**Prøveeksamen - ”Female exceptionalism” in the Middle Ages**

*Kvinder i magtpositioner fremstilles oftest som udtryk for ”female exceptionalism” i middelalderen. Brug to eller flere kilder til at illustrere kvinders repræsentation - eller usynlighed - i kildematerialet. Overvej hvem skribenterne og målgrupperne var i de forskellige kildetyper.*

**Power in the Middle Ages**

Max Weber derives his definition power from the definition of authority and further distinguishes between the different types of authority; charismatic authority, traditional authority and rational legal authority. Charismatic authority is a very effective form of authority and is the oldest type of authority. It is characterized by the authority being seen as superior to ordinary people. Traditional authority is usually characterized by traditions and that somebody is more fit to lead. This could be the case in kings and queens being chosen to rule, due to their ancestry. The last authority is the rational-legal authority, which is based on the people’s acceptance of authority carried out by competent officials. This could be police and their power in their field, due to their competence within their workplace.

The different types of authority can be useful in researching female exceptionalism and how women carry out agency in the respective power positions. It can be helpful to categorize their type of power in a traditional sense to illuminate their agency outside of their “original” position, usually given to them by others or by circumstantial occasion.

**Dronning Margrethes instruks**

Queen Margrethe provides a good example of how agency carries out through different measures than by given authority and power. Queen Margrethe was queen of Norway and Sweden by marriage and ruler of Denmark as guardian for her son Oluf 2. After his death she elects a new heir to the throne; Erik of Pommern, which in itself could be an exercise of power and show of agency.

Here she utilizes traditional authority in which she has access to power by proxy. She, herself, could not be ruler, but due to her son being heir to the throne, she has access to traditional form of power. This can be defined as “female exceptionalism” in terms of power acquisition since the “trickle down” system of elected royals often excludes women. Furthermore, in her instruct for Erik in relation to his imminent travel to Norway, she is able to define herself as a legitimate ruler. This source has also been used in later research to define how she was able to hold on to her power after her guardianship of Erik had expired. In the source it is highly possible that the motivation behind the instruct could be a her worries that Erik is not competent in his role and that he might not be able to uphold her biggest official feat, which is the creation of the Kalmar Union. In the source she presents thorough advice on where to be at certain times, including what beverages he should be able to offer his visitors and thus institute a good relationship with them. It is very visible that she wishes to uphold royal procedure, certainly through Erik, but possibly for generations of heirs to come. It can be seen as a testament of her accomplishments, her knowledge within royal protocols and use of power. Especially in context of letter writing in the Middle Ages, since it is highly possible, if not expected, that other members of royal staff or advisers are going to receive and read her letters. If the information was given to Erik, purely as advise to Erik, she did have the option of giving it to him privately and in person. Since she was never officially crowned, letter writing on her part could authorize her role as both primary adviser, but also as legitimate ruler of Denmark, and instituter of the Kalmar Union. Her agency in her official role has thus extended beyond her official capacity, due to her own use of power and agency. In her letter to Erik, she can make her invisible form of power (power by proxy or power as royal guardian) visible, and possibly being seen as a more legitimate ruler, which is quite exceptional since the participation of women in power positions are often not acknowledged at the time.

**Christine de Pizans - The Book of the City of Ladies**

Another example of female exceptionalism and agency carried out by a woman in the Middle Ages it is interesting to look at Christine de Pizans book, The Book of the City of Ladies. Christine lived as a part of the nobility and was married until her husband died. After this she had access to money through his estate whilst earning a supplying income as a copyist. Furthermore, her work was often supported by numerous patrons, which was vastly different circumstances than her contemporaries´. This in itself displays her agency in her existing role as widow (thus without means, since the husband usually was the breadwinner of the household). [[1]](#footnote-1)

Through her work “The Book of the City of Ladies” she argues against the accepted views on women at the time; that women have defective bodies and are lesser beings than men. In her argument against this postulate, she utilizes saints as a form of spiritual authority. It is not herself who argues against the statement, rather she lets saints talk for her. Furthermore, she lets the saints use scripture as an argument, rather than utilizing a personal opinion. In this example she argues that women were created by God in paradise and from a better material (the rib of Adam) rather than being created outside of paradise and of dirt, like man was. This argumentation is a clever way of giving away the authority to get her own personal message across to her audience.

1. https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ez.statsbiblioteket.dk/lib/asb/reader.action?docID=5508489&ppg=44&c=RVBVQg [↑](#footnote-ref-1)