ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the traditional feminine roles as inciters of violence, actors in violence, and as peacemakers. Scandinavian sagas, Anglo-Norman chronicles, and Crusader chronicles of the twelfth century are analyzed because of the benefits of the relative peace of the period and the establishment and reformulation of ideas regarding gender roles that took place in that era. Looking at these three sets of sources from distinct geographic regions illuminates the continuance of chroniclers’ uses of these traditional roles as well as the alterations in the portrayals of women in these roles.

The standard roles for both male and female characters that medieval writers present in their texts create recognizable stock characters. Women continually appear as inciters, actors, and peacemakers in violent situations. Although these roles remain recognizable, nevertheless, they changed according to the location and context of the violence. Chroniclers from twelfth-century Scandinavia, Anglo-Norman England, and the Crusader Kingdoms portrayed women in these roles with various interpretations and characteristics according to the situations and regions in which they lived, showing both the versatility of these roles (in the fact that they remain present in texts through space and time) as well as their malleability (in their evolution to fit particular circumstances). Although this thesis looks at the texts of three specific regions, texts of other European regions contain examples of women participating in violence during the Middle Ages as well and present an area of further study.