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DOSSIER

**MATILDA 900: REMEMBERING
MATILDA OF CANOSSA WIDE WORLD**

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Women at Canossa. The role of royal and aristocratic women in the reconciliation between Pope Gregory VII and Henry IV of Germany

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Modern historians rarely mention the presence of royal and aristocratic women at Canossa in January 1077. Yet contemporaries emphasised the important roles played by several women, including Matilda of Tuscany, Adelaide of Turin, Empress Agnes and Queen Bertha. This paper seeks to re-appraise royal and aristocratic women's actions at Canossa in the light of gender studies, and also of recent scholarship on political diplomacy and mediation, in order to emphasise their centrality to political events in the eleventh century.

Canossa is a small word with a great deal of resonance. It refers, first and foremost, to a place: a castle in the Apennines. In the late eleventh century this castle belonged to Matilda of Tuscany, who ruled the mark (or march) of Tuscany (r.1076–1115). The term Canossa is also used, in a narrow sense, to refer to events that took place there in January 1077: King Henry IV of Germany (r.1056–1106), who was under sentence of excommunication, stood in the snow before the gates of Canossa, bare-foot and dressed as a penitent, asking Pope Gregory VII (r.1073–1085) for absolution. Henry did this for three days in a row (25–27th January) after which, following the intervention of aristocratic women, and others, he was permitted to enter the castle where Gregory released him from excommunication. Finally, 'Canossa' is used to encompass the wider implications of this meeting. The literature on this is vast,

and focuses in particular on the meaning of these events for papal and royal authority¹. This work links with the broader historiography of the so-called ‘Investiture Controversy’: the «struggle for right order in the world» [Tellenbach 1940, 1] between papacy and empire in the late eleventh – and early twelfth – centuries². Modern accounts rarely mention royal and aristocratic women at Canossa. Yet numerous contemporaries emphasised the importance of women, particularly Matilda of Tuscany and Adelaide of Turin, in the reconciliation between Henry and Gregory. This paper investigates the involvement of these, and other women at Canossa. What did contemporaries, writing within a decade of these events, make of their presence? And what are the implications of this for women’s participation in medieval politics?

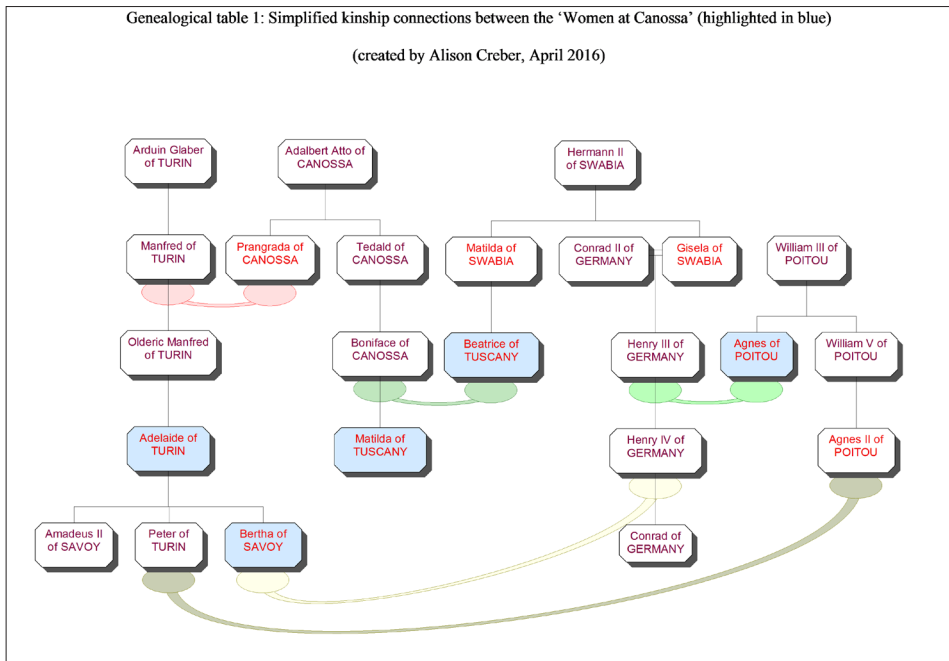
Women at Canossa

Matilda of Tuscany and Adelaide of Turin (c.1014/20–1091) played crucial roles in the events at Canossa in January 1077, and are recognised as doing so by contemporaries. Three other women were more peripherally involved: the dowager Empress Agnes (c.1025–1077), Queen Bertha (c.1050–1087), and Beatrice of Tuscany (c.1020–1076). With the exception of Bertha (who was married to Henry IV of Germany), these royal and aristocratic women were all widows with experience of ruling. Beatrice, Matilda and Adelaide were princely women (from *princeps*, meaning a pre-eminent non-royal ruler). They were heiresses, who – although they sometimes shared their power with others – ruled large domains and exercised supra-regional, trans-Alpine influence. After the death of her husband, Boniface of Tuscany, Beatrice ruled his

¹ Reuter 2006a; Robinson 2000, esp. 143–170; Cowdrey 1998, 129–166; Golinelli 2013; Fried 2012.

² Miller 2009; Airlie 2013; Körntgen 2013.

lands – the mark of Tuscany and counties in Emilia Romagna – until her own death (r.1052–1076) [Goez 1995; Bertolini, 1970]. Beatrice shared power with her daughter, Matilda, during the last years of her life (1071–1076); thereafter Matilda ruled independently (r.1076–1115).³ Adelaide ruled the mark of Turin for more than fifty years (r.1036–1091), and the county of Savoy from the death of her third husband, Otto of Savoy (d.1057/60), onwards.⁴ Agnes, wife of Henry III (r.1039–1056) and mother of Henry IV of Germany, acted as a regent for her son during the first years of his minority (1056–1062). She then took religious vows and retired to Rome, but remained involved in imperial politics for the rest of her life [Bulst-Thiele 1933; Black-Veldtrup 1995]. These women were linked by kinship, friendship and politics, both to each other and to Henry [Genealogical table]. Beatrice and Matilda were Henry’s cousins (and thus related to Agnes by marriage). They were related via two sisters: Beatrice’s mother, Matilda of Swabia, and



³ Hay 2008; Golinelli 2004; Goez 2012.

⁴ Previté-Orton 1912, 165–251; Sergi 1995, chs. 3–5; Creber 2016.

Henry's paternal grandmother, Gisela of Swabia. Henry acknowledged their kinship in his letters and diplomata.⁵ Matilda was also Adelaide's second cousin (via Prangarda of Canossa: Matilda's great-aunt and Adelaide's grandmother), but contemporaries do not remark upon this relationship. Adelaide and Agnes were also related by marriage: Adelaide's daughter, Bertha, was married to Agnes' son, Henry; and Adelaide's son, Peter (c.1046-1078), was married to Agnes' niece, also called Agnes (d. after 1089). These women nurtured their kinship connections by corresponding with each other, and sometimes meeting face-to-face [Golinelli 2011].

Modern accounts rarely allude to the presence of women at Canossa. Adelaide, Agnes and Bertha are mentioned briefly, if at all.⁶ Matilda is present in one of *the* key images of Canossa: a miniature from Donizo of Canossa's *Vita Mathildis* (*Life of Matilda*), completed c.1115 (which is not the focus of this article).⁷ There is thus more discussion of Matilda's role at Canossa⁸, but she is often marginalised, too. At most, scholars tend to note that Matilda and Adelaide acted as intercessors at Canossa, without considering the wider implications of this.⁹ An exception is Timothy Reuter, who argues that the rituals performed at Canossa were carefully worked-out in advance and therefore that the intermediaries who negotiated the terms – women as well as men – played a crucial role [Reuter 2006a, 161, 165]. This paper aims to build on Reu-

⁵ *Die Urkunden Heinrichs IV*, 379 (11th January 1086); 385 (14th January 1086): «*Mahtilda nostra neptis*»; *Gregorii VII. registrum*, III.5 (11th September 1075), which includes an extract from a lost letter of Henry IV's, referring to «*mea amita Beatrix*».

⁶ Cognasso 1968, 115-116 is unusual in emphasising Adelaide's active participation in these events.

⁷ Donizo, *Vita Mathildis*, II.1, esp. vv. 89-103. On the miniature: Verzar 2010, 78-80; Lazzari 2006, esp. 69.

⁸ Struve 1995, 42-44; Goetz 2012, 102-107; Hay 2008, 67-70; Golinelli 2004, 214-224.

⁹ Cowdrey 1998, 155-156; Althoff 2006, 152; Weinfurter 2006, 17; Previt -Orton 1912, 239-240.

ter's important insight. Equally, Paolo Golinelli is unusual, in two brief overviews, in emphasising that several of these women (Adelaide, Bertha and, particularly, Matilda) were present at Canossa [Golinelli 2011, 260-261; 2016, 3-4]. Despite emphasising these women's important contribution at Canossa, Golinelli does not investigate how or why this was the case, nor what contemporaries made of this. Instead, Golinelli's arguments are based on old-fashioned essentialism: at Canossa, Matilda took on the «traditional role of woman as peacemaker» (*il ruolo tradizionale della donna pacificatrice*), and supported Gregory VII «for reasons of idealism, or reasons of the heart, [...] a typically feminine or 'gendered' choice» (!).¹⁰

The general absence of women from scholarship on Canossa is part of a wider trend: there are still too many important medieval sources which have not been studied from the perspective of women and gender [LoPrete 2014; Earenfight 2008]. In part, this omission is the legacy of nineteenth and early twentieth century historians' definition of politics and diplomacy as the sphere of men [Stuard 1987a, 66-67]. Historiography, and particularly the tendency towards 'split historiographies', also plays a role. Studies on the roles of queens/empresses as intercessors and as *consors regni*,¹¹ for example, have not been fully integrated into wider studies of medieval politics or conflict management [Goez 2007, 161; Zey 2015, 19-20]. In relation to Canossa scholars, understandably, have focused primarily on Henry and Gregory, and the outcome of their meeting, while other figures (not just noblewomen, but also Abbot Hugh of Cluny, and other temporal princes, such as Margrave Adalbert Azzo II of Este), who are perceived as extraneous to the 'story' of Canossa, are side-lined. Work on Canossa thus often fails to connect

¹⁰ Golinelli 2016, 17: «*per le ragioni ideali, o del cuore, [...] una scelta [...] tipicamente femminile, "di genere" direi*».

¹¹ Müller-Wiegand 2005; Föbel 2000; Althoff 1989, 32-33; Baumgärtner 2004.

with complementary research either on intercession and mediation, or on royal and aristocratic women.

The omission of women and their diplomatic efforts from Canossa contributes to misconceptions about the political activities of noblewomen in the central Middle Ages. Taken to its furthest extreme, JoAnn McNamara argued that ‘Canossa’ was emblematic of a crisis in gender relations in the eleventh century which led to the erasure of women from public life.¹² In McNamara’s view the «struggle for right order in the world» at Canossa was not between Church and State, as Gerd Tellenbach argued [Tellenbach 1940], but between women and men: the «men who headed the hierarchies of religion and politics cooperated and supported one another in ... legitimising the gender system that allotted public space solely to men» [McNamara 2005, 118].

McNamara’s view of Canossa dovetails with her work on elite medieval women and power more generally. Across several influential articles (published from 1973 onwards), McNamara argued that in the earlier Middle Ages power was located in the household, and politics was family-based¹³. Women were thus able to play key roles in gaining power for themselves and their family. From the eleventh century onwards, there was a substantive change in the exercise of power, which shifted from the personal and domestic to the public and institutional (exemplified for McNamara by Canossa). Thereafter, in McNamara’s view, women were excluded both from the public sphere of politics and law, and from participation in Church affairs [McNamara 2005, 105-113; McNamara 1994]. McNamara’s thesis was – and is – attractive to many scholars,¹⁴ because it complements other influential strands of eleventh-century historiography, including the Church reform movement,

¹² McNamara 2005. On the ‘crisis of masculine identity’ which McNamara thinks precipitated this: McNamara 1994.

¹³ McNamara, Wemple 1988; McNamara 1994; 2003.

¹⁴ e.g. Stuard 1987; Erler, Kowaleski 1988, 4-6.

changes in the structure of noble families and the so-called ‘feudal revolution’.¹⁵ More recent work has, however, questioned the timing and extent of elite medieval women’s exclusion from political power. Some scholars argue that women’s power was often more limited in the early Middle Ages than McNamara suggests¹⁶. Others demonstrate that many elite women were politically active in the central Middle Ages.¹⁷ Above all, the concept of binary public/male and private/female spheres has been heavily critiqued and revised regarding its applicability to medieval politics, and to women’s role in the political sphere.¹⁸ Some scholars argue for the existence of something approaching a medieval public sphere in relation to public opinion [Melve 2007; de Jong, Renswoude 2017], but the medieval politico-legal domain was quite different from the modern public sphere. Medieval politics continued to be centred on elite families and their households, which meant that medieval noblewomen «could intervene authoritatively and ‘publicly’ in politics even as their powers, like those of male lords, were generally construed as ‘private’ when contrasted with those of rulers in modern States» [LoPrete 2012, 145].

McNamara’s emphasis on Canossa as representative of a «womanless space» [McNamara 2005, 104] is particularly problematic, as this is emphatically not the view presented in eleventh-century sources. Numerous contemporaries emphasised the influence of several royal and aristocratic women, particularly Matilda and Adelaide, on the events at

¹⁵ These concepts have been heavily revised – if not outright rejected – in recent historiography: Cushing 2005; Leyser 2016; Stafford 1998a; Little, Rosenwein 1998, 107–210; West 2013, esp. 1–9.

¹⁶ Nelson, Rio 2013; Stone 2013; Drell 2013.

¹⁷ Evergates 1999; Johns 2003; Goetz 2007; LoPrete 2007; LoPrete 2014; Bowman 2014; Zey 2015.

¹⁸ Nelson 1990; Baumgärtner 2003; Meriggi 2004; LoPrete 2007a, esp. 1924–1926; LoPrete 2012; McLaughlin 2010, 3–5, 221–230.

Canossa.¹⁹ Matilda and Adelaide are included in Gregory VII's own account: a letter written at the end of January 1077 to the German princes and bishops, informing them of what had transpired at Canossa.²⁰ Adelaide is also mentioned in three other accounts written within a decade of the meeting between Henry and Gregory;²¹ and Matilda is named in two further early accounts.²² This paper focuses on three of these early accounts in particular – Gregory VII's letter, the *Annals* of Lampert of Hersfeld (written c.1077); and the *Chronicle* of Berthold of Reichenau (written c.1080) – as they discuss Matilda and Adelaide in the most detail.²³ Other eleventh-century works, including by Arnulf of Milan and Cardinal Deusdedit, are used to contextualise these accounts.

Matilda is referred to more often than Adelaide in relation to Canossa, particularly by Italian contemporaries.²⁴ Even authors, such as Arnulf of Milan and Benzo of Alba, who refer to Adelaide elsewhere in their work,²⁵ tend not to mention her in connection with Canossa. In part, this is because Italian authors do not write about Canossa in the same kind of detail as northern authors [Golinelli 2006]. It is also a reflection of Matilda's status as a literary patron, and the close connections between

¹⁹ For overviews of contemporary accounts: Zimmerman 1975, 89–104, 134–163; Golinelli 2006, 592–594.

²⁰ *Gregorii VII. registrum*, IV.12 (late January 1077).

²¹ Berthold, *Chronicon*, a.1077, 258; Lampert, *Annales*, a.1077, 289–290; Pseudo-Bardo, *Vita Anselmi*, c.16, 18.

²² For accounts of Canossa which mention Matilda: nn. 20–21 above; Arnulf, *Liber*, V.8, 227–229; Bonizo, *Liber*, VIII, 610.

²³ On these accounts: Zimmermann 1975, 139–145, 148–150.

²⁴ An exception is: Pseudo-Bardo, *Vita Anselmi*, c.16, 18.

²⁵ Arnulf, *Liber*, III.7, 173–174; Benzo, *Ad Heinricum*, IV.42(13), 432–436; V.9(10)–13(14), 482–498; VI.4, 544–545. On their omission of Adelaide: nn.26, 30 below.

en Matilda and contemporary authors, including Bonizo of Sutri and Arnulf of Milan, which assured her prominence in the sources.²⁶ The sources on Canossa are also split along partisan lines.²⁷ The majority of the accounts which mention Adelaide and Matilda were written by pro-papal authors.²⁸ By contrast, works written by pro-imperial authors rarely include either Matilda or Adelaide.²⁹ These authors tended to view Canossa as the scene of Henry's humiliation; they thus mentioned Canossa as briefly as possible, if at all.³⁰ After 1085, when it had become clear how little the events at Canossa had actually achieved, there was a similar tendency to downplay Canossa in accounts written by pro-papal authors. From the late eleventh-century onwards, Adelaide is present only in works which closely follow (or include) Gregory's own account.³¹ Adelaide is not mentioned in other accounts written at this time by Matilda's adherents, such as Donizo's *Vita Mathildis*, which naturally emphasised Matilda's role.³² From the mid twelfth century Matilda is increasingly omitted from accounts of Canossa, too [Golinelli 2006, 595-601]. The omission of women from these accounts su-

²⁶ Arnulf, *Liber*, V.8, 227-229; Bonizo, *Liber*, VIII, 610. Arnulf was part of a Milanese legation to Gregory shortly after Canossa (V.9, 229-230). Since Gregory remained with Matilda until mid-1077, Arnulf naturally focused on her role. Equally, Bonizo composed the *Liber ad Amicum* while at Matilda's court in Mantua: Berschin 1972, 10, 23-24.

²⁷ On this polemical literature: Robinson 1978; Melve 2007; Hay 2008, ch.5; Witt 2012, ch. 4.

²⁸ Anti-imperial accounts which omit Adelaide/Matilda: Bruno, *Saxonicum bellum*, chs. 89-90, 83-85; Bernold, *Chronicon*, a.1077, 409-410.

²⁹ *Königsberg Fragment*, 189-190; Petrus Crassus, *Defensio Henrici IV*, I.6, 446; Beno, *Gesta Romanae ecclesiae*, II.1, 374; *Liber de unitate ecclesiae conservanda*, I.6, 191-193; *Vita Heinrici imperatoris*, ch. 3, 16; Benzo, *Ad Heinricum*, I.24, 166-167.

³⁰ This is why Benzo of Alba – who discusses Adelaide in detail elsewhere in his work (above n.25) – does not mention Adelaide in her relation to Canossa.

³¹ Paul, *Vita Gregorii VII*, c. 84, 524; Hugh, *Chronicon*, II, 445.

³² Donizo, *Vita Mathildis*, II.1, 127-143; Ranger, *Vita metrica s. Anselmi*, esp. vv. 3157-3164.

perficially coincides with McNamara's timeline for women's exclusion from the public sphere. Yet, as we shall see, there were many reasons – unrelated to McNamara's thesis – that women were written into, and out of, contemporary accounts of Canossa.

Negotiations before Canossa

Gregory VII became pope in April 1073, and inherited a difficult situation with Henry from his predecessor, Pope Alexander II (r.1061–1073), who had excommunicated several of Henry's closest advisors.³³ Tensions over the appointment of a new archbishop in Milan further inflamed the situation [Cowdrey 1968; Zey 2006]. There were several phases in the conflict between Henry and Gregory [Struve 1991]. In the first phase (1073–1076) their relationship initially appeared to improve, before worsening again in 1076. Three women – Matilda, her mother, Beatrice, and Empress Agnes – were actively involved in initiatives which aimed to reconcile Henry and Gregory during this period.³⁴ Their actions indicate that Matilda's and Adelaide's activities at Canossa were not anomalous, and that in the eleventh century elite women often played important roles in conflict resolution.

Part of the reason Beatrice, Matilda and Agnes acted as mediators with such regularity is because they were related to each other, and to Henry, by bonds of kinship; and were also connected to Gregory by bonds of friendship and 'spiritual kinship'.³⁵ According to Gregory, «his most

³³ Robinson 2000, ch. 3; Althoff 2006, IV.1; Cowdrey 1998, 3.2.

³⁴ Struve 1995, 42–44; Goetz 2012, 92–93; 1995, 170; Bertolini 1970, 359; Black-Veldtrupp 1995, 378–380; Cowdrey 1998, 91–98; Golinelli 2004, 188.

³⁵ For Gregory's letters to and about Beatrice and Matilda: *Gregorii VII. registrum*, I.19–21; I.25–26; I.40; I.47; I.50; I.77, III.5; Golinelli 1991; Goetz 1995, 165–172; Struve 1995, 42–43; Goetz 2012, 92–93; and Agnes: *Gregorii VII. registrum*, I.19–21; I.85; II.30; III.10; III.15; IV.3; Bulst-Thiele 1933, 97–98; Black-Veldtrupp 1995, 99, 312,

beloved daughters» (*filiae karissimae*), Beatrice, Matilda and Agnes were among his most important advisors in the attempt to bring about «the unity of concord» between «priestly and imperial powers». ³⁶ (Gregory makes no mention of Adelaide in this regard, although other documents indicate that he was on good terms with her. ³⁷) Henry also valued these women: according to Gregory, Henry asked Beatrice and Matilda to intercede with Gregory on his behalf. ³⁸ These women were not only involved in letter-writing campaigns: Agnes ³⁹ and Beatrice ⁴⁰ travelled to Germany to negotiate with Henry face-to-face. Gregory praised these women for their efforts, particularly Beatrice and Matilda, who were «altogether backing up the Roman Church and ... striving firmly to unite [Gregory's] mind with the king's». ⁴¹ When Gregory received conciliatory letters from Henry in 1073 ⁴² and again in 1075, ⁴³ he ascribed this to the intervention of Beatrice, Matilda and Agnes. ⁴⁴ Although the relationship between Gregory and Henry briefly appeared to improve, it worsened again: the second phase of the conflict between them (1076–1080) encompassed the deposition of Gregory at the Assembly of Worms by bishops favourable to Henry (January 1076); Gregory's excommunication of Henry at the Lenten Synod (February 1076); and another temporary reconciliation between the two men at

378–380. For spiritual kinship in papal letters to women in general: Lubich 2012, 149–152.

³⁶ *Gregorii VII. registrum*, I.19 (1st September 1073); Cowdrey (trans.) 2002, 22.

³⁷ Below, nn.64–66.

³⁸ *Die Urkunden der Markgräfin Mathilde* 1998.

³⁹ *Gregorii VII. registrum*, I.85 (15th June 1074); McLaughlin 2010, 119–120.

⁴⁰ Goetz 1995, 145, 170–171, Reg. 46b–c, 47.

⁴¹ *Gregorii VII. registrum*, I.26 (9th October 1073); Cowdrey (trans.) 2002, 31.

⁴² *Die Briefe Heinrichs IV*, no. 5 (1073).

⁴³ *Die Briefe Heinrichs IV*, no. 7 (before August 1075).

⁴⁴ *Gregorii VII. registrum*, I.26 (9th October 1073); I.85; Goetz 1995, Reg. 43b.

Canossa (January 1077). At Worms, the German bishops specifically criticised Gregory for allowing the «whole world of the Church» to be administered by a «new senate of women».⁴⁵ This was an oblique attack on precisely the women who had been trying to heal the breach between Gregory and Henry.⁴⁶ Gregory responded by excommunicating Henry (22nd February 1076), which completely undermined Henry's ability to rule [Golinelli 2004, 208-209; Robinson 2000, 148-149]. At Tribur in Autumn 1076 the German princes gave Henry an ultimatum: either he must be absolved from excommunication by February 1077, or they would elect a new king [Cowdrey 1998, 150-155; Robinson 2000, 156-157]. At about this time Agnes and Matilda, along with Abbot Hugh of Cluny (r.1049-1109), became involved in another initiative, which aimed to reconcile not just Henry and Gregory, but also Henry and the German princes [Fried 2012, 161]. They counselled that a general assembly should be held between the German princes and Henry and Gregory «for the sake of peace and justice» (*pacis ac iustitiae causa*).⁴⁷ This assembly was supposed to be held at Augsburg in early 1077, but was superseded by events at Canossa.⁴⁸

Agnes, Beatrice and Matilda were involved in attempts at reconciliation before Canossa, but only Matilda was present at Canossa in January 1077: her mother, Beatrice, died in April 1076; and Agnes' whereabouts in January 1077 are unknown.⁴⁹ At the same time, Adelaide – and

⁴⁵ *Briefsammlungen der Zeit Heinrichs IV*, no. 20 (24th January 1076), 46: «*per hunc feminarum novum senatum totum orbem ecclesiae administrari*».

⁴⁶ Hay 2008, 63-64; Cowdrey 1998, 116-117; Goetz 2012, 108-109.

⁴⁷ Arnulf, *Liber*, V.8, 228.

⁴⁸ On the planned assembly at Augsburg: Fried 2012, esp. 42-44, 100-102, 122-124.

⁴⁹ Agnes was in Rome with Gregory in December 1076 (Bonizo, *Liber*, VIII, 610); and at Piacenza with Henry by mid-February 1077: *Die Urkunden Heinrichs IV*, 286 (17th February 1077). Cf. Bulst-Thiele 1933, 102-103; Black-Veldtrupp 1995, 56, 99, 307, 312, 378-380; Meyer von Knouau 1894, 761, 767.

to a lesser extent, Bertha – who were not part of these earlier initiatives, become more prominent in the sources.

The journey to Canossa

Matilda and Adelaide, who both ruled lands of huge strategic importance [Goez 2012, 92; Previt -Orton 1912, 237], played crucial roles in the journey to Canossa. Several contemporaries, including Gregory himself, indicate that Matilda encouraged Gregory to travel north.⁵⁰ Gregory left Rome on 1st December 1076, and met with Matilda in Florence. Thereafter Matilda provided Gregory with an escort as he travelled into Lombardy [Struve 1995, 44; Hay 2008, 68-69]. According to Lampert of Hersfeld, Matilda was well placed to aid Gregory, since «a great part of Italy obeyed her authority and she possessed an abundance of all the property that mortals most prize (...) wherever the pope had need of her help therefore, she was there with all speed and zealously served him, as a father or a lord».⁵¹ By 8th January 1077 Matilda and Gregory reached her court at Mantua, where Gregory was expecting to be met by an escort to Augsburg from the German princes. The escort did not arrive,⁵² but the news that Henry was in Italy did, and Matilda urged Gregory to return with her to her fortress of Canossa to wait for Henry [Golinelli 2004, 214-223].

Adelaide was equally instrumental in Henry's journey to Canossa, but there are several misconceptions about her actions in modern accounts. Lampert of Hersfeld is the only contemporary to emphasise Adelaide's

⁵⁰ *Gregorii VII. registrum*, IV.12; Pseudo-Bardo, *Vita Anselmi*, c.16, 18; Donizo, *Vita Mathildis*, II.1, vv. 66-73.

⁵¹ Lampert, *Annales*, a.1077, 287-288; Robinson (trans.) 2015, 349. Also Arnulf, *Liber*, V.8, 228.

⁵² Gregory later accepted the princes' apology for this: *Gregorii VII. registrum*, IV.12.

role in this regard.⁵³ Whether or not women were included in contemporary accounts of Canossa was determined by several factors, one of which is their personal connection with the author. Gregory VII had long-standing relationships with Matilda and Adelaide, so he naturally referred to them in his work.⁵⁴ (Berthold, whose account followed Gregory's, thus included Matilda and Adelaide, too.) Similarly, Lampert's focus on Adelaide is attributable to her daughter, Bertha's, extended stay at Hersfeld in 1073-1074, where her son, Conrad, was born and baptised.⁵⁵ Even if Lampert did not have any personal dealings with Bertha, this connection presumably put her – and thus Adelaide – on Lampert's radar. Other accounts do not mention Adelaide by name, even when they describe Henry travelling to Italy via Adelaide's lands in Turin.⁵⁶ In mid-December 1076 Henry travelled to Besançon, where he spent Christmas.⁵⁷ Then Henry met Adelaide and her son, Amadeus II of Savoy (d.1080), at *Civis*. Various Savoyard locations have been identified as *Civis*, most commonly Gex (following Oswald Holder-Egger, who edited Lampert's *Annals*⁵⁸), but also Coise, Chignin, and «near Geneva».⁵⁹ If so, this would be one of the only times that Adelaide is documented in Savoy. Other scholars suggest that *Civis* is a misreading of *Cinis*, and that Lampert was thus referring to the Mont Cenis pass.⁶⁰ This location corresponds with Lampert's assertion that Adelaide and Amadeus «enjo-

⁵³ Lampert, *Annales*, a.1077, 285-286.

⁵⁴ For Gregory's connections with Matilda and Adelaide, see nn. 34-35, 64-66.

⁵⁵ Lampert, *Annales*, a.1074, 174; Bühler 2001, 49-50.

⁵⁶ e.g. Berthold, *Chronicon*, a.1077, 288.

⁵⁷ Lampert, *Annales*, a.1077, 285; Berthold, *Chronicon*, a.1077, 255.

⁵⁸ Lampert, *Annales*, 285, n. 2 (who argues that *Civis* is a scribal error for *Iais*, which he identifies as modern Gex).

⁵⁹ Robinson 2015, 345; Previt -Orton 1912, 237; Meyer von Knonau 1894, 748-750; Giesebrecht 1876, 1138; Cognasso 1968, 115; Eads 2000, 45.

⁶⁰ Kilian 1886, 74; Sergi 1981, 59; Ripart 1999, 309.

yed outstanding authority, the most ample possessions and the greatest renown in these regions». ⁶¹ Since Adelaide possessed no lands in northern or western Savoy, this statement fits better in relation to the Mont Cenis pass, where Adelaide's lands and power were extensive [Previté-Orton 1910, 521]. It also makes sense in the context of Lampert's statement that Henry needed to enter Italy via Adelaide's lands because his opponents had blocked other Alpine passes in an attempt to prevent him from reaching Gregory, and that 'immediately' after securing his passage, Henry began the difficult crossing of the Alps. ⁶²

The sources do not state this explicitly, but Henry presumably hoped not only for safe-passage into Italy, but also for Adelaide's on-going help: for her support as he travelled south; her mediation with Gregory; and to ensure that he had a line of retreat, if needed [Cognasso 1968, 116]. Yet according to Lampert, Adelaide and Amadeus were «not at all influenced either by considerations of kinship, or by compassion at so wretched a situation» and at first refused to help Henry. ⁶³ Ian Robinson suggests that Adelaide was unwilling to support Henry because she «stood high in Gregory VII's favour and may therefore have been out of sympathy with the king» [Robinson 2000, 160]. Certainly, Adelaide had cultivated close links with Gregory, who wrote to Adelaide in 1073 calling her his «most beloved daughter» (*filia karissima*); ⁶⁴ Gregory issued a bull taking Adelaide's foundation of Santa Maria in Pinerolo into his protection the following year; ⁶⁵ and counted Adelaide's son, Amadeus, among those whom he hoped to recruit for his planned ex-

⁶¹ Lampert, *Annales*, a.1077, 285; Robinson (trans.) 2015, 346.

⁶² Lampert, *Annales*, a.1077, 285.

⁶³ Lampert, *Annales*, a.1077, 285; Robinson (trans.) 2015, 346.

⁶⁴ *Gregorii VII. registrum*, I.37 (7th December 1073).

⁶⁵ *Cartario di Pinerolo*, no. 10 (4th April 1074).

pedition to the Holy Land.⁶⁶ (Adelaide's eldest son, Peter, is not mentioned either in connection with this expedition, nor with Canossa⁶⁷). Of course, another reason – not mentioned by Robinson – that Adelaide may have been «out of sympathy» with Henry is that his attempted repudiation of her daughter, Bertha, in 1069 still rankled [Cognasso 1968, 115; Tellenbach 1988, 35]. Yet Adelaide's refusal to give Henry her unconditional support was political as much as personal. First, Adelaide was being careful to alienate neither Henry nor Gregory; and second, it was simply good business that if Henry wanted something from Adelaide, she should get as much as possible in return. As the «price of his passage» Adelaide asked Henry to grant her «five of the bishoprics of Italy, neighbouring [her] own possessions».⁶⁸ She did not receive this: instead, after much deliberation, Henry agreed to give Adelaide «a certain province in Burgundy, very well supplied with possessions of all kinds».⁶⁹ Adelaide's daughter, Bertha, was Henry's trump card in these negotiations. Despite the fact that it was a particularly harsh winter [Meyer von Knonau 1894, 750–751], Henry brought his wife, Bertha, and their young son, Conrad, with him on his journey south.⁷⁰ This was a move which was calculated to appeal to Adelaide: the presence of her daughter and grandson was a visible reminder of the dynastic reasons for helping Henry. Bertha is usually seen as lacking any political influence,⁷¹

⁶⁶ *Gregorii VII. registrum*, I.46 (2nd February 1074).

⁶⁷ Peter may have remained in Turin to administer the mark in Adelaide's absence. It is likely that Peter lived until 1078, but Previt -Orton 1912, 241 n. 3 suggests that he may have died before Canossa.

⁶⁸ Lampert, *Annales*, a.1077, 286; Robinson (trans.) 2015, 346.

⁶⁹ Lampert, *Annales*, a.1077, 286; Robinson (trans.) 2015, 346. The Burgundian province has variously been identified as Bugey, Chablais, Waadt, Wallis and Tarentaise: Hellmann 1900, 24; Meyer von Knonau 1894, 749–750; Giesebrecht 1876, 396; Cognaso 1968, 115–116; Previt -Orton 1912, 238.

⁷⁰ Lampert, *Annales*, a.1076, 283; Bruno, *Saxonicum bellum*, c. 88, 83; Berthold, *Chronicon*, a.1077, 255.

⁷¹ Tellenbach 1988, 351; J schke 1991, 143–144; Zey 2008, 73–74.

and few modern historians have emphasised the intermediary role that Bertha played between Henry and her natal kin [Cowdrey 1998, 155; Bühler 2001, 50–51]. Yet, by her presence alone, if nothing else, Bertha increased the likelihood that Adelaide would support Henry.

The location of this meeting is significant, too. If Adelaide travelled north of the Alps to meet with Henry at Gex or Coise, then it was a foregone conclusion that she would help him: why else would she have travelled to Savoy (especially during a harsh winter)? If, on the other hand, Adelaide met Henry at the Mont Cenis pass, then her aid could not be taken for granted: Adelaide could have barred the pass if Henry did not agree to her terms. Yet once terms were agreed, Adelaide's support for Henry was considerable: she not only granted Henry safe-passage into Italy; she protected and supported him en route to Canossa, where her presence (and that of the Lombard army) increased Henry's bargaining position; and at Canossa, Adelaide, along with Matilda, and others, mediated between Henry and Gregory.

Mediation at Canossa

Traditionally it is argued that at Canossa Gregory released Henry from excommunication following the intervention of noblewomen, and others, including Abbot Hugh of Cluny.⁷² Johannes Fried has recently argued that what was negotiated at Canossa was not Henry's absolution, but a long-planned peace treaty between Henry and Gregory [Fried 2008; 2012]. This view is far from universally accepted.⁷³ Moreover, even if this were the case, it would not alter the argument presented here about the important roles played by women at Canossa: if anything, it would further underline their political centrality. In either

⁷² e.g. Schneidmüller 2006; Zimmermann 1975.

⁷³ Cushing 2013; Zey 2013; Becher 2013; Goetz 2013; Körntgen 2013a.

case, there were extensive negotiations between Henry and Gregory before Canossa in which the form of Henry's submission and the type of concessions he was to make, as well as Gregory's response, were discussed and settled in advance.⁷⁴

Recent literature emphasises the role of consensus in high medieval politics [Schneidmüller 2000; Patzold 2007], including conflict resolution [Brown, Górecki 2003; Althoff, 2013]. Medieval conflicts were often resolved (if not permanently settled) through the intervention of third parties acting as intercessors, mediators or arbiters (authoritative negotiators).⁷⁵ Women as well as men participated in these processes of deliberation and consultation, which cannot be classified «in the conventional way, as either 'public' or 'private'» [White 2001: 12]. Modern accounts indicate that Matilda – and more rarely also Adelaide – acted as intercessors at Canossa.⁷⁶ There was a degree of overlap between intercession, mediation and arbitration, but there are also differences between them and at Canossa Matilda and Adelaide were not acting as intercessors but *mediators*.⁷⁷ Intercession is petitionary in nature: the intercessor pleads with someone (usually the king⁷⁸) on behalf of someone

⁷⁴ For Canossa as stage-managed: Althoff 2006, 152-160, Cowdrey 1998, 157-167; Reuter 2006a; Robinson 2000, 160-165. For an element of surprise: Weinfurter 2006, 17-26; Goetz 2000. On negotiated rituals in general: Althoff 2016; 2003; 1997.

⁷⁵ For distinctions – and similarities – between these roles: White 2001, 5-8, 11-12; White 1987, 65-70; Cheyette 1970, 291-296; Geary 1994; 1996. On conflict resolution in general: White 1986; Wickham 1996; 1997; Reuter 2006b; Innes 2000, 129-140; Davies, Fouracre 1986; 1995.

⁷⁶ Reuter 2006a, 161; 2006a, 384-385; Zimmermann 1975, 134-136; Struve 1995, 44-45.

⁷⁷ On intercession/mediation: above, n.75; Gilsdorf 2014; Garnier 2008; Müller-Wiegand 2005; Kamp 2001; Althoff 2011. Kamp 2001, esp. 11, 22-25, 80ff. argues that intercession and mediation are located at opposite ends of the same scale; more questionably, Kamp also argues for a historical progression from intercession to mediation to arbitration.

⁷⁸ There were also instances in which the ruler might petition, rather than command, or in which – as at Canossa – he was himself in need of intervention: Kamp

else. Mediators, by contrast, use their power and prestige to play an active and independent role in the settlement of conflicts. In other words, intercessors modify decisions which are made by others, but mediators play a key role in the decision-making process. While intercession is unilateral (primarily concerned with the relationship between intercessor and petitioned), mediation is bilateral (the mediator's relationship with *both* parties is crucial) [Kamp 2001, 13, 99, 180].

Explanations of how medieval intercession and mediation functioned emphasise the importance of personal ties, and that the most effective intercessors/mediators had *Königsnähe* (access to the king) [Gilsdorf 2014, ch.3; Kamp 2001, 81-110]. For this reason, bishops, abbots, queens, and other high-status women frequently acted as intercessors and mediators in the Middle Ages.⁷⁹ Although queens often acted as intercessors in the tenth and eleventh centuries, neither Henry's mother, Agnes, nor his wife, Bertha, are recorded at Canossa.⁸⁰ This may have been because queens typically interceded *with* the ruler on behalf of others, while at Canossa it was the ruler himself who was in need of intervention. In Agnes's case, since she is documented attempting to resolve the conflict between Henry and Gregory beforehand, and later confirmed Henry's oath at Canossa,⁸¹ it may simply have been that she was unable to travel to Canossa in time.

The key role of mediators in peace-making is generally acknowledged, most recently by Gerd Althoff [Althoff 2016], but the importance of Matilda's and Adelaide's intervention at Canossa has not always been

2001, esp. 76-77, 82-84; Garnier 2009.

⁷⁹ For bishops as intercessors/mediators: Gilsdorf 2014, ch.4; Kamp 2001, 92-93, 173-183; White 1978, esp. 207-209, 220, 254. For queens: above, n.11; Gilsdorf 2014, esp. 116-124; Kamp 2001, 64-76, 93-94, 155-160; Stafford 1998, 44-45, 99-101.

⁸⁰ Since Bertha is not recorded at Canossa, Goetz 2012, 105-106 thinks that she remained in Turin, but Fried 2012, 67 argues that Bertha probably travelled to Canossa as she had to undergo penance for her association with her excommunicated husband.

⁸¹ Below, n. 109.

recognised.⁸² This is partly due to historians' focus on the disputants (Henry and Gregory), rather than the mediators without whom, however, the negotiations could not have taken place. Perhaps unconsciously the definition of Matilda's and Adelaide's actions as 'intercession', rather than as mediation or diplomacy, has further devalued their role. Although intercession is not necessarily gendered there is a tendency both in some medieval sources and some modern scholarship to see 'intercession' as a 'womanly virtue'.⁸³ In other words, a specific gendered model is added to a more general understanding of intercession. The common medieval motif of 'womanly influence' had roots in antiquity, and was also influenced by biblical precedents [Cooper 1992; 2007]. According to this trope, women were to use their physical beauty and 'persuasive voices' to curb men's excesses [Farmer 1986; Nelson 2007]. This gendered model of intercession plays on traditional feminine images – of the nurturing mother, or the virtuous wife; of the Virgin Mary, and the biblical Queen Esther.⁸⁴ It provided men with a way of reversing their decisions without undermining their authority.⁸⁵ 'Womanly' intercession has also been seen as a means by which women could retain informal power, particularly after they were supposedly marginalised from the direct exercise of power from the eleventh century onwards [Farmer 1986, 521–526; Huneycutt 1995]. This model thus reinforces gender hierarchies, and promotes the view that medieval women's activities were private and informal, while men's were public and political. In relation to Canossa it re-inscribes Matilda's and

⁸² See, e.g. Althoff 2016, esp. 175–176 on intermediaries at Canossa, without reference to women.

⁸³ See e.g. above, n. 10.

⁸⁴ Gilsdorf 2014, esp. 120; Strohm 1992, 96–99; Huneycutt 1995; Parsons 1995, esp. 153–158; Parsons 1996.

⁸⁵ Parsons 1995, 147, 161–162; 1996, 53–54; Strohm 1992, 103–105.

Adelaide's important diplomatic activity as 'feminine' and ancillary: as something that modern historians can ignore.

Contemporaries rarely depicted Matilda's or Adelaide's intervention as mediators in gendered terms, and instead emphasised their status as rulers.⁸⁶ According to Berthold of Reichenau, Henry sought the «mediation and help [*interventu et auxilio*] of Margravine Matilda [of Tuscany], of his mother-in-law, Adelaide [of Turin], likewise a margravine, and of the abbot of Cluny [Hugh], [...] and also of those, whoever they were, whom he could attract to his side».⁸⁷ In addition to Matilda, Adelaide and Hugh, Lampert of Hersfeld adds that Henry also sent Amadeus II (Adelaide's son), Adalbert Azzo II of Este (Adelaide's maternal cousin), and «some others of the foremost princes of Italy, whose opinion [Henry] did not doubt would carry great weight with the pope» to intervene with Gregory.⁸⁸ In other words, Henry's mediators were made up of both temporal and ecclesiastical princes.⁸⁹ Matilda and Adelaide were named first because they were the princes with the highest status, at least in the eyes of the German audiences to whom Gregory and Berthold were addressing their work. The names of the king's mother-in-law (Adelaide) and the king's cousin (Matilda) were far more meaningful – and thus reassuring – to the German princes than a list of clerics or other Italian princes would have been. These princely women were perfect intermediaries: they were trusted because of their close connections with Henry, with each other (they were cousins), and with Gregory [Golinelli 2004, 236; Goetz 2012,

⁸⁶ For women's intercession as formal and political, see also: Mulder-Bakker 2003; Geaman 2010.

⁸⁷ Berthold, *Chronicon*, a.1077, 258; Robinson (trans.) 2008, 159–160.

⁸⁸ Lampert, *Annales*, a.1077, 290; Robinson (trans.) 2015, 352.

⁸⁹ While temporal princes, abbots and bishops all had a role to play at Canossa, abbesses did not.

103]. Adelaide's and Matilda's political dominance also meant that they were able to underwrite an agreement between Henry and Gregory. The process of mediation was typically conducted in private and is thus rarely described in detail in medieval sources. Yet in relation to Canossa several contemporaries depicted some of the bargaining, brow-beating, and decision-making which took place between Henry, Gregory and their mediators, including Matilda and Adelaide. The details of these deliberations were included by authors who wished to criticise Henry for later breaking his agreement with Gregory. Although polemical in purpose, these accounts are nevertheless revealing about contemporary expectations concerning the way in which mediation was carried out, and by whom. In Berthold's account, Henry «sent envoys to bring to him the aforementioned mediators [*interventores*] [...] [who] hastened to meet the king at the agreed place and for a long time they discussed among themselves with many words the case concerning which they had gathered together, weighing the arguments with him from every point of view and with mature deliberation».⁹⁰ Although the mediators suspected that Henry was not entirely sincere in his promises, they nevertheless returned «and gave the pope a full account». Lampert similarly depicts the mediators returning to Gregory «laden with prayers and promises».⁹¹ Since Gregory was at Canossa, and Henry was probably at Bianello (another castle belonging to Matilda, c.6km north of Canossa), the mediators had to travel backwards and forwards through the snow-covered mountains [Hay 2008, 67]. It was thus a physical, as well as a diplomatic challenge. Added to this, for Matilda, was the difficulty of housing and provisioning all these people [Goez 2012, 103-105]. In contrast with Berthold's account, and that of Gregory himself (discussed below), Lampert describes further consultations between Gregory and the mediators once they returned to Canossa: Gregory's ini-

⁹⁰ Berthold, *Chronicon*, a.1077, 258-259; Robinson (trans.) 2008, 160.

⁹¹ Lampert, *Annales*, a.1077, 290; Robinson (trans.) 2015, 352.

tial response was that Henry should meet with him, and the German princes, at Augsburg as planned.⁹² The mediators replied that because of the ultimatum made by the princes at Tribur (that Henry must be absolved before February 1077) Henry could not wait until then. Gregory, «overcome by the insistence of those who urged him and the weight of their opinions», responded that if Henry was truly penitent, «as evidence of his true and heartfelt repentance, let him resign the crown and the rest of the royal insignia into our power».⁹³ The mediators countered that this request was «too harsh», and they «earnestly pressed [Gregory] to moderate his decision».⁹⁴ Finally, Gregory «was with great difficulty prevailed on» to meet with Henry, and agreed that – if Henry’s repentance was sincere – he would be absolved.⁹⁵

Gregory – and Berthold, who follows Gregory’s account – omits these discussions. Knowing that many of the German princes had hoped that he would not absolve Henry, Gregory attempted to pre-empt their criticism by emphasising that he was obliged to absolve Henry.⁹⁶ In a letter written to the German princes and bishops immediately after Canossa, Gregory explained that when Henry entered Italy he sent «suppliant messengers» to Gregory, asking to be absolved, but that Gregory «had long delayed this by many deliberations and sharply reproved [Henry] for his transgressions through all the messengers who passed between us».⁹⁷ Yet Gregory makes no further reference to negotiations before Canossa, and in fact does not mention any mediators by name. Instead Gregory emphasises that Henry spontaneously came to Canossa and perfor-

⁹² Lampert, *Annales*, a.1077, 291. On Augsburg, above nn. 47–48.

⁹³ Lampert, *Annales*, a.1077, 291–292; Robinson (trans.) 2015, 354.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁶ *Gregorii VII. registrum*, IV.12; Zimmermann 1975, 139–141, 160; Althoff 2006, 156–157; Golinelli 2006, 592.

⁹⁷ *Gregorii VII. registrum*, IV.12; Cowdrey (trans.) 2002, 221.

med penance, and that his actions moved «all who were there present» to «great pity and merciful compassion».⁹⁸ This unnamed audience at Canossa (which presumably included Adelaide, Matilda and Hugh) in turn put pressure on Gregory to absolve Henry: «under pressure of [Henry's] compunction and overcome by such great supplication from those who were there present, we at length released the bond of anathema».⁹⁹

Although they are not always acknowledged by name, these accounts indicate that Matilda and Adelaide played important roles at each stage of the high-level political negotiations which led to Henry's reconciliation with Gregory in January 1077: they were among those who helped to maintain communications between Henry and Gregory, and they were actively involved in shaping a settlement which was acceptable to both sides. They consulted, and bargained, and also applied pressure when necessary. Despite the criticism of the «new senate of women» made at Worms,¹⁰⁰ not just Henry, but also Gregory, sought out, and relied upon, Matilda and Adelaide as mediators: the reconciliation at Canossa could not have taken place without them.

Confirmation of Henry's promises

After receiving absolution from Gregory, Henry confirmed the promises that he had already made through the intervention of Matilda, Adelaide and other mediators: he promised that he would address the grievances of the German princes, and assured Gregory's safety if he ventured north of the Alps [Fried 2012, 117-119]. There is, however, some confusion as to the way in which this promise – also referred to by

⁹⁸ *Ibidem*; also Berthold, *Chronicon*, a.1077, 259.

⁹⁹ *Gregorii VII. registrum*, IV.12; Cowdrey (trans.) 2002, 222. For the view that public penance compels forgiveness: Kamp 2001, 70-72.

¹⁰⁰ Above n. 45.

contemporaries as an oath¹⁰¹ – was made and secured. This is due both to the variation in contemporary accounts and (as Reuter emphasises in relation to Henry's submission) to the way in which the rituals performed at Canossa deliberately blurred the boundaries between religious and secular, and public and private, actions [Reuter 2006a: 157–165]. A series of verbal, written and gestural measures were employed both by Henry and by others. Certain facts are clear: Henry did not make his promise to Gregory in person;¹⁰² two bishops made it on his behalf.¹⁰³ This promise was then written down and circulated throughout the empire.¹⁰⁴ The promise was further secured by the intervention of others, many of whom had acted as mediators before Henry's absolution. The difficulty lies in ascertaining exactly who confirmed Henry's promise, and exactly how (and with what degree of formality) they did so. Depending on the account, different configurations of ecclesiastics, male religious, aristocratic laymen, and – less frequently – laywomen are said to have confirmed Henry's promises. These individuals are variously said to have placed their hands in Henry's, or in Gregory's, or to have sworn an oath on relics, or simply to have pledged their faith. Because of the disagreement in the sources, modern historians often fail to mention women's involvement. Yet both Gregory (in his first account

¹⁰¹ Early accounts refer to solemn promises (*securitates*); later ones to an oath (*sacramentum, iuramentum*): this increased Henry's personal involvement, and thus his guilt when he broke his word: Fried 2012, 129–130. On oaths in general: Waitz 1896, 474–493; Munzel-Everling 2008; Goez 1986.

¹⁰² In the eleventh century German kings did not have to swear formal oaths after they had taken their coronation oath: Waitz 1896, 474–476, 487; Siegel 1894, 47; Goez 1986, esp. 523–524.

¹⁰³ *Gregorii VII. registrum*, IV.12; V.7; VII.14a; Lampert, *Annales*, a.1077, 294–295; Berthold, *Chronicon*, a.1077, 259–260. The bishops were Gregory of Vercelli and (probably) Eberhard Naumberg: Weinfurter 2006, 20–21; Robinson 2000, 161; Struve 1995, 45. For Benno of Osnabrück as the second bishop: Meyer von Knonau 1894, 761; Goez 1986, 524.

¹⁰⁴ *Gregorii VII. registrum*, IV.12a (28th January 1077).

of Canossa) and Berthold include women as well as men in their accounts. They also indicate that all of those who confirmed Henry's promise, whether male or female, religious or lay, did so in the same way. Writing to the German princes immediately after Canossa, Gregory explained that he had taken «solemn promises» (*securitates*) from Henry; he included a written copy of these promises with his letter.¹⁰⁵ In contrast with the first part of his letter, in which he did not identify the mediators by name, Gregory states that Henry's promises were confirmed «through the hands of the abbot [Hugh] of Cluny, and also our daughters Matilda and Countess Adelaide, and of other princes, bishops and laity who seemed to us useful for this purpose».¹⁰⁶ The precise legal meaning of this confirmatory hand gesture is unclear, but it seems to indicate that some kind of promise or pledge was given [Siegel 1894; Schempf 2011]. Those who helped to secure Henry's promise at Canossa are sometimes referred to – incorrectly – as oath-helpers.¹⁰⁷ Instead, Hugh, Matilda, Adelaide, and the unnamed others who were present, were acting as *fideiussores* (sureties), who served as witnesses to the fact that an oath had been sworn, and shared the responsibility for ensuring that that the oath-swearer (in this case: Henry) adhered to his/her promise.¹⁰⁸

Gregory is the only contemporary who refers to Matilda and Adelaide by name, but Berthold of Reichenau also indicates that women were present. According to Berthold, Henry's oath (*sacramentum*) was solemnised «in the hands of those mediators [*interventores*] who were already [at Canossa], and also of the empress [Agnes], who was not yet present».¹⁰⁹ Here

¹⁰⁵ *Gregorii VII. registrum*, IV.12 (late January 1077).

¹⁰⁶ *Gregorii VII. registrum*, IV.12; trans. Cowdrey 2002, 222.

¹⁰⁷ Robinson 2000, 161; Fried 2012, 129–131; Cowdrey 1998, 157. Oath-helpers were a kind of character witness used to prove the justice of a defendant's case: Davies, Fouracre 1986, Glossary, s.v. "oath-helping"; Weitzel 2008.

¹⁰⁸ *Mediae Latinitatis lexicon minus*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Fideiussor"; Davies, Fouracre 1986, Glossary, s.v. "Fideiussor"; s.v. "Sureties".

¹⁰⁹ Berthold, *Chronicon*, a.1077, 259–261; Robinson (trans.) 2008, 161.

we can infer that Matilda and Adelaide were included with the mediators who confirmed Henry's promises; we also have further confirmation of Agnes' importance, even though she was not at Canossa.

Other contemporaries imply that only *men* were present when Henry's promise was confirmed – even if they had already emphasised Matilda's and Adelaide's key role as mediators. Lampert of Hersfeld, for example, refers to a whole apparatus of crowds, oaths and relics to secure Henry's promise, but makes no mention of Matilda, Adelaide, or Agnes: «after the relics of saints had been brought» several bishops, Adalbert Azzo II of Este and «the other princes [*principes*] who had made this agreement also confirmed on oath that the king [Henry] would do as he promised». ¹¹⁰ Cardinal Deusdedit similarly omits any reference to Matilda and Adelaide in the version of Henry's oath (*iuramentum*) preserved in his collection of canon law (written in the mid-1080s). In contrast with the version preserved in Gregory's *Register*, ¹¹¹ Deusdedit includes an extensive list of cardinals, archbishops, bishops, deacons, subdeacons, and abbots in whose presence Henry's oath was taken; the list also indicates that «many noble *men*» (*multi nobiles viri*) were present on the king's side, although they are not named. ¹¹²

Some contemporaries referred to Matilda and Adelaide by masculine titles, ¹¹³ so it is possible that they were implicitly included amongst Lampert's «princes who had made this agreement», and perhaps even among Deusdedit's «noble men». Yet Lampert and Deusdedit always used female terminology when referring to Adelaide and Matilda, ¹¹⁴ and there is a cle-

¹¹⁰ Lampert, *Annales*, a.1077, 294; Robinson (trans.) 2015, 357.

¹¹¹ *Gregorii VII. registrum*, IV.12a.

¹¹² Deusdedit, *Collectio canonum*, IV.421, 597–598. Fried 2012, 131 argues that this eschatocol is a later construct.

¹¹³ For Adelaide as *dux* and *princeps*: n. 25 above. On Matilda's titles: Goetz 1991; Reynolds 2002, 4–6.

¹¹⁴ For Lampert, above n. 88; Deusdedit, *Libellus contra invasores* II.12, 330.

ar, and gendered, contrast between contemporaries' willingness to name Matilda and Adelaide as mediators, and their reluctance to mention them in relation to Henry's promise. Those contemporaries who omitted references to women often emphasised the formal, legal nature of the confirmation. Lombard and Roman civil law, as well as canon law, all placed restrictions on medieval Italian women's ability to act at law, especially in relation to witnessing and acting as sureties.¹¹⁵ Lampert described the oath taken by the princes as an *iusiurandum*: this is a formal term used to describe a solemn oath pronounced as part of a religious and/or legal act. Lampert also distinguished between the oath sworn by the princes, and Abbot Hugh's actions: because of his monastic vows, Hugh did not swear the oath and instead «pledged his faith» (*fidem suam interposuit*).¹¹⁶ Although he did not refer to them as such, Lampert's princes were acting as *fideiussores*, and in Lampert's mind, women – and Abbot Hugh – were excluded from this role. Deusdedit described Henry's oath being taken «in the presence of» (*presentibus*) these individuals, which suggests that he saw them as witnesses, rather than guarantors. From Deusdedit's canon-law perspective, those who witnessed Henry's oath at Canossa were, by definition, men.

In contrast with Gregory's and Berthold's accounts, which indicate that women took a key role in public, political events, including the swearing of oaths, Lampert's and Deusdedit's accounts might seem to provide a limited confirmation of McNamara's view of Canossa as indicative of the erasure of women from public life.¹¹⁷ Certainly, for some contemporaries, the traditional view of women as 'intercessors' meant that presenting Adelaide and Matilda as 'mediators' at Canossa was

¹¹⁵ Wickham 1997, 200–201; 1986, 111; Arjava 1996, 233–245; Brundage 1995, 99–100, 161.

¹¹⁶ Lampert, *Annales*, a.1077, 294–295. On male religious making promises of fidelity, rather than oaths: Waitz 1896, 488–489.

¹¹⁷ Above, n. 12.

more acceptable than suggesting that they had played a formal, legal role as a witness or *fideiussor*. Yet in many cases these legal restrictions were not a new phenomenon, and in practice it is clear that noblewomen were not excluded from these kinds of legal action.¹¹⁸

The aversion of some contemporaries to women acting as witnesses or sureties was not primarily a legal issue, but rather a ‘documentary’ one about how male, clerical authors presented noblewomen’s actions in their texts. This ongoing problem was brought sharply into focus by the frequently misogynistic rhetoric of eleventh-century reform,¹¹⁹ and by the attacks on sexual morality which were a feature of the polemical literature of the Investiture Controversy [McLaughlin 2011; Patzold 2009]. In this context, presenting Matilda’s and Adelaide’s actions at Canossa, especially Gregory VII’s reliance upon them, was problematic for some contemporaries. This was true not only for reform-minded clerics, such as Deusdedit, but also Gregory VII himself.

The omission of Matilda’s and Adelaide in relation to Henry’s oath relates back to the criticisms made against Gregory by German bishops at the assembly at Worms: of his reliance on a «new senate of women»;¹²⁰ and also of his rumoured sexual impropriety with Matilda.¹²¹ This was the flip-side of the trope of ‘womanly influence’: alongside the positive view of the virtuous wife/mother as intercessor, lay the recurring fear that women could use their sexuality to gain undue political influence. Accusations of this nature were an effective means of undermining celibate men; Gregory distanced himself from women in general, and Matilda in particular, after Canossa [Hay 2008, 63–64; Goetz 2012, 108–

¹¹⁸ For (near) contemporary noblewomen acting as *fideiussores* in northern France: LoPrete 2007, 250, 263, 329, 436–437.

¹¹⁹ Cushing 2005, ch. 6; Elliott 2005: 136–145. Leyser 1998 argues that this rhetoric was really about competition between men.

¹²⁰ Above n. 45.

¹²¹ Lampert, *Annales*, a.1077, 251–261.

109]. Although Gregory ascribed a central role to Matilda and Adelaide in his letter to the German princes in January 1077, this was the only time he did so: in later references to Canossa in general, and Henry's promise in particular, Gregory omitted any mention of them. Writing to Archbishop Nehemiah of Gran, Gregory referred briefly to «promises [taken] upon oath by King Henry».¹²² In a letter to Bishop Udo of Trier, Gregory indicated that this oath was given «through certain of [Henry's] *fideles*, after he had given his own hand in that of the abbot of Cluny [Hugh]».¹²³ In the record of the Lenten synod, held after Henry's second excommunication in 1080 (at which point Henry's promises were obviously null and void), Gregory referred simply to the promises Henry had made «upon oath through two bishops» at Canossa.¹²⁴

As with Gregory's earlier omission of the names of the mediators before Canossa, his decision to conceal Matilda's and Adelaide's role here is not only about their actions, or even entirely about their gender, so much as about Gregory's *own* agenda. This relates, first, to his intended audience: writing to ecclesiastics, rather than the German princes, Gregory made no mention of Adelaide or Matilda. (Similarly, while Deusdedit listed the holders of various clerical offices, he did not mention any laymen – let alone laywomen – by name.) Second, and perhaps more important, Gregory was concerned about how his reliance on Matilda and Adelaide might be used against him by his opponents. So although women had obviously played an important role at Canossa – one which Gregory acknowledged at the time – thereafter it was evidently considered risky both by Gregory, and by pro-Gregorian

¹²² *Gregorii VII. registrum*, IV.25 (9th June 1077); Cowdrey (trans.) 2002, 239.

¹²³ *Gregorii VII. Registrum*, V.7 (30th September 1077); Cowdrey (trans.) 2002, 252. This reference to Henry placing his hands in Abbot Hugh's is sometimes conflated with Gregory's earlier reference to the confirmation he received «through the hands of» Abbot Hugh and others, but Fried 2012, 129 thinks it refers to an earlier stage of the negotiations.

¹²⁴ *Gregorii VII. registrum*, VII.14a (7th March 1080); Cowdrey (trans.) 2002, 343.

contemporaries to admit quite how important they were. Because of the fear that pro-imperial authors might use these women against Gregory, references to them were dropped, and their presence was glossed over, leading to the modern view of Canossa as a «womanless space».

Conclusion

The attempts of Beatrice of Tuscany, Matilda of Tuscany and Empress Agnes to reconcile Henry IV of Germany and Gregory VII in the period 1073–1076 were acknowledged by contemporaries. Similarly contemporary authors, particularly those writing within a decade of the events at Canossa, emphasised the important political and diplomatic roles played by Matilda of Tuscany and Adelaide of Turin in the reconciliation between Henry and Gregory at Canossa in 1077. They intervened between Henry and Gregory because of their kinship connections and social networks (both with Henry, with each other, and with Gregory); and also because they were powerful Italian princes. Matilda and Adelaide accompanied and protected Henry and Gregory, respectively, to the meeting at Canossa; Adelaide's daughter, Bertha, played a key, if minor, role in securing Adelaide's support for Henry. At Matilda's fortress of Canossa, both Matilda and Adelaide participated actively in the negotiations which led to Henry's absolution; and this was not 'womanly' intercession, but high-level political diplomacy. They then witnessed the meeting between Henry and Gregory; and finally confirmed Henry's oath, as did Agnes.

The important roles played by these women at Canossa have often been over-looked by modern scholars, in part because of an influential view of the eleventh century as a time when royal and noblewomen were increasingly excluded from the exercise of public politico-legal power. This view – based on a false dichotomy between public and private spheres – is demonstrably incorrect in relation to the women at Canossa. Matil-

da's and Adelaide's activities in 1077 were part of a wider framework in which the intervention of royal and aristocratic women in public, political affairs was both regular and unremarkable. The fact of these women's involvement at Canossa is not in doubt, but the presentation of their actions was sometimes problematic for some contemporaries. Matilda's and Adelaide's activities as mediators were often discussed matter-of-factly, but contemporaries sometimes found their role as guarantors of Henry's promises to be troublesome. This had little to do with the existence of a politico-legal sphere from which women were excluded. Instead authors included or omitted women from their accounts for a variety of reasons, including their personal connections with these women, their political affiliation, and their intended audience.

The omission of women from accounts of Canossa is also related to concerns about the perception of clerical men's reliance upon women. Gregory, in particular, emphasised or obscured Matilda's and Adelaide's roles to suit his aims and intended audience. In situations in which Matilda's and Adelaide's gender could be used against him, Gregory masked their presence. This indicates that, despite their status, gender was an ongoing issue for princely women like Matilda and Adelaide. Nevertheless, it is clear that the intervention of royal and aristocratic women in public, political affairs, was expected and encouraged by contemporaries. More than this: it was deeply necessary. The reconciliation at Canossa could not have occurred without them.

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