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In January 2014, the University of Winchester hosted the Gender and Me-
dieval Studies conference. Held sporadically since the late 1980s and, for
the most part, annually in the last fifteen years, the conference series is ded-
icated to the study of gender in the Middle Ages. In 2014 at Winchester,
the topic for discussion was "gender and status." This topic was specifically
chosen for the potential fruitfulness of the idea: gender and status could en-
compass ideas such as social status, employment, figures of authority, mar-
ital status, legal issues, and could potentially suit any academic discipline
or geographic context. The 2014 conference welcomed more than ninety
scholars from throughout Europe and North America speaking on topics
ranging from medieval gynecology[1] to clerical masculinity.[2] As the confer-
ence organizers noted, the large number of scholars attending and speaking
on gender and status in the medieval world might indicate larger trends in
medieval scholarship: that studying gender in the medieval world was no
longer a niche subject, but part of the wider landscape of not just medieval
studies but scholarship in general.[3]

The study of gender has indeed come a long way since its earliest in-
ceptions in the academy and Joan Scott's appeal for scholars to consider
gender as "a useful category of historical analysis."[4] Growing initially from
second-wave feminism's critique of the academy and the call to recognize
women's place not only in academia but in history overall, gender studies
in turn grew from third-wave feminism's recognition of the value of differ-
ence with "an inclusive and non-judgmental approach that refuses to police
the boundaries of the feminist political."[5] Indeed, it is only in a few far-
flung corners where gender studies in history are still considered as an "add-
women-and-stir" approach. Instead there is a much greater understanding
that gender as a social construct—and a normative construct at that[6]—can
affect all corners of life. As another structure around which we build society,

this social identity impacts societal expectations of gender roles,[7] and so addressing gender as a part of a broader history should be a part of any narrative of the past. This more nuanced understanding of gender in the present, as well as in the past, has opened up many lines of enquiry that would not have been considered decades ago.

One area where this is most strongly evident is in the growing interest in masculinities as a part of gender studies of the past; the failure in some cases to include the masculine in gender studies is one of the reasons that "gender" is often presumed to be a substitute for "women."[8] Although not the sole purpose of broader studies of gender in the past, studies of masculinities in gender history helps to avoid the female-centric aims endemic in second-wave scholarship[9] and resulting claims of gynocentrism. Although not without controversy as a study of the patriarchy that initially wrought the social and power structures of gender, it is more largely recognized that the study of hegemonic masculinities can lead students and researchers to challenge this hierarchical structure, as well as recognize "complementary masculinities" that "reject gender stereotypes."[10] Furthermore, even though some regard this inclusion of studies of masculinities as a reversion to the male as the normative and controlling gender, thereby reinforcing male prerogatives, "valuable feminist scholarship on the Middle Ages … has tended to ignore the gendered status of men; ironically privileging 'men' as universal, ahistorical, atemporal, and genderless."[11] Thus it comes as no surprise that the study of gender in the medieval world has broadened to areas previously unstudied but now considered to be a normal part of gender constructions in the past. Both the Gender and Medieval Studies conference and the collection of articles that came out of it reflect this desire to include all genders and consider the process of forming and understanding the construction of gendered identities in the Middle Ages.

Another highlight of the conference—and indeed this volume—is the importance of interdisciplinary work in medieval studies, particularly when it comes to the study of medieval gender. Many researchers seem to have taken to heart Martin Carver's plea with respect to disciplinary boundaries: "To study one discipline to the exclusion of others, on the grounds that archaeology or history or literature or art has its own theoretical framework makes no sense … our subjects … are what gives us our tasks … Disciplines are simply tools, not powers."[12] When researching a subject that can be difficult to trace through singular or traditional sources, interdisciplinary research can often be the best way forward to result in fruitful academically sophisticated results. As Guy Halsall has pointed out, a more fruitful method of research would include framing the research question first, and then drawing the evidence to the question, as opposed to allowing the evidence to set the question.[13] While this has long been seen as a valid method of research in earlier medieval periods, and particularly eras when there is a perceived lack of evidence, interdisciplinary work in the whole medieval period demonstrates a rich understanding of the value of varied sources.[14]

Indeed this interdisciplinarity was evidenced throughout the conference and in this volume and scholars have embraced it in their studies of both the early and the later medieval periods. Although the tradition of interdisciplinarity was well represented, many other papers and their subsequent article versions have approached research through maintaining flexible disciplinary boundaries. These include ways of viewing theological and monastic societies, art history and history as companion disciplines, and archaeology, landscape, and history working together for larger societal questions. Medieval studies as a whole is seeking new areas to explore; while single-discipline research is still strong throughout these areas of study, scholars of gender in the medieval world have embraced interdisciplinarity as another way of demonstrating the diversity of gender in the medieval world.

Gender studies nevertheless still pushes boundaries and, by theming both the conference and this issue of *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historique* on "Gender and Status in the Medieval World," a further aim was identified beyond the study of feminisms and masculinities: a greater depth of study of intersectionality in the medieval world. The term intersectionality was first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1991 as a way of expressing the combined oppressions of being a woman and a person of color.[15] Since then it has taken on a greater meaning in feminism and society, to broadly encompass the idea that differing forms of oppression can intersect and work together within society. Although its use and critiques of tokenism are not without value,[16] its concept in terms of seeing beyond a white, heteronormative, Christianized medieval west should be of incredible value to academics working in medieval studies.

Even though it has been utilized by numerous scholars, the term "intersectional" itself has seldom been explicitly adopted by medievalists,[17] despite work that tacitly addresses these key issues. The traditional academic approach to the past is one that narrowed the view of the medieval world, arising from an androcentric viewpoint as well as expectations about not only what the past constituted, but also the scholars who researched it.[18] This is the approach from which we strive to remove ourselves, and critiquing these viewpoints is one part of this process. Moving toward intersectionality in our work is another. Although research in the Middle Ages grows out of a system that perpetuated white, middle- and upper-class men as the primary researchers producing historical narratives about powerful men, the medieval world, as we well know, is far more than that. Discussions of intersectionality in the Middle Ages can further nuance an understanding of the past and deprivilege approaches to the medieval world that ignore or reject such nuances.

Although not explicitly addressed in the call for papers in either the conference or this special issue, the topic of "Gender and Status" gave a broad opportunity to explore overlapping identities that can result in a hierarchized and highly confining social structure. Papers and posters explored concepts such as physical impairment and life-ending illnesses in the Middle Ages;[19] queering the Middle Ages and its gender and sexual identities;[20] class

structures and status;[21] and non-Christian identities in the medieval West.[22] Medieval research in gender is moving into areas of inquiry that view varying constructions of identity and how these constructions can become agents of oppression in the past, even when such intentions are not always explicit. In other words, we are seeking intersectionality, if not yet using the term. This line of research will, in the long run, only enhance our views of the past; removing a concept of a white, masculine, heteronormative Middle Ages brings the past into a clearer picture of what it meant to be a person in the Middle Ages—regardless of who that person was. Modern-day popular culture in general perpetuates this "traditional" idea of the Middle Ages;[23] by embracing and discussing intersectionality and moving areas of focus in the field, medieval studies can become more fruitful not just in scholarship but also in influencing popular perceptions of the past, a process that can make the past a far richer and more complex world to modern society.

This issue offers a diverse collection of articles that highlight the number of ways in which the term "status" can be interpreted. Instead of choosing to order the articles in the issue chronologically, we decided to organize them thematically, around different ways in which authors chose to investigate the notion of status and its relation to gender. Status can be linked to concepts of power and authority or the ideal of the "elite" in society and, indeed, there was a strong strand of papers at the conference that reflected this perception of status.[24] Two articles in this issue look specifically at high or elite status members of medieval society. Alison Creber's "Mirrors for Margraves" examines the letters of a prominent churchman, Peter Damian, to two important Italian margraves, Godfrey of Tuscany and Adelaide of Turin. Creber argues that, while Damian wrote to both with deference to their elevated status on the duties of their exalted position, Damian's advice to both margraves was deliberately framed in terms of their respective gender. Linda Brown's article also examines a woman who was high ranking in terms of both temporal and spiritual hierarchies in society, as both a princess of England and the abbess of the prominent foundation at Romsey. Brown examines the dramatic change in status of the Princess-Abbess Marie of Blois after the death of her parents and siblings made her heiress to the county of Boulogne, prompting her alleged *raptus* and disputed marriage. Marie's case emphasizes the flexibility of her status as according to secular and sacred needs, and how her social status allowed for fluid movement at times between the two offices of wife and nun-abbess.

An elevated or distinctive societal status need not be explicitly connected to the exercise of authority. Mercedes Pérez Vidal's and Christina Welch and Rohan Brown's articles both focus on two different societal groups that seem to be held in semi-seclusion, holding little or no authority: female monastics and male lepers. While these groups appear quite divergent, these case studies reveal that they shared similarities in terms of being set apart from society, through physical separation or enclosure, and with regard to their high spiritual status, as "holy" men and women.

However, status need not be exclusively imagined in terms of social or spiritual hierarchies. Two articles, by Natalie Hanna and Elizabeth Leet, focus on marital or relationship status and how it can be reinforced by language. Both scholars undertake deep textual analysis to demonstrate how they reveal the status of relationships between men and women. In her article, Hanna examines how the terminology used by Chaucer in *Canterbury Tales* reflects the construction of marital status in late medieval England, and methods by which language could reflect systems of control. By contrast, Leet examines how both real and fairy women in Middle English Breton lays submit themselves to objectification—using interest in their bodies in order to help their lovers. By deconstructing linguistic elements of the display of the body, Leet shows how the male gaze could be used or subverted to a female end.

The final three articles all examine the construction of gender and status with an emphasis on the establishment or reinforcement of masculine ideals or patriarchal structures. Sean McGlynn examines how participation in warlike games and chivalric tournaments helped young men construct their gendered identity and status as warriors or knights. In contrast to this emphasis on aggression and perceived "manly" behavior, Rachel Moss discusses the significance of male fainting in Middle English romances. While this could be assumed to undermine or contravene expected male behavior, Moss argues that it reinforced the status of a knight, homosocial bonds, and even late medieval patriarchy itself. Frank Battaglia's article moves from textual analysis to material culture, examining the burial patterns of wrist clasps and what this reveals about concepts of gender identity, status, and an emerging system of patriliny on display through the decoration of female bodies in early Anglo-Saxon culture.

Taken together, these articles highlight the varied nuances of the concept of status and what examinations of both gender and status can reveal about medieval society. These concepts can be seen as binary: elite or low status, married or single, holy or cursed, male or female, or as complementary and cohesive as multiple parts of a societal whole. These articles also reinforce Scott's argument of the importance of gender as a category of historical analysis and the utility of a gender-based exploration of the concept of status in order to increase our knowledge and understanding of the society and culture of the Middle Ages. This special issue reflects the rich collection of scholarship that was featured at the 2014 Gender and Medieval Studies conference—and, indeed, in the tradition established by the conference series as a whole—to continually explore, discuss, and push the boundaries of gender-based studies of the medieval era.[25]

Notes

1. Lydia Harris, "Physicians, Healers and Midwives: Women in the Medieval Occupation, 1050–1350" (paper presented at the Gender and Medieval Studies Conference, University of Winchester, January 9–11, 2014).

2. Matthew Mesley, "Why German Bishops Could Not be Saved: Clerical Masculinities in the Works of Caesarius of Heisterbach" (paper presented at the Gender and Medieval Studies Conference, University of Winchester, January 9–11, 2014).

3. Katherine Weikert, "Closing Remarks," (paper presented at the Gender and Medieval Studies Conference, University of Winchester, January 9–11, 2014).

4. See Joan Wallach Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053–1076.

5. R. Clare Snyder, "What Is Third-Wave Feminism? A New Directions Essay," *Signs* 34, no. 1 (2008), accessed August 24, 2014, doi 10.1086/588436.

6. Alison Wylie, "Gender Theory and the Archaeological Record: Why Is There No Archaeology of Gender?" in *Engendering Archaeology: Women and Prehistory*, ed. J. Gero and M. Conkley (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 46.

7. Susan M. Johns, *Noblewomen, Aristocracy and Power in the Twelfth Century Anglo-Norman Realm*, Gender in History (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 1–7.

8. J. Wajcman, "Women and Men Managers: Careers and Equal Opportunities," in *Changing Forms of Employment, Organizations, Skills Gender*, ed. R. Cromtpon, D. Gallie, and K. Purcell (London: Routledge, 1996).

9. Amy Wharton, *The Sociology of Gender: An Introduction to Theory and Research* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 5.

10. Julie Oyegun, "Working Masculinities Back into Gender," *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equality* 37 (1998): 13, 18.

11. Dawn Hadley, "Introduction: Medieval Masculinities," in *Masculinities in Medieval Europe*, ed. Dawn Hadley (London: Longman, 1999), 3.

12. Martin Carver, "The Marriage of True Minds: Archaeology with Texts," in *Archaeology: The Widening Debate*, ed. Barry Cunliffe, Wendy Davies, and Colin Renfrew (London: British Academy, 2002), 498.

13. Guy Halsall, "Archaeology and Historiography," in *Companion to Historiography*, Routledge Companion Encyclopedias, ed. M. Bentley (London: Routledge, 1997), 805.

14. For examples coming solely from the discipline of history, see Guy Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376–568* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Robin Fleming, *Britain After Rome: The Fall and Rise, 400 to 1070*, Penguin History of Britain, vol. II (London: Allan Lane, 2010). An indication of rising acceptance of interdisciplinary work from historians can be seen in Fleming's 2013 MacArthur Fellows "Genius" Grant for "challenging the way historians view early medieval Britain and providing a framework for incorporating material culture into the writing of history"; "Robin Fleming," MacArthur Fellow Programme, 2 September 2013, accessed 25 August 2015, https://www.macfound.org/fellows/891/.

15. Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43 (1991): 1241–1299.

16. See, for example, s. e. smith, "Push(back) at the Intersections: Defining (and Critiquing) 'Intersectionality,'" *Bitch Magazine*, 5 August 2010, accessed 24 August 2015, https://bitchmedia.org/post/pushback-at-the-intersections-defining-and-critiquing-intersectionality.

17. For a limited number of examples, see M. Lindsay Kaplan, "Jessica's Mother: Medieval Constructions of Jewish Race and Gender in 'The Merchant of Venice,'" *Shakespeare Quarterly* 58, no. 1 (2007): 2, footnote 6, in criticism of the work of Lisa Lampert; Elizabeth A. Hubble, "Lettering the Self in Medieval and Early Modern France by Katherine Kong," *Medieval Feminist Forum* 47, no. 1 (2011): 86–88, accessed 24 August 2015, http://ir.uiowa.edu/mff/vol47/iss1/8, 87, noting that Kong does not address intersectionality though the topic "seems to beg for a nod" to it, 87.

18. For example, see Carl Bridenbaugh, "The Great Mutation," *American Historical Review* 68, no. 2 (1963): 315–319, implicitly outlines many of these expectations including the gender, class, and wealth of the historian.

19. Rose Drew, "Gender, Status and Impairment" (paper presented at the Gender and Medieval Studies Conference, University of Winchester, January 9–11, 2014); see also Welch and Rohan Brown, this issue.

20. Andrea-Bianka Znorovsky, "Cross-Dressing for Christ's Sake: Visualising the Sponsa in Medieval Illuminated Manuscripts" (poster presented at the Gender and Medieval Studies Conference, University of Winchester, January 9–11, 2014); Beatrice Fannon, "Masculinities in Question: Is Roland a Virgin Knight?" (paper presented at the Gender and Medieval Studies Conference, University of Winchester, January 9–11, 2014); see also Moss, this issue.

21. Sophia Germanidou, "Illustrating Women at Peasant Labour: Comparative Evidences from Medieval and Byzantine Art" (paper presented at the Gender and Medieval Studies Conference, University of Winchester, January 9–11, 2014).

22. Antonella Sciancalepore, "The Other Side of the Kingship: Saracen Ladies and Male Status in Medieval French Epics" (paper presented at the Gender and Medieval Studies Conference, University of Winchester, January 9–11, 2014).

23. For examples of three separate approaches of considering modern perceptions of the "normative" medieval, see Lillian Cespedes Gonzales, "Some Observations on Danes in Wessex Today," in *Danes in Wessex*, ed. Ryan Lavelle and Simon Roffey (Oxford: Oxbow, 2015); Katherine Weikert, "The Empress Matilda in Popular Fiction, 1970s to the Present," in *Virtuous or Villainess? The Image of the Royal Mother from the Early Medieval to the Early Modern Eras*, ed. Carey Fleiner and Elena Woodacre (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming 2016); and Helen Young, "Place and Time: Medievalism and Making Race," *The Year's Work in Medievalism* 28 (2013): 2–6.

24. For example, see Linda E. Mitchell, "Does Social Status Trump Gender, or Vice Versa? Theoretical Approaches and the Medieval World" (paper presented at the Gender and Medieval Studies Conference, University of Winchester, January 9–11, 2014).

25. For more information on the conference series, past and present, please visit www.medievalgender.co.uk. Other publications that have been spawned from Gender and Medieval Studies conferences include Elizabeth Cox, Liz Herbert McAvoy, and Roberta Magnini, eds., *Reconsidering Gender, Time and Memory in Medieval Culture* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2015); Diane Watt, ed., *Medieval Women in Their Communities* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997); Emma Campbell and Robert Mills, eds., *Troubled Vision: Gender, Sexuality and Sight in Medieval Text and Image* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).