Introduction
Women's Genealogies

In medieval Europe, genealogical narratives were central to how political legitimacy and power were created, justified, and contested. Medieval writers and illustrators imaginatively represented versions of lineage and legacy that suited their readers and patrons, using the past to justify claims to the present and future.[1] Most of these surviving narratives, whether presented visually in genealogical diagrams or textually in chronicles, hagiographies, or romances, give particular attention to men. However, historically, medieval inheritance and succession did not occur exclusively down agnatic lines;[2] women's lineages and legacies formed a crucial and normal part of how power, lands, and titles were transmitted.[3] Given the influence elite women had over literary and artistic production, it seems safe to assume that their interests in succession, lineage, and claims to history are also represented in medieval literary and visual sources. This book argues that women-oriented genealogies are prevalent in a wide variety of literary genres and textual objects, but locating them and understanding their narratives and purpose requires a broader, more nuanced view of genealogy than paternal, or even maternal, lineage alone. If patrilineage remained the central genealogical narrative in medieval Europe, it was constantly interwoven with and disrupted by women-oriented genealogies.

I make a distinction between "women-oriented" genealogies, which I discuss below, and women simply appearing in genealogies in part because finding female characters in visual and textual genealogies is not difficult in itself. Female characters are pervasive in founding myths, genealogical diagrams, chronicles, and romances and hagiographies concerned with succession and inheritance.[4] London, British Library, Royal MS 20.A.ii, for example – an early fourteenth-century codex of historiographical and romance texts – contains illustrations of English kings followed by interlocking rings showing the kings' offspring, male and female. Key descendants of the kings' daughters and sons are also depicted

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with ribbons attaching them to their parent, with "matrem" or "patrem" indicating a matrilineal or patrilineal relation. In London, British Library, Egerton MS 1500 – an Occitan manuscript presenting European, African, and Asian ruling lines – maternal ties pervade the familial ties surrounding Christ. The manuscript includes not only a detailed illustration of the Holy Kinship, with the matriarch Saint Anne, mother to the three Marys, at its center, but also, and unusually, a (complicated) matrilineage of Joseph.

In English chronicles, women ancestors who give their names to the land and people similarly abound. In the last paragraph of Geoffrey of Monmouth's twelfth-century *Historia regum Britanniae*, following the Saxon conquest of Britain, "Queen Galaes" is described as a possible name-giver to the Welsh: "Barbarie etiam irrepente, iam non uocabantur Britones sed Gualenses, uocabulum siue a Gualone duce eorum siue a Galaes regina siue a barbarie trahentes" (As their culture ebbed, they were no longer called Britons, but Welsh, a name which owes its origin to their leader Gualo, or to queen Galaes or to their decline).[5] From the fourteenth century, versions of the *Brut* narrative, a popular history of England based on Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*, often open with the story of Albina and her sisters, a foundation myth that precedes the story of the Trojan Brutus's arrival in Britain, with which the *Historia* starts.[6] These Greek (or Syrian in later versions) princesses claim the uninhabited island of Britain, led by the eldest sister, Albina, who names it Albion, and populate it with giants.[7] In the late medieval *Anonymous Short English Metrical Chronicle*, the Spanish or Saxon (depending on the version) princess Inge wins "Ingelond" from the Britons, breaking from the common story of the British king's fall to the Saxon Hengist and his daughter Ronwenna.[8] In the *Boke of Brut (Castleford's Chronicle)*, also written in the fourteenth century, the author states that while some people say the "Englisse" first gained their name from King Alle, others say they were named "Anglais" after "Quene Anglas."[9] As these examples suggest, women ancestors appear frequently in genealogical writing for various purposes; Albina and Inge underscore alternative narratives to established male-dominated histories, while Galaes and Anglas highlight the possibility of multiple histories, where women-led genealogies run in parallel with male ones.

The aim of this book, therefore, is not so much to draw attention to women figures in genealogies (though it does this too) as to examine common characteristics of women-oriented genealogies as well as textual and codicological areas in which these narratives are frequently asserted

and negotiated. By "women-oriented" or "women's" genealogies, I mean narratives about (and sometimes explicitly for) women that assert claims to power that cross generations. These narratives may be the focus of a text or codicological space (as in lives of female saints), or they may be incorporated into texts that otherwise revolve mainly around men or patrilineal structures (as in genealogical rolls of royal lines). This definition of "women-oriented genealogies" is deliberately broad; it means these narratives can encompass any account of a woman's experience that represents procreation, succession, inheritance, legacy, or descent *provided that* the account shows some investment in how women shape or lay claim to that experience. A women-oriented genealogy makes women active participants in the purpose and structure of a cross-generational narrative, showing how they create, transmit, and receive power (often political) either within the text's fictional world or in real-life contexts.

In considering the interests and experiences of women, I understand "woman" to be a socially constructed rather than biological category that relates to the expectations placed on and the ambitions of women in medieval England. A limitation of this book is that nearly all the women considered are from elite classes – the classes most involved in historical and genealogical writing and memory in the high and late medieval periods. However, Bronach Kane's recent attention to the use of non-elite women's oral and written genealogies in medieval church court records demonstrates the importance of women's descent and involvement in ancestral memory across social classes.[10]

To identify and analyze these genealogical narratives, I focus less on a notion of biological bloodlines, particularly patriarchal ones that position women as passive carriers of men's seed, than on the textuality that underpins medieval genealogies. Within women-oriented (and perhaps most) genealogies, textual objects and processes, including patronage, gifting, reception, and transmission, are frequently described alongside human kinships, such as matrilineage. Historically, medieval women were active participants in and contributors to literary culture. Descriptions of their literary activities within genealogical narratives open up roles for women as originators, recipients, and active mediators that extend beyond and reimagine the limited genealogical positions typically afforded to women as biological mothers and wives. Though this study focuses on women, I hope to suggest ways of identifying other underrecognized medieval genealogies by drawing attention to genealogical forms beyond patrilineage and to genealogy's close association with the physical nature of textuality.[11]

This book offers the first extended study of women's genealogies in English medieval literature from the early twelfth to late fourteenth centuries, with a focus on the high medieval period – the period in which notions of lineage and legacy start to be widely represented in medieval sources.[12] It considers women-oriented genealogies in romances, chronicles, hagiographies, and genealogical rolls in the major recorded languages of medieval England (French, Latin, and English) to demonstrate the many ways writers and illustrators manifested these notions. While most of the examined narratives were written in England, the mobile manuscripts, patrons, and protagonists associated with them forge relations with Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Hungary, Francia, and Provence, among other places. Codices, images, relics, and landscapes – surfaces that can be inscribed with and carry stories – aid not only in transmitting genealogical narratives but also in constructing them. Hence, this study considers the copying, compilation, and *mise-en-page* of manuscripts containing genealogies, as well as the manuscripts' trajectories of patronage, ownership, and manipulation. I use the term genealogical "narrative" to encompass these material and visual features that, along with the text, typically comprise genealogies.

Defining Genealogy

A brief survey of medieval uses of the term "genealogy" makes clear that medieval writers considered genealogy to be much more expansive than male, biological, or agnatic succession and a lineal, singular sense of the past.[13] The *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* offers a broad range of translations for *genealogia*, including "ancestry," "offspring," "kin," and "nation."[14] The term was often used in relation to women; Aelred of Rievaulx's twelfth-century *De Genealogia regum Anglorum* traces Henry FitzEmpress's lineage through the blood, prestige, and spirituality of his mother, Empress Matilda, grandmother Edith/Matilda, and great-grandmother Margaret.[15] A caption in the fourteenth-century Queen Mary Psalter (London, British Library, Royal MS 2.B.vii, fol. 12v) states that "la genealogye comence" (the genealogy starts) in reference to the biblical scenes above and below: The upper image depicts Isaac and Rebecca meeting, while the lower image shows Rebecca lying half-naked in bed with her infant twins, Jacob and Esau, after giving birth, with stronger visual emphasis placed on Rebecca than on Isaac.[16] For this illustrator, "genealogye" seems to have its origins in the couple's intimacy and the mother's labor, rather than in a patriarch. Further afield, an image

caption in the early fourteenth-century Occitan *Breviari d'amor* (London, British Library, Royal MS 19.C.i, fol. 96r) mentions Abraham's "semensa" (seed), but the image itself shows a web-like genealogical map of the Holy Kinship.[17] Abraham's "semensa" – presumably the patriarchal line of Abraham's male descendants from Isaac to Jesus – is replaced by the female-dominated Holy Kinship, an ancestry of Christ and his kin through the matriarch Saint Anne and her daughters, the three Marys. The slight contradiction between the caption and the image on this page of the *Breviari* suggests that genealogy does not have to be a singular, cohesive narrative; rather, it can be *both* a patriline, as Abraham's "semensa" is typically depicted, and a web-like matriarchy, as in the image, with the two forms interacting in sometimes complementary, sometimes confusing ways on the same page.

To remain open to various genealogical forms, this book takes a similarly wide, flexible, and sometimes contradictory view of genealogy. I understand genealogy to be a textual or visual narrative whose purpose is to describe how past characters justify, curate, or contest an individual's or family's claims to present and future power. It is, therefore, a narrative about past characters whose purpose is rooted in present political interests and hopes for the future. The narratives I examine are certainly not limited to biological, sexual, or marital kinships, but they are often underpinned by, or sometimes formed in resistance to, the idea of them. What remains key in all the narratives is embodied proof of a link between the past and present – or at least a fiction or representation of such proof. In patrilineal narratives, this proof traditionally takes the form of a male heir or land bequeathed and inherited. While heirs and land similarly appear in women-oriented genealogies, women also construct matrilineal narratives through other objects, such as books, letters, and landmarks. Both sexual procreation and textual production promise to communicate physical evidence – whether through a baby, a book, or another object – of identity and power beyond a human lifetime, which is a central aim of genealogy.

Particularly because this is primarily a literary study, I work from the premise that genealogy is inseparable from and does not preexist its representation; that is, the creation of representations of genealogy (in stories, diagrams, images, and so forth) *is* the creation, or re-creation, of genealogy. Scholars across disciplines have recognized that even the most "historically accurate" genealogies depend to some degree on myth, symbolism, and strategic decisions on the part of their makers.[18] The notion of a certain identity continuing through time must always be a construction, regardless of how much medieval writers and illustrators try to assert the

biological "naturalness" of a bloodline. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity is useful for chaffing at the pretensions of naturalness in medieval (or any other) genealogies. Rather than being fixed in and assured by biology, gender is, Butler argues, created through performance, which typically attempts to persuade viewers that biology defines gender; this show of "natural" biological gender must be repeatedly performed to remain convincing.[19] The very fact that genealogical narratives are so widespread in medieval sources indicates that there is no single biologically defined narrative and that, like gender, genealogy must be constructed and continually reperformed. Because all genealogies rely on decisions by their makers and patrons, they are all constructed using linguistic and symbolic devices and undergirded by particular political ideologies. Therefore, in this book, the terms "genealogy," "genealogical narrative," and "representation of genealogy" are used interchangeably.

The flexibility of the term "genealogy" in medieval sources and as used in this book reflects how inheritance, succession, and bequest historically occurred in medieval England. Despite the preference for patrilineage in many legal and literary texts, particularly from the twelfth century onward, historians have established that landed endowments continued to be distributed through both male and female lines.[20] In practice, as Pauline Stafford notes, inheritance and bequest took diverse forms, with people "mobilis[ing] different family links in different situations."[21] Britain itself inherited various systems of inheritance and kinship. The Saxons, like many Germanic peoples, placed a strong emphasis on clan systems, although linear royal genealogical records also exist from at least the eighth century.[22] While the Franks stressed lineage, the Normans – England's next conquerors – drew on an older system of "linkage," in which marriages were crucial.[23] In high and late medieval England, lineal claims by and through women prompted some of the region's most extended and violent conflicts, including Empress Matilda's attempt to accede to the English throne through her father, Henry I, and Edward III's presumed right to the French throne through his mother, Isabella.

Despite the flexibility of succession and inheritance in practice, the central ideal of patrilineage was relatively rigid. As a point of comparison when considering a range of genealogical forms, it is useful to identify key characteristics of patrilineage, which is the most common and easily recognizable form of medieval genealogy – and is often mistaken as being the only one. Patrilineal, or agnatic, narratives tend to privilege the story of a fixed geography, such as a castle or realm, passed consistently from male generation to male generation, preferably from father to eldest son.

Typically, this inheritance is accompanied by the transmission of a name and title. Such narratives revolve around ownership, geographical fixedness, and temporal steadiness.[24] Increasingly, from the twelfth century, this narrative was recorded in chronicles.[25] Francis Ingledew succinctly characterizes the relationship between time, space, and writing in this period: "The possession of territory and power came to correlate distinctively with ownership of time; time came to constitute space – family and national land – as home, an inalienable and permanent private and public territory. And writing enforced the new dispensation."[26] This "ownership of time," in which lies a fundamental appeal of genealogy, aligns with Elizabeth Freeman's notion of "chrononormativity," which she describes as "forms of temporal experience that seem natural to those whom they privilege."[27] In privileging a narrative in which history and even time are characterized by power passed directly from father to son, patrilineage suppresses women by ignoring the different experiences of time and space that their lives often involved, as discussed further below and expanded on throughout this book.

Michel Foucault's notion of genealogy is helpful for imagining relationships that do not extend in simple, linear ways between the past and present. For him, genealogy is a diffusive history of "disparity" that "opposes itself to the search for 'origins.'"[28] Descent, which he discusses as an aspect of genealogy, is not a set of "exclusive generic characteristics" but "the subtle, singular, and subindividual marks that might possibly intersect in them to form a network that is difficult to unravel."[29] Gabrielle Spiegel has argued that Foucault's notion of descent does not correspond with the medieval sense of genealogy because it opposes (what she understands as) the medieval genealogical ideals of unity, spirituality, and origins. Spiegel summarizes Foucault's notion as follows: "It disturbs what was previously considered immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself."[30] This notion of genealogy may not describe an ideal patrilineage, but it is a useful lens through which to identify medieval genealogical forms that break with this dominant pattern. Repeatedly, the genealogies examined in the following chapters enact what Spiegel describes: They privilege mobility (for marriage, to escape marriage, in exile, to establish or tour religious communities), acknowledge fragmentation (breaks in or uneven succession, leaving homelands, the violence of childbearing), and accept the heterogeneity of different cultures and languages. The following sections explore three aspects of form and construction useful for identifying and understanding women-

oriented genealogies and in which these genealogical narratives fre-
quently differ from patrilineage.

Genealogies through Textual Practices and Objects

To counteract the patrilineal tinge of human descent and succession, in
women's genealogies, these notions are often reshaped through textual
objects, including books, letters, and other inscribable surfaces, and their
associated practices of patronage, writing, translation, and transmission.
While represented verbally or visually in the narrative itself, these objects
and processes often also gesture toward real-world equivalents, such as a
prologue that describes how the book (originally) containing the same
prologue came into being. This position between the material world and
imaginative construction makes *represented* textual objects particularly
effective genealogical tropes in women-oriented narratives.

A close relationship between language and lineage would have been
familiar to medieval writers and readers from biblical history. In Genesis,
for example, Adam gives names to every object of creation before engen-
dering the human race.[31] In *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine argues that the
propagation, dispersion, and corruption of language following God's curse
on Babel parallel the propagation, dispersion, and corruption of men
following the fall.[32] The relationship between language and genealogy
has also been the focus of recent studies. Considering a range of written
sources from medieval France, Howard Bloch finds that "genealogy [was]
conceived along linguistic lines and language conceived along family
lines."[33] Zrinka Stahuljak goes a step further by arguing that language
precedes lineage, with literary texts constructing genealogies through lin-
guistic techniques.[34] Yet Bloch and Stahuljak recognize only limited roles
for women in these linguistic approaches to genealogy, viewing medieval
language and literature as male domains that rely on, in Bloch's words,
systems of "paternity" and transmit the right to a "*patrimoine*," with the
terms emphasizing the centrality of the father (*pater*).[35]

However, one of the most climactic moments of Christian history, as
represented in medieval sources, intimately linked childbearing and
textuality; during the Annunciation, the Virgin Mary is described as
having been impregnated by the Word, which becomes flesh in her
womb. Birth was also associated with text through the girdles placed
on women during labor, made of parchment inscribed with images and
text.[36] Aristotelian theory, popular in medieval Europe, depicted con-
ception as a form of inscription, holding that women supplied the matter

for the child, while men supplied the character.[37] This theory presents women as a form of matter to be written upon and as a passive means of transmission. A similar idea of women's passive textuality as childbearers is reflected in the early fourteenth-century romance *Kyng Alisaunder* and some of its French-language analogues when Alexander the Great is conceived illegitimately through the close and sensual interaction of inscription and conception. The sorcerer Neptanabus, having fallen in love with Alexander's mother, Olimpias, forms a doll of her in "virgyn wax" (l. 332) and the "quenes name in þe wax he wrot" (l. 335) and so "charmed" (l. 340) her.[38] This inscription prompts Olimpias to dream that she has been impregnated by a dragon. Only after this vividly physical act of writing and dream of conception does Neptanabus enter her room himself, disguised as a dragon, to impregnate her. However, even here, the romance's close attention to the materiality of writing and its alignment with Olimpias's sexual body begins to fracture the patrilineal ideal of genealogy as communication between men; it is Olimpias's name, not Alexander's, that Neptanabus writes into the statue, and it is only through her own desire and initial mental conception (her dream) that she allows Neptanabus, disguised as a dragon, into her chamber. Both writing and conception happen to her, but not without her own minor interventions.

Historically, medieval women could intervene actively in written culture and have significant intellectual influence over the content and form of literary texts.[39] While they may have played only limited roles in – and historically had limited access to – the scholarly and ecclesiastical theories of language and genealogy explored by Bloch, they were active and influential in the production of genealogical texts as patrons, readers, owners, and, occasionally, writers.[40] (In some cases, as Chapter 4 shows, these literary activities also gave them more agency in childbirth and its genealogical consequences.) Like men, they were deeply invested in their own legacies, lineages, and the futures of their kin and political communities and often bore the responsibility of recording family history and transmitting it to future generations.[41] Numerous surviving chronicles and other historiographical texts explicitly name female patrons and dedicatees. William of Malmesbury, for example, wrote his *Gesta regum Anglorum* at the request of English queen Edith/Matilda. Other royal women, including Adela of Blois, Adeliza of Louvain, and Eleanor of Provence, are also dedicatees of history texts. Geffrey Gaimar wrote *L'Estoire des Engleis*, the first chronicle in the French vernacular, at the request and with the practical support of noblewoman Constance

FitzGilbert. In his *Vita sanctae Wulfhidis*, hagiographer Goscelin of Saint Bertin, whose lives document the histories of several prominent English convents, defends the authority of the nuns of Barking as transmitters of history.[42]

Women's genealogies can also be glimpsed in material traces of manuscript possession and gifting. Books were frequently passed down female lines to daughters, granddaughters, and nieces.[43] Women transmitted language both in teaching their children to read and, in some cases, imparting an additional mother tongue.[44] These forms of cross-generational, and particularly maternal, relationships through reading and books are represented in numerous medieval sources. In Asser's ninth-century *Life of King Alfred*, for example, Alfred's mother coaxes him into reading, or at least into learning the book's contents, by gifting her son a decorated book of poetry.[45] In the late twelfth-century or early thirteenth-century *Vie seinte Osith*, Osith carries a book to be used for instructing others to her spiritual "mother," Modwenna.[46] Late medieval images frequently depict Saint Anne teaching her daughter Mary how to read; an image in the Da Costa Hours (New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M.399, fol. 351v) shows Anne reading to Mary while she is still in the womb. In the introduction to *Le Livre de la cité des dames*, Christine de Pizan describes herself as initially saved from reading an anti-feminist volume that sits among the books in her study by her mother calling her to dinner.[47]

Medieval genealogical narratives relied, therefore, not only on conceptual and theoretical notions of language, as identified by Bloch, but also on textuality – stories and information embodied in and transmitted through books, letters, and other inscribed objects. As Brian Stock argues, particularly before the thirteenth century, texts served a range of purposes beyond the verbal (either written or oral); he highlights the importance of considering medieval written works in terms of the "audiences for which they were intended and the mentality in which they were received."[48] When a text was received as genealogical (based on its content and purpose), the audience's understanding of the text's transmission – of it being translated, copied, or just handed down through generations – was surely relevant to how they understood its genealogical content. The textual object embodied the continuity through time that its written narrative sought to represent.

Focusing on *how* genealogies create continuity – frequently through processes of textual creation and transmission combined with pregnancy and childbearing – helps elucidate the roles that women play in these