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Of Arms and the Woman in Medieval Europe : Fact. Fiction. Fantasy

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FREIE UNIVERSITÄT BERLIN

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OF ARMS AND THE WOMAN IN MEDIEVAL EUROPE: FACT. FICTION. FANTASY.

Soon after arranging her husband's funeral, *"the lady shall hand over all the military equipment he owned [and used] until he died: her husband's sword, his best charger or riding horse with saddle, his best coat of mail and tent, and also the field gear, which consists of an army cot, a pillow, linen sheet, tablecloth, two washbasins, and a towel. This, in general, constitutes the military equipment and must be given over by right ... The wife need not supply the articles she does not have as long as she dares to swear that she does not possess them. ... When two or three men are born to one set of arms and armor, the oldest first inherits the sword separately, and then they divide the remaining items equally among them. Where the sons are under age, the eldest agnatic relation of equal birth takes the entire military outfit himself and becomes the guardian of the children until they come of age. At that time he must give it to them along with all their property."* Sachsenspiegel I.22–23 (Dobozy 1999: 76)

This passage in the German law book known as the *Sachsenspiegel* (<http://digital.lb-oldenburg.de/ssp/nav/classification/137692>), or the *Mirror of the Saxons,* written by Eike von Repgow about 1220-24, indicates the solemnity with which knightly arms were treated, and the intention to retain exclusive control of them by the males in the family.[1)] The sequence in the "picture book" with a low German variant of the text, made for the Duke of Oldenburg and still unfinished in 1336, shows the widow at the top of the page first directing "all stored food supplies" (hams and cheeses) to be given to the heirs, then handing over the sword to the eldest male heir, with some of the other military equipment that is itemized in the text (fig. 1); this male inheritance was known as the *Heregewäte*. The sequel, on the unfinished verso, shows the guardian pledging to keep the arms for under-age male heirs, and then distributing them (fig. 2; Schmidt-Wiegand 1995–96). A recension from about twenty-five years later shows a wealthier widow seated to take stock of fish and other food in golden vessels at the beginning of the same sequence (fig. 3 W fol. 16v <http://diglib.hab.de/mss/3-1-aug-2f/start.htm?image=00062>;

1)
I am indebted to my late colleague Charles G. Nelson for introducing me to this work and to medieval German culture. I am grateful to Emily Monty and Orsolya Mednyànszky for assistance with research and editing, and to John Fyler for help with Anglo-Saxon.



// Abbildung 1
Sachsenspiegel (LDR I 22 par.2–22 par. 4), A widow handing over food and arms to the male heirs,1336. Oldenburg, Landesbibliothek Ms Cim I 410, f. 18r

Schmidt-Wiegand 1993). Neither manuscript includes a representation of the widow taking an oath that she is not withholding any items of the equipment. The requirement is exceptional, because oath-taking on relics was not normally permitted to women (Caviness & Nelson 2003: 60–66). The later recension illustrates the full list of military equipment, including a charger with the bearing of a stallion. Whereas the widow in the Oldenburg manuscript appears to be the lady of a manor, this is the lady of a knight's castle. Another significant visual difference is that instead of the short sword seen in "O" a full-length two-handed sword is shown here, the blade covered by a decorative sheath, and it is identical to the ones that denote a judge's standing to try capital offenses. In the sequel the same sword is passed from hand to hand as prescribed. The passages in Book I par 41–44 are illustrated by both kinds of sword (fig. 4 W f. 20 <http://diglib.hab.de/mss/3-1-aug-2f/start.htm?image=00069>): in the upper registers, a guardian (protector) carries a short sword and shield; in three cases the judge has the long sword of justice. Swords convey civic and military power. It is significant that the widow on f. 16v does not remain seated to hand over the sword, and it is already grasped by the male heirs; she is never shown to have authoritative control over it.



// Abbildung 2
Sachsenspiegel, (LDR I 22 par.4-23 par. 2), A guardian distributing the sword and armor of the deceased among his sons, 1336. Oldenburg, Landesbibliothek Ms Cim I 410, f. 18v

Such urgent denial of the sword and military equipment to a woman is of interest from a feminist perspective. Tacitus' description of marriage among the Germanic peoples in Roman times states that the husband's customary morning gift to his bride consisted of oxen, a riding horse, and a shield, spear and sword (Tacitus 2009 43, 94 n. 48).[2] Hereward the Wake's biographer recounts that some time before the Norman conquest of 1066 a young woman, Turfrida, invited him to her parents' home in St.-Omer (Flanders) to show him her precious movable inheritance, including: "a mail-coat of great lightness and very fine workmanship, and much brighter and purer than any iron or steel, and a helmet of similar beauty and strength." She explained that many men crave these things from her ancestors "but up to now I have kept their heirlooms, always the most treasured among my great-grandfather's, grandfather's and father's things, so that I could present them to my bridegroom" (van Houts 1999: 90–91). These texts warn against naturalizing the ownership of arms by men, and in light of some claims for a long line of "warrior women,"

2) «Boves et frenatum equum et scutum cum framea glaudio que» (Tacitus 2010 : ch. 18 :2).

my first thought on reading the Sachsenspiegel was that Eike was placing a new restriction on female fighters: A basic assumption about laws is that they do not exist unless the opposite is happening, despite authoritative denial by the declarative statements of Eike's law and the seemingly ineluctable pictorial sequences.

In favor of this argument are some historical examples that point to the acceptance of female hereditary governance here and there in Europe during the Middle Ages, including the command of troops. Empress Matilda, widow of Henry V, helped her second husband, Geoffrey of Anjou, by raising troops when he was under siege in Normandy. She invaded England in 1139, aiming to fulfill her father's wish that she have the crown rather than the closest male heir, her cousin Stephen. Gilbert Foliot found ample arguments from natural law and from the daughters of Salphaad in scripture (*Numbers* 36), to support her cause despite those he said regarded women as too weak to rule. Margaret Chibnall reminds us that about that time St. Bernard advised Queen Melisende of Jerusalem when widowed that she should "show the man in the woman; order all things [...] so that those who see you will judge your works to be those of a king rather than a queen." Yet she surmises that Matilda did not win London to be crowned queen in part because she was not on the battle field herself (Chibnall 1991: 80–97). In 1252, the monastic chronicler Mathew Paris eulogized the queen regent and queen mother of France, Blanche of Castile, as "female in sex, male in wisdom *(consilio)*, worthy of comparison to Semiramis" (Luard 1872: vol. 5, 354). Almost a century after Eike but before the paintings in the Oldenburg Sachsenspiegel, the powerful widow Mahaut of Artois, who held land in Flanders and Burgundy, fortified her castles to protect her inheritance from male claimants; the king of France had settled her father's land on her, following Artois custom that recognized female heirs, yet her brother's son launched a new suit at the beginning of every reign up to her death in 1329 (Baron 1997: 24, 35–37). Mahaut may not have worn her father's armor, but she had the right to muster armies. And queens in the Spanish realms of Léon-Castile, Aragon and Castile whether ruling as heirs or as widows, had full authority *de iure* and *de facto,* including command of the military; a notable early example was Queen



// Abbildung 3
Sachsenspiegel, (LDR I par 22-I par 23), A widow making distributions to the heirs, and the sword passing to the sons, c. 1355-60. Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Cod. Guelf. 3.1. Aug. 2, f. 16v



// Abbildung 4
Sachsenspiegel (LDR I par41-I par44), Judges in court, with the sword of justice, c. 1355-60. Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Cod. Guelf. 3.1. Aug. 2, f. 20

Uracca of Leòn-Castile who ruled in her own right (1109–1126; Earenfight 2005: xiii-xiv, 34–35, 92; Martin 2006: 2–10).

Yet many historians have greeted the idea of a woman wielding a sword in battle with skepticism. A rare undisputed example is Joan of Arc who was fully armed when she led troops into battle in France, some forty years later than the Wolfenbüttel Sachsenspiegel; a knight, Robert of Baudricourt , supplied her first sword, but she miraculously found her second, inscribed with "Jesus" and "Maria," behind an altar (Warner 1981: 163–164).[3] The church's injunction against cross-dressing figured largely in her heresy trial, and she was ultimately burned by English civil authority in 1431 (Warner 1981: 139, 143–46; and Fraioli 2000: 182–83).[4] Defenders sanctified her virginity, and justified her masculine attire, even though church laws forbidding it had existed since the twelfth century, in Gratian's *Decretum* (Hotchkiss: 11). Yet there had been no prior prosecutions of women for cross-dressing, and there were many female saints whose biographers claimed they had disguised themselves as men (Bullough 1996: 228–30; Easton 2009:338–47). In his treatise on Virginity, for example, St. Ambrose related that the Virgin of Antioch exchanged clothing with a knight in order to escape from prison. The story, which ended in double martyrdom, crept into the *Golden Legend* on April 28 (Butler 1779: vol. 4, 305–309). A version in Alsatian dialect was illustrated in 1362 by Heinricus with an image of the virgin who astonished her jailer by an apparent transsexual transformation (Catalog); the illustrator gave the game away by retaining the knight's beard and the virgin's long hair, but otherwise cross-dressing might be imperceptible (fig. 5; for the text see fig. 5).[5]

I will reexamine the relationship between women and arms in Europe up to about 1200, in light of the broad contexts of literary traditions (including the bible), historical records, and also the modern preoccupation with women warriors that inevitably inflects historical judgments. Fact-finding is not my main purpose, but it is worth probing the conclusions of modern historians, many of whom seem unjustifiably dismissive of early accounts. I cannot bring to bear visual testimonies, or significant material evidence, that might support the stories, but there is another body of well illustrated work that reveals changing attitudes to women bearing arms in the Middle Ages.

3) For an extant sword of the period inscribed with prayers see Oakeshott 1997: pls. 18 & 19c.

4) Warner cites Deuteronomy 22:5 "The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment; for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God," and also the defenders of Joan's military garb.

5.) The version in Butler's Lives names the martyred pair Theodora and Didymus and places the events in Alexandria.



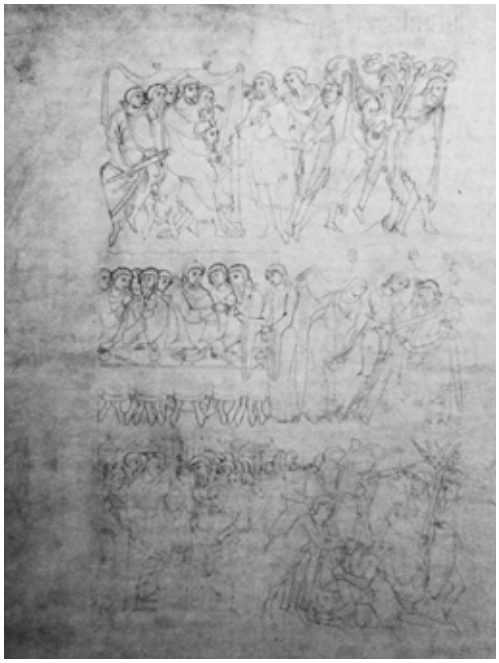
// Abbildung 5
Golden Legend in Alsatian dialect, The Virgin of Antioch and a knight exchanging clothes so she can escape from prison. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Ms Cgm. 6, fol. 84v

JUDITH, HOLOFERNES SLAYER —— The story of one a heroic biblical woman was told and retold in text and image during the Middle Ages: The widow Judith single-handedly wielded a sword to kill a man, saving the Jewish people by beheading the general of an Assyrian army that besieged them. In Donatello's hands she became a more powerful defender of Florence than David (Jacobus 1986: 128–130, fig. 6).[6] Yet I will trace the ways in which she was disarmed or dehumanized in the period roughly 950–1200, as a way of testing the water for historical accounts of women warriors. The book of Judith was grouped with the books of Tobit and Esther in the Latin Vulgate, following the grand narratives of Kings; all three were removed from the bible in the Reformation, but the Judith legend had reverberated in bible illustration, poems in Old English and German, pictorial narratives, and as a visual symbol of the virtues of humility and chastity.

BIBLICAL JUDITH —— (italics mine): The story as textualized in the Vulgate constructs Judith as a righteous and patriotic widow who acts *with the approbation of the town elders* to "take revenge of our enemies" (Judith 8:34).[7] Her identity is defined by a *long male pedigree, and a named husband* (8:2–3), after whose death she lived *chastely, and in sackcloth* despite her riches (8:5–6). Throughout chapter 9 she prepares for the deed by *fasting, cleansing herself, and praying:* she desires that Holofernes' *"pride may be cut off with his own sword,"* and she dresses in finery so he will be "caught in the net of his own eyes" (8:12); she prays for her own constancy and fortitude, "for this will be a glorious moment for Thy name, when *he shall fall by the hand of a woman"* (9:14–15). She washes and puts on a *head-covering and jewelry,* and God made her *beautiful because of her virtue* (10:1–4). The elders wish her well as she and her maid depart for Holofernes' camp; she is brought to his tent because she tells the watchmen she will betray the Hebrews, and she bows before him (10:5–20). She lives chastely in the camp, even though she banquets with Holofernes (12). When he is in a drunken sleep, *she tells her maid to keep watch outside the tent, takes Holofernes' sword, prays for strength, grasps his hair, and severs his neck with two blows.* She wraps the head in the bed canopy, and gives it to her maid (13:1–11). The deed done, *she abnegates agency by telling the elders: "[the Lord our God] hath*

6)
The immense bronze statue, dated 1455, stands in the Piazza della Signoria. Michelangelo's white marble David later competed in the same space.

7)
Citations are from the Douay-Reims Vulgate: 524–538, which attributes it to the high priest Joachim, named Eliachim in the story; and from the Latin Vulgate.



// Abbildung 6
Winchester Bible, f. 331, c. 1160–75, Judith narrative. Winchester Cathedral Library

killed the enemy of his people by my hand this night" (13:18). Even so, the Jewish captain, Achior, *fainted from terror* at the sight of the severed head of Holofernes, before praising her and defeating the Assyrian army (13:29). Joachim the high priest tells her "thou hast done *manfully (viriliter),* and thy heart has been strengthened, *because thou hast loved chastity,* and after thy husband hast not known any other: therefore also the hand of the Lord hath strengthened thee …" (15:11). Had she not been doing the will of the elders and God, Judith's act would have struck terror into the hearts of the Jews, as it did the Assyrians; but the threat is mitigated by her piety, and by the self-inflicted wound of the enemy's lust and pride. In the long run, God's might is enhanced by a weak woman who crosses the gender boundary to act manfully.

CHRISTIAN JUDITH Judith's purity and humility became essential to the story in Christian contexts. Judith is a case of the semantic association of *virgo* (virgin or chaste woman) who with *virtu* (strength, moral or physical) could be like a man *(vir):* Christian thinkers such as Jerome and Ambrose argued that a woman who grew in virtue could become masculine (Warner 1981: 147–154). Judith could prove her virtue by performing acts of contrition before going to seek out Holofernes, and by avoiding being sullied by him. *Virtu* gave her strength to do the deed, but the narratives often avoid her being seen as a *virago,* a violent *Mannweib* whom men might fear (Westphal 2002:114).

TENTH-CENTURY JUDITH The fragment of a tenth-century Anglo-Saxon poem – about the last quarter of the whole – begins on the fourth day that Holofernes is courting the "elf-lovely lady" Judith, who is "sagacious in spirit," by giving a wine-feast to which he summons his "mail-warriors."[8] When all are drunk, "the monster of evil" orders "the holy handmaid of Heaven," "the bracelet-adorned one, sparkling with rings," be taken to his bed. Her plan to take the life of the "lecherous creature" went into effect as she took his "keen-edged falchion…forced it from the scabbard/With her own right hand," and prayed lengthily for God's help. She "smote the heathen hound so that his head whirled rapidly/Forth on the floor." His spirit went immediately to the "dragon-hall." Her maid carried the head to Bethany in their food basket. Then there is a dramatic departure from the biblical story: Judith announced that God loves the people, and they received her with "humble obeisance." She urged her "shield-bearing comrades"

8) An Introduction and an edition from the only manuscript, London, British Library, Ms Vitellius A XV, is in Schultz 2000: 1–93 & 96–107. I use the modern English of Hall 1902: 5–17.

to attack the Assyrians in the name of God, and "warriors drew, then,/With their hands from the sheaths well-fashioned sword-blades." Thus Assyria's "pride was humbled." Judith was awarded with Holofernes's "battle-grim blade and blood-gory helmet," his ample "war-burnie" (cuirass or hauberk) that shone with gold, and all his jewelry. So in this account she is a comrade-at-arms who had led the charge, took command of the battle, and is rewarded with the *Heergewäte* of the enemy leader.

This view of Judith soon changed. The Winchester Bible gives one of its large pages to her story, or rather to the demise of Holofernes and the triumph of Achior in which she does not figure at the end (fig. 6 f 331).[9] The artist was working about 1160, only two decades after Matilda's failed invasion of England. At the top of the page Holofernes orders Achior be punished for his prophesy that the Hebrew God would prevail: he is tied to a tree (5:5–6:9). Judith's motivation is never clear, though her uncovered head and simple shift as she stands to wait on Holoferens at his table denote the virginal status of a "maid." Next, followed by her servant, Judith turns to the right with raised sword and severed head – entering the tent with her chaperone, there can be no inference of sexual encounter. In the lower register they return to the city with the head, but in the battle that immediately ensues the sword is back in its "natural" owners' hands, the male fighters who will liberate Bethany, including Achior.

GOTHIC JUDITH Subsequent re-tellings deprived Judith of agency. A German fragment of a heroic lay in rhymed couplets was edited and translated from a manuscript of about 1175–1200 (Schultz, 2000:146–155).[10] It modernizes the story: Holofernes is a heathen invader; Bethany is a fortified city *(burk);* the people are burgers; the elder is a count who tells Holofernes "We believe in Christ." Early on, the poet anticipates the end: Holofernes "was the wickedest person alive/Later he was killed by a woman, Judith" ... "he was killed by the beautiful Judith." She is referred to repeatedly as "the excellent Judith –/she who prayed fervently to God;" but her ritual cleansing is eroticized; seen as she prepared to take a bath "she was the most beautiful woman of all." There is no explanation why she and her maid Ava went out of the city; as if by chance Holofernes saw her and sent his chamberlains to carry her to his tent, and she asks that he arrange a marriage festival. "Because the woman was clever/the wine made him tired," she was able to hide his weapon as he slept, and go out to pray to

9)
The 468 leaves measure 583 x 396 mm. bound in four parts and continuously foliated (Oakeshott 1981: 17–19, 53, 144, Pls. I, 58, 62); Donovan 1993: 5–6, 17, Pl. 14).

10)
Voran, Stiftsbibliothek, MS Cod. 276.

God to for "help…to rescue the unfortunate faithful/from these heathen." God sent an angel to tell her to go into the tent with Ava to help her, and take the sword: "You will draw the sword as if in battle/and thrust boldly. You will cut Holofernes'/head from his trunk./You will leave the sated trunk lying there./Stick the head in your long sleeve/and go back/into the city. God in heaven commands you/to save the people of Israel." This text constructs Judith as an obedient servant of God, an *ancilla domini* like the Virgin Mary when she responded to the angel of the annunciation. The threat that an armed woman with a will of her own might pose, has been removed. The chaste widow who intervenes in the war-games of men reappears in some thirteenth-century narrative cycles where Judith is seen to cleanse herself of the sexual taint of her marriage: with penitential ashes in portal sculpture at Chartres, or with bathing and prayer in a stained glass window of the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris (Sauerländer 1971: Pl. 89; Jordan 1999).[11)]

A much reduced pictorial version of the story is in a bible picture-book made for the king of Navarre in the 1190's (Bucher 1970: I, 38–40). The titles follow the Vulgate closely, but since this work was probably a teaching-tool to instruct King Sancho on the right behaviors of Christian kings, it must be significant that Holofernes wears a crown. His attack on Bethany opens the cycle, and Judith humbles herself before him (fig. 7 a). On the facing page, Judith approaches Holofernes sleeping in his cups; she makes a symbolic gesture of decapitation with a long sword, (fig. 7 b). When she presents the clean-cut crowned head to the elders seated in council, she still has the sword in her right hand; her prayer to God as his *ancilla domini* is inscribed above (fig. 7 c). The abstract representational mode would allow the viewer to think of this woman as an agent of divine and

11)
Jordan notes the relevance of Judith for the diplomatic skills of the queen-mother, Blanche of Castille.







// Abbildung 7
Pamplona Bible made for king Sancho of Navarre, Judith narrative:
a) Holofernes attacks Bethany; Judith humbles herself before him, f. 143v;
b) Judith contemplates Holofernes in a drunken stupor, and cuts off his head, f. 144r;
c) Judith delivers Holofernes's head to the elders, upper half f. 144v, 1190s. Amiens, Bibliothèque municipale Ms lat. 108

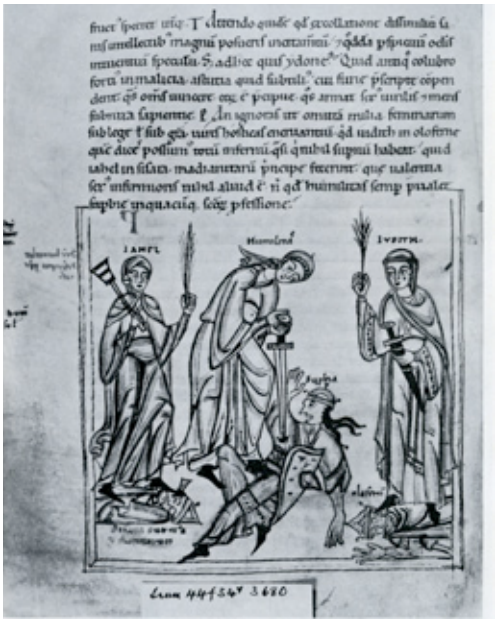
human Justice, a warning to the king not to attack Christians, just as Holofernes had been warned not to attack devout Hebrews. She bears no relevance to the military feats of Queen Uracca a hundred years earlier.

THE NEW JUDITH: HUMILITY VANQUISHING PRIDE AND FEMALE PSYCHOMACHIA Judith was re-empowered in some accounts by being transformed into a symbol of virtue defeating sin, but she is dehumanized in the process. In some of the recensions of the mid-twelfth century *Speculum Virginum,* a moralizing text written in German for nuns, the mortally wounded enemy is feminized as a woman in armor – a personification of Pride, as Judith is of Humility (fig. 8; <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=7952&CollID=20&NStart=44>).[12] Judith merely stands on the prone Holofernes, her sheathed sword held in her left hand by the blade, point down (like the judge in the Ssp, fig. 4) and a victor's palm in her right. Her elaborate head dress and bejeweled dress refer to her biblical finery. Her virtue, Humility, is more simply clothed, but wields a two-handed battle sword. Pride, also female, has only a large shield. To the left, Jael, tramples Sissera, the general fleeing from Barak, whom she killed in his tent by hammering a nail into his head (Judges 4: 17–22).[13] The artist avoids depicting three scenes of women victors in combat, and when a female Humilitas does attack with a sword, her enemy is a renegade female. Later in the book, a more ferocious enemy is supplied in the form of the devil, armed with two short swords, who attempts to block the nuns' way as they ascend the ladder of virtue toward Christ; two near the bottom repel a dragon with their lances (fig. 9). These figures embody the moral and spiritual struggle of the spirit with the flesh; though they invite the performative identification of the nuns, their abstraction does not demand of the viewer any understanding of, or desire for, real combat.

Judith also figures in another exemplary text for nuns, Herrad of Hohenberg's *Hortus Deliciarum* (fig. 10; Green, 1979b: 98–99). The original manuscript, composed between 1176 and 1197, and evidently a splendid large book, was burned in Strasbourg in 1870. Eleanor Green et al. managed to reconstruct the contents from hand copies (Green 1979a: 190). The sparse text for Judith, borrowed from the *Speculum Ecclesia,* explains: "That

12) Most recent writers agree that it was produced for or at the Cistercian abbey of St Mary, Eberbach.

13) Perhaps why the nuns gave my 5-yr-old class the assignment of illustrating this scene! It was rarely depicted in the middle ages (Escobedo 2005: 107, fig. 148).



// Abbildung 8
Speculum Virginum, Victory of Humility, stabbing Pride in the centre, flanked by Jael trampling Sisera, and Judith trampling Holofernes, 1140–45, Eberach. London, British Library Board, Ms Arundel 44, f. 34v

here a widow conquered a tyrant signifies that love of Christ conquered the devil". In a pictorial narrative that is minimally symbolic, the maid has the flowing hair of a maiden, and Judith is veiled like a widow or nun. She grasps Holofernes's hair to sever his neck with a long sword, then carries the head in her sleeve – as in the contemporary German poem. Bethany appears to the right, the enemy general's head impaled on a spear above the battlements. The narrative has been adapted to the nuns who would use the book – both old and young – but Judith's personal heroism is lost. Only the inscription prepares us for the armed victory of Humility that follows at some remove.

The theme of the combat of Virtues and Vices is developed separately in the *Hortus,* with labeled figures involved in intense combat spread over ten pages (Green 1979a: 326–335, ff. 199v-204r; Green 1979b: 190). Most of these women wear complete chain mail armor over long skirts, and helmets with nose pieces, and they carry shields. The vices attack from the left page with spears, while the virtues wield long swords. The sequence begins with Pride leading a spear attack (fig. 11a). On the facing page, her sword held upright like the sword of justice, Humility leads Faith, Hope, Caritas, Prudentia, Justice, Fortitude and Temperance, each of whom will bring their own supporters to subsequent battles (fig. 11b). As "Chief among the Virtues," Humility's sword signifies the Word of God, as in St. Paul's injunction to take up "the sword of the Spirit (which is the word of God)" (Ephesians, 6:17; Griffiths 2007:197); in the next register Humility digs a pit to tumble Pride, then severs her head. Meanwhile Idolatry has penetrated the right page, threatening Faith, who strangles her violently in the next register, with Hope slitting Dispair's throat as a pendant to the right. Most Vices have longer swirling skirts under their hauberks, but the worst, as here, are dressed in sumptuous female fashion. In this discourse nuns become manly because they are morally strong. In real life, many of Herrad's nuns must have come from knightly households, where they could be deprived of an inheritance because of sexual identity. But were there (still) any fighting women in twelfth-century Europe?



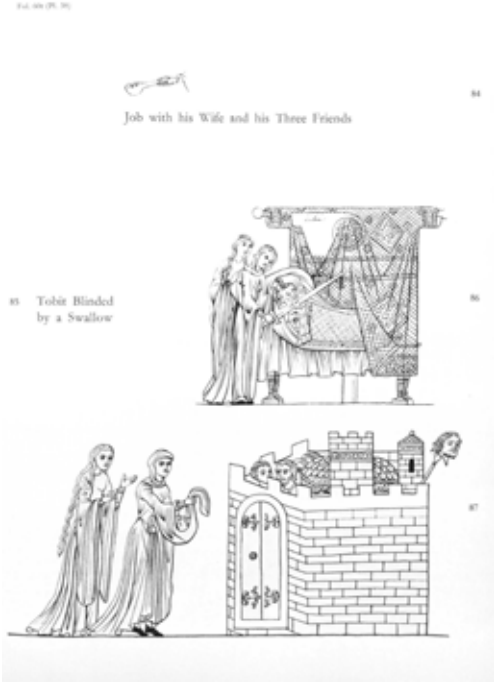
// Abbildung 9
Speculum Virginum, Ladder of Virtue, with nuns climbing towards Christ, a devil with swords, and a dragon below,1140–45, Eberach. London, British Library Board Ms Arundel 44, f. 93v

One of the pictures cut out of a later recension of the *Speculum Virginum* illustrates the part of the text where Judith appears in the Arundel manuscript, with a Psychomachia (Härtel 1999:

104–105) http://www.manuscripta-mediaevalia.de/hs/katalogseiten/HSK0518_b105_jpg.htm. This time two pairs of almost equally matched warriors are locked in a violent duel (fig. 12). Completely clothed in hauberks, surcoats and helms, there is no visible sign that they might be female personifications of virtues and vices, but female fighters are praised in the text on the verso, including the Amazon queens Marpesia and Lampeto (from part 4: Mews 2001: 24–5). The fighting figures – as opposed to the nuns in the *Hortus Deliciarum* – are a reminder that with the new helmets women could pass unobserved in the battle field, yet thereby lose their identity.

FEARS AND FANTASIES: VIRAGOS AND PHALLIC WOMEN

As I reviewed the cases for and against the early women who are celebrated as fighters in scholarly or popular literature I became acutely aware of the scarcity of "evidence" and the abundant politics of interpretation. Assessments have been made against the shifting ground of the treatment of women in uniform from the Soviet Revolution through the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. The context in the US includes a debate about the admissibility of women to the battlefield as combatants, the sexual harassment of women service members, the retroactive recognition of previous female contributions, and whether or not a woman who lost her legs in combat in Iraq is a war hero. One popular book "restores women's deeds in wartime to their rightful place of honour and prominence" (Cross 2011; Miles 2008).[14] Yet fighting women once invoked – perhaps still do – Communism; they are also a threat to male phallic power. Soviet "rifle women" were treated brutally in the battle field by German fighting men, and a Polish cartoon from the end of World War I may go to the crux of the matter; gynophobia has seldom been so vividly depicted (fig. 13). Klaus Theweleit accounts for atrocities against women by interweaving field reports, fiction and psychoanalysis (Theweleit 1993: 171–204). Mary Jacobus has used the Judith legend and its representations to overturn Freud's notions of female envy and anger (Jacobus 1986: 110–136): A woman who seizes a phallic symbol as powerful as the sword (or rifle) risks male envy and anger; she is a castrating woman. Margarita Stocker has traced the transformation of Judith in modern European culture – after 1500 – into a figure of sexual dominance



// Abbildung 10
Hortus Deliciarum composed by Herad of Hohenberg, Judith narrative, 1176-97, copy by $$ 18.., Strasbourg, Oeuvre Notre-Dame 12/24 & 12/25

14) Cross 2011: dust-jacket. Among those celebrated is Tammy Duckworth who lost her legs while flying a helicopter in Iraq, and in 2008 lost an election in Illinois accused of lack of heroism, but she is going to the US Congress in 2013. Miles 2008 presents a denser set of biographies.

15) De Beaumont, 1900; first published in French in 1881, the likely date of Albert Bessé's engraving. The English version of 1930 was "privately issued for subscribers only" by the notorious Panerge Press in London.

16) Wonder Woman appeared first in Action Comics in May 1943 and then in Detective Comics (DC): <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Superwoman>. She is on the 40th anniversary poster for Ms. Magazine: <http://store.feminist.org/posterspecial.aspx>.

that terrifies and seduces (Stocker 1999). Traditional swordsmen preferred to keep women at play, as in this titillating fin-de-siècle book-cover (fig. 14).[15]

In the struggle for women's rights, old mythologies have been revived and new ones created. The invention of the comic strip Superwoman dates from World War II and she lives on in many guises as friend or foe of Superman, in comic strips, on YouTube, and in animated films in the Wonder Woman series about the Amazons (Early 2003).[16] From Superwoman's many images online I selected a silver figurine, like an action figure cult statue, that has some vestiges of "medieval" armor but with enhanced breast plates. Like many of her sisters, she is not armed, thus avoiding the danger of appropriating a male weapon, and she does not challenge the viewer with her gaze (fig. 15). Her aggression is veiled, in contrast to the Polish rifle woman's.

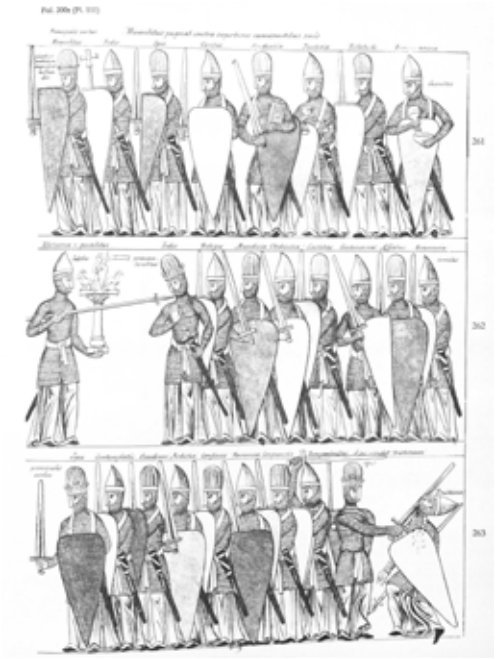
BACK TO TACITUS – "BOADICEA" AND ALL THAT

The Roman accounts of northern women, and their modern reception, are an instructive place to continue this historiographical enquiry. Tacitus is often cited for his statement that taking hostage "girls of noble family" among the Germani could effectively secure a hold on a state (Tacitus 2009: 38–39, *Germania* 8); I cite above the gift of arms such a girl would receive on marriage. He also said that the peoples of Britain "made no distinction of sex in the appointment of leaders." He gives two accounts of the rebellion of the Iceni, in south-eastern Britain that was led by Queen Boudicca in about 60AD, and he had a possible eye-witness in his father-in-law Agricola (Tacitus 2009: xxi, 11–12, *Agricola* 15–16).[17] Yet the translators constantly express doubts about his observations, regarding his account as distorted in the direction of idealizing the northerners at the expense of Romans (Tacitus 2009: xliii and many footnotes).

The Roman sources for Boudicca's rebellion are carefully presented and weighed by Richard Hunt, with an eye for the topoi of Roman accounts of battles, but he is selectively credulous. The accounts do not vary on the subject of the British Gallic leaders using horse-drawn wagons in battle, from which they could hurl javelins before dismounting for hand-to-hand combat,

17) The other account is in his Annals of Imperial Rome (Hunt 2003: 4, 132).





// Abbildung 11
Hortus Deliciarum, Battles of Virtues and Vices, reconstruction:
a) f. 199v;
b) 200r, before 1197

from which I conclude that Boudicca must have done the same. Hunt speculates that she was Scots, based on Tacitus's description of those northern people, and Dio Cassius's description of Boudicca as an unusually tall woman with a fierce glance and harsh voice, her reddish hair falling about her (Hunt 2003: 74, 113–115). He cites Tacitus's account of the Iceni king's attempt to save the realm from attack by naming the Roman emperor as "co-heir with his own two daughters;" instead "Kingdom and household were plundered like prizes of war, the one by Roman officers, the other by Roman slaves. As a beginning, his widow Boudicca was flogged and their daughters raped. The Icenian chiefs were deprived of their hereditary estates as if the Romans had been given the whole country. The king's own relatives were treated like slaves." Hunt speculates that strategic concerns drove the Romans to these actions, but I suggest they were unable to deal with, and grossly underestimated, women in power. Tacitus gives reason enough for a deeply humiliated and injured mother to become an avenging widow.



// Abbildung 12
Speculum Virginum fragment, Battle of Virtues and Vices, late 12th century, middle Rhenish. Hannover, Kestner-Museum, Nr. 3984.

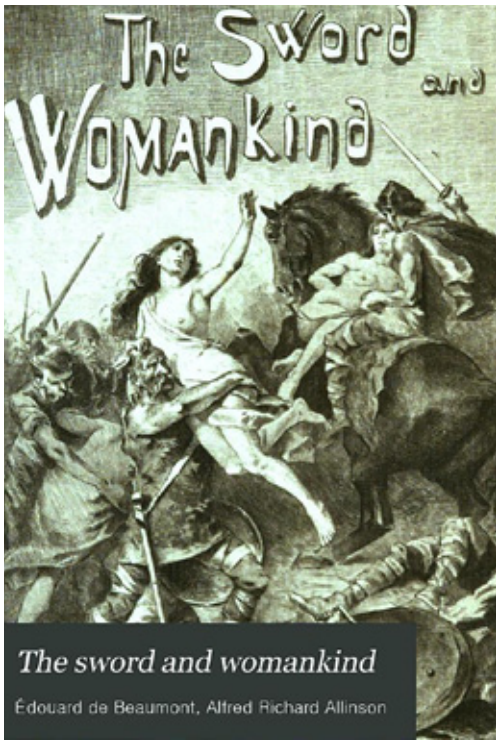
In modern times, Boudicca has channeled nationalist, feminist and anti-colonial energies, and there are inevitable distortions. When I first encountered her, I was delighted by the havoc she had wrought in Verulamium (St. Alban's). In 1956 I was digging under the direction of Sheppard Frere and Sir Mortimer Wheeler when we found "Baudicea's burning layer" (Fraser 1989: 91–92). As a child of World War II I loathed all invaders, and this resonated for me with bombing back the Nazis. I was not yet (consciously) a feminist, nor did I learn then about the brutal treatment of Boudicca and her daughters, but I had already set the freeing of colonized nations as a political goal. Ironically, constructing Queen Boudicca as a national heroine during the reign of Queen Victoria had been part of a colonizing agenda, confirmed by the inscription on the plinth of a bronze monument to the queen and her daughters: "Regions Caesar never knewortherners at the expense of/Thy Posterity shall sway;" the lines are attributed to William Cowper (Fraser 1989: facing 96). In the 1850s the empress's consort Prince Albert planned for Thomas Thornycroft's group "Boadicea and her Daughters" to be place in London near the Houses of Parliament; installed in 1902, it was there to ward off invaders in the wars with Germany



// Abbildung 13
Polish drawing of German soldiers fleeing from a female combatant in WWI, c. 1919

– and inspire Brits to fight (fig. 16).[18] Yet some viewers who know Tacitus's account of beating and rapingmay see this voluptuous woman and her naked daughters as a sado-erotic spectacle. Many contemporary renderings of Boudicca have to compete with Pat Kochakji's supremacist Gothic apparition that illustrates yet another publication on the women warriors theme (fig. 17; Apeles 2003: 97).

18) Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27369>.



// Abbildung 14
Albert Bessé, colored engraving, ca. 1881. Sword and Womankind, by Edouard de Beaumont, book cover, (1900 edition)

FAST FORWARD: ANGLO-SAXONS, NORMANS, CRUSADERS, NIBELUNGS Double reception history – weighing immediate medieval reception and modern constructions and interpretations – is needed in every case study. Among early medieval women who are serious candidates for being present and armed on the battlefield is the Anglo-Saxon widow Aethelflaed, eldest child of Alfred the Great of Wessex. In the 880s she married Aethelred, ruler of Mercia, bordering Welsh lands. Among female rulers of Mercia who preceeded her was Cynethryth who minted coins with her own likeness (Cross 2011:60). Historians agree that Aethelflaed had a major strategic role in building up forts, collaborating with her younger brother Edward the Elder who ruled Wessex, to the south east. She ruled as a widow from 911 to 918, and campaigned with Edward against Scandinavian invaders, having herself negotiated alliances with the Scots, and the Danes in York. Anne Crawford gives a factual account of her, and plausibly surmises that the Anglo-Saxon *Judith* poem celebrates her deeds (Crawford 1983:8–9). If so, Aethelflaed was regarded as a sagacious comrade of the military and capable of wielding a sword; and even if she did not join the battle whose conditions she had helped control, she was worthy of the victor's spoils because of her good council. Jean Traux cites the laudatory accounts by later Anglo-Norman chroniclers (Traux 1999:118): About 1125–35 Henry of Huntingdon wrote a eulogy to mark the end of his life of Aethelflaed in which, having mistaken her for her husband's daughter, he calls her a virgin who struck terror into men, deserving of the title of man having overcome nature, a king not a queen, more successful in conquests than Caesar, a *virgo virago:* O Elfleda potens, O terror virgo virorum,/Victrix naturae, nomine digna viri./Te, quo splendidior fieres, natura puellam,/Te probitas fecit nomen habere viri.



// Abbildung 15
3D silver superwoman. http://clipartof.com/info/eula-commercial.

/Te mutare decet, sed solam, nomina sexus,/Tu regina potens, rexque trophaea parans./Jam nec Caesarei tantum meruere triumphi, Caesare splendidior, virgo virago, vale (Henry 1879:158). Yet another historian writing c. 1125, William of Malmesbury, mentions only that Edward the Elder of Wessex drove out the Danes and liberated the English, even though he later recalls Aethelflaed as having "terrified foreigners" (William of Malmesbury 1840 I: 137, 196).



// Abbildung 16
Thomas Thornycroft, Boudicca in her chariot with her daughters, designed 1850s, installed 1902, bronze sculpture. London Westminster Bridge

Like Boudicca, Aethelflaed was a vector for Victorian ideology: a commemorative statue in Tamworth shows her in regal attire, protecting a small boy under her cloak, and holding an unsheathed sword that rests on its point – as if saving the kingdom for her brother's son (Cross2011:61). Yet ethnic and gender bias may have caused at least one modern scholar to set aside details of a famous defeat of the "Pagans" in a contemporary Irish account as "obviously legendary accretions" (Wainwright 1974:319). Frederic Wainwright notes that Aethelflaed is not given an important place in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* since its authors privilege Wessex and would want to keep her out of sight and memory (ibid. 305–306). Yet he is skeptical of the details in a source known as the *Three Fragments* that was written by the Welsh and Scots [known as Irish], with whom she formed an alliance. Legendary accretions were hard for me to find in this account in Duald Mac Firbis's stilted translation from the Gaelic (Mac Firbis1860, 246–247):



// Abbildung 17
Pat Kochakji, Boudicca with a sword, c. 2003. Apeles, Teena. Women warriors Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2003, 97

When Otter, the most influential Iarl that was in the battle, saw that his people were slaughtered by the Saxons, he fled to the dense woods which were in his neighbourhood, carrying with him the survivors of his people. Great parties of Saxons followed in pursuit of them, and they encompassed the wood round about. The Queen ordered them to cut all the wood down with their swords and axes. And they did so accordingly. They first cut down the wood, and [afterwards] killed the Pagans who were in the wood. In this manner did the Queen kill all the Pagans, so that her fame spread abroad in every direction.

Cutting down a wood may be hyperbole, but the account puts Aethelflaed on the battlefield where she could rally and direct her troops, so that her order to fell sacred trees clinched the victory. Wainwright also cites the *Annals of Ulster* that describes her

as *famiosissima regina Saxonum* but equivocates that "the term queen has little meaning in these sources" even if she "was regarded as holding a position of power and dignity" (ibid. 319–320); but if the Latin translation rex/regina is an approximation, we could say female ruler. Wainwright masquerades as the proper skeptical historian, which allows him to doubt the non-Saxon sources when a woman is credited with engaging a battle, but take it in his stride to talk of Edward waging one.

To assess claims and counter claims about combatants in the twelfth century, I refer to the pioneering work of Megan McLaughlin (1990), and the cautious assessments of Jean Traux (1999), Michael R. Evans (2001) and Keren Caspi-Reisfeld (2001), all of whom have a discerning eye for women in armor. Caspi-Reisfeld cites several contemporary references to European women who participated in combat during the crusades, reporting that a female skeleton in scale armor was found in Caesarea (Caspi-Reisfeld: 95–96, 99–102, 107 n. 51). She concludes that female participation was dictated by urgent need, but declined during the thirteenth century.

McLaughlin noted records of women who wore armor or were referred to as a miles or bellatrix, (ibid.: 198–99). She discerned a decreasing acceptance of the role of fighting women by 1200, and an increasing tendency to regard it as virile or unnatural, noting a coincidence with the general decline in the standing of women in Europe (ibid.: 194–95, 200, 208 n.32). This trend is in agreement with the attitudes I have found toward Judith. Accounts discern between widows saving their son's inheritance and those acting for themselves. As McLaughlin says: "Some of these women even led forces against their own male relatives [... A] striking case is that of the widow of Arnoul II of Guines, who made war on her son for two years, from 1220–1222, over control of her widow's portion" (ibid.: 199). Widows intent upon disrupting the new norm of agnatic inheritance may have been a factor in Eike's insistence that they not take over their husband's armor.

Mindful of the ideologies that shape texts, Traux fears that feminists seek recognition for women's roles in present-day combat by projecting their desires onto the past. He regards praise of women riding armed with their troops with skepticism because no details are offered – as when William of Malmesbury described Matilda of Tuscany as "a woman, who, forgetful of her sex, and comparable to the ancient Amazons, used to lead forth her hardy troops to battle" (Traux: 117). Yet his excerpted description

of Isabel of Conches in 1090 by Oderic Vitalis, whom he says has "gleefully embroidered" it (ibid.: 117–118), is arbitrarily shorter than McLaughlan's (203–204) and Evans's (2002: 53–54); I place the part Traux leaves out in parentheses: "(Isabel was generous, daring and gay, and therefore lovable and estimable to those around her. In war, she rode armed as a knight among the knights, and) she showed no less courage among the knights in hauberks and sergeants-at-arms than did the maid Camilla, the pride of Italy, among the troops of Turnus. She deserved comparison with Lampeto and Marpesia, Hippolyta and Penthesilea and the other warlike Amazon queens …." More significant than engaging in a she-did-she-didn't dispute is consideration of the Anglo-Norman chroniclers' habit of praising some armed women – as in Henry of Huntingdon's eulogy of Aethelflaed. And the Amazon queens, who figure as virtuous warriors in the *Speculum Virginum,* were not yet reviled for supposedly killing their sons (Evans 2001: 49–50). Evans notes that Oderic portrayed Isabel's conflict with Helwise, Countess of Evreux, as a "malignant rivalry of two proud women;" though taking Isabel's side, Oderic regrets that "the hearts of brave men were moved to anger," as in the opening of the *Nibelungenlied,* where Kremhild is introduced as one "who came to be a beautiful woman, causing many knights to lose their lives" thus predicting the "great slaughter" when as a widow she "avenged her mortal wrongs on her nearest kinsmen;" and when she quarreled with Brunhild "many good warriors had to pay for it later" (Hatto 1969: 17, 258, 114).

Eulogizing some women in arms while reviling or deriding others exercises a form of control over female power that may be feared as unnatural, or as an enemy weapon. In Crusader discourse, Muslim accounts denigrate female crusaders as prostitutes while Christian accounts either ignore or praise them (Evans 2001: 45–49, 53–56). Another incident in Norman history sheds light on conflicting attitudes toward women fighters. Georges Duby noted how the courageous women combatants *(pugnatrices)* of Coutances, who defended the city against the English according to the account of their fellow Norman, William of Jumièges, were transformed into "savages," "disheveled" like "delinquent women" – that is like prostitutes – by the poets who wrote for Henry Plantagenet (Duby 1995: 73–74, citing *Le Roman de Reu* v.1175). Yet instead of regarding this as political rhetoric, Duby generalizes that even "women who took up arms in defense of the rights of their husbands or sons" acted in a way that "seemed abnormal,

even scandalous." He also cites the treatment of Richilde, countess of Hainaut, who engaged her male rivals in battle at Cassel in 1071; the chronicles excoriate her as a bad mother, untrue to her vow of chastity, quarrelsome, cruel and sly as wife and ruler, and accused of trying to use witchcraft in the battle (ibid. 75–77). For Duby there is a single explanation: "a woman could not take sword in hand [...] Normally the woman did not brandish the sword [...] *Potestas,* the power to command and to punish, the duty of preserving peace and justice, was exercised by the sword such as one solemnly entrusted to the lord's son when he came to power and held unsheathed before him when he fulfilled his function." The symbolic power Duby ascribes to the sword as concrete object anticipates Eike's laws of inheritance by nearly a century. Yet the derogatory texts did the ideological work of keeping swords from women. And at a deeper level, language had identified the penis as a sword: It still has a sheath in English, but when the protagonist in the old Norse *Grettir's Saga* answers to a woman's amazement that his genitalia are so small, he refers to his penis as a "hair-girt sword" (Murray 1996:137). In Latin various weapons, including the sword, were frequent synonyms for male genitalia, and a common word for its sheath was vagina (Adams 1982: 20, 115). Thus the sword is inseparable from phallic power, and a woman with a sword is either manly or a freak.

My aim has been to complicate the factual question of how often women wielded arms in Europe from Roman times through the high Middle Ages. If the texts and pictures cannot inform us of actual patterns of behavior, they can give an indication of traditional and changing attitudes and the discourses that shaped them. Those attitudeswere not binary: they speak to an underlying need to fantasize, a need that grows out of both desire and fear, even a desire for fear. The conflict between *virgo* and *virago* might be resolved in poems and allegorical paintings, but seldom in the lives of real women as told by their contemporaries. Even in the *Nibelungenlied,* Brunhild fails. Hagen calls her a Devil's woman when she appears with magnificent armor, shield and spear; she had banned swords from the castle, but she was overcome by magic (Siegfried's invisible cape); she hung her husband up by his heels on their wedding night to preserve her virginity, but when she was duped and raped she lost her power and soon faded from the narrative (Hatto, 1969: 62–68, 87–89; Nelson 1992). The more "feminine" Kremhild assumed Brunhild's aggression when she became a widow, destroying her own people in battle.[19)]

Fear associated with a subjugation fantasy, asembodied in the Nibelungenlied, may motivate calling women fighters prostitutes, or raping them on the battlefield. Sarah Westphal analyses the figure of Brunhild as *virago* and began by invoking the fear of women's anger that is seen in the treatment of Calefurniain the *Sachsenspiegel,* who "misbehaved before the emperor in a fit of rage because her demands could not proceed without a spokesman"(Dobozy: 112, SspII:63).Her egregious misbehavior is described in a related law book and illustrated in the Sachsenspiegel manuscripts as waving her *"hindeschame"* (rear pudenda) at Charlemagne; the punishment is that women can never again plead in court without a guardian (Westphal: 105–106; Caviness & Nelson 2003: 56–59, fig. 5). Her "mooning" might be compared to the rifle woman in the Polish cartoon, whose vagina terrifies the German soldiers (fig. 13).Narratives like Judith's and the *Nibelungenlied* were ideological tools to raise the alarm about phallic women. The fear of women's violence – of their weakness in the face of their own rage – is exploited in the *Psychomachia,* the fourth century poem that lies behindthe images in the *Hortus Deliciarum* and the *Speculum Virginum* (figs. 9, 11–13). S. Georgia Nugent has argued that the brutality exhibited by the Virtues as they decapitated the Vices was viewed as being of a peculiarly female kind, since "women's destructive instincts are ungovernable" and the ultimate message is that "the bodies of the women are both explicitly sexualized, and that sexuality is – in violent and bloody terms – repudiated" (Nugent 2000: 21, 25). Stories of Amazons and Valkeries, of Boudicca and Aethelflaed, of Brunhild and Kremhild, of Richilde of Hainaut and the *pugnatrices* of Coutances, even of Judith, constantly reenacted this transformation of *virgo* into *virago,* and sent a shiver through the spines of fighting men. By the thirteenth century a scholar well versed in legal matters was intent upon curbing the anger of women, in the name of keeping order in the court, by insisting that the power of the sword be passed peacefully from one patriarch to the next.

19) On the historical context and audience, and the role of fantasy: Schäufele 1979.

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