# Introduction

Some of the most famous and infamous women in medieval England served as ladies-in-waiting. Among the well known were Alice Perrers, mistress of Edward III; Philippa Chaucer, wife of the celebrated author Geoffrey; Eleanor Cobham, alleged witch and duchess of Gloucester; and, of course, Anne Boleyn, one of the catalysts of the English Reformation. Riveting tales about ladies-in-waiting have made their way into Shakespearean drama, contemporary novels, and television series. Stories of royal mistresses such as Alice Perrers, Katherine Swynford, and the Boleyn girls, and tales of those who rise "above their stations" only to fall spectacularly, captivate both medieval and modern audiences. Other female servants, like Anne of Bohemia's attendant Agnes Launcecrona, scandalized their contemporaries, but remain little known today. Desiring Agnes, Robert de Vere, ninth earl of Oxford, repudiated his wife Philippa de Coucy, granddaughter of Edward III; Philippa's discarding was "one of the principal causes of the hatred all England bore [de Vere]." Some medieval attendants are popular today. Literary scholars have delved into the marriage of Philippa and Geoffrey Chaucer, who both served as courtiers, while Maria de Salinas earns respect for her steadfast loyalty to Catherine of Aragon during and after Henry VIII's abandonment of his first queen.

This book illuminates the quotidian aspects of life for English ladies-inwaiting, beyond the salacious or notorious tidbits that have made their way into modern dramatizations. In medieval literature, the damsel-in-waiting often facilitates the heroine's romantic goals, like Brangaene in *Tristan and Isolde*, or furthers other narratives, as when the capture of Guinevere's cousin and servant Elibel (when delivering her queen's message) led to war between Arthur and King Claudas.<sup>2</sup> Most female attendants in late

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Froissart, *Chronicles*, 2: 264.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Fuller, "Damsels-in-Waiting," 1; *Lancelot-Grail*, V: 60, 255–62, 401–2; Caples, "Brangaene and Isold."

2

## Introduction

medieval England lived their lives and experiences behind the scenes of both mundane days and great ceremonial occasions.

Their ordinariness did not make them unimportant, however. Elite female servants played significant roles in royal and noble households, though their value and influence receive little acknowledgment from historians. Rewards earned for service, including lands, dowries, retirement annuities, and material commodities, demonstrate attendants' value to employers. Families sought to promote their daughters and wives at court and in great households, because female servants could gain both remuneration and intangible patronage opportunities for themselves, their families, and their associates. The significance of some ladies-in-waiting is revealed in the roles they played in major political events, in ways that assisted and promoted the monarchs, but sometimes they were targeted by other courtiers hostile to what they saw as undue influence. As monarchs and noblewomen came to be served by a greater number of women during the Middle Ages, well-dressed women in their entourages enhanced their grandeur at coronations, marriages, tournaments, diplomatic gatherings, and other significant events.

This study provides the first comprehensive scholarly examination of elite female servants in medieval England, by investigating the lives and experiences of over 1,200 ladies-in-waiting who served queens and aristocratic women during the last three medieval centuries with almost 4,000 references to specific activities chronicling their experiences.<sup>3</sup> A *longue durée* methodology documents both continuity and change over time. Households increased in size and complexity over the period, creating greater roles and opportunities for female servants. Yet this investigation also reveals continuity, in the frequency of marriages contracted between male and female household staff, for example, and in the cyclical swings of hostility against immigrants – kin and friends of foreign queens – serving at court. Although it is possible to reconstruct full biographies for some elite attendants, many appear in only one or two sources – perhaps receiving livery or bequests – and thus this study proceeds thematically using prosopographical techniques to capture the lived experiences of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> To be precise, my database contains 1,240 women with 3,992 references to their service activities, plus 259 examples of female attendants who are not identified by name in the records (for example, the unidentified damsel of Sibyl Beauchamp, given livery by the crown for a mid-fourteenth-century tournament (TNA, E 101/391/15, m. 7) or the rewards given to *diversis dominabus et damicellae Regine* (diverse ladies and damsels of the queen) granted a century later by Margaret of Anjou (TNA, E 101/409/14)).

#### Introduction

3

many unknown and uncelebrated women who served medieval queens and noblewomen.

# Historiography

Scholars have not entirely neglected the lives of medieval English ladies-inwaiting, but female attendants before the Tudor era have been explored mainly in gossipy books that focus on famous servants,<sup>4</sup> or in works centered on some of the better-known women who served as ladies and damsels in royal courts, especially in the later fourteenth century. Edward III's mistress Alice Perrers, his son John of Gaunt's mistress and later wife Katherine Swynford, and Katherine's sister Philippa Chaucer have each received much attention.5

The Tudor era and beyond is better represented in English scholarship analyzing the roles of female attendants.<sup>6</sup> Theresa Earenfight has investigated Catherine of Aragon's household, especially before her coronation as Henry VIII's queen;<sup>7</sup> Jeri McIntosh compared the pre-regnal households of Tudor sisters Mary and Elizabeth,8 while Charlotte Merton's dissertation focused on the female servants in these two women's regnal households.9 Scholarly studies of women who served later queens in the seventeenth to twentieth centuries are abundant.<sup>10</sup>

- <sup>4</sup> Strickland, Lives of the Queens of England; Weir's England's Medieval Queens series include several stories about royal attendants. Ashdown, in Ladies-in-Waiting, examines medieval ladies in Ch. 1 and those serving Catherine of Aragon in Ch. 2, but the rest of the book covers more modern households. Although Ashdown limits her medieval examples to famous women, she examined some chronicles and archival sources.
- <sup>5</sup> For Perrers, see Bothwell, "Management of Position," 31–51; Ormrod, "Alice Perrers and John Salisbury," 379–93; Ormrod, "Who Was Alice Perrers?" 219–29; Tompkins, "Uncrowned Queen," 41–44; Tompkins, "Alice Perrers and the Goldsmiths' Mistery," 1361–91; Tompkins, "Edward III's Gold-Digging Mistress," 59-72. I thank Laura Tompkins for sharing her thesis with me. On Swynford, see Lucraft, Katherine Swynford; Weir, Mistress of the Monarchy; Perry, "Katherine Roet's Swynfords, "122–31, 164–74; Goodman, *Katherine Swynford.* For the Chaucers, see Galway, "Philippa Pan, Philippa Chaucer," 481–7; Hulbert, "Chaucer's Official Life"; Krauss, "Chaucerian Problems.
- <sup>6</sup> Like Ashdown earlier, Somerset's Ladies in Waiting: From the Tudors to the Present Day focuses on entertaining anecdotes from the period.
- <sup>7</sup> Earenfight, "A Precarious Household," 338–56; Earenfight, "Raising *Infanta*," 417–43; Earenfight, "Shoes of an Infanta," 293–317; Earenfight, *Catherine of Aragon.* <sup>8</sup> McIntosh, *From Heads of Household to Heads of State.*
- <sup>9</sup> Merton, "Women Who Served Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth." On Elizabeth's servants and confidantes, see also Whitelock, Elizabeth's Bedfellows.
- <sup>10</sup> Fry, "Perceptions of Influence," 265–85; Akkerman, "Goddess of the Household," 287–309; Wolfson, "Female Bedchamber of Queen Henrietta Maria," 311-41; Bucholz, Augustan Court; Weichel, "Ladies-in-Waiting at the British Court," 41-61.

4

# Introduction

Many of these examples demonstrate that studies tend to focus on a single reign or a few successive ones, and various scholars have considered the roles of female household attendants within their biographies of queens or important noblewomen. Queens are currently in fashion, and queenship studies have proliferated in recent years, with publications that have moved away from strict biography to more incisive analyses of gender and politics at royal courts.<sup>11</sup> John Carmi Parsons initiated the trend in medieval English studies, with an important study of Edward I's first consort, Eleanor of Castile, in the introduction to his edition of one of her wardrobe books, published in 1977. The late 1990s saw Parsons' biography of Eleanor and Margaret Howell's monograph on Eleanor's predecessor, Eleanor of Provence.<sup>12</sup> Twenty-first-century scholars have furthered analyses of English queenship, with the publication of Lisa Benz St. John's examination of three fourteenth-century queens, Kristen Geaman's and Elena Woodacre's studies of Anne of Bohemia and Joan of Navarre, and Joanna Laynesmith's investigation of the four queens who experienced the Wars of the Roses.<sup>13</sup>

Before the late-twentieth-century onset of feminist scholarship into medieval English queens and noblewomen, several scholars of English monarchy and its bureaucratic accounts had offered perceptive analyses of queenly finances and political power within broader projects to understand royal administration. Hilda Johnstone's chapter on "The Queen's Household," despite its early publication, is still cited frequently because she offered a complete understanding of the complex workings of the queen's landed and fiscal resources and how they were administered.<sup>14</sup> Also writing in the middle of the twentieth century, A. R. Myers delved into the finances of medieval queens, although he focused on fifteenthcentury monarchs.<sup>15</sup> Seeking to understand the late medieval court, Myers also translated and edited a series of regulations that outlined

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> For comprehensive overviews of historiography of medieval queenship in Europe, see Bárány, "Medieval Queens and Queenship," 149–99; Earenfight, *Queenship in Medieval Europe*, 1–12. <sup>12</sup> Parsons, *Court and Household*; Parsons, *Eleanor of Castile*; Howell, *Eleanor of Provence*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Benz St. John, Medieval Queens; Geaman, Anne of Bohemia; Woodacre, Joan of Navarre; Laynesmith, Medieval Queens. Briefer analyses of all later medieval queens are in Aiden Norrie et al. (ed.), Later Plantagenet and the Wars of the Roses Consorts. A comparative project with much broader focus of chronology and geography is Earenfight's textbook Medieval Queenship.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Johnstone, "Queen's Household," in *Chapters in the Administrative History of Mediaeval England*, 5: 264–84. Johnstone offers a narrower chronological focus in "The Queen's Household," in *The* English Government at Work, 1: 253–66.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Myers, "Captivity of a Royal Witch," 263–84; Myers, "Household Accounts of Queen Margaret," 79–113; Myers, "Household of Queen Elizabeth Woodville," 207–35.

#### Introduction

responsibilities of court officials, including some women, as well as limits upon their appointment to restrict financial extravagance.<sup>16</sup>

The experiences of medieval noblewomen have also drawn attention, primarily from the late twentieth century, as historians have drawn insight from diverse sources such as account rolls, charters, letters, and archaeological remains to explore female lives. Jennifer Ward details the life of Elizabeth de Burgh while providing a valuable survey on medieval noblewomen.<sup>17</sup> Linda Mitchell explores various case studies of (mostly) thirteenth-century elite women, while Nicola Clark examines the women of the preeminent Howard family who commanded social and political power in early Tudor England.<sup>18</sup> C. M. Woolgar's studies of aristocratic households consider (among other areas) household composition, servant life, and uses of space in medieval residences.<sup>19</sup> Investigating late medieval and early Tudor aristocratic women, Barbara Harris explores the life-cycle of highborn women and, most pertinently for this current investigation, includes a final chapter on their service at court. Harris designates their periods of service as "careers," which, given that female servants worked and gained rewards for their work, provides a helpful framework for our understanding of ladies-in-waiting.20

Studies focusing exclusively on ladies-in-waiting are more abundant outside England (apart, perhaps, from the Tudor queens-regnant Mary and Elizabeth). Susan Broomhall's research on women at the Burgundian court offered early insights about cross-cultural interactions when foreign brides travelled abroad to wed; similarly, Katrin Keller's investigation of Habsburg ladies-in-waiting highlighted the rising influence of female courtiers in Vienna.<sup>21</sup> Research by Marie-Véronique Clin and Caroline zum Kolk illuminates the roles of female courtiers in late medieval and early modern France,<sup>22</sup> while women in Iberian royal households have been well served by Diana Pelaz Flores, Manuela Santos Silva, and María

- <sup>16</sup> Household of Edward IV. <sup>17</sup> Ward, *Elizabeth de Clare*; Ward, *English Noblewomen*.
- <sup>18</sup> Mitchell, Portraits; Clark, Howard Women.
- <sup>19</sup> Woolgar, *Great Household*; Woolgar, "Queens and Crowns"; Woolgar, *Senses*.
  <sup>20</sup> Harris, *Aristocratic*, 5–6. Harris (ibid., 67) offers the following definition of career: "a set of activities that formed the center of their lives and defined their place in society." Compare Reynolds' book Aristocratic Women and Political Society in Victorian Britain, which similarly offers a chapter on ladies at Victoria's court.
- <sup>21</sup> Broomhall, "Gendering the Culture of Honour," 81–93; Broomhall, "Orbit of the King," and several of the articles in Broomhall (ed.), *Women, Power, and Authority at the French Court,* including Bouchard's "Power of Reputation and Skills," 241-62; Keller, "Ladies-in-Waiting at the Imperial Court," 77-97; Keller, Nur die Frau des Kaisers?; Keller, Hofdamen.
- <sup>22</sup> Clin, *Isabeau de Bavière*, esp. 58–61; Kolk, "Household of the Queen of France," 3–22; Kolk, "La naissance de la 'cour des Dames,'" 23-47.

6

## Introduction

Narbona Cárceles.<sup>23</sup> Finally, two comprehensive volumes with transregional scope are very helpful. Several articles from the admirable volume *The Politics of Female Households: Ladies-in-Waiting across Early Modern Europe* have already been cited, and the editors have provided a fruitful comparative introductory essay that addresses the power and influence of early modern women at court.<sup>24</sup> Even more global is Anne Walthalls's collection *Servants of the Dynasty: Palace Women in World History*; the articles therein consider female servants as well as royal women, mistresses, and concubines.<sup>25</sup>

This proliferation of scholarship investigating royal and aristocratic women, along with female courtiers and other serving women, from the 1980s and beyond, demonstrates that paucity of historical documents cannot explain earlier failures to investigate these women. They may have been previously invisible, or at least "obscured," but that "obscurity" stemmed from historians' interests, not surviving medieval records themselves.<sup>26</sup> Earlier scholars writing biographies of monarchs or analyses of royal power touched on women infrequently. When women's history gained ground in the 1960s and especially the 1970s,<sup>27</sup> the Marxist training of those interested in groups subjugated by dominant powers meant that non-elites were the main focus of historians who wrote important works on peasant women and townswomen but were less interested in gueens and courtiers.<sup>28</sup> Royal women and their highborn servants, with their access to power and influence, are also worthy of study. As Earenfight writes, elite women "are everywhere and they are busy"; records reveal their involvement in "diplomacy, hospitality, patronage," and numerous other areas of medieval courtly life.<sup>29</sup>

# Court and Household

Royal ladies-in-waiting operated in the households of queens or royal daughters, which formed part of the court, yet scholars have raised the

<sup>24</sup> Akkerman and Houben, "Introduction," 1–27. <sup>25</sup> Walthall (ed.), *Servants of the Dynasty*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Pelaz Flores, *Casa de la Reina*, 104–26; Santos Silva, "Portuguese Household of an English Queen," 271–87; Narbona Cárceles, "Women at Court," 31–64; Narbona Cárceles, *La corte de Carlos III el Noble*; Narbona Cárceles, "De Casa de la Senyora Reyna," 151–67; Narbona Cárceles, "Noblas Donas," 89–113.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Earenfight, "Highly Visible, Often Obscured," 86. Earenfight (*Queenship*, 2, 20–21) argues that royal women were "highly visible to their contemporaries."

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Although note Eileen Power's earlier interest in medieval women's history. See her essays published in *Medieval Women* as well as Berg, *A Woman in History: Eileen Power, 1889–1940.* <sup>28</sup> A point also made by Earenfight, "Highly Visible, Often Obscured," 86–7. Among many works,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> A point also made by Earenfight, "Highly Visible, Often Obscured," 86–7. Among many works, see Bennett, Women in the Medieval English Countryside; Hanawalt, Ties that Bound; Goldberg, Women, Work and Life-Cycle.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Earenfight, "Highly Visible, Often Obscured," 88; Earenfight, Queenship, 5.

#### Introduction

question of whether courts even existed in the medieval period. According to Harriss, the later Middle Ages marked the transition period between the "small, mobile, military household of the earlier Middle Ages to the hierarchical palace establishments of the later 'Court Society.""30 For some, the medieval monarch had a household, but not vet a true court, which, in the words of Renaissance author Sigismondo Sigismondi, was "the household of a great, absolute ruler ... and it consists of various officials and minsters related to each other within a hierarchy" of various ranks; "some serve only for honour and receive no pay, while others are salaried."31 Asch notes that medieval records employed the term "household" rather than "court" in both England and France, and that the word "courtier" did not arrive until late-fifteenth-century England.<sup>32</sup> Such a view is consistent with the influential thesis developed by Norbert Elias linking growing state power to the "civilizing process" that occurred in the expansive early modern court.<sup>33</sup>

On the other hand, Vale, Horrox, and others allow a longer-term view, critiquing modern historians who see courts as a more recent development. For Vale, the household gave rise to the court, but the terms cannot be viewed as synonymous.<sup>34</sup> Certainly change over time occurred, but one cannot say that "because Versailles was a court, Winchester cannot be. That would be to ignore real continuities of purpose and attitude."35 According to Horrox, "the court is the environment in which the king existed."<sup>36</sup> Writing in the late twelfth century, Walter Map understood this too, although he also found the term troublesome to define: "in the court I exist and of the court I speak, but what the court is, God knows, I do not."37 Moreover, the concept of a royal court must predate the use of the adjective "courtly," which appears from the middle of the fifteenth century.<sup>38</sup>

This investigation of female attendants follows the positions of Vale and Horrox, arguing that court is a useful term for understanding the

<sup>38</sup> OED, s.v. "courtly."

7

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Harriss, Shaping the Nation, 14. The household could be synonymous with "familia," a term not identical to our contemporary word "family" but rather indicating a group of "co-residential nuclear kin." See Grace, "Family and Familiars," 189. Household is itself a complicated and unstable term.

See Riddy *et al.*, "Concept of the Household in Later Medieval England," 117–21. <sup>31</sup> Sigismondi, *Prattica Cortigiana*, 15–16. Quoted in Guerzoni and Alfani, "Court of Renaissance Ferrara," 8.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Asch, "Introduction: Court and Household," 9–10; Morgan, "The House of Policy," 70.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Elias, Court Society. There have been many critiques of this thesis, for example, see Vale, Princely Court, 17-18 and Duindam, Vienna and Versailles, 7-9, 261, 295.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Vale, *Princely Court*, 15–16. Griffiths ("Court during the Wars of the Roses," 44) sensibly worried that some late medieval historians use the terms "court" and "household" interchangeably. <sup>35</sup> Horrox, "Caterpillars," 2–3. <sup>36</sup> Horrox, "Caterpillars," 2. See also Vale, *Princely Court*, 23.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Map, De Nugis Curialium, 2-3; Griffiths, "Court during the Wars of the Roses," 67.

8

# Introduction

proliferation of ceremony (religious, diplomatic, dynastic) experienced by medieval English ladies-in-waiting in the presence of king, queen, or both simultaneously. Hayward's description of early modern courts identified with a central figure (king) "with a style of dress and regalia of his or her own, and a carefully orchestrated daily and annual cycle of ceremonial activities that were both religious and social" holds true for my understanding of the thirteenth-, fourteenth-, and fifteenth-century monarchy and its regal entourage.<sup>39</sup>

While arguing that the terms court and courtier can be used, unanachronistically, to describe the lives and experiences in medieval palaces, this study nonetheless distinguishes between the terms court and household. Vale's definitions for the medieval period are particularly helpful. He describes the court as "the space, or ambiance, around the king ... the term does not denote an institution, department, or specific place. On the other hand, the household ... was the formal body which provided a permanent framework, or structure, for the court."40 The king's court in medieval England brings to mind important state occasions, such as the opening of Parliament, Edward III's tournaments, or dynastic ceremonies such as christenings, marriages, and coronations, along with important seasonal events such as Christmas and Easter festivities.<sup>41</sup> The royal household was present for daily duties at these events but also in ordinary times, when queens attended matins, for example, or when they met privately with the king, their councilors, or estate officials. Her household helped her wake, dress, eat, stay healthy, accomplish daily tasks, and pass the time through leisure activities. As we will see, different duties characterized those who might be termed courtiers from those who were household staff. Courtiers received summons for major ceremonial events while household members were formally appointed in their employment. Overlap occurred sometimes between court and household; some great ladies appear living and waiting upon the queen within the household, and lesser household staff members, such as damsels and maids of honor, appeared on some significant events and rituals as part of the wider court.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Hayward, Dress, 217.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Vale, *Princely Court*, 23; Griffiths, "Court during the Wars of the Roses," 46, 53; Asch, "Introduction," 9.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Vale, *Princely Court*, 28.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> According to Vale (*Princely Court*, 15), "Court and household were never entirely synonymous, yet courts could not have existed without household organizations behind and within them." See also Horrox, "Caterpillars," 3; Duindam, *Vienna and Versailles*, 38, 187, 305.

#### Introduction

Recognizing that we may employ the term "court" to understand political machinations enveloping the pre-Renaissance monarchs does not overlook how methods and meanings of ritual and propaganda changed at court, although many of these changes were, in Vale's words, "perhaps more of degree than of real substance."43 As Map wrote, "the court is constant only in inconstancy."44 Royal courts defy definition precisely because so many diverse activities centered on them. For Bucholz, courts were places that intermingled "administrative, financial, political, social, and cultural aspects, none of which can be examined properly in isolation from the others."45 Courts also changed over time, because the personae and dynamics of rulership changed over time.46 Courtiers and household staff often played similar roles. In the ambit of the monarch – or in the space around a great aristocrat – they can be found offering and receiving hospitality and other favors; they worked to enhance their own social capital, sometimes through factions, and built important social networks through the recruitment, promotion, and forging of ties with others at court.47

Women cannot be isolated from this picture. Olwen Hufton compared female courtiers to a body's nervous system, arguing that women eased communication of messages and favors and that their lack of formal position made it possible to advance network opportunities in channels beyond official appointments and rewards.<sup>48</sup> One way to understand the royal court is to view it as a series of households that included "secondary households" of the queen, the nursery, and, at times, adult royal children and siblings.<sup>49</sup> Since ladies-in-waiting enjoyed opportunities to gain the ear of kings and queens in the royal household, understanding the nature of, and access to, power at court is crucial to interpreting the female and familial networks in which such ladies operated.<sup>50</sup> Research into the career paths of male members of the household is also important for our

<sup>44</sup> Map, *De Nugis Curialium*, 3; Griffiths, "Court during the Wars of the Roses," 67.

<sup>48</sup> Hufton, "Role of Women," 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Vale, Princely Court, 18–20. See 26–8 for some of those evolutionary changes. Also see Duindam (Vienna and Versailles, 3) and Costa Gomes (Court Society, 20–21) on the evolutionary nature of courtly change in Western Europe.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> Bucholz, *Augustan Court*, 4. <sup>46</sup> Griffiths, "Court during the Wars of the Roses," 64.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> McIntosh, "Diversity of Social Capital in English Communities," 460, 466; Duindam, *Vienna and Versailles*, 313.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Duindam, "Versailles, Vienna and Beyond," 413. See also Guerzoni and Alfani, "Court of Renaissance Ferrara," 9–12.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Harris, "Women and Politics," 259–81; Bousmar and Sommé, "Femmes et espaces féminins," 47–78; Münster, "Funktionen der *dames et damoiselles d'honneur*," 339–54; Duindam, *Vienna and Versailles*, 239.

τo

## Introduction

understanding of female attendants, not only for comparisons but because ladies-in-waiting operated within male-dominated familial networks.<sup>51</sup>

#### Women and Power

The rise of feminist scholarship, and especially the desire to understand the experiences of elite women from the late 1980s and beyond, focused attention on women's access to political power, which in turn has greatly aided understandings of how gendered power dynamics impacted both men and women. Seeking to add women to the power structures traditionally viewed as almost entirely male (apart from "exceptional" examples like Eleanor of Aquitaine or Queen Elizabeth I) delineated how consorts could wield "private" influence and "informal" power. The importance of Bourdieu's theories about symbolic power has informed many studies, consciously and unconsciously.52 Helen Maurer, building on anthropological works, separated power from authority in her study of Margaret of Anjou, demonstrating that while that consort may have lacked official authority to rule, Margaret had many informal means to wield power and get things done.53 Yet through Margaret's example, Maurer reminds us that even influential women faced limits to their political role or authority that men with the same status did not.54

Many have identified problems with the dichotomous frameworks that often theorize power: authority/power; formal/informal; public/private; institutional/personal; male/female. The public/private distinction, for example, does not work for all regions, let alone time periods. It is particularly problematic in the medieval period, because the household was the main institution that governed not only rulership but also business and trade.55 There was no significant relegation of women to "separate spheres" in medieval England – in theory or actuality.<sup>56</sup> We need to be careful about infusing the past with our contemporary ideas of separateness

<sup>54</sup> Maurer, Margaret of Anjou, 62.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> See Given-Wilson, Royal Household and the King's Affinity; Brondarbit, Political Power-Brokers.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> Bourdieu, Outline of a Theory of Practice, Ch. 4; Bourdieu, Logic of Practice, Book 1, Ch. 7; Benz St.

John, Medieval Queens, 17; Weiss, "Qué Demandamos de las Mugeres?" 237-74.
 <sup>53</sup> Maurer, Margaret of Anjou, 5; Lamphere, "Strategies, Cooperation, and Conflict," 98-100; Rosaldo, "Women, Culture and Society," 21.

<sup>55</sup> Benz St. John, Medieval Queens, 9; Kelly-Gadol, "The Social Relations of the Sexes," 809–23; Skinner, Studying Gender, 35-42.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Dronzek, "Private and Public Spheres," 670–1; McSheffrey, "Place, Space, and Situation," 960–1, 986-90.