques des XIe et XIIIe siècles* (Turnout: Prepols, 1998): 95-109. Such an assemblage demonstrates the power of the family.

¹⁰⁴ Durandus of Troarn, “Liber de Corpore et Sanguine Domini,” *Patrologia Latina* CXLIX, 1375.

¹⁰⁵ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 22-23.

¹⁰⁶ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 296-299. Orderic described Durandus and two other abbots (Gerbert of St. Wandrille and Ainard of Dive) as “compared to three stars shining in the firmament of heaven, so brightly did these three abbots glow in the temple of the Lord. They were talented men, distinguished by piety and true religion, and they devoted themselves unceasingly to the praise and worship of God in the liturgy. They stood out among the most skilled masters of the art of musical composition...”

¹⁰⁷ This is my translation of Duval’s French. Excerpted from Duval, *La louve d’Alençon: Mabilie de Bellême dans le roman et dans l’histoire*, 12, ‘Cy git la grande comtesse Mabilie qui, place au premier rang parmi les femmes illistres, brilla dans le monde entier par son mérite. A un génie ardent à la vigilance, à l’activité dans l’exécution, elle joignait une éloquence persuasive, et la prudence accompagnait ses desseins. Petite de taille, elle fut grande par ses vertus. Elle aimait le luxe et l’èlégance dans ses vêtements,



mais elle n'en fut pas moins le bouclier de son pays et le boulevard des marches de Normandie, et elle sut se faire aimer ou redouter de ses voisins.'

Figure 3.4. Church of St. Martin, Sééz.
Photo taken by Crescida Jacobs.

Figures 3.5 and 3.6 show the seals of manuscripts H927 and H938. These charters come from the eleventh-century court of Earl Roger,¹⁰⁸ but the seals are substantially different. They are both included here for comparison, but because this study is a preliminary assessment of the documents, little can be known. Seals were not typical in Normandy until the twelfth century,¹⁰⁹ so the inclusion of such a novel validation is likely important and conveys wealth, importance, and prestige. It is likely that one seal is from Normandy and the other from England or that one is from during Mabel's life and the other from after. The latter scenario could be evidence that one of the seals is Bellême and the other a Montgomery, but without further investigation into the origins of the charters, neither scenario can be known with any measure of certainty. Susan Johns provides evidence of 142 twelfth-century noblewomen who used their own seals,¹¹⁰ and Brigitte Bedos Rezak notes that, while Normandy was the most concentrated evidence of women using seals, the use of a seal remained a male prerogative until Bertrada de

¹⁰⁸ In charters, Earl Roger refers to himself as "earl." Although there is no written evidence as to his promotion to the title of earl, Thompson asserts that he became an earl in 1074; see Kathleen Thompson, "The Cross-Channel Estates of the Montgomery-Bellême Family c.1050-1112," (Masters dissertation: University of Wales, 1983), 238; J.F.A. Mason asserts that he became an earl upon receiving Shropshire in England c.1071; see Mason, "Roger de Montgomery and His Sons": 4.

¹⁰⁹ Roche, "Reading Orderic with Charters in Mind," in *Orderic Vitalis: Life, Works and Interpretations*, 151.

¹¹⁰ Johns, *Noblewomen, Aristocracy and Power*, 58, 59, 69, Appendix 1. Johns describes how Countess Ermentrude of Chester used her own seal during her widowhood as early as 1106, Adeliza the wife of Gilbert fitz Richard used her own seal c.1136-1138, and Countess Hawise of Gloucester and Countess Petronella of Leicester used seals for their charters drafted in widowhood in the last decades of the twelfth century.

Montfort in 1115,¹¹¹ and we cannot know whether Mabel had or used a seal of her own. They are included here for visual evidence of Mabel's existence and power, and they indicate the need for future inquiry in the Orne archives.



Figure 3.5. A seal of manuscript H927. This is a charter of Roger of Montgomery from the Orne archives.
Photo taken by Crescida Jacobs.

¹¹¹ Brigitte Bedos Rezak, "Women, Seals, and Power in Medieval France, 1150-1350" in *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, 63.

*



Figure 3.6. Manuscript seal from H938, a charter of Roger of Montgomery from the Orne archives.
Photo taken by Crescida Jacobs.

Figure 3.7 shows a copy of Mabel’s signature—an autograph cross as a sign of her confirmation—from a donation charter from Roger and Mabel on which they “signal

their assent . . . for the redemption of their souls”¹¹² a grant of various measures of wood and silver along with the profits from the Bellême forest, mills, and vineyards to the abbey of St. Martin.¹¹³ The date of the charter is c.1060. As further evidence of Mabel’s powerful position, it is worth noting that her signature is third, after Bishop Yves¹¹⁴ and Roger, out of nine charter signatories.¹¹⁵ Medieval charters were signed according to the importance of the charter witnesses.

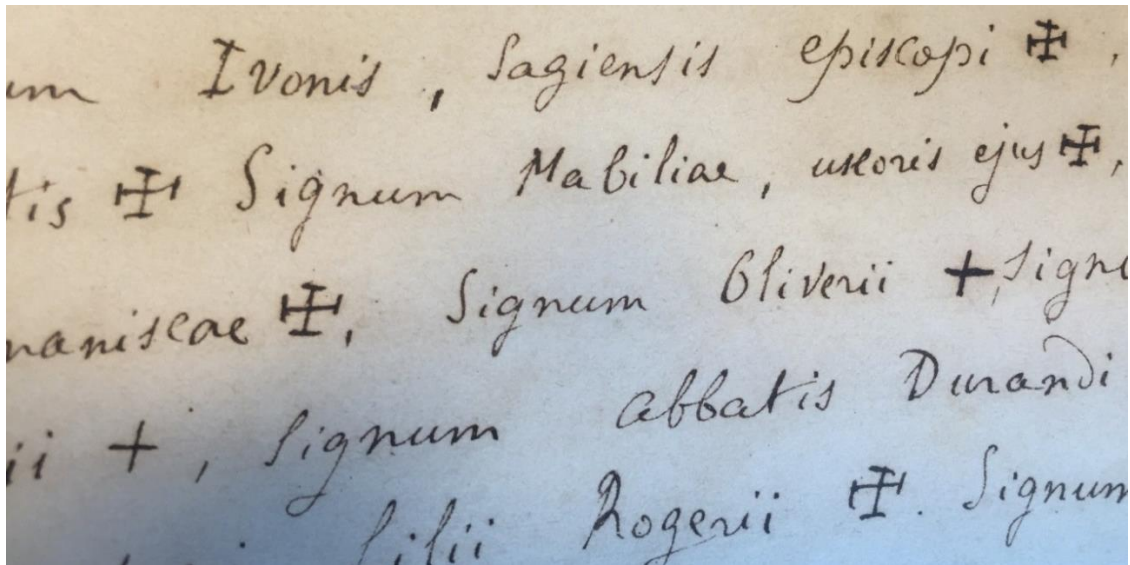


Figure 3.7. The “signature” of Mabel of Bellême from a donation charter to the Abbey of St. Martin.
Photo taken by Crescida Jacobs.

¹¹² ‘pro redemptione annuerunt suarum annuerunt’

¹¹³ This document was found among the documents of the *Liber Albus* in the Archives of the Orne Department.

¹¹⁴ Yves became bishop of Séz in c.1035, and although he was censured by papal counsel at Rheims in 1049, this signature contradicts Bates’s assertion that Yves was “completely absent from the charters of the Norman duke after the 1040’s” and had become the ally and vassal of Geoffrey Martel by this time, see Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 78-79.

¹¹⁵ I regret that I did not include a photo of the entire witness list during my trip to the archives, and I endeavor to spend more time in the archives performing more in-depth research on Bellême-Montgomery charters.

Establishing Power: Mabel's Foundation of St. Martin of Séez

Mabel founded the Church of St. Martin at Séez before or upon her marriage to Roger, and the noble couple endowed the abbey with enough income that it would remain self-sufficient.¹¹⁶ Mabel endowed a library, which exists today,¹¹⁷ and then enriched it with several landholdings and tithes, including lands from around Séez and the tithes of the parish; lands in Masnil-Gaut¹¹⁸ as well as other places¹¹⁹; the church of Aunou-sur-Orne; a mill at L'Etang de la Roche; land in Hadachaville;¹²⁰ four parts of the profits from the mills at Alençon and St. Paul-sur-Sarthe; a tithes of the toll of Séez and a tithes of the wood of Ecouvres; the church of Labeaurera in Montgomery along with a mill and one ploughland; land in Granley (Séez); half of the church of St. Ouen at Villiers;¹²¹ a mill in Ecouvres; and two fairs and a mill at Labeaurera.¹²² This charter also reaffirms Mabel's hereditary holdings, including lands, rents, and churches that once belonged to her father and uncle and other known bequests.

¹¹⁶ *RRA* (Bates), no. 271. This charter indicates Roger endowed the abbey with the following: Troarn itself, the mill and church of Janville, land the priest held in Janville and Lirose, the churches of Sannerville and Goulet (Ecouché) along with the tithes, the tithes of the toll and mill plus the churches and lands of the priest at Trun, the church at Crocy, lands at St. Germain and St. Hilaire, the church and other property of St. Sylvain, and property in Bures-sur-dives, Bassenville, and St. Sanson. Charter evidence suggests that Roger (here "count" Roger) provided for the restoration of the abbey in 1050, the year of his marriage to Mabel of Bellême. However, the language of the charter suggests that this discrepancy could be attributable to the required approval of Duke William, who was a relative of Roger. Mabel's signature is not recorded on the foundation charter of St. Martin, her most enduring legacy in the region.

¹¹⁷ *Livre rouge of Séez* (MS 18953), 37, 222.

¹¹⁸ In Orne Département near La Chapelle-près-Sées.

¹¹⁹ The charter lists Martellum Ceresiasos and Vedogium, place names that no longer exist.

¹²⁰ Likely the Château d'Aché near Valframbert.

¹²¹ In Sarthe near Roullée. This church had previously been granted to St. Aubin of Angers by Bishop Ivo according to a charter signed by Roger and Mabel in 1051. Charter MS 10060, no. 69 translated by David Bates for Kathleen Thompson, "The Cross-Channel Estates of the Montgomery- Bellême Family," 230.

¹²² *RRA* (Bates), no. 271.

St. Martin of Séez became Mabel's most enduring foundation. Shortly after she founded this monastery, Mabel and Roger invited Abbot Thierry of St. Évroul to bring a few monks and to supervise the construction.¹²³ Thierry was a respected scholar with a reputation for saintliness who had recently been embroiled in a feud with his fellow monks because his devotion to the spiritual life caused him to be neglectful of the material concerns of his brethren.¹²⁴ Mabel and Roger gave the Church at St. Martin to Abbott Thierry. Thierry died some years later, not long after the death of Mabel, on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Mabel's brother, Oliver, would become a monk there c.1087 to 1093 before residing at Bec.¹²⁵ Figure 3.8 shows the ruin of this monastery.

¹²³ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 48-49.

¹²⁴ *Ecclesiastical History*, I: 14.

¹²⁵ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 112-113.



Figure 3.8. Ruin of St. Martin at Séz
A leper hospital was added in 1209.
Photo taken by Crescida Jacobs.

Building Power: Mabel's Monastic Endowments and Fortifications

Roger I had established a house of twelve canons at Troarn c.1022.¹²⁶ These canons became corrupt and were “wholly given over to gluttony, carnal lusts, and worldly profit”,¹²⁷ so in celebration of his marriage alliance and to cement the couple's power in the area, Roger II built an abbey there and sent monks “vowed to regular discipline” (*monachos regularibus imbutos disciplinis*) to inhabit the place.¹²⁸ A church dedicated to St. Martin was built there in 1059.¹²⁹ A few years later, in 1069, because Roger “was about to cross the sea with the king”, he confirmed the income for St. Martin at Troarn.¹³⁰ Mabel then refounded the Abbey of St. Mary in Lonlay, in the diocese of Le Mans, which had originally been built by her father, William, and mother, Hildeburge, c.1020.¹³¹ Mabel financed the function of her churches and abbeys, as evidenced by her tithes of taxes and property, including the mills at La Roches, the town's tax, the mill at Calvonis, the mill of Letardi, six parts of the revenue of the mills of the town of Letardi, the church of St. Peter, and other unidentifiable places to St. Nicholas of Rocha.¹³² One charter records separate donations of English holdings by Roger and Mabel to shore up

¹²⁶ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 20-25. Roger I had established the twelve canons, attached to Fécamp, in 1022. See Sauvage. *L'abbaye de Saint-Martin de Troarn* and Alfred de Caix, “Chambrière de l'Abbaye de Troarn” In *Mémoires de la société des antiquaires de Normandie* 2 (1856): 311-312.

¹²⁷ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 20-21, ‘Expulsis autem clericis quia gulæ et libidini aliisque carnis uoluptatibus deseruerant et sæcularibus emolumentis...’

¹²⁸ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 22-23.

¹²⁹ Fauroux, no. 144.

¹³⁰ *CDF*, no. 463.

¹³¹ Du Motey, *Origines*, 131. Round provides the same date, but incorrectly names Mabel's grandfather, 247.

¹³² Charter dated c.1060 in Thompson, “The Cross-Channel Estates of the Montgomery-Bellême Family,” 234.

the finances of St. Martin.¹³³ A charter issued by Mabel and Roger in 1061¹³⁴ and two others in the last years of Mabel's life granted more land and revenue to St. Martin of Séez.¹³⁵

Her ancestors had already founded the abbey church of Notre Dame in the same area. These foundations, miles from the center of the family's nexus, were undoubtedly meant to reinforce the family's power in the vicinity. This follows the pattern of Yves I, first lord of Bellême (Mabel's great-great paternal grandfather), who established two important places: the priory of la Dorée (commonly known as l'Abbayette of Mont-Saint-Michel) in 997 and the church of Notre Dame de Bellême c.1005.¹³⁶ Figure 3.9 shows the Abbey Church of Notre Dame, Lonlay, which her parents built in 1022, but was later refounded by Mabel. It has had additions and restorations over the centuries and is still in use to this day; however, one can see the original, simple design from the exterior from this vantage point.

¹³³ This charter dated c.1074-1077 specified that Roger gave some of his lands, but Mabel donated two churches (Arrington and Shingay) in Cambridgeshire along with the tithes of Orwell to St. Martin. The charter was transcribed by David Bates for the MA thesis of Kathleen Thompson. The Latin text is provided in Thompson, "The Cross-Channel Estates of the Montgomery-Bellême Family," 241.

¹³⁴ David Bates transcribed this charter for the MA thesis of Kathleen Thompson. The Latin text is provided in Thompson, "The Cross-Channel Estates of the Montgommery- Bellême Family," 235.

¹³⁵ The last charters that Mabel's assented; date to within three years of her murder. David Bates has transcribed the charters for the MA thesis of Kathleen Thompson. The Latin text is provided in Thompson, "The Cross-Channel Estates of the Montgomery-Bellême Family," 238-240.

¹³⁶ MS H.2150, cited in Du Motey, *Origines*, 76, 112.



Figure 3.9. The Abbey Church of Notre Dame, Lonlay.
This impressive and functioning church also has extensive grounds to visit where docents show how the monks pressed grapes to make wine and grind grain.
Photo taken by Crescida Jacobs.

In addition to her own monastic foundations, Mabel exercised power of the lord by confirming gifts made by other prominent inhabitants to local houses¹³⁷ within her realm. Sometimes Mabel oversaw gifts made to churches alongside the presiding bishop, as was the case in a confirmation made by Gunherius of Luertio of the local church in Luertio, lands, and a fishpond to St. Vincent of Le Mans¹³⁸ as well as gifts to other houses by other inhabitants of the territory.¹³⁹ As the *domina* of Bellême,¹⁴⁰ Mabel also witnessed the sale of land by her subordinates, as demonstrated in charter H 7843 in which Huard sold land at Sannerville.¹⁴¹ The map in Figure 3.10 shows the scope of Mabel's monastic endowments over the course of her lifetime.

Other family houses held during Mabel's life that she may have endowed with gifts¹⁴² include Dancé, a church in Bellême, St. Martin of Vieux Bellême, a church of St. Pierre in Séez, and a nunnery in Almenêches.¹⁴³ The Bellême were recorded as patrons of

¹³⁷ Thompson includes a charter dated c.1055-1060 ending the dispute with Walter of Montmirail and a second charter c.1055-1060 confirming the gift of Walter of Montmirail to St. Vincent of Le Mans; see "The Cross-Channel Estates of the Montgomery-Bellême Family," 230.

¹³⁸ Thompson, "The Cross-Channel Estates of the Montgomery-Bellême Family," 234.

¹³⁹ Mabel does not sign these charters, but she is mentioned as confirming the gifts, all made during the 1060s, to St. Vincent of Le Mans. Final charters to consent to the gift of lands to St. Vincent of Le Mans is dated August 1076 and to St. Peter of Préaux is dated c.1077; Kathleen Thompson in "The Cross-Channel Estates of the Montgomery-Bellême Family," 242. David Bates transcribed the last charter that bears Mabel's assent for Kathleen Thompson's M.S. thesis.

¹⁴⁰ Mabel succeeded her uncle, Bishop Yves, over two living brothers and two living nephews, as discussed above. However, no charter refers to her as *lord* in Bellême. At worst, Mabel shared lordship with her husband, Roger, when he was in residence in Normandy before the Conquest of England.

¹⁴¹ Charter included in Thompson, "The Cross-Channel Estates of the Montgomery-Bellême Family," 241.

¹⁴² A common medieval practice was to give property to churches and monasteries for the salvation of the souls of your loved ones. Since Mabel's family was the benefactor of these religious houses, it seems likely that she would have continued the practice of gifting to these places. The absence of charter evidence does not prove a lack of such benefactions.

¹⁴³ Louise, *La Seigneurie*, I: 396-400. While there is no direct evidence for all of these gifts, these are houses which were held and enriched during Mabel's lifetime. Countless charters have been lost to history, and historians have debated how some of these houses came into Bellême control and influence;

a litany of monastic houses in the region, including Troarn, St. Martin of Sées, Other houses in the territory of Bellême were erected during Mabel's life and therefore could have been founded by her;¹⁴⁴ these other holdings include St. Aubin in Angers and St. Leonard in Bellême.¹⁴⁵ One of the last recorded acts of Mabel's life was her gift to St. Leonard in Bellême,¹⁴⁶ a church which had been established in 940 by her great-grandfather, Yves. The charter showing the gift of Ventes-de-Bourse and the woods of Aunsi to St. Leonard was written in the 1070s, possibly within two years of Mabel's murder. In addition to her ecclesiastic holdings, Mabel built a castle at Domfront (Figure 3.11), where the previous castle had been destroyed, and at Alençon in Sées on the Sarthe.¹⁴⁷

for example, the nunnery of Almenêches likely was under the control of Roger of Montgomery c.1020, and was a particular favorite site for Mabel's heirs ; however, no eleventh century charters exist for this nunnery. For some of the historiography, see Augustin Goujon, *Histoire de Bernay et de son canton touchant à l'histoire générale de la Normandie* (Evreux: Hérissey, 1875): 53; Lucien Musset, "Les Premiers temps de l'abbaye d'Almenêches des origines au XII siècle" in *L'Abbaye d'Almenêches-Argentan et Saint Opportune*, ed. Yves Chaussy (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1970): 11-36.

¹⁴⁴ See Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 78-80 for the houses built, strengthened, and endowed in the area in the late eleventh century

¹⁴⁵ MS H. 2151. H.W.C. Davis asserts that this charter is a counterfeit, but a trip to Bellême turns up churches of different names, so the charter may be real but may be a copy with an altered name. Copies of charters were a necessity. Two copies of the same charter (H938) were found, which I went through line-by-line, finding only one slight difference, one changed word, and the same signature of the scribe. See Appendix C.

¹⁴⁶ *CMP*, no. 2. This was a confirmation that occurred between 1070 and 1082 of the gift of lands around Ventes-de-Bourse, a community between Alençon and Sées.

¹⁴⁷ Thompson, "The Cross-Channel Estates of the Montgomery-Bellême Family," 46-48.

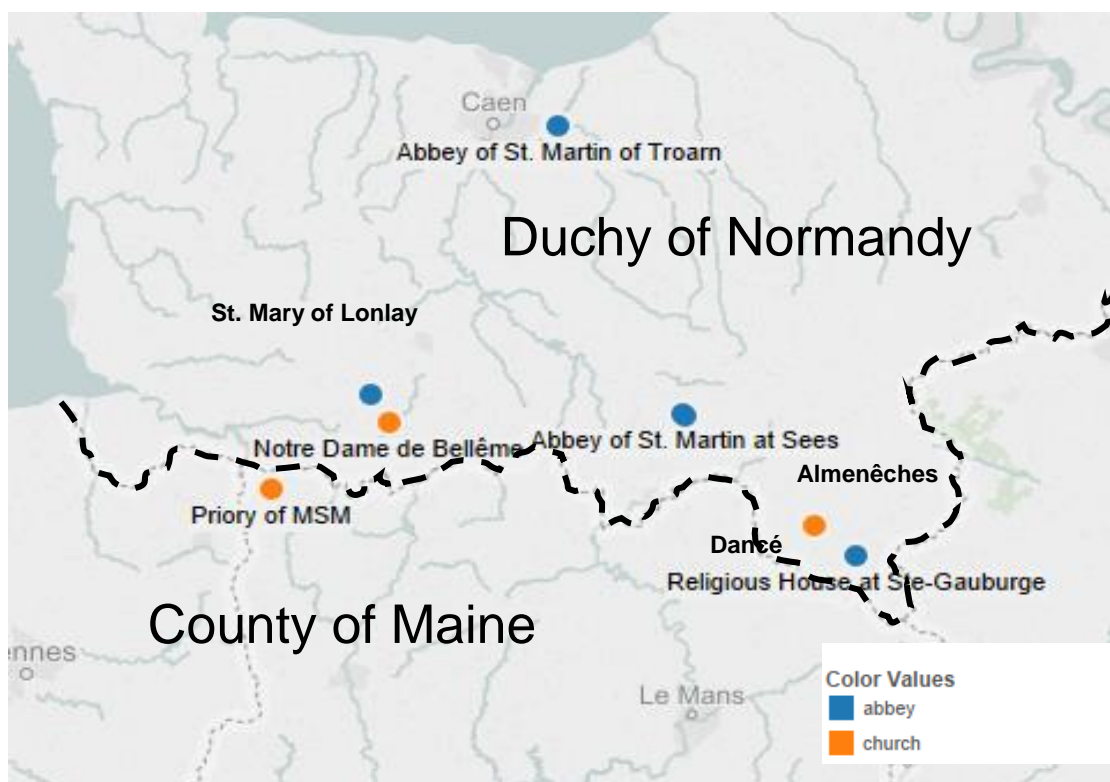


Figure 3.10. Mabel's monastic endowments to 1080.



Figure 3.11. Castle Ruin at Domfront.
Photo by Crescida Jacobs.

Other major fortresses from which the lordship could be defended included Roche-Mabille and St. Cenery-le-Gere on the southwestern border and Memers in the

south.¹⁴⁸ Where her father, William Talvas, had built an abbey at Neufchâtel-en-Saosnois, Mabel constructed a major fortress.¹⁴⁹ She also had the care and upkeep of numerous minor fortresses in the territory, such as those at Dame-Marie, Conde, and St. Pierre des Nids, as well as St. Denis sur Sarthe, which held the western boundary of her lands, and Villeray on the eastern border.¹⁵⁰ The maps in Figures 3.12 and 3.13 show the number and strategic positioning of Mabel's fortresses constructed along the frontier.

As discussed in chapter 1, the eleventh-century Norman frontier was an ill-defined place that existed somewhat beyond the range of ducal authority.¹⁵¹ In this place, the lords of Bellême exerted their control over neighbors, utilizing area families to garrison the numerous castles and fortresses in the region and building alliances when it was beneficial to them. Demonstrating Bates's "new feudalism", the lords of Bellême (and their neighbors) acquired dependents and developed power structures in the absence of ducal authority. This was a violent reconstitution of the social structure. Sometimes families turned against one another in an effort to maintain boundaries or exert control. Orderic tells of a "serious quarrel" (*seditio exorta ... pro quibusdam calumniis*) that broke out between Robert of Bellême and his cousin, Rotrou.¹⁵² The men "fought each other furiously" (*atrocem guerram... fecerunt*) about "the boundaries of their properties."¹⁵³ The lords of Bellême dominated the region so violently that families which did not

¹⁴⁸ Louise, *La Seigneurie*, I: 311-313.

¹⁴⁹ Thompson, "The Cross-Channel Estates of the Montgomery-Bellême Family," 66-67.

¹⁵⁰ Louise, *La Seigneurie*, I: 314, 318, 320-22.

¹⁵¹ Note that, while vassals of the Norman dukes, Mabel and Roger's lands also reached into Maine and Francia, but they were also beyond the reach of these authorities as well.

¹⁵² *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 396-399.

¹⁵³ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 396-397, 'pro suorum limitibus fundorum.'

participate could find themselves at in deadly opposition to this powerful house.

Following the terrifying example of her father, who turned abruptly and gruesomely on his former vassal, William Giroie, Mabel exercise brutal force over the region, as evidenced by the descriptions of Orderic and by the brutality of her murder by local men who had been displaced on her authority.

It is clear from the depiction of the expansion of control through the construction of many fortresses throughout the lordship of Bellême, that Mabel understood her role as a frontier lord. She likely coordinated her efforts with her husband when he was in Normandy, with her grown sons, or even other nearby lords. She held her natal territory and built on the strength of her husband's family to continue to grow her importance in the region. These physical construction not only meant that Bellême authority was a new source of localized authority, but also necessitated bringing more people into the region to garrison and maintain fortresses and potential threatened nearby families, just as Bates describes happened at this time.

A writ of William I, Duke of Normandy and King of England, notifying the archbishop Lanfranc of Mabel's estate shows land that she held of the king in post-Conquest England immediately after her death. This charter granted Mabel's English lands to the abbey where she was buried:

He [William] granted to St. Martin's Troarn all the land that *Mabel the Countess of Shrewsbury held of him in England*,¹⁵⁴ with all its appurtenances, to be enjoyed

¹⁵⁴ Emphasis is mine. Mabel's lands are not listed in *Domesday Book*, but Bates believes this charter refers to Horsley in Gloucestershire. This land is about 100 miles due south of Roger's lands in Shrewsbury, Shropshire. The Latin reads 'W(illelmus) rex Anglorum L(anfranco) archiepiscopo et G(osfrido) episcopo Contantiarum salutem. Sciatis me concessisse sancto Martino de Troarno totam illam terram quam Mabilia comitissa de me tenuit in Anglia cum his omnibus que ad eandem terram pertinent. Et ita concedo ut quietam habeat de omni servitio et omnibus consuetudinibus pro anima Mabilię, sicut ego ipse cum habebam illa die qua ei dedi. Quo circa facite sancto Martino liberare totam terram.'

free of all service and dues for the soul of Mabel, as he held it himself on the day he gave it.¹⁵⁵

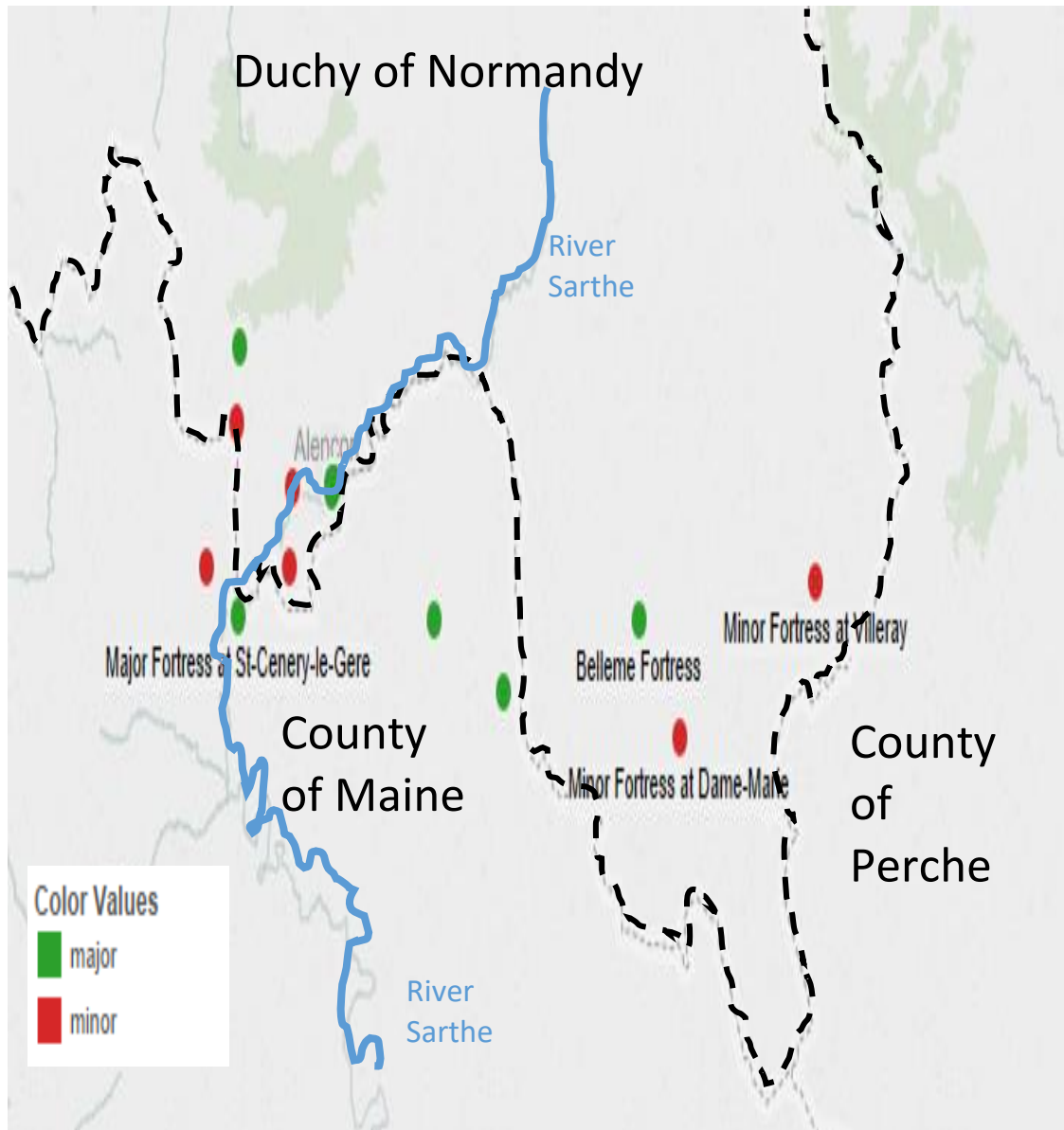


Figure 3.12. Mabel's fortresses on the frontier by 1080.

¹⁵⁵ *RRA* (Bates), no. 285 is likely written immediately after Mabel's murder. It was paraphrased by Round but translated by Bates. Likely, since King William is granting her lands, these are lands she held in his name in England. After her death, he grants these lands to the abbey of St. Martin in Troarn, where the countess was buried.

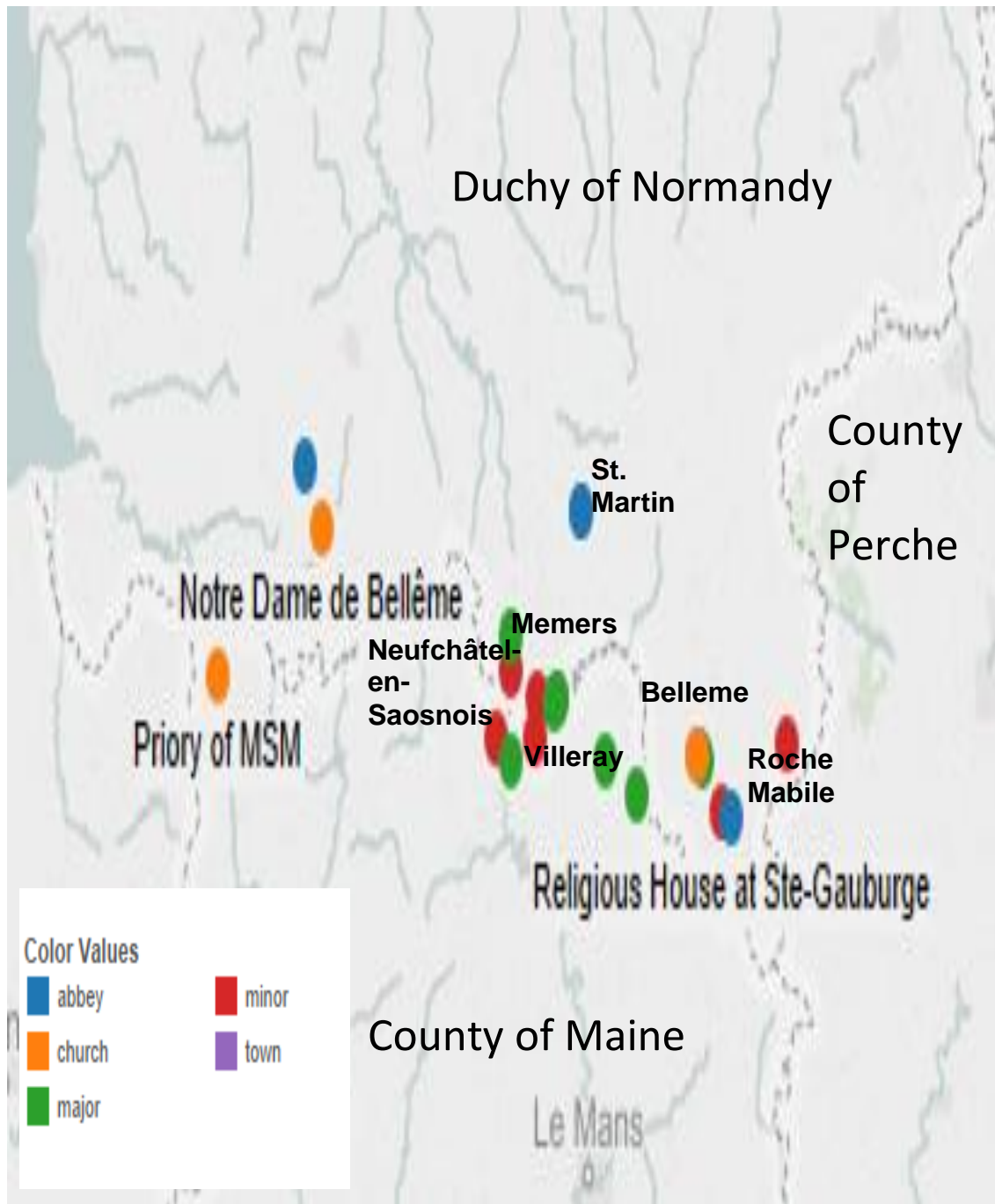


Figure 3.13. Mabel's sacred and secular holdings throughout the lordship to 1080.

A second charter that once again references Mabel's lands in England comes from Henry I to Sampson the Bishop of Worcester and Walter, the Sheriff of Gloucester. This was a confirmation of the lands mentioned in the previous charter. It is dated c.1100 to 1107. Horace Round transcribes it

He [Henry I] grants to St. Martin Troarn all the lands *which Mabel the countess of Shrewsbury held of his father in England* with all of its appurtenances, to be held as quit of all service and dues as his father granted for Mabel's soul, and as his father held it on the day he gave it to the countess.¹⁵⁶

Other charters reference Mabel's English lands by name, although the places exist neither in *Domesday* nor in the modern era. Scholars of *Domesday* note that it is common for place names to be reduced over the past 900 years to less than an acre or to be no longer recognizable by name.¹⁵⁷ Figure 3.14 shows an entry in a manuscript collection commonly called the "Liber Albus" (The White Book), dated c.1086, that demonstrates Earl Roger's grant of some of his English lands may have been held jointly,

Earl Roger gave, in England, two small villis namely Gath and Fishbourne, and forty shillings of tithe from Stotona and Hantona, in Chambridgeshire he gave, *the countess Mabel granting it*, the churches of Erningastone and Senegaia with the land of the priest and all the tithes of Oruella (Orwell)...

And after the death of the countess Mabel in 1082 [sic], earl Roger gave for her soul a moiety of Clenpinges [Clippings] with all the rents belonging to it....¹⁵⁸

By the time of her murder, her eldest son inherited her holdings in Normandy; upon Earl Roger's death in 1094, this eldest son, Robert, would become the largest

¹⁵⁶ *CDF*, no. 469.

¹⁵⁷ See H.C. Darby and G.R. Versey, *Domesday Gazetteer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 2-4.

¹⁵⁸ *CDF*, no.657. Even though this charter is for English lands belonging to Roger, my emphasis that the countess Mabel granted the gift is a possible indication that Mabel once held the lands or the churches mentioned in the grant.

landowner in the Anglo-Norman world. More about Mabel's heirs will be revealed in chapter 4. While it seems axiomatic that Mabel ruled as a lord with the physical construction of castles, fortresses, and with ecclesiastical foundations, constructions, and endowments, she also benefitted from her position as a female lord due to her proximity to victuals and wine.

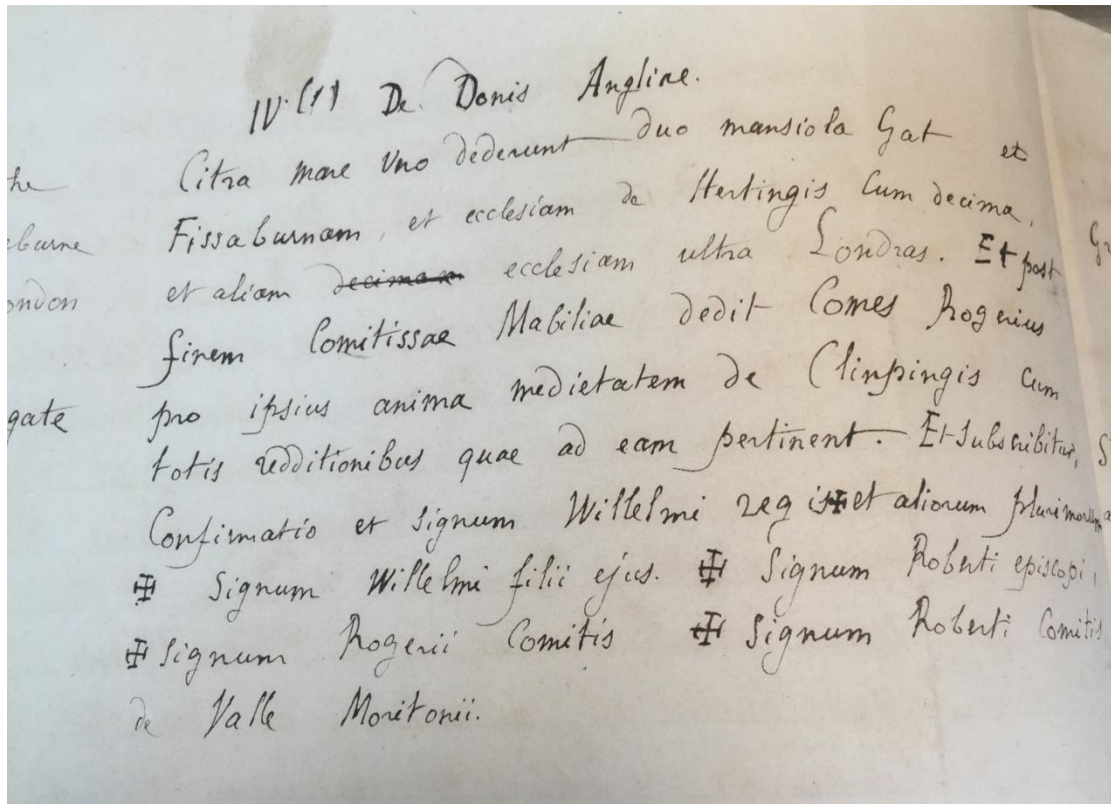


Figure 3.14. Donation of Mabel's English lands from copy of the "Liber Albus" held at the Orme Archives.
Photo by Crescida Jacobs.

Mabel the Poisoner

Although the episode of the poisoning of the Sowsnose child, as related by Orderic Vitalis and detailed earlier in this chapter, is an unexpected tale, Mabel of Bellême also used more traditional vehicles to envenom, such as food and wine. She also carried out political assassinations before she was murdered during a bath in her home in 1082. Orderic’s description of both attempts are included here. These assassinations show how turbulent frontier life could be, even to the friends and family living within the vicinity of rival houses.

Because of their role in the home, women had easier access to foodstuffs than men might have enjoyed. Such poisonings, though less provocative than his earlier anecdote, are also related by the chronicler Orderic Vitalis. Mabel’s first target was the house of the Giroie, whose members had once been friends and vassals of the Bellême lords but had been entangled in the feud that began with Mabel’s father’s mutilation of William Giroie.

The Giroie family “came from a noble French and Breton family”,¹⁵⁹ and they had been important vassals of the lords of Bellême until Mabel’s father attacked William of Giroie at the wedding feast between 1048 and 1062. William was the leader of the Giroie family; he was at first betrothed to the daughter of a Norman nobleman named Heugon. Her dower lands included Montreuil- l’Aigle in Eure and Échaufour in Orne.¹⁶⁰ However, Heugon and his daughter died before the wedding took place, so his lord, William of

¹⁵⁹ *Gesta Normanorum Ducum*, II: 110-111, ‘Geroius uste...ex nobili Francorum et Britonnum prosapia originem....’ See genealogical chart, Figure 2.13.

¹⁶⁰ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 22-23.

Bellême, interceded for Giroie with Duke Richard II to acquire these dowry lands by hereditary right. Eventually Giroie fell in love quite suddenly (*ad prandium forte uidens adamauit*) with Gisla de Montfort and married her.¹⁶¹ The Giroie's were the parents of numerous children of varying fortunes, including Arnold, Fulk, who was killed with his brother-in-law, Walkelin of Pont-Échanfroi,¹⁶² Hawise, who married Robert of Grandmesnil and had two sons, Hugh and Robert and then married William, the youngest son of Archbishop Robert and bore a daughter named Judith who married Roger of Sicily.¹⁶³

In 1061, Duke William had some difficulty with his magnates, “for one would try through jealousy to oust another from his position,”¹⁶⁴ which greatly disordered the people living in the area. So the duke expelled several magnates from Normandy including William Giroie's son, Arnold of Échauffour, and grandson, Hugh of Grandmesnil, along with Abbot Robert of St. Évrout, who was a Giroie.¹⁶⁵ In relating these events in the *Ecclesiastical History*, Orderic tells us that Roger and Mabel were the evildoers against their neighbors, “cunningly inciting” the “quick-tempered duke” (*animosus autem dux*) who “gave full reign to his anger” (*frena relaxans*) “against their

¹⁶¹ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 110-111.

¹⁶² *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 95; *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 26-28.

¹⁶³ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 30-31.

¹⁶⁴ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 90-91, ‘Nam cupiditate furente unus alium supplantare conabatur.’

¹⁶⁵ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 152-155. Orderic tells that the abbot was actually convicted on the word of Rainer, a trusted friend and monk at Conches, to whom Robert had privately made some disparaging remarks against the duke in jest. Knowing the duke had been violently turned against him by Mabel and Roger, he fled to Pope Nicholas.

neighbors”.¹⁶⁶ Once more this demonstrates the fractious nature of frontier politics, and how the Bellême¹⁶⁷ used their power against their neighbors. Arnold was exiled along with many other “factious nobles”¹⁶⁸ (*dissidentes proceres*), and he went to Apulia and became very wealthy.¹⁶⁹ Upon his return to Normandy, Arnold sought an audience with Duke William, who, “bearing in mind the high birth and outstanding valor of the man, and reflecting that he had all too few loyal knights for overcoming the resistance of the men of Maine and Brittany, was inclined to treat him with indulgence and excuse his offenses; he made a truce with Arnold, promising to restore his patrimony to him and granting him freedom of movement throughout the duchy for as long as the truce should last.”¹⁷⁰ However, the duke may have been deceiving Arnold in his forgiveness, as Orderic goes on to relate that, while Arnold was “overjoyed” (*lætatus*), “his hopes were vain” (*percepta est sed frustra*) as the duke’s truce was an “empty promise” (*uana ducis promissione percepta*)¹⁷¹ However, before he could take his place as the heir to Giroie lands, Orderic tells how Mabel of Bellême “prepared poisoned food and drink, and

¹⁶⁶ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 90-91 ‘Tunc Rogerius de Montegomerici et Mabilia uxor eius exorta simultate gaudebat, et blandis adulationibus sibi ducem allíciebant et contra uicinos suos callidis factionibus commotum acrius ad iram concitabant.’

¹⁶⁷ In this instance, Mabel and her husband are able to capitalize on the connection to the duke to turn him against their neighbors.

¹⁶⁸ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 104-105.

¹⁶⁹ Arnold’s wealth gained in exile is reported in several ways by Orderic. *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 106-107 says he “enjoyed rich possessions” and returned “laden with wealth and presented a costly mantle to the duke”. *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 122-1123 says that he “made his fortune in Apulia”.

¹⁷⁰ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 122-123, ‘Dux autem considerans nobilitatem uiri et ingentem probitatem, recolensque suam contra Cenomannos et Britones aliosque sibi resistentes proborum militum paucitatem iam lenior effectus ei reatus indulisit, datisquis induciis patrimonium suum se illi redditurum sponpondit et usque ad statutum terminum per terram suam eundi et redeundi liberam securitatem concessit.’

¹⁷¹ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 122-123.

offered him [Arnold] refreshment on his way back to Gaul from the Duke's court."¹⁷²

This political assassination was meant for a familial enemy; Arnold of Échauffour was the son of William Giroie. However, Arnold was forewarned of the crime: "He, however, was given warning of the treachery by a friend who knew of her wickedness. When this woman's servants approached as he was talking to some friends . . . and most pressingly invited him to dine with her, he remembered the friend's warning and was firm in his refusal to touch the food and drink which he feared might be poisoned."¹⁷³ Her brother-in-law, Gilbert, serving as Arnold's escort, was not aware of the plot, and he accepted a cup and drank the wine undiluted without dismounting from his horse; the poison quickly took effect and he died two days later at Rémalard."¹⁷⁴

Mabel was undeterred in her quest for revenge against the house of Giroie, even though her first attempt resulted in the death of "her husband's only brother, a man who showed the highest integrity in his youth and was remarkable for his knightly virtues."¹⁷⁵ She continued to devise ways to bring down her rival house. She "took to heart the failure of her first attempt," and "not long afterwards she devised another scheme no less deadly

¹⁷² *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 122-123, 'Mabilia Talauacii... letali ueneno cibum et potum infecit eumque dum de curia ducis in Galliam remearet refici iussit.'

¹⁷³ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 122-123, 'sed illi per quendam amicum suum doli conscium tantum nefas innotuit. Vnde dum... ad quosdam amicos suos colloqueretur, et a clientibus præfatæ mulieris ad conuiuium cum summa prece inuitaretur memor amici iussionis nullatenus adqueiuit, sed omnino cibum et potum in quo letum inesse metuebat repudiavit.'

¹⁷⁴ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 122-123, 'utpote qui penitus doli nescius erat scifum accepit, super equum residens merum bibit et ueneno infectus apud Raimalastum tertia die obiit.'

¹⁷⁵ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 122-123, 'Sic perfida mulier dum mariti sui emulum extinguere putauit mariti sui unicum fratrem qui multa honestate in annis adolescentiæ et equestri probitate pollebat occidit.'

to bring about the end she desired.”¹⁷⁶ Mabel used bribes and persuasion (*precibus et promissis*) to win over Arnold’s chamberlain, convincing him to participate in the second assassination attempt. Orderic writes that Mabel “prepared poisoned cups,”¹⁷⁷ which the chamberlain gave to his lord Arnold, Giroie of Courville, and William Count of Montmirail. All three men were poisoned, but only Arnold succumbed to the effects of poison, dying after suffering greatly for some days just after he “renounced the world and with true piety of spirit became a monk”¹⁷⁸ of St. Évroul, while the other men “secure[d] proper remedies [and] recovered through the grace of God and skill of their doctors.”¹⁷⁹

Mabel’s plan to bring down the house of Giroie succeeded. “After Arnold’s death,” Orderic continues, “the noble family of Giroie fell on evil days; and up to the present not one of their descendants has been able quite to restore the fortunes of his ancestors.”¹⁸⁰ Such understandings of the impact of Mabel’s actions on the world around her illustrate the agency with which she has never been credited. In past scholarship on Orderic, women have been portrayed as little more than passive characters; however, when we begin to understand Mabel’s point of view and motivations, we see that Mabel is a powerful woman in the duchy. Using poisoned wine, Mabel was able to successfully

¹⁷⁶ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 122-123, ‘Non multo post dum primo conatu se delusam esse ingemuit ad concupitum facinus perpetrandum alio nisu non minus ferali denuo insurrexit.’

¹⁷⁷ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 122-123, ‘Deinde pesti feras potiones hæc præparauit’

¹⁷⁸ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 124-125, ‘manifestata reuelatione quam pridie uiderat sæculoque relicto cum benigna deuotione animi monachus effectus est.’

¹⁷⁹ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 122-125, ‘Deo effectum remediis medicorum præstante conualuerunt.’

¹⁸⁰ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 124-125, ‘Defuncto itaque Erinaldo tota Geroianorum nobilitas pene corrui nec ullus posteriorum stemma priorum ex integro usque hodie adipisci potuit.’

murder a member of a powerful rival house and her husband's rival;¹⁸¹ unfortunately her brother-in-law accidentally fell victim to her unsuccessful first assassination attempt. These events can be understood as political assassinations. Mabel's own death, at the hands of assassins who broke into her home at Chateau de Bures, could have been politically motivated.¹⁸² Ironically, Mabel's own family fell from favor during the following generation and was nearly erased from history. Most of her castles and sacred foundations are in ruins today. Her legacy was locally revived in drama and poetry as romantic writers recalled her beauty and ferocity.¹⁸³

Mabel's life and her tenure as *domina* of Bellême was in many ways quite ordinary: she married and had children as women were expected to do; she built castles,¹⁸⁴ endowed monastic buildings, and argued with rivals in surrounding villages as any other lord might hope to do.¹⁸⁵ As a female heir she embodied a fortuitous option for

¹⁸¹ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 122-123, 'mariti sui emulum extinguere putavit mariti'

¹⁸² Since this biography follows Mabel's life cycle, her death will be detailed after her life as a wife and mother are described in Chapter 6.

¹⁸³ The play was Henri Augu and Paul Delair, *La Louve d'Alençon, Roman historique, tire des chroniques de la Normandie et de la Bretagne*; the poem was written by Louis Duval, the first librarian of the city of Alençon, titled "Mabille d'Alençon." The play and poem are analyzed in Chapter 6 of this dissertation.

¹⁸⁴ Mabel is not known to construct castles with her own hands, but many castles were erected in Bellême lands during her lifetime. Orderic does describe a woman named Aubrée of Ivry who built the castle of Ivry, hiring the architect and master builder, Lanfred, herself and overseeing its building, see *Ecclesiastical History*, IV: 114-115, 290-291.

¹⁸⁵ These are some of the ordinary tasks a Norman noblewoman might do. Fauroux charters are replete with women who co-granted lands and other gifts to churches and monasteries. A few examples of Mabel's contemporaries should suffice here, including no. 61: Countess Emma of Arques found a church at Trinité-du-Mont (near Rouen) in 1030 and no.62 when, later that same year, she and her husband enriched St. Amand, a church they had previously founded; no. 95: the lady Emma had given Ticheville to the abbey of St. Wandrille; no.101: Renza of Mesnières en Bray consented to a donation of sixty acres in Quèvreville to the abbey of St. Trinité du Mont in Rouen in 1043; no. 117: Emma and her husband Guidmundus gave land and other gifts to St. Père de Chartres in the 1040's; no. 120: In c.1050 Adeliza of Tosny and her husband gave many lands for the foundation of the church of Notre Dame de Lyre; no. 123: In 1051 Countess Béatrice of Eu make an exchange of money for the forest of Epinay with the abbot of St. Trinité du Monte in Rouen; no. 140 Lesceline, mother of Bishop Hugh of Lisieux, donated land for the

consolidating power throughout the region through marriage to a nearby powerful house. Her father was able to arrange a marriage that expanded family power, ensuring that Bellême building program continued. Being a woman did not diminish her ability to govern; her power may have been ameliorated since her husband was away in England after the Norman Conquest.

It seems that Mabel continued to use power in whatever form she could obtain it. She continued to use the weapon of wine—Orderic reports that she murdered two men in this way.¹⁸⁶ Her own violent death comes at the hands of men whom she had “deprived of their inheritance.”¹⁸⁷ Her death and legacy are topics for chapter 6. This chapter intended to describe Mabel’s life story accurately and completely within the context in which she lived. The next chapter shifts to the noble couple, Mabel and Roger, and the avenues of power they employed during the mid-eleventh century.

construction of the monastery of Notre Dame du Pré in 1049-1058; no. 143, In 1059 Emma of Varenne (c.1010-1059) sold and gifted lands to Abbot Rainier of La Trinité de Mont in Rouen; no. 226: Adela of France (1009-1079) gave Manneville-ès-Plains to the abbey of Montivilliers in 1065 or 1066; no. 231: Queen Matilda (c.1031-1083) made numerous donations, such as to the monastery of La Trinité at Caen in 1066.

¹⁸⁶ Two examples (two murders and a third attempted murder) are found in *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 122-125.

¹⁸⁷ As Orderic reports was the case with Hugh Bunel, discussed in chapter 7.

CHAPTER 4: MARRIAGE, MOTHERHOOD, AND MURDER: PRESERVING AND EXPANDING POWER

Mabel of Bellême gained a powerful husband and, as the mother to several children, grew her influence in the region. Basing the biography of Mabel on her life cycle¹ creates a narrative frame for the story of Mabel’s life. The position of medieval women within the family has been a key historical debate between historians such as Georges Duby, Pauline Stafford, Jo Ann McNamara, and Suzanne Wemple. Georges Duby argued that changes in inheritance customs placed limits on women’s roles in the family, especially upon marriage.² This biography looks at Mabel as a wife and mother, and it demonstrates how her power changed over the course of her life. Mabel was a member of the privileged elite class,³ but she capitalized from the unique characteristics of living on the Norman frontier.⁴ In order to assess how marriage and motherhood helped Mabel preserve and expand power, this chapter looks closely at Mabel’s marriage to Robert of Montgomery, her children, and charter evidence throughout her lifetime.

In many ways, Mabel of Bellême was just like every other medieval noblewoman in Normandy—she grew up in a dynamic family and eventually married and had children

¹ Writing biography that depicts the changing role of women over the course of their lives was practiced in Pauline Stafford, *Gender, Family, and the Legitimation of Power: England from the Ninth to Early Twelfth Century* (Aldershoot: Ashgate, 2006).

² Georges Duby, “Women and Power” in *Cultures of Power: Lordship, Status, and Process in Twelfth-Century Europe*, 69-85.

³ The historiography of the unique position of female lords is recounted in Johns, *Noblewomen, Aristocracy and Power*, 3-4.

⁴ While reviewing chapters of this dissertation, I was influenced by bell hooks, *Feminist Theory, From Margin to Center* second ed. (London: Pluton Press, 2000). Which cautioned me about over-generalizing about medieval women or even eleventh-century Norman noble women based on the experiences of Mabel. Note that Bell Hooks is a person’s name, but she does not capitalize her name.

of her own. Like her peers, Mabel would have been expected to run her household, manage the servants, and host visiting nobles along with their entourages. She would have also learned to complete practical tasks such as sewing, embroidering, reading, and counting well enough to oversee her household. Although Orderic Vitalis might think of her as a cruel and wicked woman, charter evidence has shown that she was strong and fierce. She managed several minor and major fortresses, and she highlighted her role as the religious and moral compass for her family through founding or refounding important church buildings.

What was her daily life like as a wife and mother? The sources cannot report many of the details, and Mabel left only a charter mark for signature, but how women like Mabel organized their lives and families can be explored to gain an understanding of Mabel's life. Orderic tells us that Mabel's household contained servants⁵ and a retinue of knights. How Mabel built her power in the lordship and passed her power on to her descendants is apparent. Vitriol directed at Mabel supports the notion that she was a powerful woman, because weak women did not garner as much attention; therefore, the ire of the criticism directed at her serves to prove her strength. To continue her story, the Hiémois family that joined the Bellême in 1050 and the man whom Mabel married are described here to show how Mabel and Roger turned two substantial territories into one gigantic base of power.

⁵ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 122-123.

Montgomerys in Normandy

The story of the house of Montgomery provides a contrast to the usual ways lineages advanced and constructed power in the rest of the Norman world. Most families gradually built up power through service of children and grandchildren. The Montgomerys, in contrast, rose dramatically within one generation.⁶ The Montgomery family can only be traced back to Roger I, the father of Roger of Montgomery and father-in-law of Mabel of Bellême. The Montgomery lands, centered on the Hiémois, had been granted to Duke Rollo from Charles the Simple c.924.⁷ Providing no source, Sir Francis Palgrave asserts that Roger I, “designated himself as ‘*Northmannus Northmannorum*’ (Norman of Normans),”⁸ died c.1040, before the fortunate marriage alliance of his family with the Bellême family. Roger I was married to Joseline, who was a niece of Duchess Gunnor.⁹

Roger I and Joseline had five children, but their oldest two sons died during the disruptions of the minority of Duke William, which occurred consistently from 1046 to 1054; another son died shortly after his father c.1035, and later, the youngest son, Gilbert, was accidentally envenomed by his sister-in-law, Mabel of Bellême.¹⁰ Roger I was temporarily exiled from Normandy because his son William of Montgomery was held

⁶ RRA(Bates), no. 281. The wealth of the lords of Bellême and the wealth gained by the Montgomery family upon the Conquest is well documented. See Chandler, “Lordship, Prestige and Piety: Charitable Donations of the Anglo-Norman Aristocracy,” 67. Chandler relied upon George Edward Cokayne, *The Complete Peerage; or a History of the House of Lords and all Its Members from the Earliest Times*, Vol. IX, ed. Geoffrey H. White, revised edition (London: St. Catherine’s Press, 1949), 682-687.

⁷ Keats-Rohan, “Two Studies in North French Prosopography,” 10.

⁸ Sir Francis Palgrave, *The History of Normandy and England* (London: Public Records Office, 1919), I: 704.

⁹ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 264-267.

¹⁰ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 122-123.

responsible for the murder of Osbern, Duke William's steward,¹¹ but he returned to his lands and became a favorite of the Duke until Osbern's man, Barnon of Glos, exacted revenge by breaking in and killing William of Montgomery and his companions.¹² Roger I also employed a clerk, Odelerius of Orléans, whose son, Orderic, would write *The Ecclesiastical History*,¹³ a chronicle from which most of the family information is gleaned.

Roger was familiar with the lands of the Bellême family. As a count of the Hiémois, his territory touched Bellême's northernmost lands. He also had field experience with the frontier hostilities that plagued the southern and westernmost fringes of the Duchy. In the *Gesta Guillelmi*, William of Poitiers describes how Roger, a kinsman of the Conqueror and a "strenuous young man," went ahead of the Duke in battles with Geoffrey Martel in Alençon and Domfront in 1048, fortifications within Bellême territory.¹⁴ He was an advisor to the Duke and a member of his inner circle.¹⁵ After the invasion of King Henry I of Francia in 1041, the County of Exmes was bestowed upon Roger II, adding to his landed wealth.¹⁶ This county eventually fell under the control of Mabel while Roger II was across the Channel visiting his newly acquired

¹¹ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 94-95. See also Kathleen Thompson, "The Norman Aristocracy Before 1066: The Example of the Montgomerys," In *Historical Research* 60 (1997), 258; Chandler, "Lordship, Prestige and Piety: Charitable Donations of the Anglo-Norman Aristocracy," 69.

¹² *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 94-95. Previously in the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, another revenge killing took place when Bellême men hanged Walter of Sordenia, which caused Walter's sons to imprison and murder their lord, Robert. See *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 56-57.

¹³ *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 142-143.

¹⁴ *Gesta Guillelmi*, 23, 26-27, 29.

¹⁵ Chandler, "Lordship, Prestige and Piety: Charitable Donations of the Anglo-Norman Aristocracy," 70. This is evident in his mention in the Duke's council in the discussion of the Norman Invasion as well as by his generous grants of English land post-Conquest.

¹⁶ Louise, *La Seigneurie*, I: 25, 79, 91-92.

lands in England after 1066 as well as during his other absences, which likely were frequent.

The Marriage of Mabel to Roger of Montgomery

Roger of Montgomery (c.1015–1094) was born to Roger, the first Count of the Hiémois.¹⁷ Although the family's lineage is somewhat undetermined,¹⁸ William of Poitiers describes him as one of the most “outstanding men of the secular order,”¹⁹ and William of Jumièges describes him as “brave, courageous, and mature in wisdom.”²⁰ Roger of Montgomery participated in the baronial rebellion, which lasted from 1035 to 1045 and involved several important families in the region.²¹ This uprising highlighted the conflict in the Duchy, marked by prominent lords violently antagonizing their neighbors in order to expand their holdings.²² During these conflicts, sometime between 1027 and 1035, Robert the Magnificent confirmed the authority of Roger of Montgomery

¹⁷ The settlement dates of the Hiémois have been the topic of some debate among historians. Le vicomte Du Motey asserted 944-965, but his chronology is no longer accepted. Lucien Musset, “Naissance de la Normandie (Ve-XIe siècles), *Histoire de la Normandie* (Toulouse: Private, 1970), 105-106, dates settlement to 870-890. Prentout, *Essai sur les origines et la fondation du duché de Normandie*, 285, believes that the Hiémois became a distinct part of Maine in 924. Karl Ferdinand Warner, “Quelques observations au sujet des débuts du ‘duché’ de Normandie,” in *Droit privé et institutions régionales: Etudes historiques offertes à Jean Yver* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de Francia, 1976), 691-709, has uncovered evidence that while most of western Normandy was ceded to the Normans in 924, the remainder was held by the count of Rouen until 933. For a discussion of the Norman count, see David C. Douglas, “The Earliest Norman Counts,” *English Historical Review* (1946): 148-149.

¹⁸ Douglas, “The Earliest Norman Counts,”: 129-156, 148.

¹⁹ *Gesta Guilelmi*, II: 100, ‘quorum in collegio splendoriora quaedam eius lumina atque ornamenta emicuerunt.’

²⁰ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 118-119, ‘At ille, qui fortis erat et probus, consilioque matures.’

²¹ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 40-41. See also Vaughn, *The Abbey of Bec and the Anglo-Norman State*, 14.

²² *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 40-41. Orderic describes the conflict and the gruesome battle wounds sometimes suffered. See also Vaughn, *The Abbey of Bec and the Anglo-Norman State*, 14.

to control the Marche of Montgomery.²³ Roger II made a name for himself at the siege of Domfront in 1048. The role of viscount in Normandy was always associated with the custody of castles and with increased agency for the Duke himself.²⁴ Even though William of Jumièges bumbled the ancestry of the Montgomery family, the Montgomery family was well established in western Normandy.²⁵ Before the Conquest, the title of count was exclusively granted to close kinsmen of the Duke, which means that although Roger expanded his influence through his marriage to Mabel, she gained more honor than her natal family provided. The marriage was sanctioned by Duke William, who may have encouraged this bond to manage the frontier lordship of Bellême and secure the boundary of the duchy, as the marriage coincides with the time when Duke William was most closely guarding powerful families from acquiring new lands.²⁶

The marriage was mutually beneficial and productive on all accounts. There are no accounts of violence or rebellion within the lands joined during Mabel and Roger's marriage, although Orderic Vitalis reports that Roger and Mabel joined to get Duke

²³ Original MS H30 in the Archives of Seine-Maritime.

²⁴ Douglas, "The Earliest Norman Counts," 129-156, 152. Important to note that Roger's title is confused in charter evidence. For example, in *RRA*(Bates), no. 271, (dated to 1078-1082) he is "vicecomes" (viscount) once and "comes" (count) twice. Also in *RRA*(Bates), no. 280, (dated to 1068) Roger is both "vicecomes" and "comes".

²⁵ William of Jumièges writes that Roger's father was Hugh, his grandfather was William de Montgomerie, and there were two different generations of counts named Roger, making the first Roger, Count of Montgomerie, the great-great grandfather of Roger who married Mabel. This genealogy seems likely to have been a way for William of Jumièges to extend the lineage of the family back to the late eighth or early ninth centuries to match "before the coming of Rollo." See *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 94-95.

²⁶ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 101. According to Bates, Duke William began to closely control territorial acquisition c.1050 and many powerful families "turned some of their energies into consolidation" of their power. The marriage of Mabel and Roger would represent such a consolidation and a way for the duke to plug the gaps along the frontier.

William on their side and then seemingly “incited him to anger against their neighbors.”²⁷

In addition, the marriage was fruitful—the couple eventually had nine children: five sons (Robert, Hugh, Roger, Philip, and Arnulf) and four daughters (Emma, Matilda, Mabel, and Sibyl).

Orderic Vitalis writes that Roger was a “wise and prudent man, a lover of justice, who always enjoyed the company of learned and sober men” (*Hic sapiens et moderatus et amator aequitatis fuit*)²⁸ who “loved and protected the monks” (*uir eius monachos amabat et honorabat*)²⁹ toward whom his wife was openly hostile. Roger is depicted as uxorious, for as the *Ecclesiastical History* continues, Orderic Vitalis sees the power of Mabel flowing through her husband’s actions,

After the fall of the house of Giroie, Roger of Montgomery had possession of the whole patrimony of Échauffour and Montreuil for about twenty-six years; and at first, as long as his wife Mabel, who had always hated the sons of Giroie, the founders of St. Évroul lived, he showed himself hostile to the monks in many ways *at her* instigation.³⁰

Roger gained the respect of Orderic Vitalis when he built a great abbey in England at Shrewsbury, on the site of the timber chapel at Shrewsbury where Orderic’s father had served and Orderic had been born. Orderic was present with his father when Roger of Montgomery placed his glove on the altar of the wooden church of St. Peter at

²⁷ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 90-91.

²⁸ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 262-263.

²⁹ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 54-55.

³⁰ Emphasis added. *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 134-135, ‘Rogerius de Monte Gomerici postquam Geroiana progenies cecidit, totum patrimonium Excalfoii et Monasterioli fere xxvi annis possedit et in incio quamdiu Mabilla uxor eius quæ Geroianos Ebrulfiani monasterii fundatores semper exosos habuerat uixit, Vticensibus illa stimulante pluribus modis molestus extitit.’

Shrewsbury, where Orderic served as an acolyte, and vowed to found a monastery there.³¹

Lands Gained at Conquest

Whether Roger went to England in 1066 or later is a matter of some debate, but the prestigious position of the Bellême family after the Conquest of England remains unquestioned. Some scholars remain convinced that Roger was left behind to govern Normandy but managed to cross the Channel sometime in 1067.³² Whether Roger accompanied his friend and kinsman in 1066 or not, the outcome was the same for the Montgomery-Bellême family.

As a kinsman of the Conqueror, Roger and his wife Mabel were given large amounts of land during the creation of the Anglo-Norman state. Most interesting for this study are the lands that Mabel seems to have been given to hold herself, apart from the lands her husband received as a gift from the Conqueror. By the end of the century, the oldest son managed to control all the family's lands on both sides of the Channel, but the changes brought about in years immediately post-Conquest should be considered—these were rich years of marriage in many ways.

William of Poitiers, biographer of William the Conqueror, did not provide a list of the Normans who crossed the Channel with the Duke to take on King Harold. In the twelfth century, Orderic Vitalis provided a list that he declares is a complete list of the

³¹ *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 143-151. This passage contains an encomium to Orderic's father as well as a speech intended to describe Odelerius's motivations for sending his son abroad.

³² Chandler, "Lordship, Prestige, and Piety: Charitable Donations of the Anglo-Norman Aristocracy," 70.

actors at the battle of Hastings, which does not include the name of Roger of Montgomery. Later in the twelfth century when Wace was constructing his *History of the Norman People*, he included a lengthy list of the brave Normans who fought alongside their Duke.³³ Wace stressed the involvement of the most important families in Bayeux, where he was the canon, and of the families throughout lower Normandy, where Bellême and the Hiémois lands both lay. A charter, likely from 1069, reaffirms property to the abbey at Troarn “because Roger was about to cross the sea with the King.”³⁴ Roger’s name appears on the “ship-list” of William the Conqueror, most likely written at Fécamp between 1067 and 1072.³⁵ In this document, analyzed by Elisabeth Van Houts, Roger pledged extensive properties along the Dives and Orne rivers along with their ports,³⁶ sixty ships,³⁷ and over 130 fiefs.³⁸ This is a prodigious amount of property, and its value cannot be calculated.³⁹ Duke William ordered his men to provide supplies according to their finances and in proportion to their possessions; the “ship list” indicates the supplies were his by right (*iure sibi debitum*) along with the service to fight at Hastings, all of which was owed to him as the Duke of Normandy.⁴⁰

³³ Green, *The Aristocracy of Norman England*, 25.

³⁴ *CDF*, no. 463.

³⁵ Elisabeth Van Houts, “The Ship List of William the Conqueror” in *Anglo-Norman Studies: Proceedings of the Battle Conference* 10 (1987): 159-183.

³⁶ Van Houts, “The Ship List of William the Conqueror,” 178: Appendix 3.

³⁷ Van Houts, “The Ship List of William the Conqueror,” 179: Appendix 4.

³⁸ Van Houts, “The Ship List of William the Conqueror,” 179: Appendix 4.

³⁹ The monetary value of this vast property cannot be calculated.

⁴⁰ Van Houts, “Ship List of William the Conqueror,” 166, 171.

The value of the lands Roger held in Anglo-Norman England mirrored the value of his lands in Normandy and his service to his Duke, and this was quite high, according to the scale of landed wealth in *Domesday Book* established in “The Development of the Duchy of Normandy and the Norman Conquest of England.”⁴¹ Annual income from these lands exceeded 750 pounds per year in 1086.⁴² The totality of the value of Roger’s English lands, listed in a chart provided on Table 4.1 below, exceeded 2000 pounds, which would be the equivalent of a billionaire in today’s money.

Some historians include Roger as one of the “leading contributors” of the invasion because one of the “three men who had long been closely associated with the duke and were related to him by blood: William FitzOsbern, Roger of Beaumont, and Roger of Montgomery.”⁴³ As a close companion and relation of Duke William, it seems probable that Roger went to England in 1066. However, some historians interject a bit of intrigue to the story at the time when the Duchy must have been in a state of chaos, preparing the fleet for invasion. Judith Green asserts that Roger was not involved in the initial invasion of England because he was “left in Normandy to defend the duchy”⁴⁴ from outside invaders who might seize the absence of so many lords and the Duke to take advantage.

⁴¹ W.J. Corbett, “The Development of the Duchy of Normandy and the Norman Conquest of England,” in *Cambridge Medieval History*, 5 (1926), 505-513.

⁴² Using Corbett’s information and several currency converters online, this land would be worth an estimated 850,000 pounds today, or well over \$1.5 million US.

⁴³ Elisabeth Van Houts, “Robert of Torigni as Genealogist,” in *Studies in Medieval History presented to R. Allen Brown*, ed. C. Harper-Bill, C. Holdsworth, and J.L. Nelson (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1989), 215-233.

⁴⁴ Green, *The Aristocracy of Norman England*, 30. Although Green does not provide a specific citation for this information, she notes that Roger was not included in the list of nobles during the 1066 invasion in the *Gesta Guillelmi*. Davis and Chibnall also claim this fact in the introduction to the *Gesta*, p. xxxvii, stating, “Roger of Montgomery who had remained in Normandy...now accompanied the King” in 1067.

Other scholars have pointed out that, according to *Domesday*, most of the Norman landholders came from Seine Maritime and the Calvados, both northern coastal regions, with few noble men representing the Orne Department, from whence came Roger.⁴⁵

Regardless of whether Roger participated in the initial invasion of England or went to England a year or two years later, his reward seems undiminished. Roger's grant of English lands almost equaled that of Duke William's brother, Robert.⁴⁶ Roger was given the Earldom of Chichester and the Rape (in England this is a portion of a county) of Arundel along with some very wealthy estates in the area and the village⁴⁷ of Shropshire. In Arundel, Earl Roger received a substantial castle.⁴⁸ According to *Domesday*, Roger's holdings in England included the village of Shrewsbury and its formidable castle, the Rye in Sussex along with all of west Sussex,⁴⁹ and multiple estates in Surrey, Hampshire, Wiltshire, Cambridgeshire, and Middlesex, along with one in Hertfordshire, which he received from the female landowner, Goda.⁵⁰ He also gained

⁴⁵ Green uses numbers from several sources to make her claim that Roger represented the contingent of strong men who stayed behind to protect Normandy. From Lewis C. Loyd, *Origins of Some Anglo-Norman Families* (Baltimore: Genalogical Publishing, 1975), 42, she provides numbers from *Domesday*: 95 men from Calvados, 93 from Seine-Maritime, 15 from the Orne.

⁴⁶ Green, *The Aristocracy of Norman England*, 93.

⁴⁷ James Balfour Paul, *The Scots Peerage: Founded on Wood's Edition of Sir Robert Douglas's Peerage of Scotland, containing an Historical and Genealogical Account of the Nobility of that Kingdom* (Edinburgh: David Douglas Publishers, 1904), I: 491, indicates this is the County of Shropshire not merely the village. In the *Domesday Gazetteer*, this county extended to the Welsh border and possibly into the country of Wales because the "boundary between Shropshire and Wales was in an extremely fluid condition" in the eleventh century. Today this land is located very near the Welsh border. A good map of this region in 1086 can be found in H.C. Darby and I.B. Terrett, eds. *The Domesday Geography of Middle England* 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 159.

⁴⁸ Paul, *The Scots Peerage*, I: 491.

⁴⁹ Salzman, L.F., ed. *A History of the County of Sussex*, IV: 1, (London: Victoria County History, 1953) citing the *Sussex Archaeological Papers*, LXXII: 20-29.

⁵⁰ Darby and Versey, *Domesday Gazetteer*, 1.34b, 44b, 68b, 193-193b, 137b.

estates throughout Warwickshire, Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, Surrey, Hampshire, Wiltshire, Middlesex, Hertfordshire, and Staffordshire⁵¹ and unnumbered estates at Hartings, Singleton, Stoughton, Westbourne, Lyminster, and Binderton, each with their own incomes.⁵² Shrewsbury was inhabited by about two thousand residents c.1100, but by 1400, only London, Bristol, and York had more residents.⁵³ Table 4.1 shows Earl Roger's English holdings.

In these English lands, Roger built a castle⁵⁴ situated on an eminence that took the place of some fifty houses, which were razed; the castle was subsequently demolished by the Welsh, then rebuilt by William Rufus in 1093, and then burnt by Henry III in 1232. Because the English holdings were located in a contentious border region along the Welsh Marches, Roger also built the castles of Bridgnorth and Ludlow, rebuilt the castle of Arundel, established a castle at Hen Domen,⁵⁵ and erected a wall around the town of Ludlow.⁵⁶ *Domesday* shows that Robert built castles at Montgomery and Oswestry, and that part of his holdings extended into Wales where "a certain Welshman holds of Earl

⁵¹ Green, *The Aristocracy of Norman England*, 93 and Mason, "Roger de Montgomery and His Sons," 5.

⁵² According to Mason's calculations, Earl Roger's income for his English holdings was £2,100 *per annum*. This made him the second wealthiest tenant-in-chief, after Bishop Odo of Bayeux. See Mason, "Roger de Montgomery and His Sons," 5.

⁵³ Martyn Whittock, *A Brief History of Life in the Middle Ages* (New York: Little and Brown, 2013), xii.

⁵⁴ *A Description of England and Wales in 10 volumes* (London: Newbery and Cornan, 1770), VIII: 39. Full text accessed via download at <https://archive.org>.

⁵⁵ Thompson, "The Cross-Channel Estates of the Montgomery-Bellême Family," 113.

⁵⁶ *A Description of England and Wales in 10 Volumes*, IX:163. Thompson, "The Cross-Channel Estates of the Montgomery-Bellême Family," 92.

Roger” and paid him tribute in return.⁵⁷ Figure 4.1 shows the Welsh Marches controlled by Bellême lords, c.1086.

# of estates	place name	valuation
unknown	Hartings	Assessed at 261.5 hides which equaled about £78.45 ⁵⁹
unknown	Singleton	
unknown	Stoughton	
unknown	Westbourne	
unknown	Lymminster	
Unknown	Binderton	
3	Wiltshire	£350 ⁶⁰
8	Middlesex	
11	Cambridgeshire	
1	Hertfordshire	
1	Gloucestershire	
2	Worcestershire	
11	Warwickshire	£750 ⁶¹
30	Staffordshire	
7/8ths	Shropshire	
77	Sussex	£1000 ⁶²
4	Surrey	
9	Hampshire	

⁵⁷ Darby and Terrett, *The Domesday Geography of Middle England*, 158.

⁵⁸ Numbered estates provided in *Domesday Survey*, which was made in 1086.

⁵⁹ The Rape of Arundel (which does not include the un-numbered estates or the southern shires), was valued at 768 hides, which equaled more than 230 pounds. Calculations were made using data from Thompson, *Domesday Gazetteer*, and online medieval currency calculation sources to represent approximations as accurately as possible. Note that income was listed for levying taxes by the Crown.

⁶⁰ Mason, “Roger de Montgomery and His Sons,” 5.

⁶¹ Mason, “Roger de Montgomery and His Sons,” 5.

⁶² Mason, “Roger de Montgomery and His Sons,” 4-5.

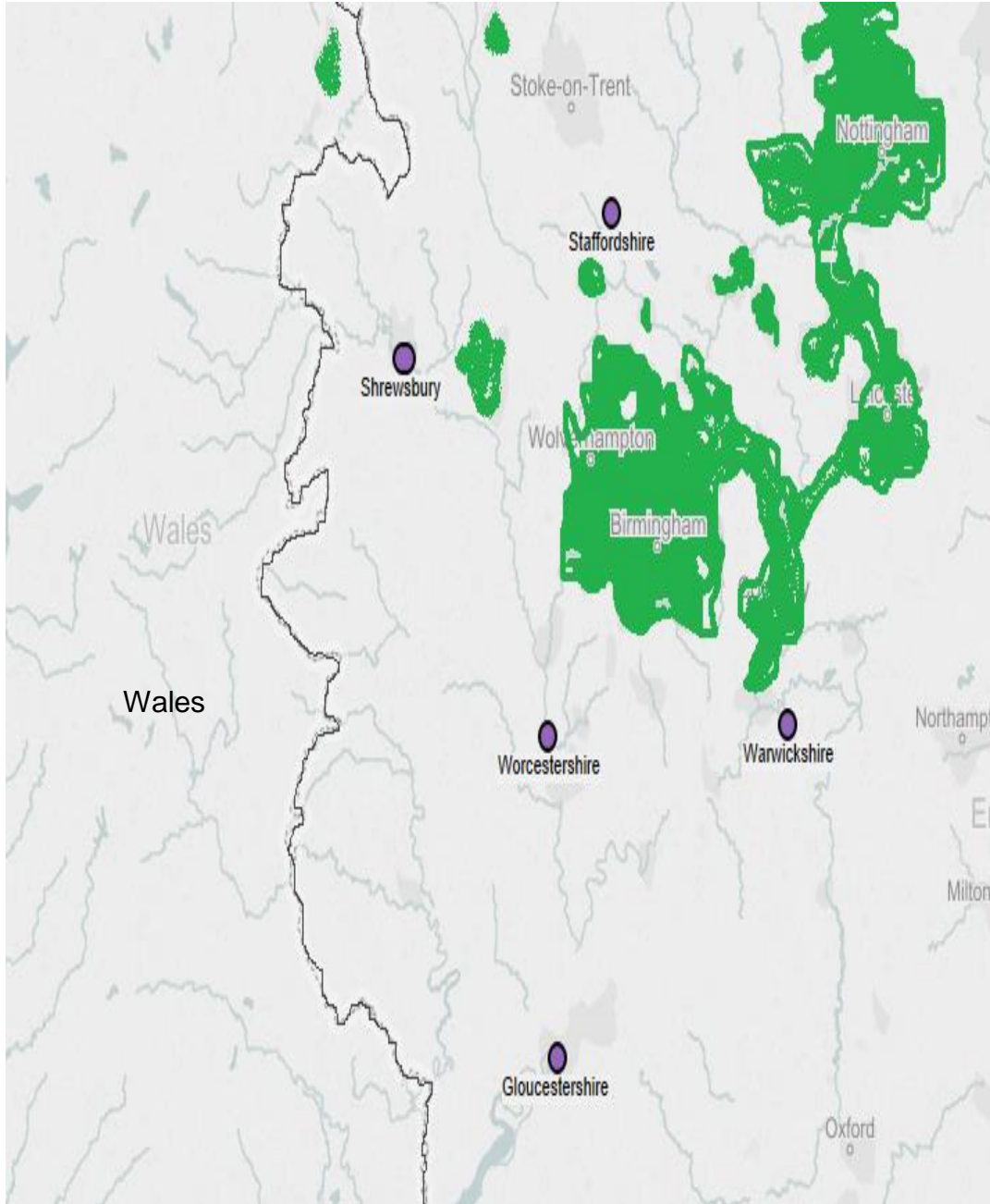


Figure 4.1. Welsh Marches controlled by Bellême lords, c.1086.

Roger continued the religious patronage that he and Mabel used in Normandy. In England, Roger erected a new nunnery in place of the decayed one at Wenlock and built a church dedicated to St. Milburga at the same place.⁶³ He generously gave his English holdings for the finances of St. Évroul, including all lands in Melbourne, Cambridgeshire; Onn and Marston from Staffordshire; lands from Graffham, Chichester; revenue from cheese and wool in Poulton; and tithes from Cambridgeshire.⁶⁴ He reinforced the stability of the region by granting lands to the Church. Sometimes he cannibalized the lands of other churches, which were likely Saxon and moribund, to enrich the churches he supported.⁶⁵

To understand the position of Mabel post-Conquest, it is important to realize that eleventh-century Normandy was a unique place to be a woman. As previously discussed, Normandy was without a clear inheritance custom, and women as well as men could be lawfully made heirs. Eleventh-century Normandy was a most extraordinary and dynamic place, as nobles crossed the Channel after 1066. These lengthy and numerous absences of men left Norman women with access to power unlike any known since the Viking Age. Many possibilities may have existed for any noblewoman throughout the Duchy at this time, especially a kinswoman of the Conqueror who lived and ruled on the volatile frontier of Normandy. We have already seen that Mabel's father contracted a beneficial marriage for her that sustained her inheritance, and that her husband accompanied the

⁶³ Thompson, "The Cross-Channel Estates of the Montgomery-Bellême Family," 126-127, 129.

⁶⁴ *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 234-235, 'Rogerius comes Scroesburiae dedit omnem quod habebat in Melleburna in Grantebregæscira, Othnam quoque et Merestonom in Estafordæscira, et unam hidam terræ in Graphan, et terram Vulfuini aurifabri in Cicestra, decimamque caseorum et lanarum de Pultona, et decimam de Senegai in Grantebregæscira.'

⁶⁵ See Thompson, "The Cross-Channel Estates of the Montgomery-Bellême Family," 125-129.

Conqueror to England at least once, now, through motherhood, we will see that Mabel amplified her influence through her children.

Medieval Motherhood

Being a mother might have been Mabel of Bellême's most important role. Medieval noblewomen not only had to endure childbirth but also had to ensure their children survived into adulthood in order to protect their heritage.⁶⁶ Mabel may have nursed her own children—she might have been lactating upon her infamous visit to the monastery in St. Évrour.⁶⁷ Her life most likely ended around the beginning of menopause, however her job as a mother was not necessarily completed.⁶⁸ As an aristocratic mother, Mabel would have been as likely as any of her peers to be “preoccupied with the past, the present, and the future,”⁶⁹ so she might have served as the primary history teacher and producer of historical knowledge to those around her. Mabel's fecundity produced nine children; she and her husband needed to enlarge their holdings so that their children's estates would be ample to secure good marriages for each.

Women's power through the family had been on the rise in the ninth and tenth centuries after the Carolingian empire fragmented, as power slipped from the monarch into the hands of landed nobles.⁷⁰ The key to gaining and maintaining power was holding

⁶⁶ McNamara and Wemple, “The Power of Women through the Family in Medieval Europe,” 133.

⁶⁷ As will be discussed in the following chapters, according to Orderic Vitalis, Mabel nursed a child to relieve pain in her breast. The most logical explanation for this episode is that Mabel was lactating at the time or perhaps had recently weaned a child and suffered from a clogged milk duct.

⁶⁸ Mabel was murdered at the age of 52; her youngest child was still unmarried. Though Mabel may have been of childbearing age, she had nine surviving children.

⁶⁹ Van Houts, *Les femmes dans l'histoire du duché de Normandie*, 19.

⁷⁰ McNamara and Wemple, “The Power of Women through the Family in Medieval Europe,” 133.

landed property, which the Bellême lords guarded closely and granted to churches in the region. For example, she assented with her husband to the founding of St. Martin of Séez c.1060, as recorded in the Fauroux charter collection.⁷¹ Mabel also granted English churches, lands of English priests, and tithes from England, as recorded in the *Liber Albus*.⁷² Although a widower might share control of his wife's lands with a son in some cases, it is important to note that the husband of the deceased was acting as a ward for his heirs, which is why two signatures were required on charters dispersing a dead woman's land.⁷³ Especially powerful eleventh-century women, such as Matilda of Tuscany, countess of Canossa, could exclude their husbands from management of their allodial lands during or after life.⁷⁴ Matilda died on July 24, 1115, and although she had willed her lands to the papacy, Henry V inherited her lands in Tuscany, Emilia, and Lombardy by force.⁷⁵ Upon her death, Mabel's lands passed to eldest son, Robert.⁷⁶

The land and its maintenance were not the only concerns for a *domina* such as Mabel, for the land was connected to various other avenues of power such as administering justice, raising an army, minting money, and performing all types of

⁷¹ Fauroux, no. 219. Numerous examples of women assenting to grants of land and property have already been discussed in Chapter 3.

⁷² *Liber Albus*, H. 938 Arch. de l'Orne, c.1086.

⁷³ Work on the position of women and their positions of power connected to allodial lands had been conducted by Georges Duby, *Rural Economy and Country Life in the Medieval West* (London: Edward Arnold Press, 1968); and Stenton, *The English Woman in History*.

⁷⁴ McNamara and Wemple, "The Power of Women through the Family in Medieval Europe," 134.

⁷⁵ Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda*, 28, 30.

⁷⁶ Robert was of age in 1073 when he was knighted by Duke William at Fresnay. When his mother was killed in 1082, he became count of Bellême and Alençon. See *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 306-307 and Cokayne, *The Complete Peerage*, XI: 690.

governmental regulating that had once been the task of the Carolingian kings.⁷⁷

Noblewomen also oversaw houses and staff, as Guibert of Nogent reminds us through his mother's hiring and negotiating pay for the teachers who lived in the household.⁷⁸ In the Norman period (1066-1154) in England, female lords held honor courts⁷⁹ to resolve disputes among tenants or servants and to enforce feudal rights over wardships and vassals.⁸⁰ Further adding to their power as autonomous rulers over their lands, women such as Mabel would have also directed the governmental duties of her husband's lands when he was absent. We know that Roger took at least one trip to England. Although no record of such an administration exists for Bellême lands under any generation of Bellême lords, such administrative duties would have likely been overseen by capable and controlling mistresses, such as Duchess Matilda, who oversaw Normandy during the Conquest of England and at various times when Duke William had to be in England.⁸¹

Women used their power and authority to end hostilities, as was the case when Matilda of Tuscany (1046-1115) helped negotiate peace between Pope Gregory and Emperor Henry IV at her castle at Canossa. Subsequently, Matilda served the Pope and

⁷⁷ McNamara and Wemple, "The Power of Women through the Family in Medieval Europe," 134.

⁷⁸ *A Monk's Confession*, 14-15.

⁷⁹ Jennifer Ward, ed. and trans. *Women of the English Nobility and Gentry* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), 8. This practice likely began in the Norman period as part of the duties of a female lord, especially in the absence of her husband. As acting lords (or as lords in their own name), "women in charge of an estate were expected to know how to meet its obligations," including producing knights, hosting feudal lords, guarding castles, and enforcing relief and wardship in addition to holding honor courts.

⁸⁰ Ward, *Women of the English Nobility and Gentry 1066-1500*, 8. For women testifying in court, see Stenton, *The English Woman in History*, 31, and Elizabeth de Burgh's honor court, which was conducted separately from her husband's court; see Ward, *Women of the English Nobility and Gentry*, 148-149. Ward's text covers women from the Norman and Angevin period while Stenton's text begins with Anglo-Saxon women.

⁸¹ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 208-211, 222-225, and *Gesta Guillelmi*, 178-179.

defended the Church with her own army, and upon her death she willed her vast Tuscan lands to the Church, lands that “form the bulwark of the papal state.”⁸² Queen Matilda of Boulogne negotiated her husband, Stephen’s, release from prison, and Mabel of Gloucester secured the release of her husband, Robert, Earl of Gloucester.⁸³ Examples such as these serve to highlight women’s powerful positions. Mabel lived at the right historical moment to be able to gain and use her powers to maximum effect before restrictions such as primogeniture and other measures that limited women’s power were enacted.⁸⁴

The actual lived experience of parents and children in the medieval period is hard to ascertain from most medieval sources. One measure of the depth of the parent–child relationship is through charter evidence. Charters record donations made to churches and on whose behalf the donations were made. Most of the time, donation charters were formulaic (X gives [gift] for the salvation of my soul, my spouse’s soul, and the souls of my children . . .); however, this was not always the case. One example of an emotional donation is found in the words of grieving parents in the eleventh century,

Hamelin of Langeaus and his wife Halvisa, daughter of Odo of Dubellus, by divine grace they had a son named Walter, beloved of God, a fine example of a young boy. When from the present rapture of this secular world he was called to

⁸² McNamara and Wemple, “The Power of Women through the Family in Medieval Europe: 500-1000,” 134. Writers noted Matilda’s role in the eleventh-century reform in her day.

⁸³ Paula Bailey, “Daughters, Wives, and Widows: A Study of Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman Noble Women” (unpub. MSE thesis: Henderson State University, 2001), 10.

⁸⁴ Georges Duby has written extensively about primogeniture and the family’s motives to maintain as much power as possible through streamlined inheritance practices that keep lands together with only one (male) heir. In the case of Normandy, once primogeniture took hold (by the time of Henry I, 1100-1135), women’s inheritance rights became heavily restricted as a way to consolidate power against neighboring kingdoms. By the twelfth century, a Norman woman’s inheritance was limited to no more than a third of the patrimony. For a list of recent scholarship seeking to move women from the margins of the twelfth century, see Erin Jordin, *Women, Power, and Religious Patronage* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 4-9.

God at seven years, concerned with the state of his soul, and made vehemently sad by his absence . . . His parents made a gift to the monks.⁸⁵

Similarly, a donation was made in the twelfth century by a grieving mother, Juliana of Pray, who upon the death of her daughter, Guitberg, appeared before the monks of St. Trinité “groaning and weeping with her son Peter...”⁸⁶ Even monarchs were not immune to such grief. Queen Adelaide (of Louvain), second wife of King Henry I of England, deeply mourned the death of her fifteen-year-old son, Peter, after a fatal injury from a horse accident. King Louis VI (1081–1137) was so stricken over the death of his child, Philip, in 1131, that he “grieved mournfully and cursed his wretched life because he was the one who survived.”⁸⁷

At other times, there are glimpses of mothers relating the importance of literacy to their children⁸⁸ or encouraging donations to monastic houses.⁸⁹ A prime example of this bond between mothers and children is reflected in the writings of Guibert of Nogent, who repeatedly recalls the positive and enduring impact of his mother’s love and her influence upon his childhood, his early education, and his choice of monastic life.⁹⁰ Guibert’s mother, a minor noblewoman who lived in the royal demesne next to Normandy at the same time as Mabel, was “beautiful yet chaste and modest and filled with the fear of the

⁸⁵ Amy Livingstone, *Out of Love for my Kin: Aristocratic Family Life in the Lands of the Loire, 1000-1200* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 31-32.

⁸⁶ Livingstone, *Out of Love for my Kin*, 33.

⁸⁷ Livingstone, *Out of Love for my Kin*, 33.

⁸⁸ Guibert of Nogent records the powerful and positive influence of his mother in his early education. See *A Monk’s Confession*, 14. Guibert’s mother, a widow from the time the baby was eight months old, taught him as best she could but turned him over to a tutor at the age of seven.

⁸⁹ Livingstone, *Out of Love for my Kin*, 33-34.

⁹⁰ *A Monk’s Confession*, 8, 14-15, 21-23.

Lord,”⁹¹ and even though Guibert’s family was populated with “fierce, brutish warriors and murderers,”⁹² his mother was his sole source of purity and Godliness. Guibert’s mother had other children who died. Then she labored and nearly died giving birth to her son, “a frail little thing.”⁹³ Widowed only eight months after giving birth to Guibert, his mother hired a series of nurses, tutors, masters, and chaplains.⁹⁴ After a particularly harsh day, Guibert’s mother discovered that he had been beaten by his tutor, and she became “disturbed and quite agitated, and her eyes filled with tears” to learn of his suffering; she was so distraught that she was willing to go back on the vow she made to God to give her son to a monastery and offered to allow him to become a knight instead.⁹⁵ Even though Guibert began his memoirs after his mother’s death and romanticized her life in retelling it, there is no doubt that the bond between mother and child was intense. Through Guibert’s words, one can better understand the lives of women in the eleventh century.

The value of evidence such as this cannot be exaggerated, for it demonstrates the intimate connection between aristocratic parents and their children and dispels the myth that a rigid patriarchy dominated medieval households. Parents cared deeply for their children’s lives—and more important to those in the medieval world—cared for their eternal souls. Mabel and Roger made several donations for the souls of their parents and with their children.

⁹¹ *A Monk’s Confession*, 6.

⁹² *A Monk’s Confession*, 8.

⁹³ *A Monk’s Confession*, 10.

⁹⁴ *A Monk’s Confession*, 14-15, 38.

⁹⁵ *A Monk’s Confession*, 20.

Mabel's Descendants⁹⁶

Mabel was an exceedingly fecund woman, and her marriage to Roger proved quite productive both economically and biblically.⁹⁷ There is no evidence of spontaneous abortion or stillbirth, and there is no record of children who died during infancy. These facts are not axiomatic as records of deaths or evidence of burials were not recorded in medieval Normandy. Although there is no way to ascertain birth order, it is likely that Robert was the eldest; his eight siblings are generally listed with girls last. Therefore, Mabel and Roger's children are Robert, Hugh, Roger, Arnulf, Philip, Matilda, Emma, Mabil, and Sybil. The following brief descriptions of important events in their lives show how power descended from Mabel to her children.

Robert of Montgomery, also known as Robert de Bellême, was born within a couple of years of his parents' marriage in c.1052. In 1070, after the death of his great-uncle, Yves Bishop of Séez, his parents brought Robert to Bellême, which at that time had become his mother's inheritance; as the oldest surviving son, it would eventually be his.⁹⁸ William the Conqueror knighted him in 1073 at the siege of Fresnay.⁹⁹ He was of age when he took part in the 1077 revolt of the young Robert Curthose against King William.¹⁰⁰ Robert became the Count of Bellême and Alençon, in which seigneuries he succeeded his mother after her murder on December 2, 1082. He became the Count of

⁹⁶ See complete Descendants Chart, Appendix B.

⁹⁷ Genesis 1:28, King James Version of the Holy Bible: "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth...."

⁹⁸ Cokayne, *The Complete Peerage*, XI: 690.

⁹⁹ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 306-307.

¹⁰⁰ Cokayne, *The Complete Peerage*, XI: 690. Note that Duke William of Normandy became King in 1066.

Montgomery and Exmes on the death of his father in 1094, and Earl of Shrewsbury and Arundel on his brother Hugh's death in 1098.¹⁰¹ By 1100, Robert had control of thirty-four castles.¹⁰² In 1100, a "serious quarrel" broke out between Robert and his kinsman, Rotrou of Mortagne, over the boundaries of their marcher territories.¹⁰³ These men "fought each other ferociously, looting and burning in each other's territories and adding crime to crime."¹⁰⁴ The turmoil ends with Rotrou victorious, Robert's men captured, and Robert imprisoned in the dungeon of Rotrou.¹⁰⁵ In 1101, Duke Robert of Normandy granted him the Bishopric of Séez, including the castle of Argentan and the Forest of Gouffern.¹⁰⁶

Robert proved to be a tendentious figure. Although he inherited all his father's estates, he seems to have inherited little of his father's prudence and forbearance. In fact, in public matters he behaved more like his mother—daringly, controversially, and powerfully, behaving as "cruel and proud and evil in every way."¹⁰⁷ Robert became infamous for his alleged cruelty. He has been called "the most notorious tyrant of the

¹⁰¹ *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 148-149.

¹⁰² *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 398-399.

¹⁰³ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 396-397.

¹⁰⁴ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 396-397, 'Vnde atrocem querram uicissim fecerunt, in terriis suis predas et incendia perpetrarunt, et scelera sceleribus accumulaurunt.'

¹⁰⁵ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 396-397.

¹⁰⁶ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 14-15.

¹⁰⁷ *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 148-149, 'quia crudelis et superbus et ualde nequan erat innumeras iniquitates exercuit.'

age.”¹⁰⁸ Orderic Vitalis calls him “grasping and cruel, an implacable persecutor of the Church of God and the poor . . . unequalled for his iniquity in the whole Christian era.”¹⁰⁹

In an episode of hostility toward his lord, which Orderic dates to 1102, Robert had King Henry summoned Robert to answer for forty-five offenses against the royal family.¹¹⁰ Instead of answering for his crimes, Robert fled and the king “publicly condemned” (*publicis questibus impetitur*) him and “pronounced him a public enemy unless he returned to do right and submit to justice.”¹¹¹ Robert attempted to flee and fortify his castles against the king.¹¹² Eventually Robert encamped at his castle at Shrewsbury, where Henry met Robert and his men. Orderic Vitalis writes, “As Henry approached Shrewsbury, Robert was chagrined; and driven to despair by his unhappy fate, consulted his friends, and went to meet the King as he approached the town, confessing his treason, and laying the keys of the town at his feet.”¹¹³ Henry permitted him to retire unmolested with his horses and arms, and gave him a safe conduct through England to the coast.¹¹⁴ Orderic added that “England was in a tumult of joy at his

¹⁰⁸ Charles Wendell David, *Robert Curthose, Duke of Normandy* (Chicago: Klemperer Press, 2010), 77.

¹⁰⁹ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 179-180, ‘suum cuius crudelitas in diebus nostris super miseras plebes nimium efferbuit ipsi et Rogerio aliisque monachis apud Sagium morantibus.’

¹¹⁰ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 20-21, ‘Anno ab incarnatione Domini MCII indictione X^e Henricus rex Rodbertum de Bellissimo potentissimum comitem ad curiam suam ascivit, et xlv reatus in factis seu dictis contra se uel fratrem suum Normanniæ ducem commissos obiecit, et de singulis eum palam respondere precepit.’

¹¹¹ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 20-21, ‘Rodbertum itaque publicis questibus impetitur nec legaliter expiatum palam blasphemavit et nisi ad iudicium rectitudinem factorum remearet publicum hostem iudicavit.’

¹¹² *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 20-31.

¹¹³ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 30-31, ‘Ille tandem tristis casus sui angora contabuit, et consultu amicorum regi iam prope urbem uenienti obuiam processit, et crimen prodicionis confesseus clause urbis uictori exhibuit.’

¹¹⁴ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 31-33.

banishment, and numbers congratulated the king, saying, ‘Rejoice, King Henry, and return thanks to the Lord your God, for you begin to reign independently from the moment you reduced Robert de Bellême to subjection, and drove him out of your kingdom.’”¹¹⁵ Therefore, the Bellême family’s great English estate was confiscated.¹¹⁶ In addition, his ruin involved that of his brothers, Arnulf de Montgomery, and Roger, Earl of Lancaster. Robert retired to his estates in Normandy, where he “carried his ill temper; and boiling with rage and overwhelmed with grief.”¹¹⁷

Robert’s Norman career was doomed because of both his impatience and his anger. In Normandy, details of his life mirror his mother and maternal grandfather in their cruelty. Orderic Vitalis reports that in exile in Normandy, he turned his rage to the people who had (allegedly) betrayed him, and he commenced “pillaging their estates, burning all behind him, and tortured to death or mutilated the knights and other persons whom he was able to capture. He was so cruel that he preferred tormenting his prisoners to growing rich on fat ransoms offered for their release.”¹¹⁸ In Normandy, Robert became “thoroughly disorderly and found many ways of causing disturbances all over the duke’s domains. By his cunning subterfuges he prevented many men from giving the duke

¹¹⁵ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI:30-33, ‘Gaude rex Henrice, Dominoque Deo gratias age, quia tu libere cepisti regnare, ex quo Rodbertum de Belismo uicisti, et de finibus regni tui expulisti.’

¹¹⁶ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI:30-33.

¹¹⁷ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 30-31, ‘Rodbertus autem ira et dolore plenus in Neustriam transfretauit, et compatriotas suos qui mollem dominum adiuuare suum nisi fuerant crudeliter inuasit, cædibus et incendiis uehementer aggrauauit.’

¹¹⁸ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 30-31 ‘Rura eorum predis direptis ignibus conflagrauit, et milites uel alios quos capere ualebat usque ad mortem seu debilitationem membrorum cruciatibus afflixit. Tanta enim in illo erat seuitis, ut multa ditari pecunia.’

help... He was a man of keen intelligence, treacherous and devious, strong and well-built, bold and victorious in battle, ready in speech and appallingly cruel....”¹¹⁹

Earl Robert exercised power through cruelty in a multitude of ways. Never one for “honoring, aiding, or clothing holy Mother Church as a son should,”¹²⁰ he burned churches and nunneries, he tortured his children,¹²¹ and he pillaged and tortured friends and enemies, rich and poor. He committed such violence that remonstrations were made against him from every quarter. Orderic tells of an episode c. 1112 when “Robert of Bellême gave vent to the fierce hatred he had fostered by long brooding, and openly came out against the king whom he had previously placated, hiding his venom.”¹²² Then, “breaking his oath of fealty, he [Robert] openly committed perjury, for he deserted his natural lord Henry at a time when foes beset him on all sides, and gave both counsel and military support to help Fulk of Anjou and other public enemies of his lord.”¹²³

Eventually, he was put on trial for his crimes of for perjury and treason “against God and king,” among “other misdeeds.”¹²⁴ In an eloquent plea, Orderic records a speech made by Bishop Odo to the duke at Rouen,

¹¹⁹ *Ecclesiastical History*, IV: 158-159, ‘Erat enim ingenio subtilis, dolosus et uersipellis, corpore magnus et fortis, audax et potens in armis, eloquens nimiumque crudelis, auaricia et libidine inexplebilis.’

¹²⁰ *Ecclesiastical History*, IV: 158-159, ‘Sanctam æcclesiam non ut filius matrem honorauit....’

¹²¹ Henry of Huntingdon tells that Earl Robert tore out his little son’s eyes when he hid under his coat, ‘Filioli sui oculos sub clamide positi, quasi ludens pollicibus, extraxit.’ Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, ed. and trans. Diana Greenway (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 602.

¹²² *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 178-179, ‘Tunc Rodbertus Belesmensis ingentem maliiam quam diutina curiositate fouerat exulit, et contra regem cui hactenus uenenosis simulationibus blandiebatur ceruicem palam erexit.’

¹²³ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 178-179, ‘Hic siquidem rupto fidelitatis uinculo periurium palam incurrit, dum naturalem dominum suum Henricum qui tunc a multis undique infestabatur dereliquit, et Fulconem Andegauensem aliosque domini sui publicos hostes consilio et uiribus adiuit.’

¹²⁴ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 178-179.

Remember your fathers and ancestors, whose spirit and courage brought terror to the warlike Franks...I ask you to imitate their justice and their achievements...attack Earl Roger and banish him and his seed forever from the soil of Normandy...Now you hold Robert, Roger's eldest son, in captivity; now if you continue resolutely with the struggle as a good duke should you can utterly extirpate the rebellious sons of Talvas from your duchy. Their stock is accursed: it nourishes evil and conspires almost by right of inheritance. This is proved by their horrible ends; you will find that none of them has met an ordinary or normal death like other men. I consider that unless you root out the family of Talvas now it will become more menacing to you and invincible later. They have strongly fortified castles: Bellême, Lurson, Essay, Alençon, Domfront, Saint-Céneri, La Roche Mabilie (for the sake of which the daring Hugh cut off Mabel's head), Mamers, Vignats, and many others, which William of Bellême, Robert, Yves, and Waren and other successors of their either built in their pride or wrested by force or fraud from their lords or neighbors. They have always been addicted to deceits and evil plots; they have never kept faith with any of their friends or neighbors. They have grown excessively powerful by annexing the possessions of the innocent neighbors they have killed or taken prisoner and have built great houses and almost impregnable castles by the sweated labor of peasants.¹²⁵

Like his mother, Robert had some redeeming qualities. Like his great-great grandfather, Yves, Robert was a siege engineer who went on Crusade assisted the king of France and the duke at the siege of Bréval,

Robert of Bellême, whose engineering skill was to help the Christians capture Jerusalem, brought a most ingenious invention to the siege. He built contrivances which were wheeled against the enemy's fortresses, hurling great stones at the castle and its garrison, and taught the attackers how to make assaults by which the boundary wall and palisades surrounding the castle could be smashed to pieces,

¹²⁵ *Ecclesiastical History*, IV: 150-153. 'Cenomannensibus subiugatis Rogerium comitem aggredere et ipsum cum progenie sua de finibus Normanniæ funditus exclude. Ne timeas, sed in uirtute Dei confides. Virile robur arripe et consiliis sapientum utere. Iam Robertum Rogerii primogenitum tenes in carcere, iam si pertinaciter ut bonum ducem decet perstiteris in agone. Talauacios subuersores de ducatu tuo poteris penitus expellere. Maledicta est prosapis eorum alit nefas et machinatur quasi ius hereditarium. Hoc nimirum horrenda more eorum attestatur quorum nullus communi et usitato fine ut ceteri homines defecisse inuenitur. Talauaciana propago nisi nunc eam eradicaueris adhuc ut opinur noxia tibi erit et inexpugnabilis. Habent quidem fortissimo castella, Bellismum, Lubercionem, Axeium, Alencionem, Damfrontem, Sanctum Senericum, rupem de Ialgeio pro qua ab audaci Hugone digladiata est Mabilia, Mamercias et Vinacium et alia plura, quæ Guillelmus Bellismensis et Robertus, Iuo et Guarinus aliique successores eorum superbe construxerunt aut ui seu fraude dominis suis uel finitimis surripuerunt. Dolis et scelestis machinationibus semper inhiauerunt nec ulli amicorum uel affinium fidem seruauerunt. Simplicibus itaque uicinis nece seu captione supplantatis admodum creuerunt et ingentes domos ac fortissimos munitions cum nimio sudore pagensium condiderunt.'

the roofs of the buildings brought down on the heads of the inhabitants, and the enemy forces to surrender by such calamities.¹²⁶

Robert was able to pay King William Rufus (r. 1087-1100) the sum of three thousand pounds for the Montgomery-Bellême lands in England, to which he soon added the barony of Tickhill, Yorkshire, which belonged to a relative named Roger de Builli.¹²⁷

Robert would eventually be imprisoned for life in Cherbourg Castle, and later, Warham Castle.¹²⁸ Henry of Huntingdon recorded, “Of him whose fame had been spread everywhere, no one knew, after he was in prison, whether he was alive or dead, and report was silent of the day of his death.”¹²⁹ None of his inherited wealth and honors prevented him meeting his death in a felon’s cell, where his own hand was speedier than that of justice. “He was a very Pluto, Megaera, Cerberus, or anything you can conceive still more horrible,” said Henry of Huntingdon, who gave details of his cruelties omitted

¹²⁶ *Ecclesiastical History*, IV: 288-289, ‘Illuc Robertus Belesmensis ingeniosissimum artificem adduxit, cuius ingeniosa sagacitas ad capiendam Ierusalem Christianis profecit. Hic machinas contruxit, contra munimentum hostile super rotulas egit, ingentia saxa in oppidum et oppidanos proiecit, bellatores assultus dare docuit, quibus uallum et sepes circumcingentes diruit, et culmina domorum super inhabitantes deiecit, tantisque calamitatibus aduersarios ad deditionem coegit.’ William of Malmesbury also wrote of Robert’s military acumen, particularly at the Battle of Tinchebray in 1106 for Robert Curthose. It seems likely from these words of Orderic, that Robert participated in the Siege of Jerusalem in 1099.

¹²⁷ Builli is sometimes spelled Busli, Bully, or Bulli. Neither of the experts on the Montgomery family (Eton and Mason) nor those on the Buillis of Torkshire (Clay and Timson) can determine how Robert of Bellême and Roger of Builli were related. Marjorie Chibnall is also unable to determine the relationship beyond “kinsman” in “Robert of Bellême and the Castle of Tickhill” in *Droit privé et institutions regionales: études historiques offertes à Jean Yver* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de Francia, 1976): 151-156.

¹²⁸ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 179 n.3. The last year of his life, as recorded in the *Pipe Rolls* of Henry I, was 1130-1131.

¹²⁹ *Historia Anglorum*, 604-605, ‘Quem tantopere fama coluerat, dum uiueret in carcere, utrum uiueret uel obisset, nesciunt. Diem quoque mortis eius obmutescens ignorauit.’

by Orderic, such as driving stakes through men and women, from anus to mouth and gouging out the eyes of his young son.¹³⁰

Because of his love for Robert's parents, Roger and Mabel, King William Rufus arranged for a noble marriage with Agnes, the daughter of Guy, count of Ponthieu, in c.1087. Robert soon became Count of Ponthieu by right of his wife, Agnes, whose father died in 1100. Robert and Agnes had one surviving son, William III of Ponthieu. The stories of Robert's brutality may have inspired the legend of Robert the Devil, but recent scholarship has attempted to contextualize Robert's cruelty in the increasingly violent age in which he lived and exercised power.¹³¹ Robert was a brilliant military engineer and a capable warrior, but he was also known for his fits of rage. He derived pleasure from mutilating captives, hostages, and even his own men.¹³² Orderic Vitalis leaves this image: "Robert of Bellême, whose name is now a byword for his cruelty of the wretched..."¹³³

Hugh was likely the second-oldest son of Mabel and Roger. His title was styled Hugh "de Montgomery," Earl of Shrewsbury and Arundel, because Hugh was given his father's English holdings when Roger died in 1094.¹³⁴ Hugh helped other nobles negotiate a truce between Ascelin Goel and his lord William of Breteuil that began when Goel feloniously took his lord's castle at Ivry from him, then "flung him into prison and

¹³⁰ *Historia Anglorum*, 603, 'Vidisti Robertum de Belesme. Qui princeps Normannensis in carcerem positus erat. Pluto, Megera, Cerberus, uel si aliquid horrendius scribi potest.'

¹³¹ Mason, "Roger de Montgomery and His Sons," 26-27.

¹³² *Ecclesiastical History*, IV: 158-161.

¹³³ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 48-49 'Rodbertum quoque de Belesmia primogenitum filium suum cuius crudelitas'

¹³⁴ *Ecclesiastical History*, IV: 302-303. Mason states without sources that Hugh held a manor in Worfield and Staffordshire in his own name before his father's death. Worfield was in Staffordshire and is located in Shropshire today, so this could be one or multiple different manors. See Darby and Terrett, eds. *The Domesday Geography of Middle England*, 115.

cruelly ill-treated him in his foul dungeon through the following Lent....”¹³⁵ Hugh was privately remonstrated by King William Rufus after a failed uprising in 1095, but then bought back the king’s favor for three thousand pounds.¹³⁶ Hugh continued his father’s commitment to maintaining the Welsh Marches by building a castle at Cleobury and adding considerably to his parents’ endowments at Shrewsbury and Quatford; however, he concentrated his religious generosity on an abbey that he founded in 1079 in the Bordelais, called La Sauve-Majeure.¹³⁷ Like his father, Hugh also held land in Wales in a place called Gal.¹³⁸

Hugh did not spend his time in the Welsh Marches building religious houses; he was a warrior. Sometimes he found himself defending against raiding Welsh bands, but many times he took the fight into Wales. He led an attack into Wales at Ceredigion in 1074;¹³⁹ thereafter, he remained on the Marches to guard the English border against incursions of Welsh fighters in 1094 and 1098.¹⁴⁰ For his actions on the borders, the Welsh nicknamed Hugh “Hugh Goch” (The Red Headed), a name that indicated their reproach for the Norman intruders on the Welsh border as well as Hugh’s cruelty.¹⁴¹

¹³⁵ *Ecclesiastical History*, IV: 198-203.

¹³⁶ *Ecclesiastical History*, IV: 284-285.

¹³⁷ Mason, “Roger de Montgomery and His Sons,” 19.

¹³⁸ Darby and Terrett, eds. *The Domesday Geography of Middle England*, 160.

¹³⁹ Cokayne, *Complete Peerage*, XI: 688.

¹⁴⁰ Chandler, “Lordship, Prestige and Piety: Charitable Donations of the Anglo-Norman Aristocracy,” 72. Chandler mentions that Hugh “earned a reputation for sacrilege and cruelty by turning one church into a dog kennel and mutilating an old priest.” This is an astounding assertion, but no note to primary sources is given and Orderic Vitalis does not describe Hugh in these words. Chandler seems to be confusing Hugh with his elder brother, Robert; see *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 34-35.

¹⁴¹ Chandler, “Lordship, Prestige and Piety: Charitable Donations of the Anglo-Norman Aristocracy,” 70, and Mason, “Roger de Montgomery and His Sons,” 24. Mason believes that because Orderic was an Englishman by birth, perhaps his cruelty toward the Welsh was overlooked as unimportant.

Even though Mason believes that the English remember Hugh as “madly ambitious and monstrously cruel.”¹⁴² This language contrasts sharply with the language of Normans who noted that Hugh was the only son of Mabel to be remembered as courteous and amiable (*mansuetus et amabilis fuit*).¹⁴³ He outlived his father by only four years, dying in 1098, unmarried, in Llandyfydog at the hands of the Norwegian pirate King Magnus “Barefoot,” son of King Harold of Norway.¹⁴⁴ The Norwegians were fighting in Wales to defend the rights of the Welsh people. Hugh died bravely, wading out to meet the approaching Norwegians. Orderic Vitalis records that King Magnus “mourned deeply with his men”¹⁴⁵ and that both the Norman and English sought Hugh’s corpse when the tide ebbed. Further, Orderic tells that Hugh was buried in the cloister at Shrewsbury and that “He alone of all Mabel’s sons was courteous and lovable, and he governed his paternal honor very justly....”¹⁴⁶

Roger was known as “the Poitevin,” Earl of Lancaster, and Count of Marche. Mason reports that Roger held lands in Hampshire, Essex, Suffolk, Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, and Yorkshire in addition to lands he held lands in the hand of the king. In the early twentieth century, historians questioned how and why Roger held so much lands and how and why he lost them.¹⁴⁷ Roger became involved in the misfortunes of his

¹⁴² Mason, “Roger de Montgomery and his Sons,” 24 citing Robert W. Eyton, *Antiquities of Shropshire*, II (London: John Russell Smith, 1855): 191.

¹⁴³ *Ecclesiastical History*, V: 224-225.

¹⁴⁴ *Anglo Saxon Chronicle*, cited in David Douglas, *English Historical Documents, 1042-1189*. vol 2. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 175.

¹⁴⁵ *Ecclesiastical History*, V: 224-225, ‘Cuius mortem Magnus rex ut comperiit, uehementer cum suis planxit... sui paternum honorem moderatissime rexit.’

¹⁴⁶ *Ecclesiastical History*, V: 224-225, ‘Hic solus de filiis Mabilie mansuetus et amabilis fuit.’

¹⁴⁷ Mason, “Roger de Montgomery and His Sons,” 14.

father and brother in an attempt to supplant Henry I in the Rebellion of 1101. Because of his involvement in the rebellion, he lost all his English and Welsh lands¹⁴⁸ shortly after his father's death.¹⁴⁹ He had made a fortuitous marriage with Almodis, the daughter and heir of Adelbert, Count of Poitou, which made him a count in Francia.¹⁵⁰ After losing¹⁵¹ his English lands, c. 1086, Roger and Almodis retired to her castle at Charroux. Roger and Almodis had five children: Aldebert, Boso, Odo, Pontia, and Avice. Roger continued his mother's practice of religious patronage by donating the priory of St. Martin's in Lancaster to the Abbey of St. Martin in Séz. Roger died in 1123.

Arnulf is the fourth son of Mabel. He had his mother's rebellious spirit, and he was implicated in the rebellion against King Henry I of England in 1101. Arnulf was the Lord of Holderness in Yorkshire after Odo of Champagne rebelled against William Rufus,¹⁵² and he was probably created Earl of Pembroke.¹⁵³ Arnulf was "much regarded among his companions for . . . knightly skill and reputation of valor."¹⁵⁴ He was a "notorious character" who was also loved by Anselm of Canterbury, who was his good friend.¹⁵⁵ At some time in his adult life, he contracted a marriage with Lafracloth, the

¹⁴⁸ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 30-31. Holdings in England likely included Staffordshire, Essex, Suffolk, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Lincolnshire, Hampshire, and North Yorkshire.

¹⁴⁹ *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 150-151.

¹⁵⁰ Mason, "Roger de Montgomery and His Sons," 13-23.

¹⁵¹ Or forfeiting, according to Mason, "Roger de Montgomery and His Sons," 14.

¹⁵² *CDF*, 667.

¹⁵³ See Mason, "Roger de Montgomery and His Sons," 17-18. Chibnall, citing Mason, says "Arnulf probably took his comital title from Pembroke," see *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 150, n.1.

¹⁵⁴ *Ecclesiastical History*, IV: 302-303, 'militiæ probitatumque titulis inter contubernales ualuerunt.'

¹⁵⁵ Vaughn, *Anselm of Bec and Robert of Meulan*, 195, n. 266. Chibnall, *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 32 n.1.

daughter of Murchertack O'Brien, King of Ireland.¹⁵⁶ Arnulf negotiated with the King for the hand of Lafracloth and then sent his steward, Gerald, to bring her to him while he and his brothers planned the rebellion. In 1098, after her brother Hugh was killed and in honor of that death, Arnulf made a generous donation to the brethren at Sééz, giving the monks¹⁵⁷

in alms for ever, for his soul and those of his father Roger and his brother Hugh, who was slain that year, the church of St. Nicholas at Pembroch, a castle of his in Wales, and 20 carucates of land, together with all that his men had given or should give the abbey; and he promised that he would give other land of his, lying in England sufficient to provide footgear (*calceamenta*) for the brethren of the abbey.

Arnulf had schemes of “secur[ing] his father-in-law’s kingdom”¹⁵⁸ to become the King of Ireland; however, regarding Arnulf’s fate, it is only known that he “throve for while with comital rank, enjoy[ed] power and wealth”¹⁵⁹ and then was ruined by the rebellion in 1102. He was ejected from England along with his brothers Robert and Roger.¹⁶⁰ Vaughn reports that Archbishop Anselm convinced Murchertack to “restore royal favor” to Arnulf,¹⁶¹ but other scholars are divided about his fate and believe it is likely that he was imprisoned or killed along with Mowbray and his coconspirators or

¹⁵⁶ E. Curtis, “Murchertach O’Brien and his Norman son-in-law, Arnulf of Montgomery, c.1100,” in *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, LI (1921): 116-124.

¹⁵⁷ *CDF*, no. 666.

¹⁵⁸ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 30-33, ‘Arnulfus enim filiam regis Hiberniæ nomine Lafracloth uxorem habuit, per quam soceri sui regnum optinere concupiuit.’

¹⁵⁹ *Ecclesiastical History*, IV: 302-303.

¹⁶⁰ Vaughn, *Anselm of Bec and Robert of Meulan*, 238, 248, citing *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 20-32.

¹⁶¹ Vaughn, *Anselm of Bec and Robert of Meulan*, 333, citing the *Sancti Anselmi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi opera omnia*, epistle 426. This epistle was not considered, and Vaughn is a trustworthy scholar on the writings of Anselm. This episode is not included in Southern’s translation of *The Life of St. Anselm*. This episode is reported by Chibnall, *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 32 n.1.

that he spent his remaining years between Normandy and Ireland.¹⁶² An episode in the *Vita Anselmi*¹⁶³ tells of Arnulf and his men who, during a trip from Normandy back to England, were caught up in a terrific storm half way across the Channel that lasted for two days. Finally, Arnulf “recalled to mind the ever-memorable name of Father Anselm” and asking everyone to “turn our hearts and tongues to our saintly father and bishop, Anselm, whom we have often seen, to whom we have clung, with whose sacred teaching we are imbued, and whose holy blessing we have so often enjoyed.” Miraculously, the storm ceased, the English coast came into view, and the men were saved. Figure 4.2 shows an overview of twelfth-century Bellême family holdings in England.

¹⁶² Again, scholars speculate that he may have left offspring from his marriage to the Irish princess. Henry Jacques Renault Du Motey, *Le Champion de la Normandie, Robert II de Bellême, lieutenant du duc Robert Courtehouse, seigneur d’alençon, etc. et son temps 1056-1124* (Paris: Champion Press, 1923), 272, claims there was a son named Robert who died c.1180 after going to Scotland, but he gave no source for his speculation. Likewise, Curtis, “Murchertach O’Brien,” 123, believed Arnulf had a daughter named Alice who later married Maurice fitz Gerald and was the founder of the earls of Kildare. There may have also been an illegitimate daughter named Sybil, according to William Oliver Roper, ed. *Materials for the history of the church of Lancaster* (Manchester: Chetham Society, 1906), 10.

¹⁶³ Eadmer of Canterbury, *The Life of St. Anselm Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. and trans. R.W. Southern, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972): 144-147.

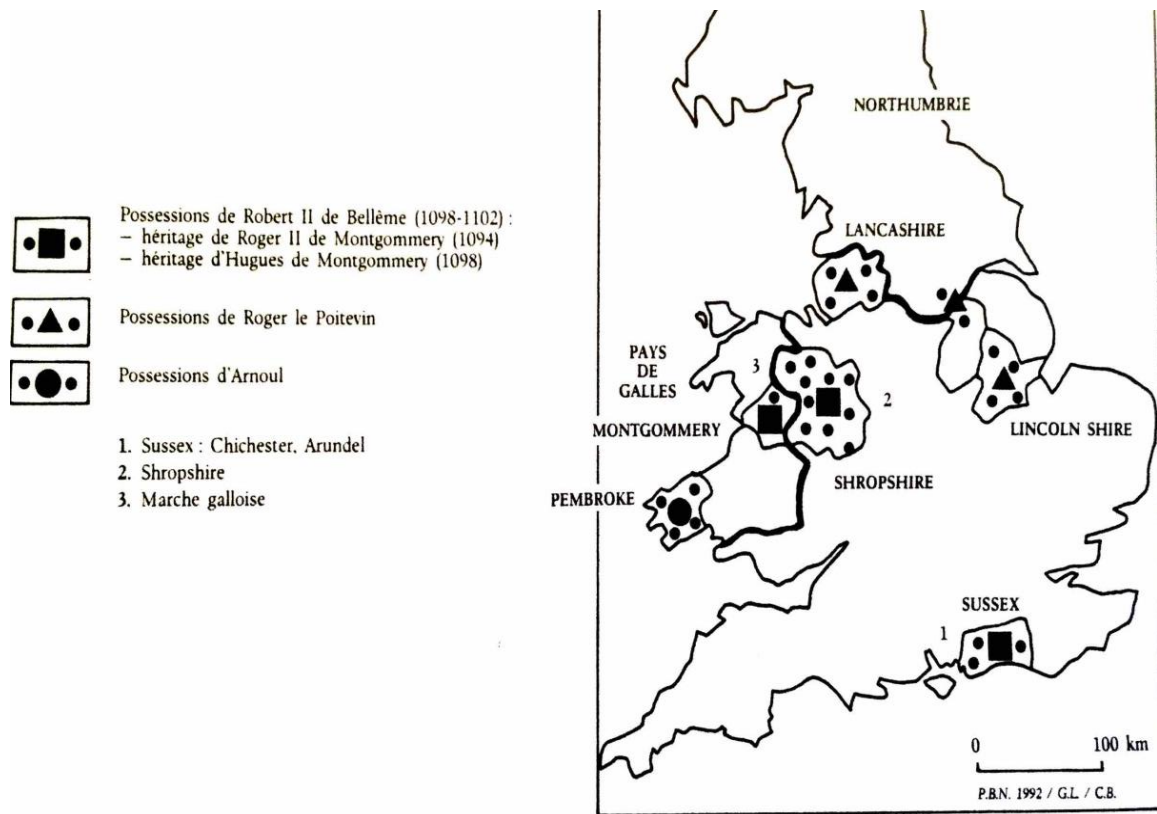


Figure 4.2. Overview of twelfth-century Bellême family holdings in England.¹⁶⁴
 Awaiting permission from Gérard Louise.

The youngest of Mabel's sons was named Philip. Historians have labeled Philip "the Clerk" or "the Grammarian" because he received an education that was beyond the standard.¹⁶⁵ It seems likely that Philip was destined to take holy orders; however, Philip was implicated with his brother in Robert de Mowbray's Rebellion of 1095. For penance,

¹⁶⁴ Louise, *La Seigneurie de Bellême*, I: 394.

¹⁶⁵ Le Patourel, *Norman Barons*, 20, calls Philip "that rare bird of the eleventh-century, a literate knight."

or to avoid prison, Philip left on Crusade. He died along the Crusade route in Antioch in 1099.¹⁶⁶ His only child was a daughter named Matilda who succeeded her aunt as abbess of the nunnery at Almenêches in 1113.¹⁶⁷

Mabel's daughters also lived successful, though somewhat more ordinary, medieval lives. Matilda married a man who was a contemporary to her parents, Robert, Count of Mortain (c.1031–1090). Robert was, like Matilda's father, a close friend and kinsman¹⁶⁸ of the Conqueror and a beneficiary of substantial English holdings.¹⁶⁹ Matilda was the mother of many children. She left four surviving and highly successful children when she died c.1085,¹⁷⁰ including Agnes, Denise, William, and Emma, whose granddaughter would be Queen of Aragon.¹⁷¹

A second daughter, Emma, chose the cloister over marriage. She became the third abbess of Almenêches,¹⁷² signing a charter c.1060¹⁷³ and c.1074.¹⁷⁴ The nunnery of

¹⁶⁶ *Ecclesiastical History*, IV: 302-303.

¹⁶⁷ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 36-37.

¹⁶⁸ Half-brother of William of Conqueror according Cokayne, *Complete Peerage*, III: 427; see also Mason, "Roger de Montgomery and His Sons," 16.

¹⁶⁹ His position of authority in the southwest has therefore led many to consider him the Earl of Cornwall, although it appears uncertain whether he was formally created as such. *The Complete Peerage*, 3:428, states that although he may have been considered the earl, he was only known officially as *Comes Moritoniensis*. According to Charles Henderson, "Count Robert did not call himself Earl of Cornwall [but] enjoyed the power that in the following century belonged to the earls, and after them the dukes." See C.G. Henderson, "Cornwall and her patron saint," in *Essays in Cornish History*, ed. Charles Henderson, A.L. Rowse, and Mary Isobel Munro Henderson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), 197-201.

¹⁷⁰ One of Mabel's children may have died in childhood, but her surviving children were Mathilde, the first abbess of the abbey of Belhomert, and Mabile, who married Gervais of le Ferté, lord of the Friaize, according to Louise, *La Seigneurie*, II: 165.

¹⁷¹ See descendants chart, Appendix B.

¹⁷² James Robinson Planché, *The Conqueror and His Companions*, Vol. I (Tinsley Brothers, London, 1874), 202

¹⁷³ See Tabuteau, *Transfers of Property in Eleventh-Century Norman Law*, 359 n.144.

¹⁷⁴ *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 157-158.

Almenêches suffered because of the connection to the Bellême lords; Duke Robert and his men “turned consecrated buildings into stables for their horses”¹⁷⁵ before they set fire to the nunnery and “burnt it to the ground”¹⁷⁶ in 1100; subsequently, the nuns dispersed to family homes or to St. Évroul.¹⁷⁷ Almenêches was devastated by fire later in the twelfth century and once more in 1308.¹⁷⁸ King Henry stripped the English lands from the nunnery of Almenêches, which Roger had endowed. Emma died c.1113, and her niece¹⁷⁹ succeeded her as the abbess.

Mabil, a third daughter, married Hugh de Châteauneuf-en-Thymerais, lord of Brézolles, Sorel and Rémalart.¹⁸⁰ This daughter continued the legacy of the monastic donations of her mother by giving sixty shillings sterling annually as her tithes out of her revenues in England for the lights of the Church of St. Évroul.¹⁸¹

The last known of Mabel’s daughters was Sybil. Sybil married a nobleman named Robert Fitz Hamon, who held the honor of Gloucester during the time of King William and was “equal to the greatest magnates in England.”¹⁸² Robert was the son of Hamo,

¹⁷⁵ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 34-35, ‘et ad depredandam regionem ardentem in sacris aedibus stabula equorum constituerunt.’

¹⁷⁶ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 34-35, ‘iniecto igne cenobium combussit.’

¹⁷⁷ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 36-37.

¹⁷⁸ Hicks, *Religious Life in Normandy*, 129.

¹⁷⁹ Philip’s only daughter, Emma.

¹⁸⁰ Louise, *La Seigneurie de Bellême*, II: 165. This land lies just outside of the border of Normandy.

¹⁸¹ *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 234-235, ‘Mabila uero filia eiusdem comitis de redditibus suis in Anglia lx solidos sterilensium pro decimis suis dedit sancto Ebrulfo per singulos annos ad luminaria aeclesiae.’

¹⁸² *Ecclesiastical History*, IV: 182-183, ‘magnos honores tribuit et inter maximos optimates Angliae ipsum sullimauit.’

steward of the royal household,¹⁸³ who built and endowed an abbey called St. Mary's near Tewkesbury.¹⁸⁴ Robert and Sybil had many children who also married well or entered the cloister, including Matilda, who married Robert of Caen, the earl of Gloucester.¹⁸⁵

Power is limited, and Robert tested the limits of the family's power in a public way. The Bellême family name disappeared, but the Bellême bloodline continued through the female lines and daughters-in-law of Mabel, a nod again to the power of the female of which Mabel herself would have been proud.

Through the reconstructed life of Mabel and her children, it seems that Mabel of Bellême ran her household and completed the practical tasks necessary to oversee her household. She managed fortresses along the precarious Norman frontier, and she founded important ecclesiastical buildings. Mabel built her power in the lordship and then passed that power on to her descendants. Mabel benefitted from a powerful marriage alliance and the creation of children to ensure the survival of her lordship.

To understand how Mabel's story came to be included in the *Ecclesiastical History*, a careful reading of text and a thoughtful look into the worldview of the chronicle writer is the objective of the next chapter.

¹⁸³ *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 228, n.1.

¹⁸⁴ *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 228-229.

¹⁸⁵ *Ecclesiastical History*, IV: 182-183. Robert was a bastard child of King Henry I.

CHAPTER 5: CONTEXTUALIZING MABEL: A CLOSER LOOK AT THE *ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY*

Chapter 4 showed how Mabel of Bellême rose to power, expanded her power, and preserved her power before her death. In chapter 5, we will see how her story became a part of Orderic Vitalis’s chronicle, which was composed between 1114-1141. An important objective of this chapter is to determine what Orderic’s stories about Norman women tell us about his concern for the lives of women. To contextualize Mabel, this chapter will place the *Ecclesiastical History* into its literary, cultural, and historical context that influenced Orderic Vitalis’s worldview.

Before we take a close look at the *Ecclesiastical History*, we should consider all of the connotation of gender and the role it may have played in both Mabel’s life and culture and in Orderic’s conceptions of power.¹ In Mabel’s life, gender did not affect her ability to inherit, to hold land, or to fulfill her functions as a lord of Bellême. Conversely, being a woman could have made her neighbors conceive of her as even more dangerous because she was physically different from them. In an analysis of her power, we have to acknowledge that gender *may* have played a part because she was a woman. For example, men were rarely accused of poisoning people- this was a woman’s weapons.

So what, if anything, could have shaped Orderic’s views on gender? Political, social, religious, and economic changes that influenced the century will be discussed in greater detail, below. First, religious views on gender were evolving because of the rising

¹ While no specific gender theory is endorsed here, we should note that gender studies is simply one way to conceptualize representation. This discussion considers eleventh- and twelfth-century conceptions of gender and what role, if any, such ideas played in Orderic’s depictions of women such as Mabel.

cults of the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene. These religious views reflected the rising importance of women. Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), a Benedictine abbess and mystic, believed that she was living in a “womanly age” (*muliebre tempus*), where it was acceptable to God for women to take over role that had been abandoned by men.² .

Writing from the period shows gender depicted in fluid terms. Secondly, monastic spaces were not men-only spaces. Medieval monks, none more so than Orderic, included women in their writings. Medieval churchmen corresponded with women and enjoyed spiritual friendships with women. Finally, it must be acknowledged that Orderic was not influenced by gender but by the actions of the people he discussed. He described men and women who were good and bad; his characterization of them was not a byproduct of latent fear or mistrust of women.

The context of the *Ecclesiastical History* is fundamental to understanding the perceptions of medieval Norman writers. Medieval historiography shows us it is no longer appropriate to read a medieval source literally, without giving consideration to how texts are constructed; further, we must consider that language does not always reflect reality but rather may be constitutive of reality.³ For example, Mathew Kuefler argues that in the twelfth century, language about gender and sexuality was taking on heavier political import.⁴ Reading a medieval source through cultural, intellectual, and

² Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 3-4, 27-28.

³ Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999): 57-58.

⁴ Mathew S. Kuefler, “Male Friendship and the Suspicion of Sodomy in Twelfth-Century France” in *Gender and Difference in the Middle Ages*, ed. Sharon Farmer and Carol Braun Pasternack (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003): 145-146. Kuefler is specifically targeting male

deconstructive lenses⁵ enables scholars to characterize the period more accurately. This perspective allows historians to see Mabel more like her peers saw her.

First, we should present the *Ecclesiastical History* within the context of the religious and social changes occurring around Orderic's monastery of St. Évroul, including the rise of the cults of the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene. Second, the mentality of the chronicle writer who included, fabricated, or exaggerated stories about Mabel's violence within the history of the church is addressed.⁶ Without this context, the medieval period reads as little more than a "dark age" for women. Orderic's words cannot be read in isolation however; a close reading reveals the knowledge that he likely gained from the vast library at St. Évroul as well as from the political, social, economic, and religious forces at work in eleventh- and twelfth-century Normandy. Even though Orderic was a cloistered monk who wrote from the scriptorium,⁷ he also traveled around Normandy and made at least two trips to England, the land of his birth. Great harbingers of change influenced the Church at this time—for example, the Gregorian reforms, the Investiture Controversy, and the rise of the cults of the Virgin Mary and Mary

friendships and how the accusation of sodomy among nobles could have serious political ramifications during the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries.

⁵ Janet Nelson and Alice Rio, "Women and Laws in Early Medieval Europe" in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, ed. Judith M. Bennet and Ruth Maxo Karras (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): 103-104.

⁶ Microhistorical scholars seek to deepen the understanding of mental and spiritual dimensions, but caution is advised: This can be difficult to prove based on evidence available; see Bednarski, *A Poisoned Past*, 49.

⁷ We know that Orderic wrote from the scriptorium at St. Évroul because his master, John of Reims, was the master of the scriptorium at the monastery. See Marjorie Chibnall, Introduction to the *Ecclesiastical History*, I: 32 and III: xiv; as well as other works relating to the production of the *Ecclesiastical History* and other works at St. Evroult, such as Denis Escudier, "Orderic Vital et le scriptorium de Saint-Évroul" In *Manuscrits et enluminures dans le monde normand, Xe- XVe siècles* (Caen: Presses universitaires de Caen, 1999).

Magdalene. All these internal and external factors must be considered when interpreting Orderic's language regarding Mabel, for they each play a role in his understanding of Mabel and her power.

Original Motivation of Orderic Vitalis and the Bellême Family

Orderic may have held a grievance against the lords of Bellême. Orderic was born in Shropshire, England, in lands given to the Bellême family post-Conquest. His father, Odelerius, had been a clerk for Roger's father, Roger I, in Normandy. However, young Orderic was not allowed to enter the monastery in Shropshire, where his younger brother, Benedict was given.⁸ Instead, Odelerius paid thirty marks of silver for Orderic's oblation in 1082,⁹ the same year that Mabel was murdered. In 1085, Orderic was sent abroad at the age of ten to live and work at St. Évroul. Odelerius's motivations can be hypothesized using Orderic's words.

For his part, Orderic says that it was his weeping father's wish to "renounce me utterly"¹⁰ (*sibi penitus abdicaret... omnimodis*) and give him to the monks at St. Évroul. Chibnall believes that Odelerius would likely have allowed his son to remain in England, because he sent his two other sons to English monasteries, except that the monastery in Shrewsbury was "still too little established to receive a child oblate."¹¹ Elisabeth Van Houts disagrees with Chibnall, claiming that Odelerius sent his oldest son to the continent

⁸ Van Houts, "Orderic and his Father, Odelerius," in *Orderic Vitalis: Life, Works and Interpretations*, 20.

⁹ Van Houts, "Orderic and his Father, Odelerius," 23 citing *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 146-147.

¹⁰ Chibnall, introduction to *Ecclesiastical History*, II: xiii-xiv.

¹¹ *Ecclesiastical History*, I: 4.

as a form of penance for the sin of clerical marriage,¹² or for despoiling the English church upon Conquest, or a combination of both.¹³ The choice of the particular monastery in Normandy raises an important question about the possibility that although Odelerius served as the chaplain to the Bellême family in England,¹⁴ he may have had political motivation for sending his son to be educated at the monastery attached to his lord's enemies. Or perhaps he wished to have his son brought up on lands near where Odelerius had once served at Troarn or Séez.¹⁵ Of the decision, Orderic indicates that his father made the vow upon Earl Roger's foundation of Shrewsbury, saying,

My eldest son I have already placed in the care of a teacher of the liberal arts, to learn his letters, and I have procured for him a place of safe refuge among the faithful servants of God at Saint-Évroul in Normandy, and have given as a free-will offering for his blessing thirty marks of silver out of my own substance to his future masters and companions. So out of love for my Redeemer I renounce my first-born son and destine him for exile among strangers; free from every tie of kinship and fatal affection he may devote himself utterly to the observance of the monastic rule and the worship of God....¹⁶

Odelerius's motivations remain somewhat enigmatic. However, it should be noted that Odelerius may have wanted his son to gain the best education available. Mabel's uncle, Yves, was the Bishop of Séez, and he inherited the town of Bellême when his father and brother were killed.¹⁷ Abbot Thierry had constructed a wonderful school at St.

¹² Clerical marriages were forbidden in Normandy and England after the first Lateran council in Rome in 1123, but Orderic's parents were likely married in the 1070s, and Pope Leo IX had ruled for clerical celibacy as early as 1049. See Van Houts, "Orderic and his Father, Odelerius," 22-24.

¹³ Van Houts, "Orderic and his Father, Odelerius," 31-32.

¹⁴ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 262-263.

¹⁵ Chibnall, Introduction to *Ecclesiastical History*, I: 4.

¹⁶ *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 146-147.

¹⁷ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 46-47. The killing of Yves three kinsmen is discussed in Chapter 2.

Évrourl.¹⁸ Presumably Odelerius considered this school the best place for his son, Orderic to be educated. During his education, he may have come into contact with ancient texts, which were replete with images of killer women.

The Ancient Tradition of the Female Poisoner

Because of their close relationship with the cultivation and production of victual and drink, food-based poisons such as the types Mabel was able to prepare and deploy when she assassinated two men using wine have been the realm of women since antiquity.

The Golden Ass,¹⁹ a widely read second-century Latin novel that survived antiquity, demonstrated that writers were familiar with ancient fiction on the theme of poison.²⁰ *L'Index des motifs narratifs dans les romans arthuriens français en vers* (The Index of Narrative Motifs in French Arthurian Romances) was widely read in the twelfth century, and Arthurian legends were rich with mentions of *breuvages magique*²¹ (magic beverages). The image of the female poisoner is a stock mythic figure, like Circe of Greek mythology, whose magic herbs transformed her guests into swine. Even the Biblical story of Eve, who brings devastation to humanity, involves food; this image carries the seed of the mythical image into the Christian world. Ancient writers describe

¹⁸ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 48-51.

¹⁹ The original title of this work is *L'Âne d'or d'Apulée*.

²⁰ Franck Collard, *Le Crime du Poison au Moyen Age*, Trans. Deborah Nelson-Campbell (Westport : Praeger, 2008), 17.

²¹ Collard, *Le Crime du Poison au Moyen Age*, 17.

women's intentional poisonings in their discussions of ancient medical practices. These ancient medical treatments could be applied or ingested.²²

Ancient writers who wrote about poisons and poisonings include Dioscorides, Pliny the Elder, Tacitus, Lucan, Cicero, Juvenal, Livy, Galen, and Horace. The ancient word most commonly translated as “poison” was actually *venenum*, a word derived from *Venus* that means, “love potion.”²³ The only way to discern the purpose of the *venenum*—it could have been a potion, remedy, poison, magic, drug, or abortifacient—was from an adjective such as *bonum* or *malum*.²⁴ Ancient thinkers usually associated poison with women in pursuit of love or medicine.

How Ancient Ideas Became Medieval Thoughts: The Monastic Libraries

A review of the ways people used medicine in the ancient world brings the discussion back to the chronicle writer, Orderic Vitalis. Medieval libraries, like their ancient antecedents, were storehouses of scientific knowledge. Medieval medical practices centered on the Greek belief in the body and its four humors: sanguine (blood), phlegm, cholera, and melancholia. Clinicians diagnosed diseases through observation and evaluation, as in the medical charts shown in Figure 5.1. Medical writing showed a “good

²² John M. Riddle, *Eve's herbs: A History of Contraception and Abortion in the West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997): 138-139. Dioscorides was also concerned with the medicinal qualities of animal dung and animal milk.

²³ David B. Kaufman, “Poisons and Poisoning among the Romans,” *Classical Philology* 27, no. 2 (1932): 156.

²⁴ Kaufman, “Poisons and Poisoning among the Romans,” 156.

deal of continuity over the millennium between 500 and 1500” as writers focused on “transmitting and interpreting ancient texts,” especially of the Greek thinkers.²⁵

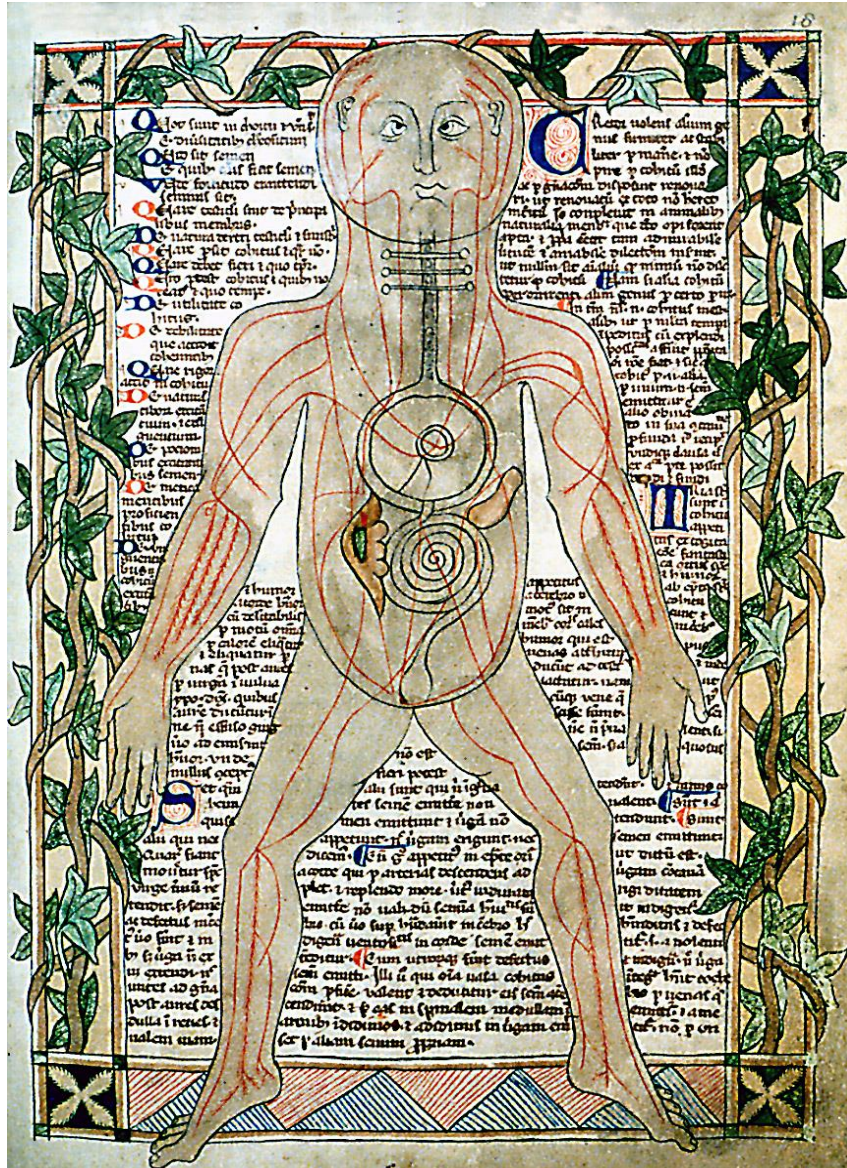


Figure 5.1. A tenth-century drawing of the human body used by barber-surgeons in England.

Photo from *Bald's Leechbook (Medicine Anglica)* digitized by the British Library, www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Royal_MS_12_D_XVII

²⁵ Katherine Park, “Medicine and Natural Philosophy: Naturalistic Traditions,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 84-100.

Ninth-century libraries in Francia were filled with all types of texts. An inventory conducted in 1104 of the library at St. Bertin shows three hundred and five secular volumes comprising mostly ancient writings such as Cicero, Gellius, and Suetonius.²⁶ Saint Amandus, the founder of St. Amand, brought books he had copied while cloistered in Italy in the early seventh century.²⁷ Many of the works of these ancient writers were available at the Norman monastic libraries that Orderic would have visited, such as Bec and Fécamp. A catalog of holdings for St. Évrout, Bec, and Fécamp during the twelfth century can be found in Appendix C.

Orderic was well versed in the writings of ancient thinkers; he boasted of reading and learning much from the works within the library at St. Évrout, which contained Pompeius Trogus, Dares Phrygius, Josephus, Hegesippus, Augustine, and many others.²⁸ References and allusions to ancient thinkers litter his *Ecclesiastical History*. He placed his work within the canon of historical writing,

Our predecessors in their wisdom have studied all the ages of the erring world from the earliest times, have recorded the good and evil fortunes of mortal men as a warning to others, and . . . have added their own writings to those of the past . . . in Dares Phrygius and Pompeius Trogus and other historians of the gentiles . . . in Eusebius and the *De Ornestra mundi* of Orosius and Bede . . . and

²⁶ Karl Christ, *The Handbook of Medieval Library History*, trans. Theophil M. Otto (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1984): passim, but see especially 155-160. Libraries in Francia favored texts of Augustine, but also contained Byzantine works, Germanic poems and *gestes*, and other works traded and bought from scriptoria in far-flung places. See also François Avril, *Manuscrits normands, Xie- XIIIe siècles* (Rouen, Musée des Beaux Arts, 1975) for detailed information regarding collections of Norman manuscripts.

²⁷ Christ, *The Handbook of Medieval Library History*, 162-163.

²⁸ Amanda Jane Hingst, *The Written World: Past and Place in the World of Orderic Vitalis* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 19. Monastic libraries contained ancient texts. *Ecclesiastical History*, I: 130-131. Orderic himself mentions the work of first century historians writing in praise of, 'Darete Phrigio et Pompeio Trogo comperimus aliisque gentilium historiographis.'

Paul of Monte Cassino . . . I study their narrative with delight, I praise and admire the elegance and value of their treatises.²⁹

Even though the monastery had been sacked and during the Viking raids, it was refounded c.1050, and its first abbot, Thierry of Mathonville (d. 1058), made building up the library one of his first concerns; by Orderic's arrival, it was well established.³⁰ Abbot Thierry trained many scribes to provide books for the library, which started with the Bible and important liturgical texts, but within a century the library contained more than 130 texts.³¹ Recent scholars, using palaeological analysis, have reached the consensus that Orderic served as the librarian at St. Évrout³² as well as its *armarius*.³³ Its holdings included classical texts as well as texts covering the natural sciences, medicine, history, and music, in addition to the traditional texts for divine worship. The library at St. Évrout was a major center of Norman scholarship by the twelfth century.³⁴ It was ranked third

²⁹ *Ecclesiastical History*, I: 130-131, 'Antiores nostri ab antiquis temporibus labentis seculi excursus prudenter inspexerunt, et bona seu mala mortalibus contingentia pro cautela hominum notaverunt, et futuris semper prodesse volentes scripta scriptis accumulaverunt...in Darete Phrigio et Pompeio Trogo comperimus aliisque gentilium historiographis... in Euseio et Orosio de Ornesta mundi anglicæque Beda et Paulo cassini ensi... Horum allegationes delectabiliter intueor, elegantiam et utilitatem sintagmatum laudo et admiror'

³⁰ Geneviève Northier, *Les bibliothèques médiévales des abbayes bénédictines de Normandie* (Paris : P. Lethielleux, 1971), 219-244.

³¹ Chibnall, Introduction to *Ecclesiastical History*, I: 17.

³² See Rozier, "Orderic Vitalis as Librarian and Cantor of Saint-Évrout," in *Orderic Vitalis: Life, Works and Interpretations*, 61. Chibnall reached this conclusion during her translation of *Ecclesiastical History*, and recent paleographical studies affirm her conclusion.

³³ Rozier, "Orderic Vitalis as Librarian and Cantor of Saint-Évrout," 62- 64. Sometimes this person was also called a "cantor" or "precentor." This is the person whose responsibilities included "the care of books and the supervision of the liturgy," By the eighth century, the primary job was the protection of the books, especially against "damp and mould."

³⁴ Barbara Ruth Miller Wheeler, "Ordericus Vitalis: A Twelfth-century Deuteronomic Historian" (Unpub M.A. Thesis. University of Arizona, 1969), 3.

among area monasteries, behind Bec and Fécamp, both of which were frequented by Orderic Vitalis,³⁵ and whose contents are listed in Appendix C.

Orderic did not limit his intellectual pursuits to the continent; Northier describes Orderic's connections to English abbeys, especially Worcester and Winchester, in the waning years of the eleventh century and periodically in the twelfth century.³⁶ Northier speculates that because of his strong *relations intellectuelles* to his homeland, Orderic might have borrowed manuscripts from English libraries without visiting these houses himself.³⁷ Orderic made one trip to England, where he visited English abbeys at Worcester, Thorney, and Crowland about 1120.³⁸ This is likely how he obtained copies of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* and *De Temporibus*.³⁹ Orderic referenced or alluded to many ancient writers, such as Eusebius, Horace, and Pliny, as well as to works that include poisons and poisoning.⁴⁰ Thus, it is plausible that Orderic would have been acquainted with the stories of Cleopatra VII, a vicious and powerful woman who killed

³⁵ Wheeler, "Ordericus Vitalis: A Twelfth-century Deuteronomic Historian," 3-4. Many sources Orderic used are not listed in the twelfth-century catalogue of St. Évroul, so it is likely that he borrowed texts from Bec or Fécamp. See Hingst, *The World of Orderic Vitalis*; and Roger Dale Ray, "The monastic historiography of Orderic Vitalis" (PhD dissertation, Duke Univ, 1968), 137-8; or James Westfall Thomson, *The Medieval Library* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939): 242.

³⁶ Northier, *Les Bibliothèques Médiévales des Abbayes Bénédictines de Normandie*, 3.

³⁷ Northier, *Les Bibliothèques Médiévales des Abbayes Bénédictines de Normandie*, 226.

³⁸ Chibnall, Introduction to *Ecclesiastical History*, I: 25.

³⁹ Leah Shopkow, *History and Community: Norman Historical Writing in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 160.

⁴⁰ Orderic cited Eusebius among his predecessors see *Ecclesiastical History*, I: 130-131, 'hoc in Darete Phrigio et Pompeio Trogo comperimus aliisque gentiliū historiographis, hoc etiam aduertimus in Eusebio.. Horum allegationes delectabiliter intueor, elegantiam et utilitatem sintagmatum laudo et admior...' (this we find in Dares Phrygius and Pompeius Trogus and other historians of the gentiles, this too we perceive in Eusebius...I study their narratives with delight, I praise and admire the elegance and value of their treatiseses....).

through poison, and he could have easily made the connection to Mabel, an enemy of his monastic house.

Orderic's inclusion of numerous instances of poisonings within the *Ecclesiastical History* may be indicative of the large number of the accusation of poisonings made in Normandy.⁴¹ He does not limit poisoners to women. He tells of the poisoning of the monk Gunfred, traveling companion of William Giroie, by greedy Romans at the monastery of St. Paul the Apostle,⁴² of the poisoning of Count Walter of Pontoise and his wife Biota at the hands of their enemies, of Duke William poisoning Conan the Count of Brittany,⁴³ of the Saracen baker who poisoned Robert of Grandmesnil,⁴⁴ and of the jealous enemies who poisoned the Bishop of Liège in 1121.⁴⁵

In order to understand Orderic's views on the functions of the female body, how the Church thought about gender and the female body, including the body of Christ, is examined next. Even though Mabel killed two men using wine (both attempts were against the Giroie, but, her first attempt was unsuccessful and resulted in the accidental poisoning of her brother-in-law), in the strange tale regarding the Sowsnose child, Mabel

⁴¹ David Douglas has commented on the prevalence of poison stories in eleventh- and twelfth-century Normandy at the same time that rates of poisoning accusations went down in England. See Douglas, *William the Conqueror: The Norman Impact Upon England*, 408-415. Orderic's inclusion of numerous poisonings could also point toward an interest in medicine or science.

⁴² *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 60-61.

⁴³ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 312-313. Chibnall notes that these accounts are only told in Orderic's account and not elsewhere and that they may not be supported or convincing. However, as many of Orderic's stories about Mabel and the lords of Bellême are similarly unsupported, this note seems inconsequential. The stories of the poisonings are in the *Ecclesiastical History*, and therefore are documented here.

⁴⁴ *Ecclesiastical History*, IV: 22.

⁴⁵ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 252-254. The inclusion of non-Normans illustrates how Orderic's view of events was not circumscribed by geography.

used her body to administer poison; therefore, a contextual analysis study should include an exploration of the worldview that fostered the recording of such an event. The body is an important category for gender theorists as well as for historians discussing space, as spaces were inhabited by bodies and therefore became necessary for social regulation.⁴⁶ The regulation of bodies was a salient component of medieval monastic life⁴⁷ as well as the body as it related to sacred space, as in the burial of dead bodies within the monasteries.

Medieval Physiological and Medical Theories Regarding the Female Body

Orderic's descriptions of Mabel's powers mirrored ancient physiological theory. During Orderic's tenure at St. Évrout, scholars in other parts of France were copying the medical texts of Hippocrates, Galen, and Soranus.⁴⁸ Ancient and medieval biologists believed that the mother's blood fed the fetus within the womb and then a special vein

⁴⁶ Theories of the body and gendered space were employed by historians in the 1990s and are included in recent works of medieval gender. See Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin, eds. *Framing Medieval Bodies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994); Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 1992); Sharon Farmer and Carol Braun Pasternack, eds. *Gender and Difference in the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Hicks, *Religious Life in Normandy, 1050-1300*; Judith M. Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Michelle M. Sauer, *Gender in Medieval Culture* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

⁴⁷ Much research has been conducted on gender in medieval monasticism. The most important to this study include Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982) and Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991); Albrecht Diem, "The Gender of the Religious: Women and the Invention of Monasticism" in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, 432-446.

⁴⁸ Park, "Medicine and Natural Philosophy: Naturalistic Traditions," 93. Park discusses these texts as if they are common knowledge and gives no primary source information, but she asserts that twenty-four medical texts from these ancient thinkers were copied from an unknown scholar in twelfth-century Provence. Note that both Hippocrates and Galen are listed among the library holdings in Appendix C.

called the *kiveris vena* transmitted the blood from the womb to the breasts⁴⁹ where the blood was finally transmuted into milk, and in this way the mother's blood fed the baby outside of the womb.⁵⁰

In this conception of physiology, the woman provides the matter of the fetus and the male provides the spirit; this view echoes medieval theologians' position that Eve came from the matter of Adam, and Christ came from the matter of Mary.⁵¹ Following this theory, "blood was the basic bodily fluid and female blood was the fundamental support of human life."⁵² As early as the second century, Clement of Alexandria spoke of Christ as a mother who feeds humankind with his blood (the Eucharist) in the same manner as a human mother, "whose blood becomes food for her child."⁵³ Plinian theorists from the first century BC through the Middle Ages taught that menstrual blood could be an effective medical tool.⁵⁴ Medieval medical ideas regarding blood as the material that brings forth life related to religious teaching about the blood of Christ, which purged sin in the Atonement and fed souls in the Eucharist.

⁴⁹ The *kiveris vena* was first discovered by Galen in the second century A.D. According to the Stanford.edumedical website, Galen wrote, "Now Nature conducted arteries and veins to all the [other] parts over the shortest interval...and only the testes and breasts did she bring then not from vessels nearby but from those at a distance...for both milk and semen are generated from perfectly concocted blood." For more details on the *kiveris vena*, see Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 34.

⁵⁰ Bettina Bildhauer, "The Secrets of Women (c.1300): A Medieval Perspective on Menstruation," in *Menstruation: A Cultural History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 54; Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 135.

⁵¹ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 133.

⁵² Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 100.

⁵³ Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 270-271.

⁵⁴ Bildhauer, "The Secrets of Women," 58.

In both theories, blood makes and sustains life. Orderic may have understood these theories regarding blood and bleeding, which were widely practiced in the Middle Ages in the purging of blood (naturally through menstruation, which women could regularly do, or artificially through the application of leeches). Aristotle, Galen, Pliny, and Isidore of Seville believed menstruation was the evacuation of pernicious melancholic fluids from the female body.⁵⁵ Isidore's works were a part of the monastic library at St. Évrout, and some of the works of Aristotle⁵⁶ were available at the library of Fécamp (see Appendix C).

Eleventh- and twelfth-century people also associated women with food because their bodies produced food in the form of breast milk. Images of God as mother appear in Christian writings beginning in the patristic period. Writers who employed these images include Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Irenaeus, John Chrysostom, Ambrose, and Augustine. In *Jesus as Mother*, Bynum provides a host of list of medieval authors who describe the divine in maternal language; some notable names from Orderic's time include Anselm, Peter Lombard, Bernard of Clairvaux, William of St. Thierry, Aelred, Gueric of Igny, Isaac of Stella, and Adam of Perseigne.⁵⁷

Medieval writers and artists recycled antique stories with lactation as a theme, such as the ancient act of filial piety of a daughter that involved offering the breast to

⁵⁵ Franck Collard, "Le poison et le sang dans la culture médiévale," *Médiévales* 60 (2011): 142-143.

⁵⁶ Aristotle's *Topica* was known to exist in Fécamp from eleventh and twelfth centuries and Aristotle was listed as an author in the inventory of the medieval library at St. Évrout. See Appendix C.

⁵⁷ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 115, 126, 140. To be clear, there is no evidence that Orderic met in person with these churchmen; however, their inclusion highlights the rising status of women in the church during Orderic's lifetime.

fathers or other male relatives.⁵⁸ Saint Augustine of Hippo (354–430) writes, “Neither my mother nor my nurses filled their own breasts with milk . . . It was you [God] who, through them, gave me the food of my infancy.”⁵⁹ Augustine’s model might have imprinted upon Orderic’s views on women in his village, in his mind, and in his writing. Images of benevolent nursing mothers were widely used in the medieval period, as evidenced by the popularity of the image of The Lactating Virgin, from the eleventh century onward.⁶⁰ In a sermon on the *Song of Songs*, Bernard expands on a verse: “Be gentle, avoid harshness, do not resort to blows, expose your breasts: let your bosoms expand with milk, not swell with poison.”⁶¹ He instructs, “Suck not the wounds but the breasts of the Crucified [Christ]. He will become mother to you, and you will be son to him.”⁶² Dozens of images depicted the nursing Virgin in the medieval period, especially after 1050 when her cult exploded in popularity. The cult of the Virgin’s milk was one of the most extensive cults in medieval Europe.⁶³

⁵⁸ Carolyn Walker Bynum, “Fast, Feast, and Flesh,” in *Food and Culture: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 257; Adolphe de Ceuleneer, “La Charité romaine dans la littérature et dans l’arte,” *Annales de l’Académie Royale d’Archéologie de Belgique* 67 (1919): 175-206.

⁵⁹ From Augustine, *Confessions*, I: 6, quoted in Margaret Miles, *A Complete Delight: The Secularization of the Breast, 1350-1750* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), x.

⁶⁰ Goldy and Livingstone, *Writing Medieval Women’s Lives*, 151.

⁶¹ Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 117-118. Translated by Killam Walsh, *On the Song of Songs*, (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Fathers Series), II: 23.

⁶² Bernard of Clairveaux, *Sancti Bernardi opera*, Vol. II. eds. Jean Leclercq and H.M. Rochais (Rome: Cistercienses Editiones, 1977), Bynum, “Fast, Feast, and Flesh,” 322, “... suge non tam vulnera quam ubera Crucifixi. Ipse erit tibi in matrem, et tu eris ei in filium.”

⁶³ Hilda Graef, *Mary, A History of Doctrine and Devotion*, 2 vols. (London: Christian Classics, 1963), 1:210-264; P.V., “À propos d’une des légendes mariales les plus répandues: le lait de la Vierge,” *Bulletin de l’association Guillaume Budé* 4 (1975): 403-411; 257. In a way, through his tale of Mabel, Orderic was un-gendering her by creating a story where her breasts are the opposite of life-giving and her body polluted with poison.

The iconography of the Virgin was also distributed by monastic houses in the twelfth century. The associated writings remind the audience that milk was “processed blood,” and the milk of the Virgin paralleled the role of the blood of Christ.⁶⁴ During the medieval period, the milk of the Virgin produced miraculous results; when squirted into the eye, it would heal ophthalmological disorders. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) nursed from the lactating Virgin in the twelfth-century depiction shown in Figure 6.1, called *Lactatio Bernardi*. In this miracle story, which occurred at the cathedral in Speyer in 1146, the Virgin’s milk gave Bernard wisdom.

Twelfth-century Benedictines such as Orderic felt “particular devotion to Mary as the gateway by which salvation entered the world,” while Guerric of Igny (c.1070–1157), Abbot of Igny Abbey, Reims, described his fellow monks as “curled up against her breast.”⁶⁵ Orderic may have used such nursing imagery for his own purposes.

⁶⁴ Elizabeth Saxon, *The Eucharist in Romanesque Francia: Iconography and Theology* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006), 205-207; Michael Goodrich, “Bartholomaeus Anglicus on Child-Reading,” *History in Childhood Quarterly: The Journal of Psychohistory* 3 (1975): 80.

⁶⁵ From Guerric, “First Sermon for the Assumption,” Ch.4, *Sermons*, 2: 422, quoted in Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 137.



Figure 5.2 *Lactatio Bernardi*, reproduced from MS 264 in Bodleian Library.

It is possible that Orderic, like most eleventh- or twelfth-century people, understood deaths not caused in battle or the collapse of a seemingly healthy adult as *maladies, hypotheses criminelles* (a possibly criminal sickness).⁶⁶ Writers generally categorized such events as *la mors propria* or *la mors ou naturelle*⁶⁷ (a proper or natural death). Franck Collard tells us that by the twelfth century, chroniclers became preoccupied with death and favored attributing sudden deaths to poison.⁶⁸

Reading the *Ecclesiastical History* with the worldview of the writer in mind help historians envision twelfth century Normandy the way Orderic's intended audience would have seen it.

Norman Writers are an Exception to the Rule in Medieval Christendom

Modern historians have asserted that medieval writers divided the world rigidly into categories or orders.⁶⁹ Certainly, this seems to be the case with some monks. For example, Hugh of Flavigny saw the world as a hierarchy with women on the bottom, below the men who work, pray, and fight.⁷⁰ However, Marjorie Chibnall believes that Orderic Vitalis was more egalitarian than Hugh was; Orderic did not place women on the bottom of social structure but rather elevated women to sinecure alongside their nearest

⁶⁶ Collard, *Le Crime du Poison au Moyen Age*, 12. My translation of Collard's French.

⁶⁷ Collard, *Le Crime du Poison au Moyen Age*, 12.

⁶⁸ Collard, *Le Crime du Poison au Moyen Age*, 12-13.

⁶⁹ Georges Duby, *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978); Shahar, *The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages*, who follows Duby.

⁷⁰ Chibnall, "Women in Orderic Vitalis," 105, n.1, 2, and 4.

male relative.⁷¹ Chibnall translated the *Ecclesiastical History* into English and wrote extensively about Orderic and his worldviews. Chibnall accepts his criticism of Mabel without comment or question, stating that Orderic did not excoriate women because of their gender, but he deployed “stereotypes of one kind or another . . . alongside a record of acts of real women in his own day.”⁷² Even Chibnall notes that Orderic’s criticism of Mabel was superfluous, but she attributes this to his “handling of vice in general.”⁷³

While Norman chroniclers were mainly concerned with political and ecclesiastical matters, gender sometimes crept into the narrative.⁷⁴ Some historians note the fear that medieval monks seemed to have toward women.⁷⁵ Although this may have been the case in other parts of the medieval world, it was not the case with Orderic Vitalis—he peoples his history with a large number of female characters. Even though Saint Augustine (fourth century) was afraid of sharing personal space with women, he considered women his equal and his friends.⁷⁶

Perhaps what other scholars attribute to fear is simply the omission of women from the histories. Many chronicle writers do not include any females within their

⁷¹ Chibnall, “Women in Orderic Vitalis,” 106.

⁷² Chibnall, “Women in Orderic Vitalis,” 108.

⁷³ Chibnall, “Women in Orderic Vitalis,” 108.

⁷⁴ Amy O’Neal’s dissertation addressed women in the Anglo-Norman sources, see O’Neal, “Pragmatism, Patronage, Piety, and Performance”.

⁷⁵ In particular, see Wells’s description of monks and how monastic writers discuss people in German chronicles in Scott Wells, *Negotiating Community and Difference in Medieval Europe: Gender, Power, Patronage and the Authority of Religion in Latin Christendom*. (Leiden: Brill, 2009); and Penelope Johnson, “From Chroniclers to Prophets: Monastic Historical Imagination in Germany, ca. 1000-1179” (PhD diss. New York University, 2003).

⁷⁶ Holle Canatella, “*Scipsit Amica Manus: male-female spiritual friendship in England and Francia ca. 1050-1200* (PhD. Dissertation, University of Houston, 2010), 66. This is salient point to make in the interest of gendered spaces and the idea of *habitus*, rules that govern social behaviors in various spaces. See Hicks, *Religious Life in Normandy*, 2-6.

histories. Women could be quite important within the sacred realm,⁷⁷ and this could have been the cause of some of the monks' mistrust. Holle Canatella asserts that religious men in the eleventh and twelfth centuries valued both lay and religious women and even trusted some women as spiritual teachers.⁷⁸ In fact, she attributes this phenomenon to an "increasingly positive stance toward female agency and gender relations" taking place in the eleventh and twelfth centuries as Mabel was living and as Orderic was writing his history of the Norman church.⁷⁹

During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, several churchmen engaged with women through letter writing.⁸⁰ Although Orderic leaves no record of his correspondences, it is likely he would have developed friendships with noblewomen in and around St. Évroul. Even if monastic letters with women ruminated on topics typically believed to be associated with women, the letters nevertheless indicate a more inclusive vision for Christendom than is usually ascribed. The male correspondents understood women to be worthy subjects of the elements of Christian teachings, which broadened the understanding of who was excluded from the kingdom of God and who was included.

These letters also illuminate the private concerns of the monks, highlighting again their concern for the lives of women, which were not necessarily revealed through sermons or treatises. Scholars have combed these letters for a clearer understanding of medieval gender. For example, using the letters of St. Anselm of Canterbury, Sally N.

⁷⁷ Think of female mystic or the cult of the Virgin here.

⁷⁸ Canatella, "*Scripsit Amica Manus*," 7.

⁷⁹ Canatella, "*Scripsit Amica Manus*," 8.

⁸⁰ Canatella, "*Scripsit Amica Manus*," 83.

Vaughn traces how Anselm “created a model of womanhood where mothers and wives reigned supreme.”⁸¹ Anselm saw his noblewomen friends who maintained their places as virtuous wives and mothers as representative of the ideal woman.⁸² Anselm’s correspondence, particularly with Countess Ida of Boulogne, demonstrates both her importance and his care for her throughout the course of his life.⁸³ Although the fundamental purpose of the letters seems to be instructional, they provide an important picture of the ideal life in the medieval world. Though no evidence exists of Orderic’s letters, his concerns likely mirrored his peers; we see through his *Ecclesiastical History* that he was concerned with women, including a thousand of them in his chronicle.⁸⁴

Changing Culture of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries

At the turn of the millennium, important changes were occurring throughout the European world. Rachel Fulton ascribes many of these changes to the failure of Christ’s return c.1033,⁸⁵ and she documents events that occurred during the “terror of 1033”,⁸⁶ when Christ failed to return to earth a thousand years after his death, which waned only

⁸¹ Canatella, “*Scipsit Amica Manus*,” 13. Canatella is using Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaiden of God*, passim, but see especially 286.

⁸² Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God*, 2-3.

⁸³ Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God*, passim, esp. 2, 61, 63-65, 114-118, 126-159. Sally N. Vaughn, “Anselm in Italy, 1097-1100,” *Anglo Norman Studies* 16(1994): 251-252.

⁸⁴ O’Neal, “Pragmatism, Patronage, Piety, and Participation”, 4. Eighteen individual women in the *Ecclesiastical History* will be discussed later in this chapter.

⁸⁵ Rachel Fulton, *From Judgement to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800-1200* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 3. Although Bates ascribes different reasons for the genesis of the changes in the eleventh century, Fulton’s theories supplement Bates without contradicting his. While Bates analyzes changes of economic, social, or political basis, Fulton’s thesis is intellectual-emotional.

⁸⁶ Fulton, *From Judgement to Passion*, 63-69.

after the success of the First Crusade (1096-1099).⁸⁷ There is a connection between increase in the number of alleged poisonings and the amount of turmoil in the culture. Orderic lived at a time of religious turmoil aimed at the morality of the clergy, ritual purity of priests such as the Gregorian Reforms, and later, the Investiture Controversy.⁸⁸

One critical change was the growing influence of women in the Church. In the eleventh century, the number of female saints increased from 9.8 percent in the late eleventh century, to 14.6 percent in the mid-twelfth century, to 24 percent by 1300.⁸⁹ Women were overwhelmingly the recipient of miracle cures in the twelfth century, and they began to be called upon as witnesses to miraculous events.⁹⁰ Another important change was the rise of the cults of the Virgin and the Magdalene, which began in earnest during the late eleventh century. Anselm of Canterbury participated in the revival of these cults, as did Herbert of Losinga (d. 1119) and the eleventh-century monk Goscelin of St. Bertin.⁹¹ Herbert wrote numerous sermons about the importance of the Virgin as well as many letters about her and prayers to her on behalf of his spiritual friend, Queen Matilda.⁹² Anselm composed prayers to the Virgin, and Goscelin's *Liber confortatorius*

⁸⁷ Fulton, *From Judgement to Passion*, 4.

⁸⁸ For the social impact of Gregorian Reform (c.1050-1080) and the Investiture Controversy of the twelfth century, see John Gilchrist, "Pope Gregory VII and the Juristic Sources of Ideology," in *Canon Law and the Age of Reform, 11th and 12th centuries* (Surrey: Ashgate, 1993), 5; and Lindsay Brook, "Popes and Pornocrats: Rome in the Early Middle Ages," *Foundations for Medieval Genealogy* 1 (1): 5-21.

⁸⁹ Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, "Sexism and the Celestial Gynaecium from 500 to 1200," *Journal of Medieval History* 4 (1978): 122, 127, 131; in Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 137.

⁹⁰ Johns, *Noblewomen, Aristocracy and Power*, 35. Johns specifically draws upon the writing about the canonization of Hugh of Lincoln and the writings of Goscelin.

⁹¹ Canatella, "*Scripsit Amica Manus*," 89, 118, 124.

⁹² Canatella, "*Scripsit Amica Manus*," 115-119.

demonstrates the growth of the cult of the Virgin.⁹³ Mary Magdalene became the patron saint of hermits and repentant sinners, and the divine office written for her described her as “apostle to the apostle.”⁹⁴ The cult of the Magdalene was particularly popular in and around Bellême; Canatella describes the effect of the cult,

Both the cults of Mary Magdalene and the Virgin Mary exploded in popularity during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The Magdalene’s cult appears to have been especially favored in northern Francia . . . and her popularity spread quickly during the last years of the eleventh-century. For instance, in 1093 a new church in Angers was dedicated to the Magdalene, and Marbod of Rennes, *magister* at the cathedral school in Angers, wrote several hymns praising her. The proper name “Magdalena” also became popular . . . during this period.⁹⁵

Medieval writers sometimes changed the gender of their subjects to reflect the cultural constructions of gender.⁹⁶ Eleventh- and twelfth-century people had both mystical and miraculous conceptions of anatomy and sexuality. Medieval medical texts follow the Classical doctrine of the “one-sex” model: that women and men’s bodies are the same, except that women’s bodies are inside out male bodies with internal instead of external genitalia.⁹⁷ This theory follows Galen’s ideas regarding biological differences.⁹⁸

⁹³ Canatella, “*Scipsit Amica Manus*,” 118-119.

⁹⁴ Victor Saxter, “Le cult de Marie Madeleine en Occident des origines à la fin du moyen âge,” *Cahiers d’archéologie et d’histoire* 3, 2 vols (Auxerre: Publications de la Société des fouilles archéologiques de l’Yonne, 1959) in Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 137.

⁹⁵ Canatella, “*Scipsit Amica Manus*,” 9.

⁹⁶ Susan M. Johns quotes William of Newburgh writing of Countess Petronalla as having “a man’s spirit” when she took up arms, Johns, *Noblewomen, Aristocracy and Power*, 21. See also Georges Duby, “Women and power” in *Cultures of Power: Lordship, Status, and Process in Twelfth-Century Europe*; and Stafford, “Emma: The Powers of the Queen in the Eleventh Century”.

⁹⁷ Sauer, *Gender in Medieval Culture*, 18, 26-27.

⁹⁸ According to Galen’s *De usu partium*, female bodies are characterized by being colder as well as “softer, wetter, and more spongy than male” and can therefore not form external genitals, as described in Sauer, *Gender in Medieval Culture*, 26-27.

In addition, during the eleventh century, Christ and religious men were linked to maternal imagery. Eleventh-century people could conceive of the body of Christ as female, describing it as the *ecclesia*, which is both a feminine noun and the allegorical personification of the Church.⁹⁹

Drawing on pre-Christian traditions, medieval men and women argued, “woman is to man as matter is to spirit.”¹⁰⁰ In such an ideology, Christ’s human body was associated with the feminine or flesh; such an understanding reveals the supernatural connection between medieval mystics and food sometimes displayed through extreme Eucharistic devotional practices. This connection between the body and femininity also accounted for the feminine nature of Jesus. Women writers such as Hildegard of Bingen¹⁰¹ described Christ’s body as female because it came from his mother’s body—his flesh was solely of her flesh because he had no physical father to contribute to his reproductive matter.¹⁰² In her *Book of Divine Works* (c.1163–c.1172), Hildegard writes, “Man signifies the divinity of the Son of God and woman his humanity.” This elevation of Mary therefore elevates all women. These changes taking place throughout Christendom might have been familiar to Orderic.

⁹⁹ Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 93.

¹⁰⁰ Bynum, “Fast, Feast, and Flesh,” 256.

¹⁰¹ Images of feminine Christ populate the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century works of female writers such as Mechthild of Magdeburg (c.1207–c.1282), Marguerite of Oingt (c.1240–1310), and Julian of Norwich (c.1342–c.1416). These women live after Orderic and could not be analyzed here, but they continue to build upon the feminine Christ established during this time.

¹⁰² Bynum, “Fast, Feast, and Flesh,” 257.

Women in the *Ecclesiastical History*

Orderic is unique among the monastic writers of the eleventh century. He includes numerous women within his thirteen books. He showed women in a variety of life circumstances, and some examples will be shared next to demonstrate Orderic's positive assessment of women. As we will see here, it is clear that Orderic was positive about the role of women in Norman culture and concerned for the lives of women. As we will see here, it is clear that Orderic was positive about the roles of women in Normandy and concerned for the lives of women. Orderic peoples his *History* with four types of women: married women, single maidens, cloistered widows, and young girls. Of married women, he depicts four types: married women who use their influence upon their husbands for good, married women who influence their husband for evil, married women who only exercise power in the absence of their husbands, and wives who use their power against their husbands.¹⁰³

Chibnall illustrates that Orderic appreciated women who dedicated their lives to the service of God, such as Isabel of Tosney and Avice of Auffay.¹⁰⁴ He describes Isabel as a beautiful woman who repented of her youthful sin of luxury and took the veil after her husband died.¹⁰⁵ Orderic blamed women's "suspicions and quarrels"¹⁰⁶ for inciting men to violence. Isabel and the Countess Helwise, wife of William count of Évreux and

¹⁰³ Jean Blacker, "Women, Power, and Violence," *Violence Against Women* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1998), 45.

¹⁰⁴ Chibnall, "Women in Orderic Vitalis," 41-43.

¹⁰⁵ *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 128-129, 'Isabel uero postquam in uiduitate diu permansit, lætalis lasciuia cui nimis in iuuentute seruierat pœnitens speculum reliquit....'

¹⁰⁶ *Ecclesiastical History*, IV: 212-213, 'Sic per suspicione et litigia feminarum, in furore succensa sunt fortium corda uirorum.'

daughter of the count of Nevers, began a war over some “slight remarks” (*pro quibusdam contumeliosis*) which “led to great bloodshed on both sides and the burning of many homes in towns and villages.”¹⁰⁷

Orderic was not ignorant in the ways of marriage—he writes that Adela of Blois¹⁰⁸, a “wise and spirited woman,”¹⁰⁹ talked to her husband, Stephen, Count of Blois “between conjugal caresses,”¹¹⁰ and convinced him that he should return to Crusade after being disgraced in Antioch. Other women gained too much power and subverted the holy state of matrimony, such as Aubrée of Ivry who built “an almost impregnable castle” and then attempted to exile her husband from it.¹¹¹ It is clear that Orderic was interested in the actions of women.

Orderic was also knowledgeable of the political role of marriage in a woman’s life. Other women’s marriages served as important connections in Normandy. Roger I of Tosney’s sister “linked Normandy and Maine” by aligning herself with Guy de Laval, and her daughter’s marriage brought Hereford into the Anglo-Norman realm.¹¹² Maud, the daughter of Richard the Viscount of the Avranchin, linked two vice-comital dynasties

¹⁰⁷ *Ecclesiastical History*, IV: 212-213, ‘quorum manibus paulo post multus mutuo cruor effuses est mortalium, et per uillas ac uicos multarum incensa sunt tecta domorum.’

¹⁰⁸ Adela’s life will be discussed more completely in Chapter 6.

¹⁰⁹ *Ecclesiastical History*, V: 324-325, ‘mulier sagax et animosa.’

¹¹⁰ *Ecclesiastical History*, V: 324-325, ‘inter amicabilis coniugii blandiment dicebat.’

¹¹¹ *Ecclesiastical History*, IV: 290-291.

¹¹² David Douglas, *The Norman Achievement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 86.

when she married Ranulf II, Viscount of the Bessin.¹¹³ Goscelin's daughter married Geiffrey, the Viscount of Arques, linking Arques and Rouen.¹¹⁴

It is clear that Orderic values women's knowledge and skills over their dimwitted spouses. Avice of Auffay was a young girl who was "filled with the love of God"¹¹⁵ as a child and remained pious as a married woman, "growing daily in the love of God" (*uxor eius in amore Dei*) in spite of being married to a man who was "handsome but lacking in wisdom"¹¹⁶ and bearing him twelve children, eight of whom died in their youth. She donated the mill at Notre-Dame-du-Parc, five acres of land, and three offerings of fifteen shillings a year, along with the Church of Holy Trinity and its tithes to Orderic's monastery of St. Évrout.¹¹⁷ Avice, "a beautiful and persuasive" wife (*pulchram et eloquentem*), was able to reform her husband, a wild young knight, to desist in his injurious treatment of monks and restrain him from his foolish ways because she was "prudent and golden-tongued, devoted to God from her earliest years and utterly given over to good works."¹¹⁸ Avice of Auffay was the ideal woman, for she possessed many of the qualities that Orderic admired: She endured a terrible marriage that lasted fifteen

¹¹³ Douglas, *The Norman Achievement*, 96.

¹¹⁴ Douglas, *The Norman Achievement*, 94.

¹¹⁵ *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 250-251, 'Præter hæc Auicia uxor eius amore Dei feruens.'

¹¹⁶ *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 256-257, "Gualterius uero puer elegans sed parum sapiens fuit et ob hoc".

¹¹⁷ *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 250-253.

¹¹⁸ *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 256-257, 'Erat enim prudens et facunda, et a puerilibus annis Deo deuota, multisque pro posse suo bonis operibus dedita.'

years before dying and being buried “in the cloister of the monks she had so truly loved, by the door of the church.”¹¹⁹

Orderic describes how Avice saved Saint Évroul from the “vagaries of her husband,” Walter, whom Orderic describes as “handsome but lacking in wisdom.”¹²⁰ She was strong but not aggressive, she was beautiful without being vain, and she performed good works from the goodness of her heart instead of as a penance for earlier acts of wrongdoing. Her uxorious husband, however, “continually injured and harassed the monks and clerks and honest peasants”¹²¹ until his wife used her charm to reform him. She was so loved by the monastic community that upon her death, the prior of the cloister built a stone vault over her, and Orderic himself inscribes the following epitaph for her,

Beneath lies the body of Avice, born nobly;
May Christ help her to Heaven, to have life eternal.
To her Lord while she lived she looked with great longing
And practiced his precepts, abiding in probity.
Most fair of face, well-spoken, full of wisdom,
She strove without ceasing to share in God’s service;
For holy masses and hours, she was daily hearing.
So as a modest maid she modelled her living...
Specially she shone with the light of sound morals;
The cult of the church she steadfastly cherished,
Bestowing her best jewels for the benefit of the altar.
Generous in giving to priests, monks, all of God’s needy,
To widows, waifs, and the sick she was gentle and well-doing;
So chaste and so constant that not the most craven
Dared to breathe one base word against her bright honor.¹²²

¹¹⁹ *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 212-218, ‘defuncta est et in claustro monachorum quos ualde dilexerat ad hostium basilicæ sepulta est.’

¹²⁰ *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 256-257, ‘Elegans sed parum sapiens.’

¹²¹ *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 256-257, ‘monachos ac clericos legitimosque colonos iniuriis crebro illatis perturbauit.’

¹²² *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 256-259, ‘Nobilis Ausciæ corpus iacet hic, sine fine Christus ei tutam concedat in æthere uitam. Cui proba dum uixit com laude frequens inhiabit. Ac studuit iugi conatu iure lucrari. Pulchra fuit ualde, facunda satis sapiensque, Cultibus assidue diuis satagebat adesse. Cotidie missas audire studebat et horas, Viuere sponte sua sic cepit honesta puella...Moribus egregiis specialiter

Orderic pities wronged women, and he admires women who seem noble and brave. Blacker tells us that He feels sympathy for young women like Bertrada de Montfort, countess of Anjou, who were forced to marry against their will so that their husbands could simply gain control of their lands.¹²³ In this case, Orderic’s words are highly critical of Bertrada’s groom, Fulk of Anjou, for he suffered from “scandalous habits” and “pestilential vices.”¹²⁴ Fulk had at least three living wives at the time of the unseemly marriage to Bertrada.

He scorns women whose behaviors were lustful or whose actions inspired sin in others—as when later in the narrative, Orderic excoriated Bertrada de Montfort who, after repudiation from her legal husband, took to the bed of King Philip of Francia.¹²⁵ Orderic disapproved of women who behaved unnaturally such as Adelais, the widow of Roger I of Sicily, who is repudiated by her third husband and was “stained with many crimes”- including the poisoning of her son-in-law.¹²⁶

Orderic supports Hildegarde of Poitou’s claim against her husband’s scandalous ways, and Orderic reports that Hildegarde appeared in court to press her claim and spoke clearly and loudly on her own behalf,¹²⁷ requesting papal clemency from Pope Calixtus at

hæc era fulsit. Æcclesiæ cultum satagens extollere multum. Contulit ornatus proprios altaris in usus. Presbiteros, monachos, uiduas, ægros et egenos. Semper honoravit multoque issamne fuit. Casta fuit tantum quod eam nullus nebulonum....’

¹²³ Blacker, “Women, Power, and Violence in Orderic Vitalis’s *Historia Ecclesiastica*,” 46.

¹²⁴ *Ecclesiastical History*, IV: 187.

¹²⁵ *Ecclesiastical History*, IV: 260-261.

¹²⁶ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 366-367, VI: 428-433.

¹²⁷ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 258-259, ‘alta claraque uoce.’

court in Reims in October 1118. It seemed that her husband had abandoned Hildegarde, and married another noble lady, Malberge of Châtellerault, and “replaced her in his bed.”¹²⁸

Some women used their aggression in negative ways. Juliana, the daughter of Henry I and wife of Eustace of Breteuil, is depicted as an “unfortunate warrior,”¹²⁹ who was originally sent by her husband to defend their castle against her father, but fails to kill him, surrenders her castle, and is forced to jump from the ramparts into the moat in February “with bare buttocks.”¹³⁰

Further, Chibnall tells us, as a monk vowed to chastity, Orderic is a frequent critic of “lust,” a sin he generally ascribes to women.¹³¹ Lust is the sin in which the female body seems most treacherous.¹³² In a vision called the “Hellequin’s hunt,” Orderic describes a priest who had a dream that he encountered a troop of women practicing the sin of *luxuria* as they,

seemed to the priest to be without number, riding in female fashion on women’s saddles which were studded with burning nails . . . loudly lamenting the sins for which they endured such punishment. Indeed, it was for the seductions and obscene delights in which they had wallowed on earth that they now endured . . . agonies too many to enumerate.¹³³

¹²⁸ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 258- 259, ‘coniugem in thoro surrogatum.’

¹²⁹ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 214-215, ‘infausta Bellatrix.’

¹³⁰ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 214-215, ‘nudis natibus.’

¹³¹ Chibnall, “Women in Orderic Vitalis,” 109-110.

¹³² O’Neal, “Pragmatism, Patronage, Piety, and Performance,” 223-225. O’Neal asserts that lust stemmed from women’s concern for vanity, beauty, and worldliness.

¹³³ *Ecclesiastical History*, IV: 238-241. Chibnall’s English translation of the priest’s vision.

Norman women in particular could be “consumed by fierce lust.”¹³⁴ In more than one instance, Orderic commanded that if their husbands did not return from their English lands “with all speed,”¹³⁵ they would “take other husbands for themselves.”¹³⁶ Women could also use their charms to cause men to go astray, according to Orderic. He blames the general moral decline among the knightly class after the death of William the Conqueror on the feminization of culture that was brought about partly because of a desire among men to please their women.¹³⁷ Harkening back to Biblical images of Mary Magdalene, Orderic describes the mistress of William Clito, who saved William from conspirators, then wept as she washed his hair.¹³⁸

Orderic appreciated women who engaged in activities that benefitted the Church. For example, Orderic mentions Lesseline, who convinced her uxorious husband, Count William of Eu, to build the abbey of St. Mary,¹³⁹ and Adelais, Earl Roger’s second wife who “encouraged” her husband to befriend monks and protect the poor.¹⁴⁰ Beatrice convinced her husband, a well-born knight named Gilbert, to establish a house of monks at Auffay.¹⁴¹

¹³⁴ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 218-219, ‘mulieres seua libidinis face urebantur.’

¹³⁵ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 218-221, ‘crebrisque nunciis a uiris suis flagitabant ut cito reverterentur.’

¹³⁶ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 218-221, ‘ipsæ sibi alios coniuges procurarent.’

¹³⁷ *Ecclesiastical History*, IV: 188-189, ‘Our wanton youth is sunk in effeminacy, and courtiers, fawning, seek the favours of women with every kind of lewdness.’; see also *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 218-221 men leave battle to go home to their wives who threaten adultery because their lust is out of hand.

¹³⁸ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 374-375, ‘Protinus ille...arma...arripuit, ipsamque secum ne aliquot modo periclitaretur sustulit et Guillelmo duci Pictaueusis coaeuo commilitoni suo per quondam abbatem destinavit, ipsumque ut liberatricem suam honorabili conubio sicut sororem suam donaret obsecrauit.’

¹³⁹ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 10-13.

¹⁴⁰ *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 138-139.

¹⁴¹ *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 246- 247. 256.

Another example is Matilda of Grandmesnil who came to St. Évroul with her family, and she and her husband, Hugh of Montpinçon, came to “renew...fraternity with the monks.¹⁴² Canatella discusses the benefits these spiritual friendships provided for the monks as well as for the women. Noblewomen, availing themselves of this closer access to the Divine, could then also deploy spiritual and political influence and could take the place of intercessor for their loved ones; this benefit would have been important for people in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, whose spiritual lives were both rich and critically important.

Orderic also tells of women who embraced whatever circumstances required, which could vary in the Anglo-Norman period. Norman women had a role to fill in place of their often-absent husbands, who were stretching out all over the world in search of lands, wealth, and glory during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This is the logical explanation for why Norman women rose to such importance during the eleventh and early twelfth centuries—these centuries coincided with the expansion of the Anglo-Norman world. One such woman who acted in the stead of her absent husband was Sybil of Tarragona, who, according to Orderic, was “as brave as she was beautiful. During her husband’s absence she kept sleepless watch; every night she put on a hauberk like a knight and, carrying a rod in her hand, mounted on the battlements, patrolled the circuit of the walls, and kept the guards on alert, and encouraged everyone with good counsel to be on the alert for the enemy’s stratagems.”¹⁴³ Even though Sybil came from pagan-held

¹⁴² *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 166-167.

¹⁴³ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 404-405, ‘Sibilia uxor eius filia Guillelmi Capræ seruauit Terraconam. Hæc non minus probitate quam pulchritudine uigebat. Nam absente marito peruigil excubabat

lands, during her husband's trips to Rome and Normandy, Orderic writes, "How greatly the young countess deserves praise for serving her husband with such loyalty and unflinching love, and watching over God's people with such sleepless care!"¹⁴⁴

Sybil was not the only leader of her people. Orderic also describes how Matilda of Boulogne "besieged Dover with a strong force on the land side and sent word to her friends and kinsmen and dependents in Boulogne to blockade their foe by sea"¹⁴⁵ when Robert of Gloucester¹⁴⁶ renounced his homage to Empress Matilda and her husband, Stephen. Her men "gladly carried out their lady's commands so that their enemies could not be resupplied."¹⁴⁷ The Empress Matilda went into Normandy soon after the death of her father to claim her dower, and the Castellan of Argentan accepted Matilda as his *naturalis domina*.¹⁴⁸ Isabel of Tosney, discussed above, was also a strong and capable female leader. The daughter of Simon de Montfort and wife of Ralph of Tosney, Isabel "rode armed as a knight among the knights, and she showed no less courage among the knights in hauberks and sergeants at arms" to defend her family's lands.¹⁴⁹ Isabel was more than a capable knight—Orderic also describes her as "generous, daring, and gay,

singulis noctibus lorica ut miles induerat, uirgam manu gestans murum ascendebat, urbem circumibat, uigiles excitabat, cunctos ut hostium insidias caute precauerent prudenter admonebat.'

¹⁴⁴ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 404-405, 'Laudabilis est iuuenis era, quæ marito sic famulabatur fide et dilectione sedula, populumque Dei pie regebat peruigili sollertia.'

¹⁴⁵ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 520-521, 'Regina uero Doueram cum ualida manu per terram obsedit, et Boloniensibus amicis ac parentibus suis atque alumnis ut per mare hostes cohiberent mandauit.'

¹⁴⁶ Robert of Gloucester was a bastard son of King Henry I.

¹⁴⁷ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 520-521, 'Porro Bolonienses dominæ suæ iussa libenter amplectentes famulatum suum ei exhibent, nauiumque multitudine operiunt illud fretum quod strictum est ne castrenses sibi aliquatenus procurarent.'

¹⁴⁸ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 454-455.

¹⁴⁹ *Ecclesiastical History*, IV: 212-213, 'In expeditione inter milites ut miles equitabat armata, et loricatorum equitibus ac spiculatis satellitibus non minori præstabat audacia.'

and therefore loveable and estimable to those around her.”¹⁵⁰ He compares Isabel to Camilla, the Amazon queen.¹⁵¹ Isabel contrasts with her nemesis, Helwise, the wife of the count of Evreux, who is “clever and persuasive, cruel and grasping”, but who eventually entered a nunnery where she repented of the “mortal sin of luxury.”¹⁵²

Orderic was pleased with noblewomen whose lives were pious and whose wealth extended to monasteries for their souls’ salvation or when they retired from life to take the veil.¹⁵³ In some circumstances, this generosity superseded the sinfulness of the women’s younger days, which was likely the intention of their gifts.

Not all women fit into one of the four categories mentioned above.¹⁵⁴ Some women killed.¹⁵⁵ While killing is a criminal act, this was not a vice of their nature, as Chibnall suggests,¹⁵⁶ but rather a way to demonstrate power. In other words, women did not kill *because they were women*, but likely because *as women* they had fewer physical options for enacting revenge, for example. Powerful noble women such as Mabel would

¹⁵⁰ *Ecclesiastical History*, IV: 212-213, ‘Isabel uero dapsilis et audax atque iocosa, ideoque coessentibus amabilis et grata.’

¹⁵¹ *Ecclesiastical History*, IV: 214-215, ‘Emulabatur Lampedioem et Marseppiam, Ippolitem et Pentesileam alisasque reginas Amazonum bellatrices.....et per xv annod armis edomuerunt Asiaticas gentes.’

¹⁵² *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 128-129.

¹⁵³ *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 128-129.

¹⁵⁴ Married women, single maidens, cloistered widows, or young girls.

¹⁵⁵ O’Neal lists fourteen women from the Anglo-Norman sources she evaluated who committed murder. See O’Neal, “Pragmatism, Patronage, Piety, and Participation,” 227.

¹⁵⁶ See Marjorie Chibnall’s defense of Orderic Vitalis’s treatment of women in Chibnall, “Women in Orderic Vitalis,” 108. Although I agree with Dr. Chibnall on most points, and honors her concern for Orderic Vitalis and her lifetime of scholarly work, without which this dissertation could not be possible, I disagree with her dismissiveness of Orderic’s ideas of women and “vice” when she recounts that other people died of poison not associated with women, such as “William Giroie [who] was poisoned by the Romans who were greedy for the gold he carried.” In this same discussion, Dr. Chibnall points out that David Douglas references the frequency with which Normans accused poison as compared with their English cousins.

have been less likely to pick up a sword and mutilate an enemy. However, because of women's proximity to food production, women usually killed using food or wine.¹⁵⁷

Poisoning by food is a bit imprecise; sometimes the wrong person ingests the tainted substance. In another political assassination against the house of Giroie, Adelaide Giroie killed her husband, Robert, with two apples. Orderic writes, "This brave warrior was sitting peacefully at the winter fireside, he noticed that his wife Adelaide, the duke's kinswoman, had four apples in her hand; playfully he snatched two of them not knowing they were poisoned, and ate them in spite of her protests. The poison spread through his body, and five days later . . . he died lamented by his followers."¹⁵⁸ Orderic also tells how Queen Bertrade of Francia attempted to poison her stepson, the future Louis VI of Francia, using wine.¹⁵⁹ Orderic also tells how Sichelgaita poisoned her stepson, Bohemond. When her husband grew suspicious and threatened her "with the Bible in one hand and the sword in the other," she poisoned him as well.¹⁶⁰

Orderic Vitalis never met Mabel—he came to live at the monastery at the age of ten, in 1085, three years after Mabel was butchered in her bath. However, her reputation

¹⁵⁷ It is important to note that women have historically been "poisoners" because of their relation to food and the preparation of food and drink. Most women chose to poison via wine or food. According to Orderic Vitalis, Mabel used her body as the conduit for death. This is an important argument to make in this dissertation and one that will necessitate a complete understanding of feminist methodologies.

¹⁵⁸ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 80-81, 'præfatus heros post innumeras probitates dum ad ignem in hieme lætus sederet, coniugemque suam Adelaidem quæ ducis consobrina erat quatour mala manu gestare uideret duo ex illis familiariter iocando ei rapuit, et nescius quod urenata errant uxore contradicente comedit. Qui mox ueneno infectus est et post quinque dies cum multo merore suorum viii idus februarii defunctus est.'

¹⁵⁹ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 50-55. The latest research on Orderic Vitalis indicates that Orderic likely made this episode up; see Roche, "Reading Orderic with Charters in Mind," in *Orderic Vitalis: Life, Works and Interpretations*, 147. This points toward Orderic's imagination, as well as his interest in gossip and myth, as discussed in Chapter 5.

¹⁶⁰ *Ecclesiastical History*, IV: 28-31.

within the Duchy would not have faded; in fact, according to Marjorie Chibnall, her murder enabled her reputation to grow.¹⁶¹ The monks from whom she used to demand hospitality talked about Mabel with less trepidation after her death. The most recent scholarship regarding the framework for Orderic's writing shows monks combining gossip and memory to preserve the knowledge of local figures; the stories themselves become a "text" for the remembrance of a gift, a tomb, or a prayer for the souls of a nearby family, for example.¹⁶² A ten-year-old Orderic, already with some knowledge of the family because of his earliest years in Bellême lands in Shropshire, might have enjoyed stories such as those of Mabel.¹⁶³ The tales could have fueled his young imagination. Later, as Orderic was writing the narrative of his history, gossip and lore became embedded within his history as a way of "saving memories, by storing them on record."¹⁶⁴ However, Orderic's audience would have been familiar with the stories of the lords of Bellême among other noble houses in the region. The times were rife with political intrigue, civil wars, and acts of revenge between rival houses.

Figures 5.3 through 5.5 give the reader panoramic views of the ruins of the monastery of St. Évroul, from whence Orderic composed his history.

¹⁶¹ Chibnall, "Women in Orderic Vitalis," 107.

¹⁶² Roche, "Reading Orderic with Charters in Mind," 166.

¹⁶³ While there is no direct evidence of tales of Mabel circulating in St. Évroul before Orderic composed the *Ecclesiastical History*, it is clear that stories of all types were handed down through oral tradition. Many historical points in the medieval chronicles come from second-hand knowledge, such as this.

¹⁶⁴ Roche, "Reading Orderic with Charters in Mind," 166.



Figure 5.3. The Ruin of St. Évroul.
Photo taken by Crescida Jacobs.



Figure 5.4. The Ruin of St. Évroul.
Photo taken by Crescida Jacobs



Figure 5.5. The Ruin of St. Évroul.
Photo taken by Crescida Jacobs

Even though upon first glance the traditional literary and historical sources often miss the actual experiences of women in the medieval period, a closer examination reveals the power women could display and the positive ways in which Orderic depicted the actions of women. Through a careful analysis of the individual representations of women, the religious, social, economic, and political motivations of the writers can be ascertained. Amalgamating these glimpses produces a more accurate appreciation for women's power and influence in the long term, so that medieval women can finally be a more substantial part of the historical record. What we learn collectively from Orderic's anecdotes about women is that he seems to embody a 'pro-feminine' point of view. "Pro-feminine' is a term used by some critics to describe writing that, "develop construction of 'woman' which are positive according to the cultural ideology of their period".¹⁶⁵ Orderic is positive in his descriptions of women who lead wholesome and spiritual lives, and this consideration helps explain his criticism of Mabel.

For now, the discussion turns to Mabel's legacy to her children. In addition, the next chapter reflects how her "story" could have traveled to other twelfth-century duchies via the writing of Orderic Vitalis and influenced others' perceptions of women and "normal" women's behavior.

¹⁶⁵ For a discussion of the salient differences between these terms and their application to pre-modern works, see Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture*, 11-12.

CHAPTER 6: AFTER LIFE: THE DEATH AND LEGACY OF MABEL OF BELLÊME

Mabel suffered a violent death, likely as revenge for actions she took against her neighbors. However, her legacy continued because of her children (especially Robert), her reputation in the region (including the drama and poetry written about her), and her expansive building campaign. But several questions about her legacy remain: Why did Romantic artists write about Mabel? What became of her castles and monastic buildings? How could a woman of such prodigious power and influence be virtually forgotten? For answers to such questions, this chapter will return to the text of the *Ecclesiastical History*, genealogies of Mabel's descendants, and a brief prosopography of some Norman noblewomen¹ who could be considered Mabel's peers.

Women of power existed and were celebrated, known, and written of in historical study. As noted in chapter 1, these women are either queens or women held up as atypical examples of extraordinary female power. Although Mabel is a noble, she was never in a position like that of a queen, and her power was somewhat typical of her peers. She did control a vast region of power, as demonstrated in Figure 6.1.

¹ Note that these are not the women from the *Ecclesiastical History*, as discussed in Chapter 5, above. Instead, these are noblewomen who lived in Normandy and along the Norman frontier, so they come closest to being compared to Mabel.

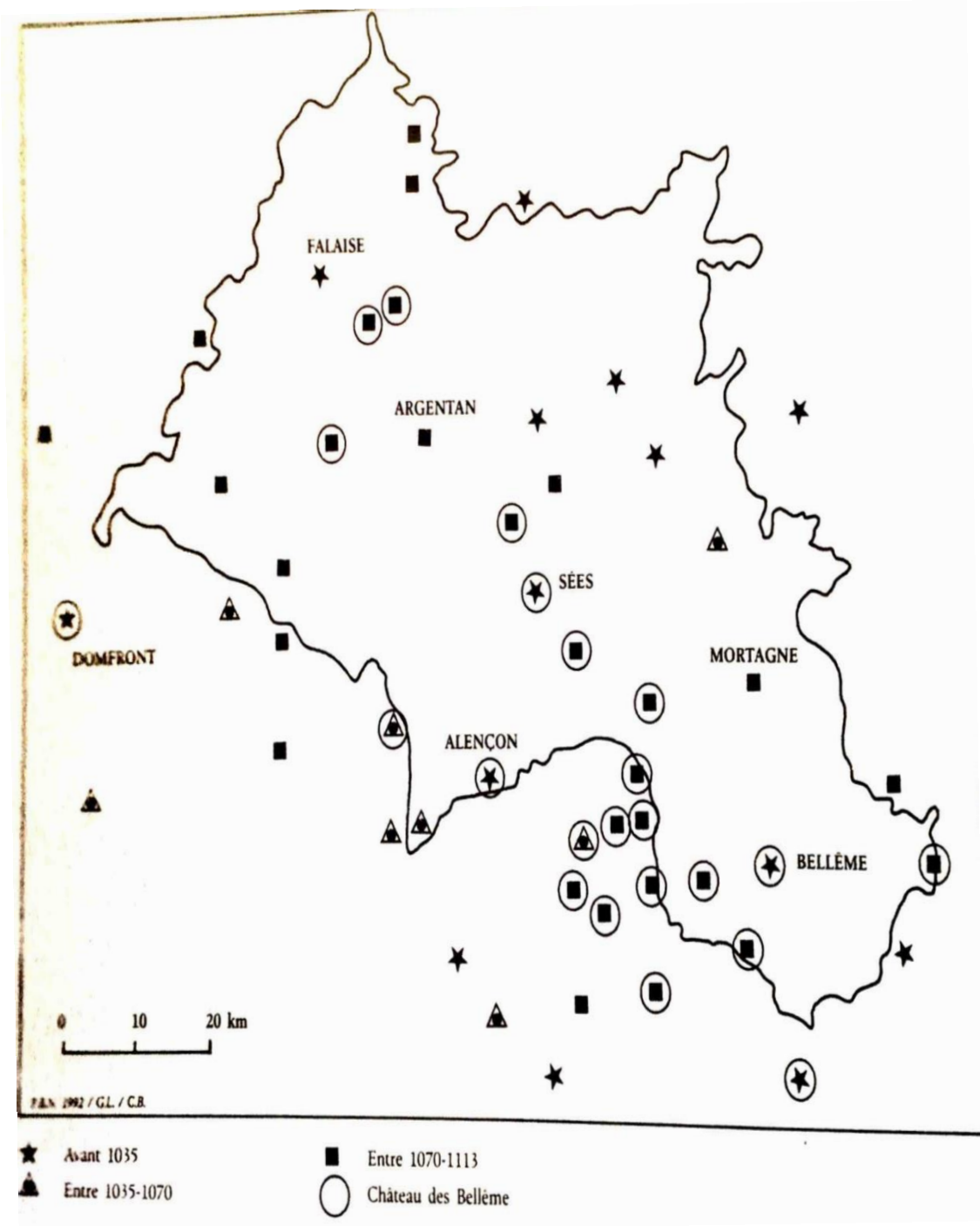


Figure 6.1. Map of territory controlled by Mabel of Bellême, from *La Seigneurie de Bellême, II*: 22.
Awaiting permission.

The catalyst for Mabel's flight from the monastery was the criticism from Abbott Thierry.² After Mabel's argument with Abbot Thierry that ended with Mabel's enigmatic affliction in her breast, Orderic Vitalis reports that she "never went to the same place [Saint Évroul] again and took care to avoid dealings either for good or ill with the monk as long as she enjoyed the transitory pleasures of mortal life."³ However, the conflict with Abbot Thierry was not taken as a personal slight by Mabel. She "loved him"⁴ for the remainder of her life, "and it was to him rather than the whole convent that she submitted the cell of St. Martin,"⁵ which remained independent from and never subject to the house of St. Évroul.⁶ Figure 7.2 shows the ruin of the Abbey at St. Martin.

² Thierry chastised Mabel from bringing so many knights to the monastery, as this placed a financial strain on the resources of the monks.

³ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 54-55, 'nunquam adire præsumpsit, et ne habitatoribus illius cœnobiï ullatenus noceret, seu prodesset, toto nisu se custodiuit, quamdiu in erumnosis huius uitæ felicitatibus postea uixit.'

⁴ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 54-55, 'dilexit eique.'

⁵ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 54-55, 'magis quam... æcclesiæ cellam sancti Martini...'

⁶ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 56.



Figure 6.2. Ruin of the Abbey of St. Martin.
Photo taken by Crescida Jacobs.

Story of Her Death and Burial

Thirteen years after Mabel perpetrated her final murder (by poisoned wine), several men broke into Mabel's home at Chateau de Bures on the Dive near Troarn and beheaded her.⁷ Orderic describes her murder and how her husband was changed after it,

After the fall of the family of Giroie, Roger of Montgomery had possession of the whole patrimony of Échauffour and Montreuil for about twenty-six years; and at first, as long as his wife, Mabel, who had always hated the sons of Giroie, the founders of Saint-Évroul, lived, he showed himself hostile to the monks in many ways at her instigation. But in the end the just judge, who mercifully spares penitent sinners and sternly smites the impenitent, allowed that cruel woman, who had shed the blood of many and had forcibly disinherited many lords and compelled them to beg their bread in foreign lands, to perish herself by the sword of Hugh, whom she had unjustly deprived of his paternal inheritance by seizing his castle at Ialgeium. He, frenzied with grief, found a reckless daring; and taking with him his three brothers who were renowned for their courage in warfare, penetrated by night into the countess's chamber. Finding her in the castle of Bures on the Dive, where she was relaxing in bed after a bath, he struck off her head with his sword and so avenged the loss of his patrimony.⁸

Such a violent murder against a woman almost never occurred in medieval chronicles, and even Chibnall considers this style of murder to be drawn from either legend or from the epic tradition of warriors like Agamemnon.⁹ Few eleventh-century

⁷ Orderic states that she perished by the sword, *Ecclesiastical History* V: 136, 'perire gladio', but then he expands the story to include the detail that she was decapitated by a sword, 'ense detruncauit', while she was relaxing in her bed after a bath, 'in lecto post balneum deliciantem.'

⁸ *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 134-137, 'Rogerius de Monte Gomerici postquam Geroiana progenies cecidit, totum patrimonium Excalfoii et Monasterioli fere xxvi annis possedit et in inicio quamdiu Mabilia uxor eius quæ Geroianos Ebrulfiani monasterii fundatores semper exosos habuerat uixit, Vticensibus illa stimulante pluribus modis molestus extitit. Denique iustus arbiter qui peccatoribus pie parcit, et impenitentes districte percutit crudelem feminam quæ multo sanguine madebat, multosque nobiles uiolenter exhæredatos per externa mendicare coegerat permisit perire gladio Hugonis cui castrum quod in rupe Ialgeii situm est abstulerat, et sic eum iniuste paterna hæreditate priuauerat. Ille nimirum merensuehementem audaciam arripuit, iunctisque sibi tribus fratribus suis qui militari probitate pollebant noctu ad cameram comitissæ accessit ipsamque in municipio super Diuam quod Buris dicitur in lecto post balneum deliciantem pro recompensatione patrimonii sui ense detruncauit.'

⁹ *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 136-137.

women had deaths as violent as Mabel did. Orderic then writes, “After the murder of this terrible mistress, many rejoiced at her fate.”¹⁰ Her son, Hugh, and sixteen of his knights pursued the murderers, but they were able to escape to Apulia¹¹ because of “the wintry season, the dark night, and the torrents bursting at their banks hindered their pursuers”¹² and because the murderers destroyed bridges behind them after crossing. Even King William was involved in tracking Mabel’s murderers. Orderic writes that the four brothers,

Because of the terrible crime he had committed the knight Hugh fled with his brothers Ralph, Richard, and Joscelin to Apulia and from there to Sicily; subsequently he withdrew to the Emperor Alexius in Greece, but he was never able to remain safely for long in any place. For William the Bastard, king of England, and all Mabel’s children sent out emissaries all over the world to seek him out, and promised rewards and gifts to any spies who could kill the exiled assassin in whatever land they might find him.¹³

Hugh lived in exile among the Saracens for twenty years “studying their customs and language for twenty years and was finally able to return as a double-agent, advising

¹⁰ *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 136-7, ‘Peracta itaque cæde feralis eræ, multi de ruina eius exultauere.’

¹¹ *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 136-137, ‘auctores confestim in Apuliam abiere.’ See also *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 162-163.

¹² *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 136-137, ‘Hiemale quoque tempus et tenebrosa nox fluminumque inundations persequentes impediabant’

¹³ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 158-159, ‘Vnde prefatus miles cum fratribus suis Radulfo, Ricardo et Goislemo pro ingenti facinore peracto in Apuliam deinde in Siciliam confugit ac postmodum in Greciam ad Alexium imperatorem secessit, sed nusquam tutus diu permanere potuit. Guillelmus enim nothus rex Anglorum cum tota progenie predictæ mulieris per totum orbem missis exploratoribus eum inuestigabat, et spiculatoribus honores et munera promittebat qui exulantem homicidam interimerent, ubicumque terrarum inuenirent.’

Hugh managed to live safely with the Saracens for twenty years, returning from exile with his knowledge of the people in service the duke.

the Normans about pagan habits and deceitful stratagems and the tricks they practiced against the faithful.”¹⁴

Because of “the partiality of friends more than any special desserts of hers,”¹⁵ the monks of Troarn buried her “mutilated corpse” (*cadauer frustratim dilaceratum*) and then engraved the following epitaph over her tomb,

From the high stock of noble parents sprung,
Mabel, great lady, lies beneath this tomb.
She among famous women showed most worth,
Known for her merits over all the earth.
In mind most keen, alert, tireless in deed,
She spoke with purpose, counselled well in need.
In stature slight, but great in probity,
Lavish in spending, dressed with dignity;
The shield of her inheritance, a tower
Guarding the frontier; to some neighbors dear,
To others terrible; she died by the sword,
By night, by stealth, for we are mortals all.
And since in death she sorely wants our aid
Pray for her: prove your friendship in her need.¹⁶

Mabel’s tomb was placed within the aisle of the Troarn Abbey (Figure 7.1), in accordance with the medieval custom of donors, founders, and large benefactors.¹⁷

During the sixteenth century, the Abbey property was confiscated, sold, and scattered.

¹⁴ *Ecclesiastical History*, V: 158-159, ‘Hugo tanti regis ualidas manus et longa brachia metuens totam latinitatem reliquit et baptizatorum gregem formidans inter allophilos diutius exulauit, et per xx annos ritus eorum atque locutionem edidicit. Susceptus ergo a Normannico duce multum suis profuit, et mores ethnicos ac tergiuersationes subdolas et fraudes quibus contra fideles callent enucleauit.’

¹⁵ *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 136-137, ‘et non ob prerogatiuam meritorum sed pro fauore amicorum’

¹⁶ *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 134-139, ‘Alta clarentem de stirpe create parentum/ Hac tegitur tumba maxima Mabilia./ Hæc inter celebres famosa magis mulieres/ Claruit it lato orbe sui merito./ Acrior ingenio, sensu uigil, impigra facto./ Vtilis eloquio, pro uda consilio./ Exilis forma sed grandis prorsus honestas./ Dapsilis in sumptu, culta satis habitu./ Hæc scutum patriæ fuit, hæc munitio marchæ./ Vicinisque suis grata uel horribilis./ Sed quia mortals non omnia possumus omnes./ Ha periit gladio nocte perempta dolo./ Et quia nunc opus est defunctæ ferre iuuamen./ Quisquis amicus adest subueniendo probet.’

¹⁷ Hicks, *Religious Life in Normandy*, 145.

Troarn lay in the path of the Campaign of 1620 during the religious wars¹⁸ and endured much destruction during the French Revolution,¹⁹ World War I, and the German occupation of World War II, so only the beautiful stone shell of the Abbey remains.



Figure 6.3. Ruin of Troarn Abbey.
Photo taken by Crescida Jacobs.

¹⁸ Mack P. Holt, *The French Wars of Religion, 1562-1629* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995), 178.

¹⁹ In 1785, the Abbey was annexed to Saint Louis de Saint Cyr (near Versailles), but by this time, Mabel's tomb was lost. The location of her tomb is the focus of future planned research on Mabel of Bellême. According to Philip Benedict, Professeur Honoraire (Emeritus Professor) of the Institut d'histoire de la Réformation at the Université de Genève, no literature has been published to date on this type of vandalism in the Calvados during the Revolution. Perhaps the local history catalog at the departmental archives would be a next step in locating the tomb.



Figure 6.4. Ruin of Troarn Abbey.
Photo taken by Crescida Jacobs.

An undated drawing of Mabel's tomb exists²⁰ (Figure 7.5), but the tomb was likely destroyed or stolen along with the rest of the Abbey's contents when Calvinists launched an iconoclastic attack on Troarn during the religious wars of

²⁰ Image used with permission from Ms. Pat Webb from MyHeritage.com, accessed May 27, 2014, https://www.myheritageimages.com/Y/storage/site127231531/files/00/97/66/009766_789036su9f3cy4d30po53a.jpg.

1562.²¹ During the seventeenth century, the Abbey was in the hands of a commendatory abbot²² until the property was confiscated, scattered, and sold c.1752.²³ The archives of Troarn were scattered into the hands of private owners during the Revolution, according to Auguste Le Prevost, the historian who donated the foundation charter to the Bibliotheque royale in 1842.²⁴

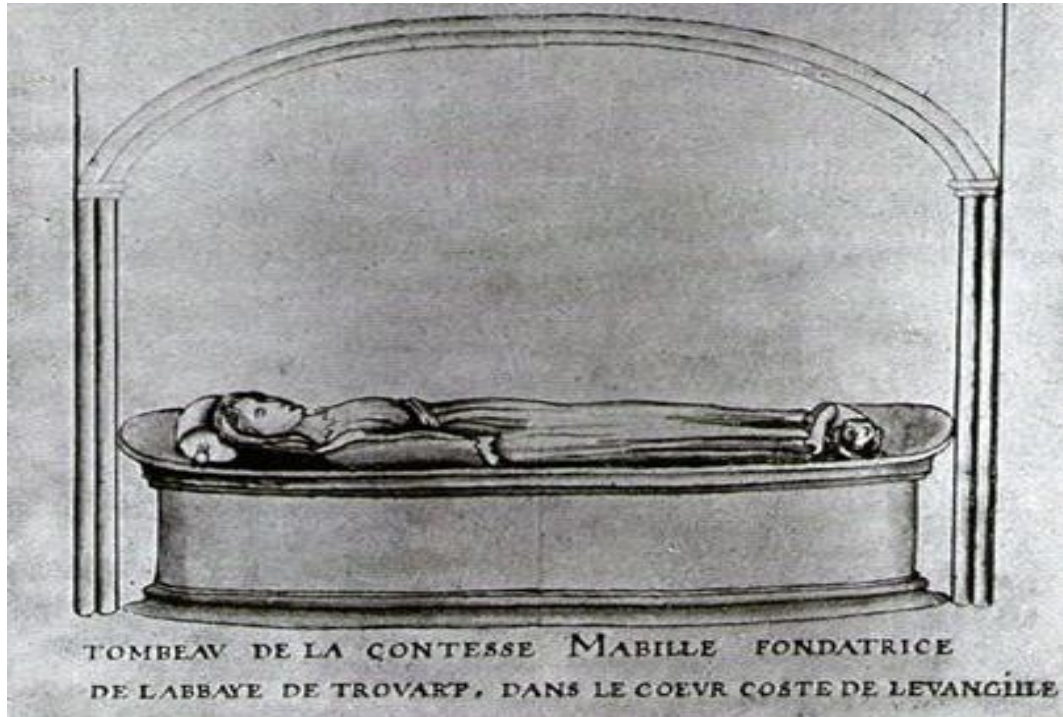


Figure 6.5. Undated drawing of Mabel's tomb.
Used with permission from Ms. Pat Webb at myheritage.com

²¹ Tourism Office of Troarn, interview with [Valérie Joannon], July 1, 2016. The looting of the abbey occurred between 1562-1563, per Archaeologique Departement du Calvados, H 7935. See Beck, "Recherches sur les salles capitulaires Normandie et notamment dans les diocèses d'Avranches et Coutances, : 17. Charter evidence confirms that the abbey was functioning in mid-fifteenth century ; see *Beaumont Charters*. University of Manchester Library. GB 133 BMC/105

²² A person who holds an abbey for the money but not with any authority over the members.

²³ Tourism Office of Troarn, interview with [Valérie Joannon], July 1, 2016.

²⁴ Cartulaire de Troarn, BNF. lat. 10086, fol. lv. The inscription reads, "Ce manuscrit, sorti des archives de l'abbaie de Troam a l'epoque de la revolution, a ete acquis par mon ami Frederic Galeron des heritiers de Monsieur l'abbe de La Rue. ..." (This manuscript, taken from the archives of the abbey of Troarn during the Revolution, was acquired by my friend, Frederick Galeron, from the heirs of the abbot)

The average age of death for Carolingian women was about thirty-six years of age,²⁵ but Mabel lived to the age of fifty-two, having been born about 1030 and being murdered in 1082. The longevity of her life speaks to her physical health and implies a power of its own, that of a middle-aged woman in a medieval world. Clearly, she remained a threat to those who mutilated her.

After the murder of Mabel, Roger remarried. Roger's second wife was more acceptable to Orderic, and she was likely still alive while Orderic was living nearby at St. Évrour. Orderic found Roger's second wife, Adelais of Le Puiset, "utterly unlike his first in character. She was remarkable for her gentleness and piety, and continually encouraged her husband to befriend monks and protect the poor."²⁶ Even though Orderic had previously insisted it was Roger who loved the monks and Mabel who had insisted upon being devious with them, after Mabel's death and Roger's remarriage, Roger came to realize his deleteriousness toward the monks of Saint-Évrour and wisely endeavored to wipe out his earlier guilt through a better way of life. From that time, he was a conspicuous patron of the monks and provided them with many gifts in Normandy and England. He voluntarily confirmed the following charter to that effect, in the presence of his chief vassals,

I, Roger, by the grace of God earl of Shrewsbury, desiring to honour the abbey of Saint-Évrour, grant to the abbey in perpetuity these possessions . . . for the salvation of my soul and the souls of my kin . . . 30 shillings . . . every year . . . to keep candles burning day and night . . . in the church of Saint-Évrour. I also grant [monks] free passage through Alençon, and freedom from all dues on their own

²⁵ Lisa Bitel, *Women in Early Medieval Europe, 400-1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 101.

²⁶ *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 138-139, 'Sequens a priori matrona dispar moribus extitit. Nam maturitate et religione uiguit uirumque suum ad amorem monachorum et defensionem pauperum frequenter incitauit.'

goods throughout all my lands; and in all my woods I grant the monks freedom from pannage for their pigs in perpetuity. At Échauffour I give . . . the land of one plough; I concede irrevocably the tithes of the mill and the tithes of all rents in the town, and freely add of my own gift the tithes of the fairs at Planches. The church of Radon . . . and the church and tithes of Saint-Jouin-de-Blavou . . . and the altar of St. Leonard in the church of Bailleul . . . and the land that Reginald of Bailleul and his wife Amieria, my niece, gave, all these things of my own choice I confirm for the love of God. In England also I give two manors . . . and the tithes of my cheeses and wool . . . and all that I have in . . . Cambridgeshire, and . . . land in . . . Sussex, and the land of Wulfwin the Goldsmith of Chichester. I confirm also everything that . . . other men have given to Saint-Évrout in England and Normandy up to the present day. All these things I grant in the sight of God, . . . for the redemption of my soul and the souls of my wives Mabel and Adalais . . . ; I confirm this charter with the sign of the cross, and if any man should diminish, contravene, or take away anything of it, may he be excommunicate.²⁷

Roger, now an old man, entered into holy orders and became a monk at the Abbey of St. Peter and St. Paul, which he had founded. Here he spent his twilight years before he died and was buried. Even in death, he continued his patronage to the monks—he left the holy relic of the coat of St. Peter for the monks, a coat that he was occasioned to wear.²⁸

Earl Roger lies near the transept in the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul in Shrewsbury, which he founded in 1070 on the site of a wooden Saxon church (Figure 7.6).

²⁷ *Ecclesiastical History*, III: 138-141. The gift is written out verbatim in the *Ecclesiastical History* on these pages.

²⁸ Shrewsbury Abbey docent, personal interview, June 30, 2016.



Figure 6.6. Shrewsbury Abbey.
This thriving church holds numerous civic events for the public. Ruins of the north transept are clearly visible on the exterior.
Photos taken by Crescida Jacobs.

Earl Roger's effigy is badly damaged, missing both the lower legs and face, but one can easily see his knightly garments and shield (Figure 7.7).



Figure 6.7. Earl Roger's tomb and effigy.
Photo taken by Crescida Jacobs.

Above his sarcophagus is the following inscription,

The figure underneath, which was at first placed within the Monastery of St. Peter and St. Paul, and was afterwards found in the ruins, was removed hither by directions of His Majesty's Herald at Arms, in their visitation of this county, 1622, to remain (as it was originally intended) in perpetual memory of Roger de Montgomery, Earl of Shrewsbury, who was kinsman to the Conqueror, and one of his chief commanders in the victorious battle of Hastings. He erected many useful buildings here, both publick and private; and not only fortified this town with walls, but built the Castle on the isthmus. As also the castles of Ludlow and Bridgenorth, with the monastery of Wenlock. He founded and endowed in an ample manner this large Benedictine Abbey; and when advanced in years, by the consent of his Countess Adelaiza, he entered into holy orders, and was shorn a monk of this his own foundation, where he lies interred. He died July 27, 1094.

Remnants of Her Power²⁹

During her lifetime, Mabel of Bellême traveled with armed retainers, dispossessed her neighbors, waged a war of attrition against a monastery, and terrorized all her enemies.³⁰ The savagery of her murder shows she was hated and feared among the Normans. She accumulated land in Normandy and its neighboring duchies as well as in England. This land was not idle farmland—a study of the lordship by Gérard Louise³¹ lists fifty-six castles and fortifications from written records and another 127 earthen castles (mottes) within the lordship of Bellême by the time it was lost by Mabel's son. Her holdings were so vast that her oldest son and heir, who received her Norman lands, became the largest and richest landowner in Normandy. The younger son, Hugh,

²⁹ Since this biography follows the life cycle, beginning with Mabel's ancestors, then describing her marriage, her role as mother, her role as domina, then her death and legacy, it seems logical to include the legacy of her life here after these events in the final chapter.

³⁰ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 52-3, 80-81, 106-107, and 432-433.

³¹ Louise, *La Seigneurie*. This is a fantastic overview of the terrain, the political boundaries, and all manner of the physical presence/space of the lordship. In the future, I would like to expand Prof. Louise's analysis through a place-by-place analysis of the lordship. An archaeological study would complement such work very well. See Appendix E for an alphabetical listing of castles and fortresses.

inherited the English lands (centered in Shrewsbury) and his father's lands in the Hiémois. Robert II of Bellême outstripped his mother in cruelty to become “the most notorious tyrant of the age.”³² Although it is only possible to guess how much of his character he gained through familial interactions or genetics, if the chroniclers are to be believed, his father was as loving and compassionate as his mother was mendacious and cunning—as her father had been before her. Among her seven children who married, only one male lived to pass his inheritance and his name to his children. The Bellême line survived only as Mortains, Châteauneufs, Gloucesters, and Ponthieuvins.

Orderic Vitalis, who believed that evil followed families for generations would have considered such an end to the once powerful family.³³ For the Bellême family, evil followed from the “very cruel” William I,³⁴ to his son Warin, who was choked by demons,³⁵ to Robert of Bellême, whose head was shattered with axes, and who suffered a “wretched death,”³⁶ through his son William Talvas who “in everything shameful he was worse than his brothers and the same boundless wickedness has flourished to this day among his heirs”,³⁷ and finally through his granddaughter Mabel, to her eldest son, Robert. Even though the family name disappeared, descendants of Roger and Mabel were

³² David, *Robert Curthose, Duke of Normandy*, 77.

³³ As described in chapter 2. See also Emily Albu, “The Tone of the ‘*Historia ecclesiastica*’ in *Orderic Vitalis: Life, Works and Interpretations*, 219.

³⁴ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 50-51, ‘Multum quippe crudelis et cupidus erat.’

³⁵ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 50-51, ‘...mox a demonio arreptus est et uidentibus sociis qui aderant strangulatus est.’

³⁶ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 56-57, ‘...miserabiliter occidunt.’

³⁷ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, II: 56-57, ‘Ipse cunctis fratribus suis in omnibus flagitiis deterior fuit, et in eius seminis heredibus immoderata nequitia usque hodie uiguit.’

present in the nobility of Francia, Normandy, and England for centuries.³⁸ Castle and monastic ruins and a small, quaint town in southern Normandy still bear the name of Bellême. Though Mabel's legacy is not familiar upon first glimpse into the medieval past, it is ready to be added to the narrative of powerful aristocratic women of the medieval period.

Norman Noblewomen: Considering Mabel's Peers

To assess Mabel of Bellême and the power she wielded during her lifetime, Mabel must be compared to her peers to see whether her life was ordinary or unique. Unlike the descriptions of women in Chapter 5 which looked at how Orderic depicted the lives of women in the *Ecclesiastical History* to demonstrate his interest in the lives of women, this prosopography will include some notable Norman noblewomen and women from frontier families whose lives and circumstances are similar to Mabel's. A few women meet this criterion; therefore, brief biographical sketches are constructed next for purposes of comparison. To facilitate the most precise comparison, noblewomen from families along the frontier should also be discussed. A future endeavor might include a comparison of Mabel to her non-Norman peers to discern whether eleventh-century Normandy was an exceptional place or simply like any other place in Western Europe at this time. Such a comparison would facilitate a broader prosopographical look at eleventh-century women.

³⁸ See Appendix B for descendants.

Although it is impossible to chart the lives of all noblewomen, and almost no details remain of non-noble women, it seems safe to assume that compared to earlier times in the Duchy, opportunities abounded in eleventh-century Normandy for women who were comfortable taking chances and being involved in nontraditional activities. Considering that many women survived multiple pregnancies and brought up their children in a time of filth and disease, conjectures can be made about the lives of women throughout the realm. For example, Hildiard of Giroie, the daughter of Arnold the Fat of Courceraut and a benefactor of St. Évrroul, was the mother of three sons and eleven daughters.³⁹ She successfully “made good matches” of marriages for her fourteen children, and her grandchildren “were destined to become the scourge of their enemies in Gaul, England, and Apulia.”⁴⁰ Hildiard’s womb was not exceptional; Orderic writes of Gisla, the daughter of Thurston of Bastembourg, who bore and raised seven sons and four daughters.⁴¹ Other mothers took control of their own and their children’s destinies. Hawaise sold her dowry lands, which comprised Le Noyer-Menarts, Vieux-Mesnil, La Tanaisise, and Le Mesnit-Dode, to her son, Robert of Grandmesnil.⁴² She also donated to the monks of St. Évrroul a fine psalter that had been gifted to her but had once belonged to the English Queen Emma, wife of Ethelred.⁴³

³⁹ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 23.

⁴⁰ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 23.

⁴¹ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 23.

⁴² *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 41-43.

⁴³ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 42-3.

Countess Lucy of Chester (?–1138)

Lucy of Chester was an Anglo-Norman heiress who lived in England. Although her family is mentioned in the *Peterborough Chronicle*,⁴⁴ a great deal of confusion and conjecture has arisen about her ancestry; however, recent scholarship seems to have settled the matter of her parentage.⁴⁵ The *Peterborough Chronicle* indicates that Lucy was the daughter of Ælfgar, the earl of Mercia.⁴⁶ However, recent historians believe Lucy was the daughter of Tuold, the Sheriff of Lincoln,⁴⁷ which burned on May 19, 1123.⁴⁸ This genealogy means that Lucy was the granddaughter of William Malet of Eye⁴⁹ (?–1071), a close companion of Duke William and known combatant at the Battle of Hastings. According to the writer of the *Deeds of Duke William*, the slain body of King Harold “was brought into the Duke's camp and William gave it for burial to William, surnamed Malet, and not to Harold's mother, who offered for the body of her beloved son its weight in gold.”⁵⁰ Soon after the Conquest, William Malet was made High Sheriff of Yorkshire, but he was deprived of his lands by King Henry at Westminster in 1110.⁵¹

⁴⁴ Cokayne, *Complete Peerage*, III: 743 The Peterborough Chronicle is a continuation of what would become the *Anglo Saxon Chronicle*. This section, which is also called Redaction E, was added at Ripon and 5 or 6 nearby southern monasteries between 112- 1154. See *The Peterborough Chronicle*, trans. Harry A. Rositzke (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951).

⁴⁵ Katharine S.B. Keats-Rohan, “Ancestor Noster: The Parentage of Countess Lucy Made Plain,” *Prosopon Newsletter* 2 (1995): 1.

⁴⁶ Cokayne, *Complete Peerage*, III: 743.

⁴⁷ Keats-Rohan, “Ancestor Noster: The Parentage of Countess Lucy Made Plain,” 1. The suggestion was first guessed at by R. Kirk in 1888, but his argument was little more than conjecture and charter references confused the lineage. The *Peterborough Chronicle* indicates that Lucy was either the niece or grandniece of Sheriff Thorold of Lincoln.

⁴⁸ *The Peterborough Chronicle*, 149.

⁴⁹ Cokayne, *Complete Peerage*, III: 743.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Douglas, *English Historical Documents*, 229.

⁵¹ *The Peterborough Chronicle*, 141.

Lucy was the heir to the family's combined English holdings, which included a large group of estates in Lincolnshire referred to as the "Honour of Bolingbroke."⁵² Although Lucy did not use power to assassinate her enemies, she did align herself in marriage with three powerful men, all of whom predeceased her.⁵³ Lucy was married first to Yves Talillebois, who served as the Sheriff of Lincoln and held the custody of lands of the see of Durham after the bishop was expelled in 1088.⁵⁴ Yves received the lordship of Kendal and signed charters on both sides of the channel before his death c.1094.⁵⁵ Then Lucy was wed to Roger fitz Gerold, with whom she had a son named William of Roumare, and finally to Ralph Briquessart,⁵⁶ with whom she had a second son named Ranulf and a daughter.⁵⁷ Although no foul play was called in any of her husbands' deaths, Lucy benefited from her increasing wealth as a widow. By the time of her death c.1138, Lucy held lands in Spalding, Westmoreland, Cumberland, Chester, and

⁵² William Farrar, *Honors and Knights' Fees* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1925), II: 154-155.

⁵³ Richard Sharp, *Norman Rule in Cumbria, 1092-1136: A Lecture Delivered to Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society on 9 April 2005 at Carlisle* (Kendal: Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society, 2006), 34-52.

⁵⁴ Cokayne, *Complete Peerage*, III: 743

⁵⁵ Cokayne, *Complete Peerage*, III: 743. See also Charles Homer Haskins, *Norman Institutions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1918), 70, 285.

⁵⁶ *Ecclesiastical History*, VI: 308-309, 332-333. Cokayne, *Complete Peerage*, III: 744, gives the surname of Lucy's third husband as Meschin.

⁵⁷ Sharp, *Norman Rule in Cumbria*, 45.

Lincolnshire, which she divided between her two sons, William de Roumare and Ranulf II.⁵⁸ Lucy also had a daughter named Alice, who married well.⁵⁹

Like Mabel and other noblewomen, Lucy practiced her power through the patronage of religious houses. In 1135, Lucy founded a convent at Stixwold, which made her “one of the few aristocratic women . . . to achieve the role of independent lay founder.”⁶⁰ During her lifetime, Lucy also held Belchford, Scamblesby, Stenigot, Tetney, and Donington, all of which had been passed to her from her grandfather through her father.⁶¹ Her *maritagum* (marriage portion) was Alkborough, which she gained from her relation to William Malet.⁶² Lucy also continued the patronage of her family’s house, Spalding Priory. Spalding was a manor held by Ælfgar before the Conquest of England; and it was listed as held by Lucy’s first husband in *Domesday*.⁶³ Lucy and her first husband, Yves, refounded this house in 1085.⁶⁴ During her marriage to her third husband, Earl Ranulf, Lucy endowed Spalding Priory with churches at Minting, Belchford, and Scamblesby.⁶⁵ Toward the end of her life, Lucy paid 500 marks of silver to King Henry I

⁵⁸ Green, *The Aristocracy of Norman England*, 369. Cokayne, *The Complete Peerage*, makes the inheritances and taxes rather complicated, especially with his uncertainty about Lucy’s parentage and three dead husbands. However, it is clear that Lucy maintained both her natal and married wealth in order to provide wealth for her three living heirs.

⁵⁹ Cokayne, *Complete Peerage*, III: 743. Alice was married to Richard fitz Gilbert, an Anglo-Norman magnate on the Welsh Marches.

⁶⁰ Johns, *Noblewomen, Aristocracy and Power in the Twelfth-Century Anglo-Norman Realm*, 60.

⁶¹ Cokayne, *Complete Peerage*, III: 743.

⁶² Cokayne, *Complete Peerage*, III: 745.

⁶³ Cokayne, *Complete Peerage*, III: 744.

⁶⁴ Johns, *Noblewomen, Aristocracy and Power in the Twelfth-Century Anglo-Norman Realm*, 60.

⁶⁵ Johns, *Noblewomen, Aristocracy and Power in the Twelfth-Century Anglo-Norman Realm*, 60.

so she could have the right not to marry again.⁶⁶ At the end of her life, Lucy willed Spalding manor house for the permanent use of the monks of St. Nicolas at Spalding Priory,⁶⁷ “in alms for my soul and for the redemption of the soul of my father and of my mother and of my husbands and kinsmen.”⁶⁸ Countess Lucy conducted her own court—she paid the king 100 marks of silver for “doing justice” (holding local, secular court) between her own men at either Spalding or Bolingbroke.⁶⁹ These final acts demonstrate Lucy’s use of economic power as well as her ability to hold lands, recover her father or uncle’s lands in Lincolnshire, and then pass on these properties as inheritance to her children.

Adeliza de Domfront (c.1026–c.1060)

Adeliza de Domfront, the daughter of Warin de Bellême, was Mabel’s first cousin. Adeliza may have inherited a portion of Bellême lands upon her father’s death.⁷⁰ During the girls’ teenage years, both their fathers and all their uncles were killed, leaving Bellême lands in the hand of Uncle Yves, Bishop of Séez. In the late 1040s, when each girl was maturing to marriage age, it seems that Bishop Yves made some type of agreement to split the Bellême lands in two, leaving Mabel with the larger, western

⁶⁶ Cokayne, *Complete Peerage*, III: 745, within five years of her third husband’s death.

⁶⁷ Johns, *Noblewomen, Aristocracy and Power in the Twelfth-Century Anglo-Norman Realm*, 60.

⁶⁸ Cokayne, *Complete Peerage*, III: 744, quoting from her charter c.1135.

⁶⁹ Cokayne, *Complete Peerage*, III: 745.

⁷⁰ Thompson, *Power and Border Lordship in Medieval Francia*, 38; Thompson, “Family and Influence to the South of Normandy in the Eleventh-Century Lordship of Bellême,” 219.

portion and Adeliza with the easternmost lands.⁷¹ At about the same time that Mabel's - exiled father was arranging the marriage with the Montgomery earl, Adeliza was married to Rotrou of Mortagne, Count of Perche.⁷²

One might envisage that Adeliza's adult life would be similar to her cousin Mabel's, with similar patterns regarding demonstrations of power and patronage; however, this was not the case. Orderic Vitalis mentions her name but does not detail her life. It seems that Adeliza devoted herself to matrimony and motherhood and left the control of her family lands in the hands of her husband. She did bear four children, who survived to adulthood, but little other evidence of her life remains. Her son Geoffry fought at the battle of Hastings, but either received no lands, forfeited, or exchanged them before 1086—he is not included in *Domesday Book*.⁷³

Adeliza's grandchildren gained more fame than did Adeliza: Her granddaughter Margaret married Henry of Beaumont, earl of Warwick,⁷⁴ and her grandson Rotrou married Maud, the illegitimate daughter of Henry I.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Thompson, *Power and Border Lordship in Medieval Francia*, 38; Thompson, "Family and influence," 215-26.

⁷² *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 266-267. Thompson, *Power and Border Lordship in Medieval Francia*, 37. Thompson incorrectly names Adeliza's husband Routrou of Nogent-le-Routrou, son of the Viscount Geoffrey.

⁷³ J.F.A. Mason, "The Companions of the Conqueror: An Additional Name," *English Historical Review* ixvi (1956): 66.

⁷⁴ *Complete Peerage*, XII: 360.

⁷⁵ *Complete Peerage*, XI: 112.

Noblewomen as Lords and Leaders

Sometimes noblewomen served in roles that were more active than being wives, mothers, or daughters. Sometimes Norman women took military action. An important example of military engagement is Judith d'Evreaux. Judith d'Evreaux (?–1067)⁷⁶ was the second cousin to William the Conqueror and half-sister to the Abbot of St. Évroul, who served as her guardian.⁷⁷ When chaos erupted in Normandy in 1061, Judith fled with her siblings to Rome. Here she apparently met Roger de Hauteville, whose brother was the Norman count of Sicily. Judith's adult life was filled with interesting events: She bore four daughters, she was taken political prisoner and held for ransom, and she commanded her husband's troops in the Apulian citadel whenever matters took him from home.

Countess Petronella also participated in military campaigns, counseled her husband before the battle of Fornham in 1173 and even took up armor and a shield.⁷⁸ Petronella patronized monastic houses in both England and Normandy, granted charters to St. Évroul,⁷⁹ confirmed lands to Nuneaton Priory, granted lands to monastic houses throughout her territory,⁸⁰ held court, and carried her own seal.⁸¹ By the end of the twelfth century, aristocratic women had become more involved in the management of familial affairs. Susan M. Johns provides a host of twelfth-century noblewomen who

⁷⁶ See John Julius Norwich, *The Normans in the South, 1016-1130* (London: Solitaire, 1981).

⁷⁷ Judith's life is known through Orderic Vitalis's work from St. Évroul, *Eccleēiastical History*, II: 390-395.

⁷⁸ Johnston, Introduction to *Jordan Fantosme's Chronicle*, xvi.

⁷⁹ *CDF*, 228.

⁸⁰ *CDF*, 139, 199, 211, 306.

⁸¹ Described in Johns, *Noblewomen, Aristocracy and Power in the Twelfth-Century Anglo-Norman Realm*, 261.

actively managed their properties, such as Matilda, the countess of Chester; Hawise, the countess of Gloucester; Hawise, the countess of Aumâle; Agnes de Percy, Matilda de Percy, and Margaret de Bohum.⁸²

Frontier Women

To get a sense of the power Mabel wielded, we should try to contextualize her more precisely within the time and place where she lived. In order to facilitate this comparison, we should look to other frontier noblewomen. The most dominant frontier families, according to Orderic Vitalis, include the Counts of Blois-Chartres, the Counts of Anjou, and the Counts of Maine.

The frontier of Blois-Chartres was sometimes ruled by a powerful woman, Adela of Blois (c.1062-1137), who was the wife of Count Stephen II. Adela was the youngest daughter of William the Conqueror. As the daughter of the duke, Adela benefitted from a formal education, probably at La Trinité.⁸³ When she was an adolescent, Adela married one of the largest landholders in northern Normandy, Stephen-Henry. Adela's father-in-law was Count of Blois, Chartres, Meaux, and Troyes. Like the other women in dissertation, Adela bore many children, raising perhaps as many as eight during her marriage of fifteen years.⁸⁴

⁸² Johns, *Noblewomen, Aristocracy and Power in the Twelfth-Century Anglo-Norman Realm*, 69-71.

⁸³ Eadmer also wrote about Adela, but the source is the excellent secondary history of her life, LoPrete, *Adela of Blois: Countess and Lord*.

⁸⁴ LoPrete, *Adela of Blois: Countess and Lord*, 16. Her daughter, Matilda, perished in the White Ship disaster on November 25, 1120, see *Ecclesiastical History V*: 314-315.

Adela, eighteen years the junior of her husband, apparently joined him on his tours of his lands and consented to his monastic foundations throughout their vast lordship. During the Crusades, Adela's husband, who was "an object of contempt to almost everyone" because he had "fled disgracefully from the siege of Antioch, deserting his glorious comrades who were sharing in the agonies of Christ,"⁸⁵ was persuaded by his wife to return to Crusade. According to Orderic, Adela "urged him to do it [go on Crusade] between conjugal caresses"⁸⁶, saying

Far be it from you, my lord, to lower yourself by enduring the scorn of such men as these for long. Remember the courage for which you were famous in your youth, and take up the arms of the glorious crusade for the sake of saving thousands, so that Christians may raise great thanksgiving all over the world, and the lot of the heathen may be terror and the public overthrow their unholy law.⁸⁷

Orderic tells us that this "wise and spirited woman" (*sagax et animosa*) gave many such speeches to her husband, who was reluctant to embark. Eventually Adela prevailed upon her husband, who left with "many thousands of Frenchmen" (*multis milibus Francorum*) and was joined by many more men along the way to Jerusalem.⁸⁸ Count Stephen was killed on this Crusade.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ *Ecclesiastical History*, V; 324-325.

⁸⁶ *Ecclesiastical History*, V; 324-325, 'inter amicabilem coniugii'

⁸⁷ *Ecclesiastical History*, V; 324-325, 'Absit a te domine mi ut tantorum diu digneris hominum opprobria perpeti. Famosam strenuitatem iuuentutis tuæ recole, et arma laudabilis militiæ ad multorum salute milium arripe, ut inde Christicolis ingens in toto orbe oriatur exultation, ethnicisque formido suæque scelerosæ legis publica deiectio.'

⁸⁸ *Ecclesiastical History*, V; 324-327.

⁸⁹ *Ecclesiastical History*, V: 346-349.

Adela also swore her own oaths and ruled in numerous key disputes between bishops and other influential people.⁹⁰ She even journeyed to Hautvillers to oversee the translation of the relics of the Empress Helen, the mother of Constantine,⁹¹ and she and her husband together oversaw other translations of relics and at numerous other church events.⁹² Adela was so kind to the monks that the Benedictine writer Hugh of Fleury dedicated his works, *The Ecclesiastical History* and the *Deeds of the Romans and the Franks*, to her.⁹³ Perhaps as a demonstration of her love for the monastic communities she so generously enriched throughout her life, Adela retired to the cloister near the end of her life.⁹⁴

Although Adela was an especially rich countess, it is likely she represented the rule of noblewomen in Normandy rather than the exception. Like all the noblewomen in this dissertation, and especially Mabel of Bellême, Adela participated actively in all matters pertaining to life in this exciting and dynamic time. She served as regent of Blois while her husband was on Crusade and again during the minority of her son, Thibaud.⁹⁵ Adela is an example of a frontier noblewoman who displayed power but without the use of weapons or poison. Perhaps this is because of the power which her husband had

⁹⁰ LoPrete, *Adela of Blois: Countess and Lord*, 17.

⁹¹ LoPrete, *Adela of Blois: Countess and Lord*, 17.

⁹² LoPrete, *Adela of Blois: Countess and Lord*, 18.

⁹³ *Ecclesiastical History*, I: 37.

⁹⁴ *Ecclesiastical History*, I: 42. Adela and other noblewomen who retired to the cloister are found throughout the *Ecclesiastical History*, for it seems that Orderic Vitalis held these women in the highest esteem. They had served God through marriage and motherhood and served the monks through their gifts before their retirement, usually in widowhood. See *Ecclesiastical History*, IV: 212-217, VI: 258-260.

⁹⁵ Kimberly A. LoPrete, "Adela of Blois: Familial Alliances and Female Lordship." *Aristocratic Women in Medieval France*. Theodore Evergates, ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1999): 15.

already concentrated in the region or the stable position of Adela as the daughter of the Norman duke or it could be due to the geographical location of Blois on the frontier or the political influence and inclination of chronicle writers. Whatever the reasons, Adela was a frontier noblewoman like Mabel, but her methods and reputation were quite dissimilar.

Anjou was held by Count Fulk III “the Black” and his first wife, Elisabeth of Vendôme (c.960-1000). In his work on Fulk Nerra, Bernard Bachrach tells that the murder of Elisabeth is mentioned in *The History of St. Florent*, a twelfth century chronicle that was composed by the monks at St. Florent.⁹⁶ Secondary sources speculate about the role which she may have played along the frontier. *The History of St. Florent*, allegedly describes her death, but Bernard Bachrach compiled a biography of her husband, Fulk Nerra, in which he describes some elements of her life.⁹⁷ According to Bachrach, Geoffrey Grey mantle intentionally acquired Viscount Fulcradus of Vendôme, as his *fidelis* for the purpose of contracting a political marriage for his son to Elisabeth, the daughter and heiress of Count Bouchard of Vendôme.⁹⁸ The marriage enabled Geoffrey to solidify Angevin control of the northern frontier of western Francia along the rivers Eavre and Oudon.⁹⁹ Bachrach is careful not to over speculate, but he mentions that Elisabeth may have played a role in the devolution of the bond between her father, Bouchard, and her husband, for in 996, Bouchard took the side of Fulk’s rival, the

⁹⁶ Bachrach, *Fulk Nerra*, 76.

⁹⁷ Bachrach, *Fulk Nerra*.

⁹⁸ Bachrach, *Fulk Nerra*, 16.

⁹⁹ Bachrach, *Fulk Nerra*, 15-16.

Capetian King Robert.¹⁰⁰ Bachrach admits that it is just as likely that the dissatisfaction grew from Elisabeth's inability to bear a son and heir, for in fifteen years of marriage she had only born one daughter.¹⁰¹ Elisabeth's final year included having her teenaged daughter, Adele, married off to Bodo of Nevers to secure an alliance along Fulk's eastern frontier,¹⁰² then it seems Countess Elisabeth was caught in a love affair, took control of the fortress of Angers, held it against her husband and his forces, fell from a high wall, and was captured alive but burned for adultery.¹⁰³ The only primary source that mentions Countess Elisabeth is the *Historii St. Florentii*, and it deals only with her death and the point of view of her husband. Bachrach excerpts this source in English as saying "Fulk, the hot-tempered one, killed his wife Elisabeth at Angers after she had survived an enormous fall. Then Fulk burned with fiery flames the same city which was defended only by a few men. He burned Elisabeth because she had committed adultery."¹⁰⁴ Bachrach concludes his description of the life Countess Elisabeth by saying, "the execution of Elizabeth had no lasting effect, excepting the physical damage caused by the fire...Fulk's daughter became heiress, and he married again. His second wife [Hildegarde of Lotharingia], bore him a son, Geoffrey Martel, and another daughter [Hermengarde-Blache]."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Bachrach, *Fulk Nerra*, 70-71.

¹⁰¹ Bachrach, *Fulk Nerra*, 72.

¹⁰² Bachrach, *Fulk Nerra*, 72.

¹⁰³ Bachrach, *Fulk Nerra*, 76.

¹⁰⁴ Bachrach, *Fulk Nerra*, 76 quoting *Historia St. Florentii*, 260, 273.

¹⁰⁵ Bachrach, *Fulk Nerra*, 86.

The Counts of Maine exist for many generations before a woman makes note. That woman is Eremburga (1096-1126), the wife of Fulk V. Eremburga's father, Elias I, count of Maine, contracted her marriage at age fourteen, to Fulk V. This marriage cemented Angevin control of Maine. However, Orderic Vitalis only mentions her briefly, and aside from bearing a son, all we know of Eremburga's life is that she died at the age of thirty, and her husband left his lands to his son and departed for the Holy Land.

It is during the lives of Mabel and her peers that the Anglo-Norman world was being created. Since Norman men spread power across the Channel and into the Mediterranean during the eleventh century, their absence created a need for women to take control of castles and villages, and to command troops. Perhaps it is not that medieval writing lacks evidence of women's power; perhaps historians are only now being accustomed to looking for the actions of women. New ways of thinking about women enables historians to pose new questions and look for new actors in historical events.

That Normandy was an exceptional place to be a noblewoman in the eleventh century seems certain. However, this does not mean that Normandy offered the only opportunities for eleventh-century women to gain or wield power. The work of Amy Livingstone should be added to this examination of eleventh-century women. Amy Livingstone wrote an engaging monograph on aristocratic families in central Francia

during the eleventh century.¹⁰⁶ Her work is best depicted in her map of noblewomen as lords in the Loire region from 1040 to 1140,¹⁰⁷ as seen in Figure 7.8.

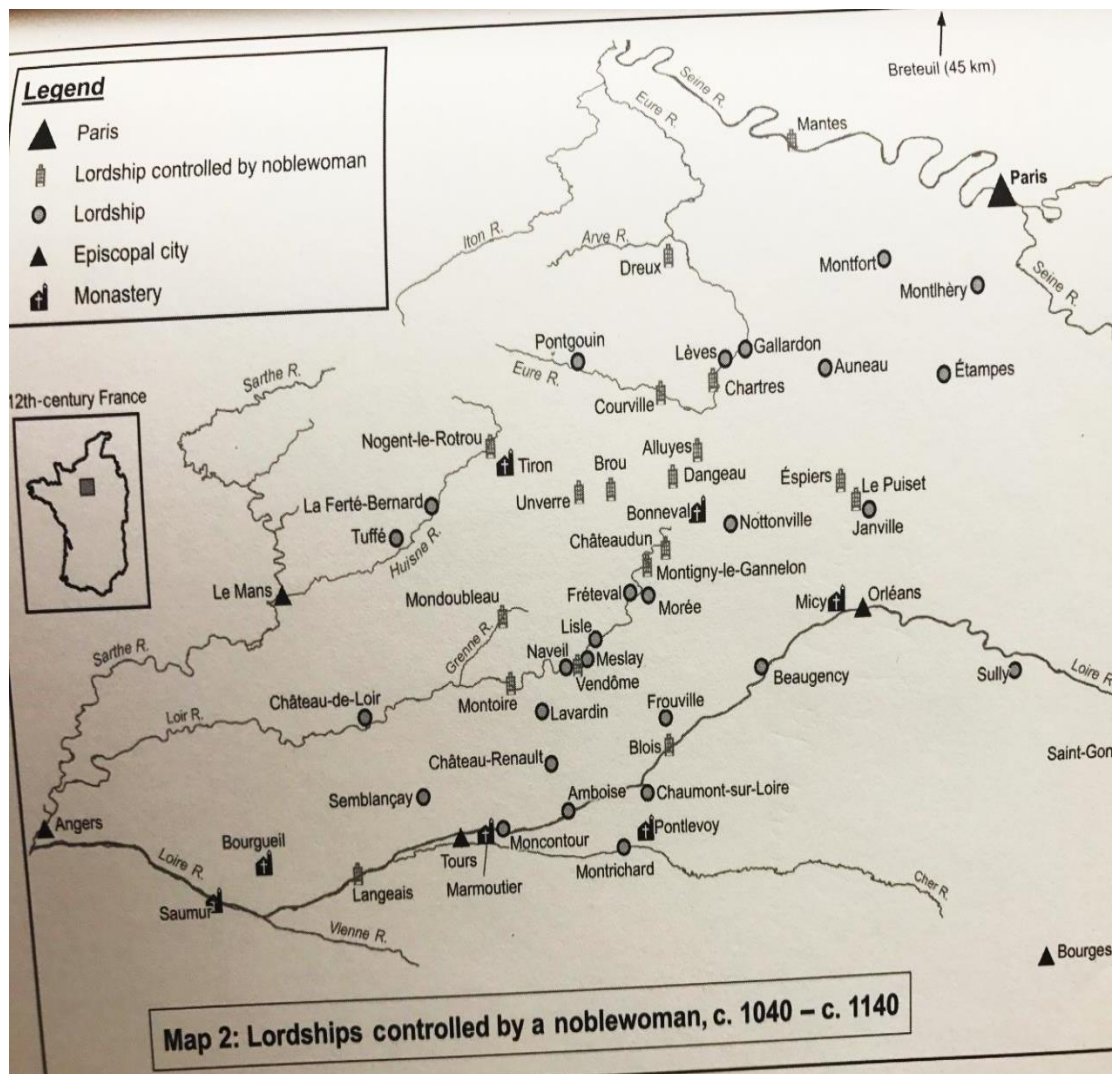


Figure 6.8. Lordships controlled by noblewomen, c.1040 –c.1140.
 From Amy Livingstone, *Out of Love for My Kin: Aristocratic Family Life in the Lands of the Loire*, xiii. Awaiting permission.

¹⁰⁶ Livingstone, *Out of Love for My Kin*.

¹⁰⁷ Livingstone, *Out of Love for My Kin*. Awaiting permission for image from Cornell University Press.

A look into the lives of Mabel's peers suggests that Mabel was less extraordinary than once thought. Other frontier noblewomen committed poison, defended their lands and loved ones, endowed monastic constructions, and other women with similar wealth and status built castles and strongholds to secure their territories and heritages. In the eighteenth century, there was interest in Mabel, who became known as "The Wolf of Alençon."

Becoming "The Wolf of Alençon"

Through storytelling, Mabel of Bellême became a minor legend in drama and poetry; she was known as "The Wolf of Alençon" (*La Louve d'Alençon*).¹⁰⁸ According to Louis Duval's analysis of the characterization of Mabel in these two works,¹⁰⁹ Mabel's character was meant to "inspire the love of liberty, love of country, and the enthusiasm for truth."¹¹⁰ Ironically, there is little truth in the drama that centers on Mabel (the wolf). However, one can look at the picture painted in the romantic imaginations of nineteenth-century dramatists to understand how Mabel's power made her a menacing enemy. According to Duval's analysis of romantic French literature, the frontier of Normandy where the lords of Bellême ruled in the eleventh century was also the location of most stories of "scoundrels, rogues, and cowards."¹¹¹ Many of these personalities seem to be

¹⁰⁸ The play was Augu and Delair, *La Louve d'Alençon*, in 1880; the poem was written by Louis Duval, the first librarian of the city of Alençon, titled "Mabille d'Alençon."

¹⁰⁹ Duval, "Mabille d'Alençon".

¹¹⁰ This is my translation of Duval's French, see Duval, "Mabille d'Alençon," 3, 'La Louve d'Alençon est faite surtout pour inspirer l'amour de la liberté, l'amour de la patrie et l'enthousiasme de la vertu.'

¹¹¹ Duval, "Mabille d'Alençon," 5, 'La Vallée est une de celle où l'on trouve le plus de scélérats, de fripons et de laches.'

“formed from the silt of the underworld,”¹¹² but Mabel’s character is “painted smooth with the bark of beauty,”¹¹³ which the male lords cannot hide behind. This feminine skill at disguise seems to make Mabel more cunning, more deceitful, and more dangerous, compared to her male family members.

Consistent with the theme of the wicked character of Mabel “the Wolf,” the first librarian of the City of Alençon, Louis Dubois, composed a poem in the romantic style about Mabel of Bellême.¹¹⁴ This librarian and artist also translated Orderic Vitalis’s *Ecclesiastical History* for the Guizot collection of historical artifacts relative to the history of Francia in 1824.¹¹⁵ According to Duval, the poem was as great as any contemporary opera and was quite popular in the nineteenth century because it could be sung with several well-known tunes.¹¹⁶ The poem lacked historical accuracy, but it was captivating, including numerous romantic elements like love, sex, and murder. William Talvas did not murder his daughter, Mabel, as it says in the poem, but he did have his wife strangled to death. This poem about Mabel also led to several legends that still survive, including the ghost of the “Lady of the Park” who returns every night to the place of her execution to cry loudly from the top of the hill.¹¹⁷

¹¹² Duval, “Mabille d’Alençon,” 5, ‘...une âme formée d’limon des enfers.’

¹¹³ Duval, “Mabille d’Alençon,” 5, ‘Il est facile de peindre la douceur avec l’écorce de la beauté.’

¹¹⁴ French text with my English translation can be found in Appendix D.

¹¹⁵ See Louis Dubois, *Collection des Mémoires Relatifs à l’Histoire de Francia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1824).

¹¹⁶ Duval goes on to commend the poem for being of greatest success in Alençon and throughout the region for making famous many sites of public interest throughout the region.

¹¹⁷ Duval, “Mabille d’Alençon,” 10.

This dissertation has endeavored to relate the biography of Mabel of Bellême as accurately as possible. In order to fulfill this, it began with her ancestry, then her birth and marriage, to her roles as mother and *domina*, to the story of her brutal murder and the legacy that she left behind after death. In the conclusion we should revisit whether or not Mabel enjoyed power which made her either an ordinary eleventh-century Norman noblewoman or a unique woman of her time.

CONCLUSION : AN ORDINARY OR EXTRAORDINARY WOMAN?

This dissertation attempts to answer the call put forth by Susan Mosher Stuard in the Introduction to *Women in Medieval Society*, which sought out the history of women to “understand women in the context of their own society and the opportunities that their times afford them”¹¹⁸ with as little of the biases of modernity as possible. Stuard traced the methodologies which have been used by historians and the shortfalls of each method. To recount the life of Mabel of Bellême and the perspective of Orderic Vitalis as correctly as possible, this dissertation used portions of a plethora of methodologies. In the end, an interdisciplinary approach helped to piece together what Orderic may have been thinking when he told the tales of Mabel. The picture that emerges is of a frontier noblewoman who possessed fearsome power over her territory. Mabel murdered her political rivals using poisoned wine- in one instance accidentally killing her own brother-in-law. While it is absurd to think that Mabel intentionally poisoned a baby using breast milk, we are left with what to make of Orderic’s mendacious anecdote. From the analysis of medieval medicine and theology, we get a better understanding of how Orderic conceived of the story of Mabel and what his audience might have learned from its telling. I hope to have lived up to the current standard of the historian Natalie Zemon Davis, who believed that “women’s history began as a study of prominent women and progressed to a study of women in the social and economic context of their day.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ S. Mosher Stuard, ed. *Women in Medieval History and Historiography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), xiii.

¹¹⁹ Stuard, *Women in Medieval History and Historiography*, xv.

It is difficult to consider the minute and monumental ways that women have changed the course of any history. Although works on female lordship are rare, glimpses into the role of noblewomen have provided tantalizing glimpses into a world that might have been.¹²⁰ Historians of the lives of queens show how a great lady with great power impacted her realm. The life Mabel of Bellême demonstrates how a noblewoman could use both her unique time and place to change lives and wield power. As this dissertation has demonstrated, the story of Mabel must be carefully read in the context of the *Ecclesiastical History*. We cannot be obdurate in the opinion of Orderic Vitalis or in projecting modern sensibilities on medieval chronicle writers. In the end, Mabel may not have done all the things which Orderic Vitalis accused her of doing; but the facts of her life also enable us to interrogate the greater world in which she lived, which is also powerful.

Mabel was the only female lord of Bellême, and she became the object of Orderic’s acrimony toward the family. Orderic describes Mabel as “wicked” (*sæcularis*),¹²¹ “cunning, garrulous, and extremely cruel” (*callida et loquax nimiumque crudelis*).¹²² He de-emphasizes her charitable contributions to the Church of Saint Martin, her devotion to Abbott Thierry, and her monastic foundation at Séez.¹²³ He mentions her benevolence briefly, describing the monastery at the Church of St. Martin that she cofounded with her husband (*eumque ut ibidem coenobium monachile construeret cum*

¹²⁰ See for example, Paul Dalton, Paul Hyams, or David Crouch.

¹²¹ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 48-49.

¹²² *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 48-49.

¹²³ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 49.

coniuge).¹²⁴ He notes that although “she was merciless to other men of religion, [she] loved the man of God, Thierry,” and sometimes she listened to him.¹²⁵

Through Orderic’s description of Mabel and her family, we get a clearer picture of the mindset of the writer himself and of the world in which he lived. Through his narrative we see the violent and dangerous lives of people along the chaotic Norman frontier; we see the ways in which Mabel and her peers sought power through a variety of means and sought absolution for their soul in the foundation of churches and monasteries. Clearly, the Norman noblewomen in the medieval period had numerous opportunities to gain and wield whatever power was available to them. They led armies, attacked their enemies, held onto strongholds, and killed inconvenient people; they also served as important ties between dynastic families, brought up future generations of leaders, and charted the course for women in subsequent centuries.

Mabel of Bellême was a noblewoman whose voice has just now started to be heard, and we should not prevaricate about her importance. Mabel was able to take control of a fluid and vital Norman frontier, and her position was essential for the creation of the Anglo-Norman realm. She wielded power through the construction of castles and churches. Her actions and alleged actions not only reflected the power that she wielded on the frontier, but also reflected the religious changes taking place in the twelfth century, including the Gregorian reform movement, the Investiture Controversy, and the rise of the cults of the Virgin and the Magdalene.

¹²⁴ He built the monastery with his wife in this place.

¹²⁵ *Ecclesiastical History*, II: 48-49, ‘Valde tamen uirum Dei Teodericum diligebat, eique licet aliis religiosis hominibus nimis dura esset in quibusdam obœdiebat.’

The vitriol with which Orderic Vitalis characterizes Mabel likely garnered the attention of a twelfth-century audience; similarly, the salaciousness of his details should attract the attention of modern historians. Mabel of Bellême was a killer who used poisons in a variety of ways, a knight who was capable of dispossessing men of their lands, a builder of garrisons great and small, a generous benefactor to the church, a mother of nine, a fierce and dangerous protector of her lordship, and an enemy to her neighbors. All the Norman noblewomen likely have interesting tales to tell, but for now, it seems certain that few women will be able to rival the power that once belonged to Mabel of Bellême.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Genealogy of the Seigneurs of Bellême

Fulcuin (c.890-c.940) **m.** Rothaïs

Yves **m.** Godhelde

Yves de Bellême

William I (c.966-c.1028) **m.** Matilda

Fulk (died young between 1027-1035)

Warin

Robert I, succeeded but predeceased father

Warin

William  illegitimate

Yves III, Bishop of Séez

William II (c.1015-c.1060) **m.** Hildeburge

Arnoul

Mabel **m.** Roger II of Montgomery

Benoit

Avesgout, Bishop of Le Mans from 1036

Godhelde

Hildeburge **m.** Hèmon I, Lord of Château du Loir

Billehende

Eremburge

Appendix B: Descendants of Mabel of Bellême¹²⁶

Robert II **m.** Agnes of Ponthieu
c .1080-c.1105

William III of Ponthieu¹²⁷ **m.** Helie of Burgandy
Guy III (died on Crusade at Ephesus in 1147)
William, Count of Alençon
John, Count of Alençon & Perche **m.** Beatrix of Anjou
John II of Alençon
Robert **m.** Jeanne de Preuilly
Matilda **m.** Theobald VI, Count of Blois
William
Alix **m.** Hugh II, Viscount of Chatellerault
Helie **m.** Robert VI FitzErneis
Phillipa **m.** thrice: Earl of Lincoln, Lord of Graville, William of
Préaux
Clemence **m.** Juhel of Mayenne
Adela **m.** William of Warenne, Third Earl of Surry

Hugh of Montgomery, count of Shrewsbury
Died without issue

Roger the Poitevin **m.** Almodis of the Marche

Aldebert
Boso
Odo
Pontia **m.** Wolgrin II of Angoulême
William VI of Angoulême **m.** Marguerita of Turenne
Wolgrin III **m.** unknown
Matilda **m.** Hugh IX of Lusignana
William VII
Aymer **m.** Alice of Courtenay
Isabella of Angoulême **m.** King John of England
Avice of Lancaster

Arnulf **m.** Lafracoth (daughter of Murchertach, King of Ireland)

¹²⁶ See Clovis F. Brunel, ed. *Receuil des actes des comtes de Pontieu: 1026-1279* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1930), v-vi; Cokayne, *Complete Peerage* XI: 693-694, 697; Louise, *La Seigneurie*, II: 143, 166-167, 157; Kathleen Thompson, "William Talvas, Count of Ponthieu and the Politics of the Anglo-Norman Realm," *England and Normandy in the Middle Ages*, eds. David Bates and Ann Curry (London: Hambledon Press, 1994), 170; Nicholas Vincent, "Isabelle of Angoulême," *King John: New Interpretations*, ed. S. D. Church (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999), 178-79.

¹²⁷ The *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* refers to Mabel's grandson, William as "William Talvas II" instead of William III of Ponthieu. See *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* II: 264-265.

Philip the Grammarian **m.** unknown
Matilda, Abbess of Almenêches

Matilda **m.** Robert, Count of Mortain
Agnes **m.** André, lord of Vitré
Denise **m.** Guy, Sire of La Val
William
Emma **m.** William IV of Toulouse
Phillipa, Countess of Toulouse **m.** Duke William IX of Aquitaine
William X, Duke of Aquitaine
Raymond, Prince of Antioch
Agnes, Queen of Aragon

Mabil **m.** Hugh of Châteauneuf and Thymerais
Daughter
Matilda, Abbess of Belhomert
Mabil **m.** Gervais of La Ferte
HOUSE OF CHÂTEAUNEUF

Sybil **m.** Robert of Torigni-sur-Vire, Count of Gloucester
Matilde **m.** Robert of Caen
COUNTS OF GLOUCESTER

Emma, Abbess of Almenêches

Appendix C: List of Library Sources at St. Évrout,¹²⁸ Bec¹²⁹, and Fécamp¹³⁰ During Orderic Vitalis's Lifetime

I. Texts of St. Évrout

St Ambrose <i>Beai immaculate</i>	Augustine <i>On the Trinity</i>
St. Ambrose <i>Exameron</i>	Augustine <i>On the Word of the Lord on the Mountain</i>
St. Ambrose <i>On Faith</i>	Bede <i>De Apocalipsin</i>
St. Ambrose <i>The Sacraments</i>	Bede <i>De temporibus</i> (On Times)
Augustine <i>Confessions</i>	Bede <i>Expositiones</i>
Augustine <i>Enchiridion</i> (The Handbook)	Bede <i>Historia Anglorum</i>
Augustine <i>On the Christian Doctrine</i>	Bede <i>Ecclesiastical History</i>
Augustine <i>On the Divinity of God</i>	Bede <i>On the Song of Songs</i>
Augustine <i>On Faustum</i>	Bede <i>On Mark</i>

¹²⁸ List compiled from M. Léopold Delisle, "Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de Francia," I (1863), 1-13; The Historical and Archaeological Society of l'Orne, *Orderic Vital et l'abbaye de Saint Evroul: notices et travaux en l'honneur de l'historien normand, moine de cette abbaye* (Alençon: Alençonnais, 1912); Leah Shopkow, *History and Community: Norman Historical Writing in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Washington, D.D.: Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 158-159; Denis Escudier, "Orderic Vital et le scriptorium de Saint-Évrout" In *Manuscrits et enluminures dans le monde normand, Xe- XVe siècles* (Caen: Presses universitaires de Caen, 1999), 17-28. Clues about the literary models that Orderic Vitalis would have used are included in William Poitiers *Historie de Guillaumele Conquerant*, vol. 2 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1952), 468-469. Marjorie Chibnall includes material regarding the library of St. Évrout in the Introduction to *The Ecclesiastical History*, 14-23. Other studies are also useful in understanding the textual component of Orderic's literary world; see Rosamond McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). For the holdings at other libraries, see M.C. Garand, "Manuscrits monastiques et scriptoria aux XIe siècle et XIIe siècles," *Codicologia* 3 (1980): 1-33, or Léopold Deslisle, *Le cabinet des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Impériale nationale*, 3 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie L. Musset, 1868-1881).

¹²⁹ Geneviève Nortier, *Les bibliothèques médiévales des abbayes Bénédictines de Normandie* (Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1914).

¹³⁰ Betty. Branch, "Inventories of the library of Fécamp from the eleventh and twelfth centuries," *Manuscripta* xxiii (1979): 159-173.

Bede *On Luke*

Cassiodorus *Institutes*

Isidore *de naturis rerum*

Isidore *De differentiis*

Isidore *Etymologiae*

Isidore *On the New Testament*

Isidore *On The Nature of Sin*

Jerome *Against Jovinianum*

Jerome *Liber interpretationis*

hebraicorum nominum

Jerome *Psalter*

Jerome *The Questions*

Hagiographical Writings

The Life of St. Columbus

The Life of St. Eadmundi

The Life of St. Elias

The Life of St. Gregory

The Life of Herluin and Anselm

The Life of the Holy Confessor at St.

Branden

The Life of St. Jude

The Life of St. Leonard

The Life of St. Marciani

The Life of St. Mark

The Life of St. Philiberti

The Life of St. Radegundis

The Martyrdom of St. Sebastian

The Miracles of St. Agili

The Miracles of St. Benedict

The Miracles of St. Stephen

The Passion of St. Agathe

The Passion of St. Eleutherii

The Passion of St. Eustachli

The Pasion of St. Killani

Expositions on the Holy Bible

The Book of Kings

The Book of the Prophets

The Evangelistic texts

The New Testament

Genesis

Exposition on Ezekial

Exposition of the Lord's Prayer

Exposition on the Psalms

St. Augustine *On the Book of Genesis*

Abbot Bernard *On the Song of Songs*

Haimo *On Pauline Epistles*

Haimo *On Isaiah*

St. Jerome *On Daniel*

Other Sacred Works

Abbot Bernard *The Mission of Gabriel*

Albricus

Amalarius

St. Ambrose *The Good Death*

Angelomus

Athansius *On the Trinity*

Augustine *The City of God*

Canones

Decem collations partum

Diadema monachorum

Dialogues

Disputacio christiani et gentilis

Emerald *On the Rule of St. Benedict*

The Epistle of St. Jerome and St.

Augustine

Abbot Garin *Sententie*

Gracianus

St. Jerome *On Jeremiah*

St. John's *Psalterium glosatum prioris*

Origen *On the Book of the Songs*

Origen *On the New Testament*

Rabanus *On Matthew*

The Great Psalter

St. Gregory *Moral Beauty* (3 volumes)

Hubert *Decreta*

Hubert *Sententie*

Hugh, Archbishop of Rouen, *Le Liber*

Bishop Yves *Liber Paterii*

St. Jerome *On the Twelve Prophets*

*Magnus passionalis, qui incipit ad vitam
sancti Gregorii*)

Marbodius

Marian

Omnilogus

Liber omeliarum (book of homilies)

Liber pastoralis (pastoral text)

Liber pontificalis

Liber sermonalis

Paul the Deacon *Vitas partum*

St. Paul the Apostle <i>Letters</i>	Rufus <i>On Homilies of Origen</i>
St. Paul <i>Epistolæ veteres</i>	<i>Summum bonum</i>
Parasisis	Three <i>antiphonaria</i>
<i>Paralipomenon</i>	Three <i>gradalia</i>
<i>The Rule of St. Benedict</i>	Twelve Italian <i>tropharia</i>
<i>Textus vetus</i>	<i>The First Psalter, The Second Psalter,</i>
William of Morula <i>Apocolypse</i>	<i>The Third Psalter</i>
William of Morula <i>Homilies</i>	<i>The Old Passions</i>
<i>Registrum</i>	Two volumes <i>de usibus</i>
<i>Regula beati Basilii</i>	Two <i>kalendaria</i>
Abbot Richard's <i>Senlenile</i>	
Secular Works and Histories	
Alberic of Vitry <i>De compoto</i>	Hippocrates Virgil
Aristotle	<i>Historia Landobardorum, cum gestis</i>
Bede <i>De temporibus</i>	<i>pontificum</i>
Boetius <i>De phylosophia</i>	Josephus <i>antiquitatum libri cum bello</i>
<i>Catalogus pontificum cum Novo</i>	<i>Judaico</i>
<i>Testamento</i>	Orosius
Cicero	Ovid
Clemente <i>Historia</i>	Priscian <i>Insitutiones grammaticae</i>
Donatus <i>Ars grammatica</i>	Prisciarus
Eusebuis <i>Ecclesiastical History</i>	Quintilian
Galen <i>Isaoge sive medicus</i>	Solinus

II. Texts of Bec

St. Ambrose	various sermons and prayers
Bede	<i>De temporibus</i>
César	<i>Commentaires</i>
Dudo	<i>Historia Normannorum</i>
Ennodius	
Eusebus	
Galen	<i>De Pulsibus</i>
Geoffroy of Montmouth	<i>De regibus Britonum</i>
Gratien	<i>Decretum</i>
Gregory of Tours	
Henry of Huntingdon	<i>Histoire des rois d'Angleterre</i>
Hippocrates	<i>Aphorisme</i>
Lanfranc	<i>De corpore et sanguine Domini</i>
Lucan	
Maurice	various poems
Origène	<i>Commentaires</i>
Paul's letters (with commentary by Lanfranc)	
Pierre Lombard	<i>Sentences</i>
Quintilien	
Sigebert	<i>Chronique</i>
St. Anselm	various prayers and letters
St. Cyprien	various sermons

St. Gregory *Moralia in Job*
St. Hilaire *De synodis*
St. Jerome
Stephen of Rouen *Draco normannicus*
Tertullien *Treaty Against the Pagans*
Thibault
William of Jumièges *Histoire*
Musica
Flores Psalmorum
Rule of St. Dunstan

III. Texts of Fécamp

Alcuin *Carmen in canones Evangeliorum*
Alcuin *De trinitate*
Amalarius *De officiis ecclesiasticis*
Ambrose *Apologia*
Ambrose *De bono mortis*
Ambrose *De fide ad Gratianum*
Ambrose *De fuga saeculi*
Ambrose *De incarnationis dominicae sacramento*
Ambrose *De officiis ministrorum*
Ambrose *De paradise*
Ambrose *De sacramentis*
Ambrose *De spiritu sancto*
Ambrose *De virginitate*
Ambrose *Expositio*
Ambrose *Hexameron*

Ambrose *Super beati immaculate*
Ambrose *Super Lucam*
Angelomus Luxoviensis *Enarrationes in Reges*
Anselm *Collectaneum*
Anselm *De casu diaboli*
Anselm *De libro arbitrio*
Anselm *Meditatio de humana redemption*
Anselm *Antiphonarium*
Aristotle *Topica*
Arnaldus Carnotensis *De verbis domini in cruce*
Athanasius *De solutionibus objectionum Arianarum*
Athanasius *De trinitate*
Athanasius *Epistolae II ad Luciferum*
Augustine *Confessionum fragmentum*
Augustine *Contra Academicos*
Augustine *Contra adversarium legis et prophetarum*
Augustine *Contra Donatistas*
Augustine *Contra Faustum*
Augustine *Contra Felicianum hereticum*
Augustine *Contra Julianum hereticum*
Augustine *Contra quinque haereses*
Augustine *Contra sermonem Arianorum*
Augustine *De anima et eius origine*
Augustine *De beata vita*
Augustine *De bono coniugali*
Augustine *De bono viduitatis*
Augustine *De bono virginitatis*
Augustine *De Cantico novo*
Augustine *De cataclismo*
Augustine *De catechizandis rudibus*

Augustine *De civitate Dei*
Augustine *De consensus Evangelistarum libri iv*
Augustine *De correptione et gratia*
Augustine *De diversis haeresibus*
Augustine *De diversis quaestionibus*
Augustine *De doctrina christiana*
Augustine *De duabus animabus*
Augustine *De duodecum abusivis saeculi*
Augustine *De fide et operibus*
Augustine *De Genesi ad litteram*
Augustine *De gratia et libero arbitrio*
Augustine *De magistro*
Augustine *De mendacio*
Augustine *De moribus ecclesiae*
Augustine *De natura et gratia*
Augustine *De opera monachorum*
Augustine *De oration dominica*
Augustine *De ordine*
Augustine *De patientia*
Augustine *De perfection justitae hominum*
Augustine *De quaestionibus*
Augustine *De symbol*
Augustine *De tempore barbarico*
Augustine *De trinitate*
Augustine *De vera religione*
Augustine *De verbis Domini*
Augustine *De virtutibus caritatis*
Augustine *Enarrationes in Psalmos*
Augustine *Enchiridion*
Augustine *Epistolae*

Augustine *Hypomnesticon*
Augustine *In epistolam Johannis ad Parthos*
Augustine *In epistolam I Johannis*
Augustine *Opuscula*
Augustine *Opuscula contra Manichaeos*
Augustine *Retractationes*
Augustine *Soliloquia*
Augustine *Super epistolas Pauli*
Augustine *Super Genesim*
Basilius *Admonitio ad filium spiritualem*
Bede *De arte metrica*
Bede *De Deo et nominibus eius*
Bede *De tabernaculo*
Bede *De temporum ratione*
Bede *Exameron*
Bede *Expositio in Marcum*
Bede *Ecclesiastical History*
Bede *Super acta Apostolorum*
Bede *Super apocalypsim*
Bede *Super Lucam*
Bede *Super parabolas Salomonis et Esrae*
Bede *Benedictiones*
Bernard *Ad Eugenium papam*
Bernard *Apologia*
Bernard *Apologia ad Guillilum*
Bernard *De dispensatione et precepto*
Bernard *Super Cantica Canticorum*
Bernard *Biblia*
Bernard *Genesis*
Bernard *Leviticus*

Bernard *Numberi*
Bernard *Regum*
Bernard *Paralypomena*
Bernard *Job*
Bernard *Psalmi*
Bernard *Psalteris glosata*
Bernard *Canticum canticorum*
Bernard *Ecclesiasticus*
Bernard *Prophetae*
Bernard *Evangelia*
Bernard *Evangeliorum canones*
Bernard *Matthaeus*
Bernard *Marcus*
Bernard *Johannes*
Bernard *Epistolae Pauli*
Bernard *Actus apostolorum*
Bernard *Apocalypsis*
Boethius *De consolatione philosophiae*
Boethius *De trinitate*
Boniface *De poenitentia*
Boniface *Brutinarius*
Burchardus *Collectio canonum*
Caesarius Arelatensis *Sermones*
Caesarius Arelatensis *Canones*
Cassianus *Colationes partum*
Cassiodorus [*Sine titulo*]
Cassiodorus *Expositio in Psalmos*
Cassiodorus *Historia tripartite*
Cassiodorus *Catalogus manuscriptorum bibliothecae Fiscannensis*
Chrodegangus *Regula Canonorum*

Johannes Chrysostomus [*Sine titulo*]
Johannes Chrysostomus *Homiliae in laude s. Pauli*
Cicero *Somnium Scipionis*
Clemens [*Sine titulo*]
Clemens *Collectatium Fiscannense cum calendario*
Clemens *Collectio grammaticorum*
Concilium aquisgranense *Lex canonica*
Cyprianus *Epistolae*
Damasus *Versus de s. Paulo*
Damasus *Decreta pontificum*
Damasus *De divisione*
Damasus *De diversis rationibus*
Damasus *De fide catholica*
Damasus *De inlustribus ecclesiarum*
Damasus *De quantitate penultimarum syllabarum*
Damasus *De quantitate primarum syllabarum*
Damasus *De s. Wanigo et foundation fiscannensis monasterii*
Defensor Monachus *Liber scintillarum*
Dionysius Areopagites *De caelesti hierarchia*
Durandus Troarensis *De corpore et sanguine Domini*
Eberwinus *Vita s. Simeonis*
Eginhardus *Vita Karoli Magni*
Ephraem *Sermines*
Ephraem *Epistolae Alex. Magni ad Aristotelem*
Ernulfus Roffensis *Epistola de incestis conjugiiis*
Ernulfus Toletanus *Versus contra crapulam*
Ernulfus Toletanus *Versus contra ebrietatem*
[Eusebius] *Ecclesiastical History*
Pseudo-Eusebius Gallicanus *Homiliae*
Eutyches *De verbo*

Flodoard *Annales*
 Focas *Liber de genere et declinatione nominis et conjugationibus verbi*
 Focas *Fragmenta juridical*
 Fulbertus Carnotensis *Sermones*
 Fulgentius Ruspensis *Pro fide catholica*
 Gerbertus *De numerorum divisione*
 Gerbertus *Gesta Salvatois*
 Gerbertus *Glossarium*
 Gerbertus *Graduales*
 Gerbertus *Grammaricorum Collectio*
 Gregorius *Dialogi*
 Gregorius *Epistolae*
 Gregorius *Homiliae in Evangelia*
 Gregorius *Homiliae super Ezechielem*
 Gregorius *Moralia in Job*
 Gregorius *Pastoralis Cura*
 Guibertus de Novigento *Glossa super Psalmos*
 Guibertus de Novigento *Moralia in Genesim*
 Guillelmus de Campellis *Fragmentum de Eucharistia*
 Guillelmus de Campellis *Fragmentum de Eucharistia*
 Guillelmus Fiscannensis *Kalendarium*
 [Guillelmus Gemmeticensis]¹ *Historia Normanorum*
 Haymo Halberstadtensis *Commentarius in Genesim*
 Haymo Halberstadtensis *Commentarius in Isaiam*
 Haymo Halbertstadtensis *Super epistolas Pauli*
 Hegisippus *Historiae*
 Helpericus [*De computo*]
 Hieronymus *Apologia adversus libros Rufini*

¹ Norther suggests the authorship of Dudo of St. Quentin, but Mont St. Michel has no manuscripts of Dudo in the twelfth century.

Hieronymus *Commentarius in canticum Deborahae*
Hieronymus *Commentarius in Danielelem*
Hieronymus *Commentarius in Matthaeeum*
Hieronymus *Contra Jovinianum*
Hieronymus *De distantiiis locorum*
Hieronymus *De fide*
Hieronymus *De illustribus viris*
Hieronymus *Epistolae*
Hieronymus *Interpretationes hebraicorum nominum*
Hieronymus *Super XII prophetas*
Hieronymus *Super Ezechielem*
Hieronymus *Super Isaiam*
Hieronymus *Super Jeremiam*
Hieronymus *Super Marcum*
Hieronymus *Super Psalterium*
Hilarius *De trinitate*
Hilarius *Super Mattheum*
Hildebertus Cenomanensis *De matrimonii sacramento*
Hildebertus Cenomanensis *De mysterio missae*
Hildebertus Cenomanensis *Historia tripartite*
Hildebertus Cenomanensis *Homeliae*
Hugo de Sancto Victore *De amore sponsi ad sponsam*
Hugo de Sancto Victore *De archa Noe*
Hugo de Sancto Victore *De institutione novitiorum*
Hugo de Sancto Victore *De sacramentis*
Hugo de Sancto Victore *De verbo incarnate collation*
Hugo de Sancto Victore *Didascalicon*
Hugo de Sancto Victore *Super lamentations Jeremie*
Hugo de Sancto Victore *Inventio sancta crucis*
Isidorus Hispalensis *De generibus*

Isidorus Hispalensis *De summon bono*
Isidorus Hispalensis *Etymologiae*
Isidorus Hispalensis *Liber officiorum*
Isidorus Hispalensis *Sententiae*
Isidorus Hispalensis *Sermo*
Isidorus Hispalensis *Super Genesim*
Iulius Valerius *Vita Alexandri Magni*
Yves Carnotensis *Decreta*
Johannes Diaconus *Vita s. Gregorii*
Johannes Fiscannensis *Epistola ad monachos dyscolos*
Johannes Remensis *In Psalmos*
Josephus *Antiquitates judaicae*
Josephus *De bello judaico*
Josephus [*Sine titulo*]
Julianus Pomerius *De vita contemplativa*
[Julianus Toletanus] *Prognosticon future saeculi*
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Leo Magnus *Epistolae*
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Marbodus *Versus de duodecim lapidibus*
Marbodus *Martyrologium*
Maximus Taurinensis *Sermones de s.Laurentio*
Maximus Taurinensis *Medicinalis*
Mico *Opus prosodiacum*
Mico *Miracula s. Michaelis*
Mico *Missale Discannense*
Origenes *Homiliae interprete Rufino*
Origenes *Super epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*
Origenes *Super Leviticum*
Origenes *Super vetus testamentum*

Orosius [*Historia*]
Pamphilus *Apologeticus pro excusatione Origenis*
Pamphilus *Paradysus*
Paschasius Radbertus *Expositio in Mattheum*
Paschasius Radbertus *Passio s. Dionysii*
Paschasius Radbertus *Passionarium*
Paulinus *Epistolae*
Paulinus Mediolanensis *De benedictionibus patriarcharum*
Paulus Diaconus *Historia Langobardorum*
Petrus Comestor *Historia*
Petrus Lombardus *Sententiae*
Potamius *Epistola ad Athanasium*
Priscianus *Grammatici partitones versuum xii Aeneidos principalium*
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Smaragdus *Diadema monachorum*
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P. Virgilius Maro *Aeneis*
P. Virgilius Maro *Vita d. Mariae Aegyptiacae*
P. Virgilius Maro *Vita s. Audoeni*
P. Virgilius Maro *Vita s. Bertae*
P. Virgilius Maro *Vita s. Columbani*
P. Virgilius Maro *Vita s. Cutberti*
P. Virgilius Maro *Vita s. Edwardi*
P. Virgilius Maro *Vita s. Joanis Eleemosynarii*
P. Virgilius Maro *Vita s. Martini*
P. Virgilius Maro *Vita s. Nicholae*
P. Virgilius Maro *Vita s. Opportunae*
P. Virgilius Maro *Vita s. Taurini*
P. Virgilius Maro *Vita Patrum*
P. Virgilius Maro *Vita Sanctorum*

Appendix D: Translation of *Mabille d'Alençon* by Louis Dubois²

Talvas fut un prince exécration,	Talvas was a detestable prince,
Il était comte d'Alençon.	He was Count of Alençon.
Sa barbarie inexorable	His relentless savagery
D'horreur pénétrait le canton.	Horror permeated the town.
Il plut à la jeune Mabille,	He was pleased by the young Mabille,
Fille d'un comte son voisin.	Daughter of a neighboring earl.
O Mabille, o pure victime,	O Mabel, o pure victim,
Du tigre le plus inhumain,	The inhuman tiger,
Ton père immolé par le crime	Your father himself in on the crime
T'attend près du lit de l'hymen.	Waiting for you near the bed of the hymen
Ecouves, dans ta somber enceinte,	At Ecouves ³ to get pregnant,
Mabille a donc porté ses pas.	Mabel is not impregnated.
Sur les bords du bois solitaire,	On the banks of a lonely wood,
Chaumont, honnête agriculteur,	Chaumont, an honest farmer,
Habiant avec son vieux père,	Lives with his old father,

² Louis Dubois, "Mabille d'Alençon," in *Collection des Mémoires Relatifs à l'Histoire de Francia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1824). My English translation of Dubois's French text.

³ Territory in Normandy

Trouvait le paix et le bonheur.
Mabille en proie à mille craintes
S'offre à leurs regards obligeants;
Sa beauté, ses larmes, ses plaints
Attendrirent ces bonnes gens.

Where he found peace and happiness.
Mabel was ridden with a thousand fears
Yielded to their good natured ways;
Her beauty, her tears, her complaints
The good people soften.

Bientôt de la triste Mabille
L'époux cruel, l'affreux Talvas,
A découvert l'obscur aïse;
Le barbare y porte ses pas.

Soon the sad Mabel
The cruel husband, the awful Talvas,
Discovered the dark lane;
No barbarian gate to keep him out.

On voit, non loin de la chaumière,
Un mont, couvert de bois épais,
Près du mon tûne roche altièrè
Qui domine sur les forêts.
Talvas y conduit sa victime
Avec son hôte généreux;
Et dans la fureur qui l'anime
Il les fait enchaîner tous deux.

We see, not far from the farmhouse,
A mountain, covered in thick woods,
Near the fixed proud rock
That dominated the forest.
Talvas led his victim
With her gracious host;
And with furious movements
He chains them both.

Du haut de la roche escarpée
Unis on les précipita.
La vengeance semble trompée;

From the top of the steep rock
They were thrown together.
Revenge seemed disappointing;

La senle Mabilie expire.

Poor Mabel dies.

La jeune home au corps de Mabilie

The young man and Mabel's bodies

Est uni des nœuds les plus forts,

Were twisted into many knots,

Et dans une mort difficile

In a difficult death

A la fois trouve mille morts.

Both found a thousand deaths.

Les lieux, t emoins de tant de crimes,

This place has witnessed many crimes,

En ont gard e le souvenir.

Has retained the memory.

On voit l'Ermitage tranquille;

We see the peaceful Hermitage;

Le Saut-de-la-Dame est aupr es

The Canyon of the Lady is nearby⁴

Ainsi que la Roche-Mabilie,

And the Roche-Mabilie,⁵

Et Chaumont au sein des for ets.

And Chaumont⁶ in the forests.

Les de l'aspect de tant d'outrages

The place of so much outrage

Dont g emissair l'humanit e,

Whose moaning humanity,

Le vieillard sur ces monts sauvages

The old man on the wild mountain

Fit b atir un toit respect e.

Had built a respectable place.

L a, dans un modeste hermitage,

There, in a small hermitage,

Terminant se sans et ses maux,

Ended his feeling and his misfortune,

⁴ This canyon is commonly known as the Canyon of the Leaping Lady, where women were known to commit suicide by jumping from the 630 meter summit into the canyon below.

⁵ Now a small town with about 160 inhabitants located about 60 kilometers east of Bell eme.

⁶ Chaumont is a picturesque old town, translated "the bald hill," where Odo, Count of Blois (d.995), built a magnificent castle that still stands intact above the Loire.

Il vécut et mourut en sage,
Pardonnant même à ses bourreaux.

He lived and died like a sage,
Forgiving even his enemies.

**Appendix E: Alphabetical Catalog of Castles and/or Earthen Fortifications within
Bellême⁷**

Aigle	Beauvoir
Aillieres	Boissei la Lande
Alençon	Boissy Maugis
Ambrieres	Boitron
Ancinnes	Bouce
Appenai sous Bellême	Brece
Athis de l'Orne	Breel
Argentan	Bretoncelles
Asnebec	Briouze ²
Bailleul	Bure (2)
Ballon	Carneille
La Baroche sous Luce	Ceauce
Bleves	Ceton
Bazoches sur Hoene	Champeaux sur Sarthe
Bazoches au Houlme	Chapelle pres Sées
Bellême (2)	Chateau Gontier
Bellou sur Huisne ¹	Chateau d'Almenêches
Beaumont sur Sarthe	Chatellier

⁷ I am indebted to the foundational study of Bellême performed by Gérard Louise, *La Seigneurie*.

¹ Eleventh-century ruins of chapel here called St. Joseph's chapel.

² Remains of a chapel here called St. Gervais.

Chemilly ³	La Ferte Bernard
Commerveil	La Ferte Mace
Conde sur Huisne	Fosse le Roi ⁸
Condeau	Fosses Robert
Contilly	Fourches ⁹
Coudehart	Fresnay sur Sarthe ¹⁰
Courbe (2)	Gace
Courcy ⁴	Gesnes le Gandelin
Courgains	Glos la Ferriere
Courtomer	Gorron
Danguel	Ige (3)
Domfront	Lande de Goult
Echauffour ⁵	Lande Patry
Ecots	Luce
Essay	Lurson
Exmes ⁶	Mamers
Falaise ⁷	Le Mele sur Sarthe
Ferriere aux Etangs	Melleray la Vallee

³ Ruins of castle still visible.

⁴ Ruins of castle still visible.

⁵ Eleventh-century castle likely in Vieux Bourg, approximately 1.22 k.m. from current town.

⁶ Motte mound still visible.

⁷ Castle of William the Conqueror still stands.

⁸ Motte mound still visible.

⁹ Castle likely located nearer to village of St. Nicolas, approximately .5km from town

¹⁰ Ruin visible.

Menil Jean	Nonant le-Pin
Merlerault	Origny le Butin
Merri	Peray
Mesniere	St. Pierre sur DYves
Messei (2)	St. Pierre
Montaigu ¹¹	Pallu
Montabard	Peray ¹³ (2)
Montgaroult	Pin la Garenne ¹⁴
Montgaudry	Remalard (2)
Montgommery	Roche Mabile
La Motte Fouquet	La Roche de Ialgeio
La Motte Gauthier de Clinchamp	Roiville
Montrauil la Cambe (2)	Rouvrou ¹⁵
Moulins la Marche	St. Aubert dur Orne
Mortagne au Perche ¹²	St. Brice sous Ranès
Neauphe sur DYves	St. Calais du Desert
Neuville sur Touques	St. Cenery le Gerei
Norrey en Auge	St. Ceronne les Mortagne
Nogent le Rotrou	St. Cosme en Vairais

¹¹ Castle ruins visible.

¹² Ruins visible approximately .8 km from village.

¹³ Ruins of castle called Château de Crussol and church called St. Estéve in town.

¹⁴ Castle ruins located .55 km from village.

¹⁵ Ruins nearby now called Ménéil Hubert sur Orne.

St. Cyr la ROSiere	St. Remy du Val ¹⁹ (2)
St. Foy de Montgommery	St. Samson
St. Georges d'Annebecq	Ste. Scolasse sur Sarthe
St. Germain de Montgommery	St. Victeur
St. Hilaire de Briouze	Saosnes
St. Honorine la Chardonne	Sées
St. Honorine la Guillaume	Sept Fprges
St.Julien sur Sarthe	Silly en Gourfern
St. Leger sur Sarthe ¹⁶	Soligny la Trappe
St.Leonard des Bois	Survie
St. Leonard des Parcs	Le Teilleul
St. Nicholas des Laittiers	Ticheville
St. Pierre d'Entremont ¹⁷	Tinchebray
St. Pierre des DYves ¹⁸	Villeray
St. Quentin de Blavou	Vignats
St. Remy du Plain	

¹⁶ Motte mound visible.

¹⁷ Castle ruins visible.

¹⁸ Castle likely between Grisy and Dives, approximately 2 km from each other.

¹⁹ Ruins visible.

Appendix F: Chronology of Important Events in Mabel's life

890	Fulcuin born
c. 966	William I born
997	Yves de Bellême establishes the Abbayette of Mony St. Michel
1005	William I establishes Notre Dame de Bellême
c.1015	William II born
1020	Mabel born
	William I & Hildeburge build abbey of St. Martin at Lonlay
1022	Roger of Montgomery builds St. Martin of Troarn
1042	Mabel re-establishes St. Leonard de Bellême
1050	Mabel marries Roger of Montgomery
	Mabel founds abbey of St. Martin of Sééz
	Mabel brings Abbott Thierry to Sééz
	Mabel & Roger build new abbey at Troarn
	Mabel refounds Lonlay abbey
c.1052	Eldest son, Robert, is born
1066	Norman Conquest of England
c.1066	Arnulf (son) is born
1067	Roger holds Shropshire, Shrewbury, Arundel castle, and the earldom of Chichester in England
c.1067	Roger (son) is born
1075	Orderic born in Shrewsbury

- 1079 Writ of William I regarding Mabel's lands in Shrewsbury
Mabil of Bellême (daughter of Mabel) dies
- 1082 Countess Mabel of Bellême is murdered at Chateau de Bures and is buried
in Troarn Abbey
Orderic arranged as oblate in Normandy
Matilda of Bellême (daughter of Mabel) dies
- 1085 Orderic becomes Vitalis, is tonsured at St. Évroul
- 1086 Bellême lords control Welsh marches in England
- 1086 Charter regarding Mabel's lands in Cambridgeshire, England
- Late 1080s Roger marries Adelaide
- 1094 Roger dies, is buried at St. Peter's, Shrewsbury
- 1098 Hugh of Bellême (son) dies
- 1099 Philip "the Grammarian" (son) dies
Robert of Bellême takes part in the Siege of Jerusalem
- 1100-1107 Charter of Henry I mentions Mabel's lands in Shrewsbury, England
- 1107 Sybil of Bellême (daughter) dies
- 1113 Emma, abbes of Almenêches (daughter) dies
- 1122 Arnulf of Bellême (son) dies
- 1123 Roger the Poitevin (son) dies
- c.1130 Roger of Bellême (son) dies

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