# Complementary Partners: The Marriages of Twelfth-Century Anglo-Norman Queens

Lauren Cengel

Several misconceptions of medieval marriage exist in the present day; it has been commonly assumed that the husband dominated the marriage and that the wife suffered under his oppression. However, a closer examination of the marriage relationship reveals much more than a cursory glance at medieval marriage suggests. The marriages of twelfth-century Anglo-Norman queens provide a prime example to demonstrate how the husband did not, in fact, suppress his wife, but rather allowed her the opportunity to take a complementary part in his rule that suited her strengths. A study of the lives of queens Matilda II of Scotland, Adeliza of Louvain, and Matilda III of Boulogne reveal much about what was expected from a queen in her marriage to the king in the early twelfth century, which could include various aspects of rule, from patronage to diplomacy. Twelfth-century sources reveal much about their authors' attitudes towards these queens, and the modern reader can glean much information by applying literary and historical analysis to the texts. Literary and historical analysis of twelfthcentury sources reveal that each of these queens was considered a "partner" in her marriage with her husband the king in that the duties she was expected to perform complemented the king's duties, even though the manner in which the sources limit the queen's role can be interpreted as somewhat misogynistic.

The first twelfth-century Anglo-Norman queen was Matilda (formerly Edith) of Scotland who married Henry I in 1100 (see genealogy chart). Contemporary chroniclers, such as William of Malmesbury, strongly stress Matilda's heritage and connection to the line of English and Scottish kings. This suggests that Henry I married Matilda in order to legitimize his rule of England by connecting himself to the old Saxon monarchy through her. Also, Matilda was very active in her role as Henry I's queen, indicating that the two acted as partners

in their marriage as king and queen until Matilda's death in 1118.1 Henry I's second marriage to Adeliza of Louvain in 1121 came about from quite different circumstances, however; his only legitimate son and heir died in the sinking of the White Ship in 1120, and he needed another wife to produce a male heir to secure the succession of his line. As such, Henry kept Adeliza with him for most of their marriage, limiting the political roles that she could play, although she did utilize other means such as patronage to influence the realm of England during her time as queen 2 Stephen I, Henry I's successor, married Matilda III of Boulogne in 1125 before he became king, so the primary consideration of his marriage was most likely to create an alliance with the family of Boulogne. Nevertheless, Stephen seemed quite eager to involve his wife in affairs in England once he became king, especially during the Anarchy when his cousin the Empress Matilda challenged his claim to the throne.3 The manner in which these queens became involved in their husbands' rule was not insignificant, and there are several areas of involvement that display their influence best: interaction with public officials, education of their children, and intercession with the

From these, the area of a queen's involvement in the governance of England most highly visible to the public eye was her interaction with other members of government and the church. The queen was in a position where public acts were highly visible to twelfth-century authors, who commented on her acts of patronage, regency, diplomacy, and the like. Patricia Dark writes that medieval society held the expectation that, in marriage, women would act as a helpmate for their husbands, and a politically astute queen could wield a great deal of influence in the governance of the country in acting to help her husband with his rule. John Carmi Parsons agrees with this statement, arguing that

expectations of the queen aiding her husband in the governance of his realm could even go so far as the queen ruling in the king's stead in his absence (that is, acting as regent). The actions of Matilda II of Scotland, Adeliza of Louvain, and Matilda III of Boulogne, as represented in contemporary texts, demonstrate the importance of the role of the queen in the political realm of England.

For instance, contemporary texts show Matilda Il as quite active in her political role as the king's wife. Lois L. Huneycutt, who has done extensive work on Matilda, writes that "Almost from the day of her marriage, Matilda began to play a part in the public life of her new realm" by participating in councils, issuing charters, and sitting in judgment at court.6 One contemporary author who describes Matilda's work is William of Malmesbury, a twelfthcentury cleric who recorded the deeds of the English kings in his Gesta Regum Anglorum. He mainly notes her piety, which he stresses as the main quality with which she helped the king in his rule. He writes, "She [Matilda] was a woman of exceptional holiness..., in piety her mother's rival, and in her own character exempt from all evil influence." showing his praise and approval of her pious influence on Henry I's rule.7

The Life of St. Margaret also gives insight into what was expected of Matilda in terms of acting in the public sphere. Matilda commissioned the text from a twelfth-century clergyman to learn more about life of her mother St. Margaret, Queen of Scotland. The author also meant for the text to be a didactic tool for Matilda in her reign as queen, showing how Matilda should imitate the way her mother used her pious and compassionate qualities to temper the king's harsher tendencies of his public policies.8 For instance, the author writes that, Margaret, "with God helping her, made the king himself more obedient to justice, compassion, charity, and good works of merit."9 Thus, Huneycutt writes that "The author of the Life of St. Margaret explicitly approves of the queen's public role" by showing how she should use her devotional qualities to affect the king in his rule of the kingdom; this was her duty as the king's wife that complemented the king's role and would greatly benefit the kingdom by making policies more fair and just. 10

However, Adeliza of Louvain does not seem to have been as active as Matilda in the public sphere of the realm. Laura Wertheimer states in her article that Adeliza was the exception to the pattern of queens left as regent by Norman kings

when the kings were absent from England. This was likely because Adeliza was rarely left in England by herself, since Henry I was more concerned with producing an heir with Adeliza than other queenly duties she could have performed, such as serving as regent. 11 However, Adeliza was able to exercise her influence in the public realm of England through another means: patronage. Huneycutt writes that Anglo-Norman queens were also expected to be active in patronizing literary works at court. This would not necessarily directly influence the king's policies, but could at least allow the queen's subjects at court to glimpse her "personality, tastes, and abilities;" one such work that she commissioned was a now lost life of Henry I. 12 Much other literature patronized by queens in this time emphasized piety and good works of its subjects, so one can reasonably argue that the life of Henry I emphasized his piety and goodness as a Christian king, even though the text is not extant today. This could favorably influence public opinion of Henry, which shows how patronage could be a way for queens to complement their husbands' rule by portraying them as good kings.

Matilda III of Boulogne, was much more active in the governance of England like Matilda II; and, like Matilda II, Matilda III is positively portrayed in acting as her husband's helpmate in the governance of their realm. 13 During the Anarchy, Matilda III was quite active in the governance of England, becoming involved in many duties that aided Stephen in his reign. For instance, Heather J. Tanner writes that Matilda III was active as a diplomat attempting to rally support for Stephen from foreign barons in Boulogne, and even commanded Stephen's military forces. 14 Matilda besieged Dover castle in 1138 while Stephen was occupied at Hereford, took control of Stephen's army and government with William of Ypres (Stephen's mercenary friend) when he was captured in 1141, and succeeded in driving the Empress Matilda out of London with an army several months after his capture. 15 The author of the Gesta Stephani praises Matilda for her efforts in helping Stephen, writing that she was "a woman of subtlety and a man's resolution." 16 Matilda was "resolutely supportive" of Stephen in her actions, showing how she was most definitely expected, as the wife of the king, in aiding her husband in the governance of his realm. 17 The fact that Stephen relied on his wife, the queen, for many of his public affairs shows how he trusted her strengths that enabled her to be his complementary partner in rule.

Literary analysis of twelfth-century texts gives further insight into the mindset of contemporary authors commenting on these events, and how they viewed the queen's role as her husband's helpmate in public affairs. Neil Cartlidge writes that a prominent theme in literature from this time period was the harmony of two partners in marriage. 18 This theme can clearly be seen in several twelfth-century texts, such as the Life of St. Margaret of Scotland. Margaret is shown throughout the work aiding the king to promote the well-being of their subjects, complementing his duties as king. There is a certain tender moment displayed in this text that clearly displays the harmonious nature of her relationship with her husband: When Margaret would run out of her own money to give to the poor, would commit "pious thievery" from the king to obtain more alms. And, "even though the king knew full well that she did this, he would often pretend not to know. He greatly loved this sort of jest. Sometimes he would seize her hand full of coins and lead her to me [the author] for justice, joking that he wanted to accuse her in court."19 This interaction shows the apparent harmony between the couple, and that medieval queens reading this text would most likely perceive this theme of harmony, and would want to complement the king's rule in a similar manner.

Another instance of the king and queen ruling in harmony can be seen in a Latin poem written for the court of Henry I.20 In the poem, the anonymous author gives Matilda II a voice in influencing the policies of her husband's realm; Matilda persuades the king in bringing about a change in unjust legislation. Matilda says, "Lex iniusticiae, rex bone, cesset!", which, loosely translated, means "The law of injustice, good king, cease!"21 Henry obeys Matilda's command and corrects the unjust laws of which she did not approve. Even if this event did not occur exactly as the author described, it still shows how the author expected the queen to aid her husband in making his rule more fair and just, and that twelfth-century authors expected similar actions of their queens.

Another piece of literature that can give insight into the medieval mindset of how the queen was viewed as a helpmate to the king is the Historia Regum Britanniae by Geoffrey of Monmouth. Geoffrey wrote this text in the early twelfth century, and it was widely circulated throughout the English court where these queens would have been present.<sup>22</sup> Paul Dalton writes that a major theme of this work was the theme of peace, which

Geoffrey displays by warning the Anglo-Norman aristocracy of the dangers of civil war; one manner in which he does this is by showing how a just woman's involvement in governmental affairs could help keep the peace in England.23 For instance, he writes of a wise king and his queen, Marcia, who rule "with kindness and moderation." Part of the reason Geoffrey portrays this couple as great is because, "Among the many novelties devised by this intelligent woman [Marcia,] was the law which the British called Marcian." Also, when the king died when his son was only a child, "His able and intelligent mother therefore came to rule the whole island [of Britain]."24 So, one can clearly see here that Geoffrey of Monmouth expected able queens to aid the king in his duties to the kingdom by creating just laws and acting as regent, taking part in the rule of their kingdom, all to keep the peace.

William of Malmesbury displays similar themes of marital harmony and peace. He shows how Matilda II aided Henry I in negotiations with his brother Robert Curthose, Duke of Normandy. Robert had come to England to claim the land for his own, and Henry promised Robert three thousand marks in a negotiation for Robert to leave the country. However, Henry was able to gain this money back because, "the following year at the queen's request [emphasis added] he [Robert] relinquished it of his own accord to give her [Matilda] pleasure."25 So, through Matilda's aid, Henry was able to regain his lost money. Because William includes this detail of Matilda's involvement, one must conclude that he expected his queen to act as the king's partner to establish peace. So, through literary and historical analysis of these texts, one can see how early twelfth-century authors positively portrayed women acting as the king's helpmate in the governance of England, complementing his duties with her strengths of bringing justice and peace.

Another aspect of the queen's duties as the king's wife was her role as a mother; as the mother of the king's children, the queen was expected to partake in the rearing and education of her children, helping to prepare them for their lives as future rulers, and helping to secure their inheritance. <sup>26</sup> Parsons writes that medieval authors greatly focused on the queen's ability to bear the king's children, and that authors showed that the queens' "maternal instinct to protect their children and their children's inheritance deserved sympathy and respect." <sup>27</sup> In addition, the queen was also expected to prepare her

daughters for marriages to other royals or powerful members of the aristocracy so that important familial alliances could be made. The attitudes of twelfth-century authors, shown by their texts, reveal that these maternal qualities were one of the greatest duties expected of Matilda II, Adeliza, and Matilda III.

The Life of St. Margaret, for instance, gives St. Margaret as an example for her daughter Matilda to follow; one can see that the author expected Matilda to take part in rearing her children to be good and just rulers. The text says, "She [Margaret] poured out care to her children not less than to herself, seeing that they were nurtured with diligence and that they were introduced to honest matters as much as possible." The author also writes that Margaret corrected the children when necessary, that their manners were exemplary, and that she taught them to fear the Lord as good Christians should.<sup>28</sup> As a didactic text, one can clearly see that the author expected Matilda to act in a similar manner with her children, educating them and taking part in their upbringing as future rulers.29 Matilda most likely did have a significant role in preparing her daughter, also named Matilda, for her marriage to Holy Roman Emperor Henry V by teaching her skills she would need to rule as empress. The Empress Matilda displayed such skills by rallying forces to assert her claim to the English throne when Stephen usurped it from her in 1135.30 While the Empress Matilda proved unsuccessful in recapturing the crown from Stephen, her actions were most likely affected by the influence of her mother's education.

Also, William of Malmesbury's focus on Matilda II's lineage shows that her maternal genealogy was very important in establishing a legitimate rule for both her husband and her children, especially her son William as the future ruler of England (see genealogy chart). He writes, "The king's wife Matilda, a daughter of the king of the Scots...was descended from an ancient and illustrious line of kings." He continues to write about her children: "The bearing of two children [by Matilda], one of either sex, left her content." These passages show the importance of Matilda's lineage passed on to her children, as well as the importance of her role as the bearer of the king's children.

Adeliza of Louvain most likely would have been portrayed in a similar manner, if she had borne any of Henry I's children. She was never actually able to conceive when she was married to the king, which is perhaps why she was somewhat neglected in twelfth-century texts and why she was limited in her participation of her husband's government, as Wertheimer argues.<sup>32</sup> Wertheimer also writes that when chroniclers did mention Adeliza of Louvain, such as with Hildebert of Lavardin in his letters and with John of Worcester, they "sadly" remarked on her childlessness.<sup>33</sup> This lack of attention for Adeliza, except to focus on her childlessness, and her limitation of participation in government shows the great importance of the queen's principal duty as the bearer of the king's children, and that this could serve as a barrier for a queen to be more active as the king's helpmate in governance of their realm.

However, Matilda III presents great contrast to Adeliza in her actions on behalf of her children. Her involvement in the war against Empress Matilda was most likely motivated by more than just partnership with her husband - she would have wanted to ensure that Stephen's reign was secure to promote the succession of Eustace after him.34 This can be seen in her later years as queen near the end of Stephen's reign; Tanner writes that, in charters from King Stephen's rule, Matilda makes less and less frequent appearances from 1147 onwards. She says that this "diminished public presence...reflects the need to groom Eustace, now of age, to succeed the king," which was expected of her as the mother of the heir to the kingdom. 35 Tanner also notes that Matilda's last public appearance, in 1152, was at a church council where she and Stephen attempted (unsuccessfully) to have the bishops of England crown Eustace as the next king. Although there are no direct references in extant twelfth-century texts of Matilda interacting with Eustace, it is clear from these charters that a primary duty of the king's wife was to prepare their heir to succeed as king. which would complement the training the heir also received from his father.

Examining twelfth-century texts from a literary perspective also shows that queens' motherly duties as the king's wife complemented his duties as the primary governor of the realm; the theme of the wife as a mother in the literature demonstrates that the authors were very approving of the queen's role in her children's lives.36 For instance, Geoffrey of Monmouth portrays a strong queen that secures the succession of her son. The queen, Guendoloena, first holds her son's place to rule by acting as his regent when he is a young boy, and "when she saw that her son Maddan was grown up, she had him crowned king." Geoffrey shows his readers here that he believes part of the queen's duty was to care

for the king's children by securing their succession when they came of age to rule, which even meant that she could act as regent to hold their place in the line of succession. This scene recalls the manner in which Matilda III of Boulogne worked ardently to secure the succession of her son, Eustace, in order to preserve the order and peace of the realm of England.

The Life of St. Margaret also shows the theme of the queen as a mother by depicting the queen mother educating her children. The author of the text writes, "Margaret had her children brought to her very often, and she taught them about Christ and faith in Christ, using words suitable to their age and understanding."38 This emphasizes Margaret's role in her children's lives as their educator, especially as educator of Christian principals. Childhood is rarely described in the literature from the twelfth century, so the fact that one of the rare times childhood is mentioned, like in the Life, coincides with emphasizing the queen's motherly duties shows that the queen's role in her children's lives was considered quite important. 39 Also, M. T. Clanchy argues that there is enough mention of children in medieval literature to show that pious mothers of the nobility took on a role of educating their children in the ways of devotion to God, further demonstrating the importance of the role of the mother with her children in medieval literature.40

However, some might argue that the theme of women as mothers (and mothers educating children about only piety) is misogynistic because of the way that the queen's role is limited to motherly tasks, too weak to take on other tasks such as ruling a kingdom. Laurie A. Finke writes that "misogynistic commonplaces were pervasive in the writing of the period [the Middle Ages], occurring in virtually all male writers and in a wide variety of texts."41 She also writes that medieval authors portrayed women as "imperfection" and inferior to men, showing how the authors of the texts viewed the woman's role as limited to certain spheres like motherhood because they were not capable of exercising duties elsewhere. 42 While it is true that women are somewhat limited in their portrayal as mothers, twelfth-century authors portray women as mothers in a positive light, showing that she was acting to her strengths by educating her children in the ways of piety to be good and just rulers. Thus, twelfthcentury authors saw the queen's motherly role in aiding and educating her children as complementary

to the rule of the king, showing how the two were considered partners in marriage.

Another aspect of the queen's role as the king's wife was that of his intimate; Parsons writes that "Queens were the closest of all women to the center of magisterial authority [the king]," and this closeness left them highly exposed for commentary from twelfth-century observers for the manner in which the queen could use her intimacy to sway the king through intercession. 43 Tanner writes that "Queenly intercession was seen as a feminine act - Christ as law, Mary as mercy; woman as peacemaker, wives as forces of moral persuasion in the home," demonstrating how the queen's role of intercessor was meant to complement the king's duties of lawmaker.44 Thus, the queen could influence the king to make his laws more merciful and just. Also, texts from this period show that the authors generally approved of the queen interfering in the king's affairs "through the affectionate bonds of marriage," and even expected the queen to intercede with the king to "temper the king's laws with mercy."45

For instance, authors commenting on the activities of Matilda II of Scotland greatly focus on her role as intercessor with Henry I. From the Life of St. Margaret, we know that the author expected Matilda to intercede with the king because he depicts Margaret as doing so with her husband, the king of Scotland. An example used previously to show how the queen was expected to be the helpmate of the king also shows how she was expected to intercede with him; the author of the text writes, "she [Margaret], with God helping her, made the king himself more obedient to justice, compassion, charity, and good works of merit" and the king "learned from her." 46 Huneycutt writes that through this text, the author makes it clear that: "Matilda, like her mother [Margaret], was perceived as a peacemaker and as influencing the course of the kingdom" because of the way that Margaret also brought peace to hers through her influence with the king.47

A major event in which Matilda interceded with Henry to bring peace to the kingdom was the investiture controversy in England; Henry and Archbishop Anselm of Canterbury became involved in a dispute over jurisdiction of appointing church officials, and the rivalry between the men was quite strong. So, Anselm, as a friend of Queen Matilda, asked her to speak to the king on his behalf in order to sway him to concede to the church and give up

his right of appointing bishops. 48 Huneycutt writes that Matilda's correspondence with Anselm and Pope Paschal is quite revealing, because their letters "continually urged her [Matilda] to use her influence in the right direction," and that one of Paschal's letters "asks Matilda 'to turn the heart of the king away from the bad advice' of his 'evil counselors." 49 Matilda, in fact, was able to soften the heart of Henry and made him more willing to reconcile with Anselm. Nonetheless, these instances show how Matilda II, as the wife and queen of Henry I, was expected to intercede with the king, especially on behalf of the church.

Adeliza of Louvain, however, was not quite as involved in intercession as Matilda II; as mentioned previously, her acts as queen were mainly limited to patronage of the church and of literature. In fact, Wertheimer states that "There is no record of Adeliza interceding with the king as Matilda did."50 However, there is record of Adeliza traveling constantly with Henry I up until 1131 because of his need to conceive an heir; so, Adeliza was most likely sexually intimate with the king on many occasions.<sup>51</sup> Even though the couple may have devoted much time to attempting to conceive an heir, any efforts of Adeliza taking advantage of this intimacy through intercession are not apparent. However, since the Life of St. Margaret was most likely meant to be a teaching tool for Matilda II's successors as well as Matilda herself, medieval authors would have probably approved of intercessory acts made by Adeliza.

This approval of intercession can also be seen in the actions of Matilda III of Boulogne; however, her intercessory acts are not done with Stephen, but on behalf of him with his magnates in order to help create peace in the realm of England. During Stephen's reign, Matilda often interceded with rebellious barons in England and foreign barons in France to gamer support for Stephen in his war against the Empress Matilda. 52 For instance, Tanner writes that Matilda "acted on Stephen's behalf to restore peace with Count Thierry of Glanders," and that while no extant chronicle describes the peace process, grants made by Matilda, Stephen, and William of Ypres shows how she had a hand in sealing the peace agreement. William of Malmesbury also writes in his Historia Novella that Matilda was highly involved in the negotiations for Stephen's release; he includes that she headed the negotiations with Henry of Blois to free Stephen after his capture in 1141, using "her tears and offers" to persuade

Henry to release his brother.<sup>53</sup> So, as the woman closest to the king and one who was supposed to have the skills of a peacemaker, Matilda is shown as exercising her strength of intercession to her and Stephen's advantage. This shows how queens were expected to intercede in political affairs to bring peace, emphasizing the quality of peacemaker that medieval authors saw as a woman's strength that complemented the role of the king.

Literature from the timealso shows that the way the queen was able to bring peace to the realm of England through her role as intercessor; this is shown by a theme of the bringing together of two cultures. Susan Crane and Andrew Galloway both comment on this issue in the Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature, writing that the aristocracy of the Anglo-Norman monarchy attempted to "make one people of diverse ethnicities and empires," and that Anglo-Norman authors "sought tactful mediations between Norman and English points of view."54 By depicting queens in roles as intercessors and peacemakers, utilizing their intimate connection with the king, twelfth-century authors had a means of showing their readers a viable means for the resolution of conflict between two groups. This theme can most clearly be seen in the Life of St. Margaret, because of the way that the author shows the intimacy of the king and queen, and because of the way that she is seen as a positive influence on the king because of this intimacy (see quote on page thirteen).55 This shows how Margaret was able to influence the king through intercession in his policies towards the kingdom; the author presents the two as a pair here, working together to rule justly, displaying to Matilda II how she could rule justly with Henry I to bring together the Norman and English cultures.

William of Malmesbury, in his Gesta Regum Anglorum, shows queen Matilda in an intercessory role that reconciles two disagreeing parties. One way in which William does this is by emphasizing Matilda II's lineage, writing that "she was in fact, of exalted rank as a great-grand-niece of King Edward [the Confessor] through his brother Edmund," and was "descended from an ancient and illustrious line of kings." This emphasizes her connection to the line of previous English kings, which would give her an advantage in interceding and negotiating in disputes because of her international connections. Another instance in which Matilda is shown as a peacemaker is when she intercedes with Henry's brother, Robert (as mentioned above), in order to

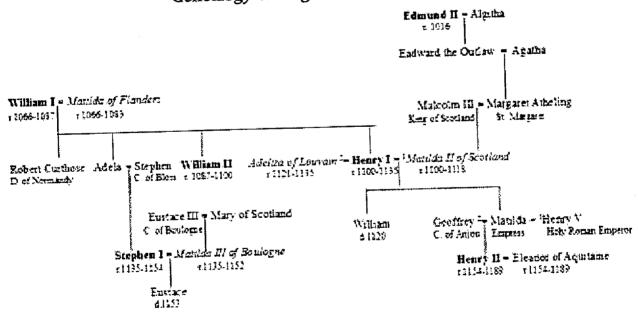
gain back losses of her husband. William writes that "at the queen's request, he [Robert] relinquished it [the three thousand marks] of his own accord to give her [Matilda] pleasure."<sup>57</sup> This further emphasizes the theme of the queen as the peacemaker in William's text, showing how William desired unity and peace in the realm of England, and that the queen could help accomplish this desire by complementing the role of her husband the king in this manner.

However, because of the manner in which twelfth-century authors show the queen as acting through primarily pious and compassionate methods, one might conclude that these authors held misogynistic attitudes about the role of women in society. This is not unreasonable, because, as Finke argues, medieval male authors viewed a wife's sexual interactions with her husband as grounds for unrest in the social, political, and economic aspects of society.58 However, it seems more likely that authors highlight these aspects of the queen's duties as the king's wife as ones that complement his reign and allow the two to act as partners, each to their own strengths. The authors just happen to perceive the queen's strengths as ones that involved

intercession, patronage, and diplomacy, as opposed to the harsher war-making and justice-dispensing duties of the king. So, through historical and literary analysis, one is able to determine that the queen was considered a partner in her marriage to the king through her intimacy with him, allowing her to act as intercessor with and on behalf of him, complementing his duties of soldiering and of dispensing justice.

Through the study of these queens, one is able to see that in the Middle Ages, marriage did not automatically condemn wives to be subordinate or submissive to her husband. On the contrary, she was able to exert her own influence over him, utilizing her strengths, as twelfth-century authors show, to act as her husband's partner in marital endeavors, like ruling as king and queen. The acts of the queens themselves and the approval of these acts by twelfth-century authors show that queens were, in fact, encouraged to aid their husbands in rule because the kingdom could greatly benefit from such acts. Thus, the queen was considered the partner of the king in their marriage, with each spouse acting in his or her own strengths in rule.

## Genealogy of Anglo-Norman Queens



Legend

Bolded names are kungs of England, Holis tred names are Anglo-Norman queens

- signifies matriage

r. ruled

d. duck

Source: Chart compiled by author.

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## 78 • The Wittenberg History Journal

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