REMODELING THE NARRATIVE
OF WOMEN AND THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT
IN THE MIDDLE AGES

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ABSTRACT

Scholarship on the design, construction, decoration, and reception of the built environment during the medieval era has tended to focus on men as the primary makers and default users of this environment. However, recent scholars have examined a variety of media – including art, architecture, and texts – and uncovered the many contributions that medieval women made to these fields. By examining feminist scholarship and historiography, this thesis explores three case studies – elite and non-elite medieval women within male-dominated design spaces, Eleanor of Castile and her acquisition of property, and Christine de Pizan’s manipulation of an architectural trope – through a feminist lens to highlight the various ways in which medieval women worked in gendered environments, and carved out space and claimed agency through their contributions to the design world in the Middle Ages. These case studies include physical structures that were created as a result of inherited or acquired wealth, idealized spaces that were designed to protect women against the vicious attacks of men, and explores conditional situations in which both elite and non-elite women worked in the built environment. This thesis recognizes the struggles that these women endured in order to create space for themselves within societal confines, and contributes to and expands the scholarship surrounding the multifaceted ways in which women contributed to the design world in the Middle Ages. These women cleverly maneuvered through gendered spaces; capitalized on their elite roles in their households; acquired and managed property; and manipulated tropes and disseminated knowledge during a time rife with patriarchal norms.
INTRODUCTION

Scholarship on the design, construction, decoration, and reception of the built environment during the medieval era has tended to focus on men as the primary makers and default users of this environment. Indeed, it has long been assumed that men were the makers of the majority of art and architecture from the Middle Ages.¹ However, recent scholars have examined a variety of media – including art, architecture, and texts – and uncovered the many contributions that medieval women made to these fields. This thesis focuses on medieval women’s engagement with various environments including idealized spaces that provided environments that could cater to specific needs, conditional spaces in which women were thrust into occupational positions based on need or availability, and physical spaces involving buildings and structures. By examining feminist scholarship and historiography, this thesis explores three case studies – elite and non-elite medieval women within male-dominated design spaces, Eleanor of Castile and her acquisition of property, and Christine de Pizan’s manipulation of an architectural trope – through a feminist lens to highlight the various ways in which medieval women worked in gendered environments, and carved out space and claimed agency through their contributions to the design world in the Middle Ages. They maneuvered through gendered spaces; capitalized on their elite roles in their households; acquired and managed property; and manipulated tropes and disseminated knowledge.

The two main subjects that I discuss in this thesis are Eleanor of Castile and Christine de Pizan. Eleanor of Castile lived in the thirteenth century while Christine de

Pizan lived from the mid fourteenth century to the early fifteenth century; however, they shared a similar impact on their societies during their lifetimes. Both were highly intelligent women who were well-known and sustained great ambition while working in the context of royal courts. Examining the varied experiences of each of these women provides useful glimpses of the roles that physical and idealized environments played in the Middle Ages through their acquisition and manipulation of spaces. In the second and third chapters, I address how these women navigated space both directly and indirectly. While the first chapter takes a more abstract approach by discussing several medieval women and structures, it, too, contributes to the discourse surrounding the contributions medieval women had on the built environment in the Middle Ages.

This thesis incorporates a range of disciplines to highlight the complexities between the medieval building trades, elite and non-elite women, the role of elite medieval households, and contemporary scholarship. Art history and architecture intersect through the discussion of medieval building trades and more specifically, construction sites. Although surviving evidence recording the roles of women in construction is sparse, both Shelley E. Roff and Barbara A. Goodman argue that women had significant roles in the building trades. Goodman indeed frames the importance of women in metaphorical city-building as “authoritative founders.” Medieval history comes into play as the roles of elite medieval households are examined in great detail by John Carmi Parsons, one of the leading scholars studying the lives of medieval women, who suggests that the household played a large part in the successes of some medieval queens. Additionally, this thesis

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intersects with work in the fields of women’s and gender studies. Sarah L. Hindman suggests that it may be misleading for Christine de Pizan to be considered a feminist due to feminism being foreign to medieval society, while scholars Roberta L. Kruger and Judith L. Kellogg have each suggested separately that Christine’s conscious modelling of her City of Ladies could have been based on the female body politic.  

Though the scholarship pertaining to women’s navigation of physical and idealized spaces as well as their involvement in the building trades is scarce, there are indeed art historians and other scholars who do give attention to the role of women in medieval art and architecture in recent scholarship. In 2012, art historian Therese Martin comprised a collection of essays between two volumes that highlight the multifaceted ways in which women contributed to the art and architecture of the Middle Ages. Each of the twenty-four contributors examines a different artist, object, geographical location, or patron, creating a comprehensive base for thinking about this type of scholarship. Martin states that “the intention of the volumes is to recognize, even embrace, ambiguities and contradictions rather than attempting to iron out differences.” In this collection of works, women’s roles are the topics of case studies from which larger theoretical, methodological, and historiographical conclusions are drawn. My thesis contributes to the exploration of the extent of women’s involvement in medieval art and architecture while broadening the scope and examination of the ways in which they manipulated these spaces, both directly and indirectly.

In order to show how medieval women maneuvered through various types of design spaces to claim agency, this thesis relies on surviving evidence of physical structures, illustrations, visual analyses, extant documents and contemporary literature. I pay close attention to the physical appearance of the structures that my subjects were associated with; specifically, the architecture and interior designs that Eleanor of Castile and the elite and non-elite women are said to have influenced or worked with. Though my chapter on Christine de Pizan does not focus on tangible physical structures, it is still imperative that the illustrations in her book are closely examined.

Understanding the ways in which medieval women maneuvered through society in addition to my growing interest in the built environment of the Middle Ages helped narrow the scope of my research as these topics sparked my interest as much as they generated questions. I am drawn to the developments that produced medieval structures including the technology that was accessible at the time, medieval construction practices, the functionality of environments through the formation of cities, rural areas and infrastructure, as well as the collaboration between various countries and individuals from wide ranging disciplines. My interest is rooted in the examination of medieval women’s cultural environment and what we can deduct from their agency and involvement in the built environment as opposed to an analysis of physical buildings and structures.

I was able to uncover various articles, documents, and images that discussed or depicted women and their relationship to the built environment; however, the information, particularly on non-elite women, was limited. Indeed, the lack of surviving documents from the Middle Ages has thwarted documentation of the past; however, some current scholarship has continued to diminish the roles of women through modern scholastic
practices. I was unaware of the multifaceted ways in which these two subjects were interconnected until a thorough examination of literature like that of Therese Martin’s book *Reassessing the Roles of Women as ‘Makers’ in Medieval Art and Architecture* (2012). I now know that it is imperative that questions and discussions surrounding the connection between these two subjects are raised more frequently in order to deconstruct that the idea that men are the default ‘makers’ of the art and architecture of the Middle Ages.

The purpose of my research is to contribute to the scholarship that investigates medieval women’s roles in the conception and creation of the built environment. Therese Martin states that “an appreciation of women’s active roles even within the constrained circumstances of the medieval past can contribute to dispelling the passive acceptance of women’s’ secondary status in the present.”\(^7\) This exact sentiment prompted me to contribute to the ongoing research in this field. The ability for current scholarship to transform the lens through which we see women’s contributions and influences can contribute to the social and political history in both the Middle Ages and the present.

My thesis consists of three chapters that address briefly the historiographies of each of the subjects and address the impacts that their contributions had on the built environment and design world of the Middle Ages. I will begin by addressing the roles of both elite and non-elite women in gendered spaces within the household and construction sites. In the next chapter I will examine works by Eleanor of Castile, who like many medieval queens, took on a major role within the royal household. I should note that because of the scarcity of information pertaining to non-elite women, and the tendency of both medieval writers and modern scholars to eclipse the activities of married women with those of their

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\(^7\) Martin, “Exceptions and Assumptions,” 33.
husbands, the first two chapters are relatively short. In the third chapter, I discuss Christine de Pizan and her book *City of Ladies* through which she created an idealized environment for the purpose of creating a safe space for women. This is in many ways the core of the thesis and the chapter for which literary, historical, and art-historical literature is most abundant.

This thesis uses feminist scholarship to examine spaces in which medieval women found themselves, highlighting the various ways in which they carved out space and claimed agency through their contributions to the design world in the Middle Ages. By exploring how women contributed to the design of their environments, contemporary scholars can gain a better understanding of the various societal confines in which these women found themselves.
CHAPTER ONE:
MEDIEVAL WOMEN:
THE NAVIGATION OF MALE-DOMINATED DESIGN SPACES

There is a longstanding pattern within past and present scholarship that elides medieval women’s contributions to the built environment, subsequently resulting in a distortion of their hard work and a single-gendered image of medieval art and architecture.\(^8\) There is evidence of medieval women from various backgrounds engaging with these types of spaces. However, most of the extant documentation pertaining to medieval women consists of information about elite women, which this chapter addresses only in the context of their connection to the built environment.

One elite woman who took part in architecture and design practices during the Middle Ages was Queen Philippa of Hainault (c. 1310-1369). For example, she extensively remodeled and repaired Ludgershall Castle (Wiltshire, England) in the early 1340s (Fig 1). The chapel was the site of some repairs during the remodel in which the structure was glazed, repainted, and reformed to construct a new chamber block.\(^9\) Furthermore, Queen Philippa also took up design projects in Odiham, where the manor came into her possession in 1331 after the fall of Queen Isabella.\(^10\) At this location, renovations included the kitchen, which was built over water, bridges over the moat, the cup-house which housed cups and other tableware, the King’s garderobe (or wardrobe storage), and the addition of a pale (or

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\(^8\) Ellen M. Shortell, “Erasures and Recoveries of Women’s Contributions to Gothic Architecture: The Case of Saint-Quentin, Local Nobility, and Eleanor of Vermandois,” in Reassessing the Roles of Women as Makers of Medieval Art and Architecture, ed. Therese Martin (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 159.


\(^10\) Woolgar, The Senses, 225.
small enclosure). Additionally, one of the exterior elements that also came under construction during Queen Philippa’s reign was a garden with seats roofed with turf and enclosed with a timber palisade. Queen Philippa’s attention to her residential remodeling projects may have reflected her rapidly growing family and the need for staff that supported her children, tutors, nurses, and others. Through building projects, Queen Philippa contributed to the development and acquisition of the royal family’s estates that by this time had often become part of queens’ dowers that they held before the death of the king.

Sylvia Tomasch argues that urbanization in the later Middle Ages was important in the overall tendency to further restrict women’s legal, economic, and spiritual opportunities. Tomasch continues by stating that according to McNamara, the enclosure of women was a general trend in many European cities which is consistent with an ideology that had a purpose of imagining a space in which women were absent. The medieval author Philippe de Navarre wrote that “Women should not learn to read or write unless they are going to be nuns, as much harm comes from such knowledge” or “If you have a female child, set her to sewing and not to reading, for it is not suitable for a female to know how to read unless she is going to be a nun” or “The female is an empty thing and easily swayed.” Hindman raises this point while highlighting the novelty of French poet and

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16 As quoted in Sandra L. Hindman’s article “With Ink and Mortar: Christine de Pizan’s ‘Cite des Dames.’” in *Feminist Studies* 10, no. 3 (Autumn 1984) 457, the source was from Phillip de Navarre, *Les Quatre ages de l’homme* and the anonymous *Libro di buoni costume*, respectively, both quoted from Julia O’Faolain and
author Christine de Pizan, who will be examined throughout the third chapter, and the ways she tried to break out of the patriarchal confines in which women were held through her literary endeavors.

Medieval women functioned primarily under male authority during the Middle Ages; however, there were ways in which elite women, namely, queens, were able to find agency within their royal administration – primarily in the household.\textsuperscript{17} By using their elite status and other tools that they had at their disposal, queens navigated their royal households and manipulated these spaces of power. This chapter examines the circumstances in which both elite and non-elite women navigated male-dominated design and construction spaces in the Middle Ages.

\textbf{History of elite women and their households}

Elite women navigated different responsibilities for great households. In one of Ellen M. Shortell’s articles, she addresses women’s contributions to architecture through the lens of erasures and recoveries. Shortell emphasizes that though “the great majority of master masons were certainly men, women were involved in the building process at nearly all levels.”\textsuperscript{18} While Woolgar notes that elite households – even those headed by women – were largely staffed by and administered by men, I will consider the roles that women could play in the creation of their physical households.\textsuperscript{19}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{17} Parsons, \textit{Eleanor of Castile}, 66.
\textsuperscript{18} Shortell, “Erasures and Recoveries,” 158.
\textsuperscript{19} Woolgar, \textit{The Senses}, 227.
\end{flushleft}
Presiding over the household was a way in which medieval queens could develop an agreeable environment and way of life. John Carmi Parsons goes into great detail about the relationship between medieval queens and their households. He states that “a major factor in the evolution of English queens’ prerogatives and administrative machinery was their need for adequate revenue and the means to assure its collection.” With that being said, the households were not just to prioritize the businesses of the Queen and King. They assuredly proved necessary for elite children, too, as seen in the aforementioned Ludgershall estate which is one of a network of manors that were designed for that purpose.

Participating in estate design was one of the potential duties thrust upon queens in the Middle Ages. For example, Queen Constance (d. 1032) engaged in design practices at Château d’Étampes in France. Annie Renoux recounts how she built a *palatium nobile...cum oratorio*, (an elaborate palace with an adjoining oratory) and how her husband, King Robert frequented the location with his men to have luncheons and to distribute alms. The significance of queens’ actions go beyond orchestrating an environment for the family and administration to enjoy. Renoux goes on to suggest that though the queen was not in the highest position at the palace, hers still remained a position of strength. By planning and carrying out these renovations, Constance, and other queens alike, helped bolster the monarchy’s status through the quality of the building.

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**Elite women and their households**

Queen’s roles in the household provided many opportunities in which they could gain power through their own operations within the administrations of their partners. Renoux notes that although the construction of the grand residences and castles of the elite was primarily a male enterprise, elite women could work as well.\textsuperscript{25} Medieval queens were indeed secondary to their husbands and heir within the administration; however, they did retain some power as the mistress or lady of the palace (*domina palatii*).\textsuperscript{26} Renoux states that as queen, these women were concerned with internal palace business as they made sure the palace was well kept and that its ceremonial was in proper order to command respect.\textsuperscript{27}

Scholar C. M. Woolgar examines the structure of Queen’s households in great detail:

“The structure of the Queen’s household reflected her status, different possibilities for display and her relationship to her children. Unlike both the King and the episcopacy, whose landed property remained relatively constant throughout the Middle Ages and in which the investments of one might be continued by a successor, the estates of English queens, although mainly from a recurrent group of holdings, often did not transfer directly to a successor. Widows held their dower after the demise of their husbands, and there were also periods when important estates remained in the hands of the King or reverted to the administration of the Duchy of Lancaster. There were, therefore, disjuncture in the development of these properties. While a queen might frequently reside with her husband and have suites of rooms in his palaces, the use of her own properties gives an indication of how her household was intended to function, her tastes and influences, and it was here that royal children were often to be found.”\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{25} Renoux, “Elite Women, Palaces, and Castles,” 741.
\textsuperscript{26} Renoux, “Elite Women, Palaces, and Castles,” 744.
\textsuperscript{27} Renoux, “Elite Women, Palaces, and Castles,” 744.
\textsuperscript{28} Woolgar, *The Senses*, 223.
By overseeing various activities throughout the household, queens were able to place themselves in positions of power within physical “centres of power” by capitalizing on their roles in elite environments.\(^{29}\)

**Non-elite women and the building trades**

Though elite women made notable contributions to the built environment during the Middle Ages, it is important to recognize that they were not the only ones contributing to this field. Shelley E. Roff has studied medieval construction sites in depth, making her work the perfect foundation for the following section. Roff has examined how the construction site was a crucial factor in the economy of cities in medieval and early modern Europe.\(^{30}\) Seeing as there were no barriers to women partaking in this type of labor, both women and children were able to seek work in this field, albeit having to work for incredibly low rates or in seasonal positions.\(^{31}\)

The conditions in which these women worked were considered less desirable as they may have included digging ditches, filling mason’s holds, and carrying sand. These conditions made women susceptible to abuse and violence, while women who worked in other types of workshops or on offsite locations may have had more security and protection.\(^{32}\) Typically, these laborious jobs were taken by the poorest of women who were in need of additional income.\(^{33}\) Roff speaks of two notable examples showcasing the

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30 Shelley E. Roff, “‘Appropriate to Her Sex’? Women’s Participation on the Construction Site in Medieval and Early Modern Europe,” in *Women and Wealth in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. Theresa Earenfight (New York, 2010), 109.
33 Roff, “Appropriate to Her Sex?,” 113.
discrepancies these women faced while on the construction site. The first example was in fifteenth-century Toledo where women worked on the construction site of the cathedral. She states that they did similar work to that of the male laborers including sweeping, gathering lime, and working on the roof; however they were paid less than their male counterparts and equal to young boys that were working on site. In France at Perigueux after 1350, women did most of the labor, yet, similar to the women in Toledo, they were paid less than the men who did the same work as them.

Other ways in which women navigated “lower echelon” built environments was through their contributions in workshops. Roff states that married couples were the foundation of craft workshops, and these environments comprised of husbands, wives and daughters were crucial as medieval economies depended on them greatly. Women who worked as day laborers on constructions or in workshops alongside their husbands or fathers worked in labor-intensive and conditional environments.

**Issues with Past and present documentation:**

There is an established issue of past and present scholarship misrepresenting the contributions of medieval women within the realm of the built environment. Shortell states that this issue, namely the blindness of historians, connoisseurs, and restorers to women’s presence at these sites plays an important factor in the misunderstanding of the history of construction of one of the largest Gothic churches in France. She goes on to discuss how when contemporary chroniclers like Canon Claude Hémeré and Louis-Paul Colliette

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34 Roff, “Appropriate to Her Sex?,” 115.
35 Roff, “Appropriate to Her Sex?,” 115.
36 Roff, “Appropriate to Her Sex?,” 110, 117.
“...included the actions of women, they were usually cast in a different light from those of men.” She continues by stating that nineteenth-century authors often projected gender differences onto their subjects as they saw Gothic architecture as “highly charged public monuments, consistent with the actions of men.” Roff discusses the work of Merry Wiesner and how, historically, women’s work was not seen as work. Wiesner discusses how “City and state governments often suggested that guilds and other occupational groups overlook the production of a small number of items by widows and other poor women because this was not really ‘work,’ but simply ‘support,’ and the women would otherwise need public assistance.” Diminishing the roles of women within these environments through literature greatly impacts contemporary studies of these edifices and time periods.

Ellen M. Shortell perfectly describes an example of the physical removal of the presence of women within architectural structures at Saint-Quentin in Vermandois (Fig 2):

“During the mid-nineteenth-century restoration of stained glass windows at the former collegiate church of Saint-Quentin in the Vermandois (Picardy, France), the heads of three of the four figures in a pair of donor panels were replaced. In the process, the restorer turned a group of four women into two women and two men. In another panel, a married couple became two men. The visual erasure of female donors parallels the compilation of historical and art-historical narratives in which modern conceits about gender obscured the roles that women played in the public sphere in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. From both historical and historiographic perspectives, Saint-Quentin is a compelling case study of women’s roles in the making of art and architecture and of the consequences of their omission from histories.”

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40 Roff, “Appropriate to Her Sex?,” 110.
41 Shortell, “Erasures and Recoveries,” 129.
Shelley Roff raises another notable problem that has a pivotal role in the issue pertaining to women’s roles in these male-dominated spaces in a section of her article that centers the discussion around the problem of exceptionalism. She states:

“When encountering women’s appearance in male-dominated crafts and as day laborers in historical documents, historians have previously rationalized this as an exceptional phenomenon to be attributed to social or economic crises, when war or disease produced a shortage of men, or when the discrepancy of the wage rate between men and women was great enough to make female labor financially desirable.”

She provides an example in which she discusses the early twentieth-century work of Spanish historian Ramón Carande:

“Carande justified the numerous accounts he had found in the archives of women doing heavy labor in fourteenth-century Seville by hypothesizing that this was the result of the Black Plague, which had decimated the population and left a great predominance of women over men. He also attributed women’s employment to the increase in a population that he labeled “disfavorable,” such as the many handicapped, mutilated, leprous, and insane, also being employed at these sites.”

Roff goes on to state that even though the Black Plague was indeed a factor in the restructuring of society, the practice of women working in these environments was present regardless. In addition to written accounts, she recalls how “Images of building construction sites in paintings and engravings from the medieval and the early modern period never, to my present knowledge, depict women working on these sites….however women do appear in these images as patrons.” Rare medieval images of women

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42 Roff, “Appropriate to Her Sex?,” 110.
43 Roff, “Appropriate to Her Sex?,” 111.
44 Roff, “Appropriate to Her Sex?,” 111.
sometimes depict them as patrons as seen in the image of a husband and wife placing the final touches on the vault of a church (Fig 3).

The many responsibilities of medieval queens showcase how they were integral parts of royal administrations as they helped reinforce their establishments both conceptually and geopolitically, carefully curated spaces that could house future kings, all while taking up their own interests as well. Moreover, women who worked on construction sites, in workshops, and as day laborers were not working on as large of a scale as the more elite women, however, the discussion of their contributions and working conditions helps create a more cohesive image of the economy of the Middle Ages. Though there is not an abundance of extant evidence explicitly tracking elite and non-elite women’s roles in construction and design in the Middle Ages, the study of their contributions remains important.

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The public image of Queen Eleanor of Castile (1241-1290), Queen of Edward I of England, was widely contested. In some cases she was viewed as a respected and devoted wife and mother, while in other cases she drew criticism for her actions within some business relationships in which she took part. She was very involved in her husband’s royal administration from the beginning of their partnership. Their extensive travel resulted in the procurement of many lands, and in some cases, Eleanor was a considerable contributor in their acquisition, maintenance, and daily administrative activities. The large number of commemorative monuments Eleanor’s widower commissioned for her include three burials (for her body, her heart, and her entrails) and twelve sculptural crosses, marking the path of her funerary cortege in 1291. These monuments act as visual reminders of her connection to her partner, his administration, and her connection to the built environment during her lifetime.

Part of Eleanor of Castile’s legacy is undoubtedly connected to the design enterprises that she undertook as a woman of elite status. By navigating her role as queen, she established herself as a rather powerful medieval landowner, whose acquisition of properties was much more controversial in her own time than her influences on interior decoration and design. This chapter examines how Eleanor of Castile established herself as a woman with two distinct roles within her household – Queen and property manager – subsequently bolstering her image, income and legacy.

46 John Carmi Parsons’s book *Eleanor of Castile* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), is the most important source on Eleanor of Castile’s life.
Early Life and Commitments

Eleanor was born in Castile and was the daughter of Ferdinand III (1201-1252), King of Castile and Leon, and Jeanne, Countess of Ponthieu (d. 1279). According to Parsons, part of Eleanor’s childhood took place at one of the most intensely literary courts in Europe. Due to the range of works that she either owned or were made for her, Parsons suggests that Eleanor possessed the characteristics essential to a seamless cultural integration upon her arrival in her new home. Additionally, from engaging with the court of her father and brother, Parsons speculates that she may have developed her skills in the written word that went above and beyond what was usually expected of medieval women of rank at this time.

The royal duties of queens discussed in the previous chapter undoubtedly apply to the actions of Eleanor of Castile. As the brides of kings, women like Eleanor were tasked with specific roles within their households in order to contribute to the royal administration in a variety of ways. International royal brides needed to establish themselves as effective presences within the household which would be key to their success within their new roles. Within the royal administration as a whole, when the king and queen were together, the queen’s household rarely functioned as a separate entity as it was subordinate to the King’s.

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48 Parsons, *Eleanor of Castile*, 55. Examples of objects that may have been made for her: the Vegetius translation, and ancestral romance for Ponthieu, a theological work by Pecham, saints’ lives.
One of Eleanor’s most critical and intimate relationships was between her and her husband. She had a strong influence over Edward I.\textsuperscript{52} Parsons states that ‘mediator’ was one of the roles placed on royal wives by the Church as society expected them to mediate with their husbands.\textsuperscript{53} With that being said, evidence suggests that there were instances when Edward was put into the position to mediate the perceptions of Eleanor as people in close contact with both of the royals feared that Eleanor posed a threat and could “turn Edward against any who crossed her” due to her ambition and acquisitiveness.\textsuperscript{54}

The acquisition of properties and lands allowed Eleanor to increase and strengthen positions of all those involved within the household. By taking on this role, she could support herself by using what we today would call business skills to develop her relationships and networks of social power, and to acquire lands that provided income – rents and goods – that could help support her own household and those of her children.\textsuperscript{55} Actions like intervening in the lives of their children and mediating with the king enabled queens to skillfully maneuver through the royal consort and may have introduced them to other opportunities within the broader administrations.\textsuperscript{56}

**Eleanor and her role as both Queen and land procurer**

The level of involvement that Eleanor of Castile showcased in both the public and private sectors of the royal administration emphasizes her interest and prioritization of her roles as both Queen and land procurer for her household. She took great care in managing

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{52} Parsons, *Eleanor of Castile*, 43.
\textsuperscript{53} Parsons, *Eleanor of Castile*, 43.
\textsuperscript{54} Parsons, *Eleanor of Castile*, 43.
\textsuperscript{55} Parsons, *Eleanor of Castile*, 123.
\textsuperscript{56} Parsons, “Of Queens, Courts, and Books,” 186.
\end{flushleft}
the estates of her administration as she exerted her prerogatives to inform the estate’s operations. Some of these duties included arranging marriages, obtaining church positions for her clerks, and participating in other patronal duties. These actions helped develop her image and enabled her to become a more visible entity in and outside of the royal household. \(^{57}\) Parsons states that as Eleanor’s business practices gained more and more traction, chronicles, letters, schedule, and petition together shaped recent descriptions of Eleanor as “the greatest acquirer of them all,” “particularly notorious” in securing lands pledged to the Jews, and “a dynamic and important landowner” who “seems to have been everywhere in the property dealings of her day.” \(^{58}\)

There is substantial evidence that Eleanor was intimately involved with her administration and tenants as she corresponded with them directly. Overseeing her business affairs proved helpful in establishing relationships and allegiances of her own that varied slightly from the larger administration that she was a part of, and that would provide her with financial and political support. Tenants’ petitions, bailiffs reports, and meetings of her council showcase that it is probable that she was the final authority within her administration and corresponding projects. \(^{59}\) A letter from one of her clerks, John de Loundres, dated September 1265, is an example of how Eleanor took an active role in the acquisition of her lands and was aware of how her actions could influence the public’s opinion of her as she instructs Loundres to solve an issue so that there are no repercussions. \(^{60}\) Other ways in which she could keep tabs on her affairs was through her relationship with royal officials including access to Chancery through John de Kirkby, as

\(^{57}\) Parsons, *Eleanor of Castile*, 116.
\(^{58}\) Parsons, *Eleanor of Castile*, 121.
well as her intimate knowledge of the king’s official circle which she sometimes used to her advantage. Additionally, she oversaw the happenings on her lands through tenants’ appeals. Parsons details how after buildings at Lyndon were found to be in ruins, Eleanor took it upon herself to restore them and personally ordered them to be rebuilt. Similarly, Eleanor’s men were responsible for damaging a man’s court, and after this was brought to Eleanor’s attention, she had his property rebuilt as well. In a complaint filed by John de Wauton in 1291, he says he was strong armed into a heavy burden of loans. In his complaint letter he asked Eleanor for help and she agreed that she would. Eleanor’s presence within her property administration showcases her interest within this role of overseeing and engaging with the business of royal estates.

Although her managerial duties took up a large portion of her role, she continued to partake in the planning and designing of other spaces as well. By incorporating patterns and decorations that were familiar to her as result of her Spanish background, Eleanor of Castile influenced many of her interior surroundings. She decorated her quarters in London in Spanish fashion through varying textiles including silk hangings and tapestries on the floors and walls. C. M. Woolgar notes that Eleanor’s taste dominated fashion and the secular use of textiles in the royal and other households grew commensurately. Eleanor took great pride in her surroundings and often participated in developing refinements for her residences. She had strong design preferences and aversions which can be seen through the speed in which refinements were supplied for her residences when she accompanied Edward during the Welsh war of 1282-84. At Rhuddlan and Caernarfon, lead roofs were

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63 Parsons, *Eleanor of Castile*, 144,145.
64 Woolgar, *The Senses*, 223.
installed and lawns were neatly turfed and fenced while interior chambers were painted
and dyed various colors.65 Additionally, Parsons states that Eleanor had an affinity for
outdoor environments, too, as she regularly incorporated ornamental plants to amplify the
exterior of her buildings.66

There is also evidence that Eleanor may have influenced some of the designs at
Caernarfon Castle in Wales as examined by scholar Sarah Cockerill (Fig 4). Sarah
Cockerill and Michael Prestwich have suggested that Eleanor's interest in Welsh and
Arthurian romance literature influenced many Arthurian aspects of the reign of Edward I,
including some that appear at Caernarfon.67 They also observed the strong similarity of
particular aspects of Caernarfon Castle, particularly the three-turreted Eagle Tower, to the
heraldic emblem of Castile. When Eleanor returned the following year to give birth to the
child who would be Edward II, the Eagle Tower had been completed up to the third story.
Additionally a knight attached to her household, Sir Eustace Hacche, was overseeing
construction in the early stages at Caernarfon.

There were other key factors in determining Eleanor’s involvement in the castle as
well. As previously stated, Eleanor is known to have been well versed in literature. She
commissioned books like the Douce Apocalypse and the Lord Edward’s Vegetius, she
maintained her own scriptorium, often exchanged books with others, and had an interest in
local myths and heroic tales. Cockerill suggests that if there was a collection of Welsh folk
tales in circulation, one would expect Eleanor to acquire a copy.68 Another key element in

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67 Cockerill, “Caernarfon Castle,” and Michael Prestwich, “Edward I: A Chivalric King?,” in Craig M.
Nakashian and Daniel P. Franke, ed., *Prowess, Piety, and Public Order in Medieval Society: Studies in
examining Eleanor’s influence on the design of this castle is the Eagle Tower (Fig 5). The tower stands three storeys high and was the first part of the castle to be built. Cockerill states that the design of the tower was heavily influenced by the arms of Castile as a result of the similarities between the turrets of the castle depicted on the arms and the design of the turrets located on the tower.\textsuperscript{69} Cockerill suggests that though there is not incontrovertible proof of her involvement, it is clear that Eleanor of Castile influenced the design of Caernarfon Castle.

Often acting outside the structures of institutionalized power, elite medieval women could seek out informal methods that were accessible to both manipulation and experimentation in order to breach cultural boundaries and make space for themselves.\textsuperscript{70} Historically, the majority of scholarship has paid little attention to queens due to their focus on in-depth investigations of kings. As a result, the challenges that these women faced go primarily unresearched.\textsuperscript{71} Though women’s involvement within architecture and design practices has been reduced while the work of men continues to be lauded, women’s patronage is becoming increasingly more recognized as having played a more significant role.\textsuperscript{72} It is clear that the role Eleanor of Castile played within her household was multi-layered as her interests did not only pertain to her role as queen nor solely in her role of managing properties. By navigating her role as queen, Eleanor of Castile was able to establish herself as a woman with a multifaceted career in property and design that elevated

\textsuperscript{69} Cockerill, “Caernarfon Castle,” 4.
\textsuperscript{70} Parsons, “Of Queens, Courts, and Books,” 187.
\textsuperscript{71} Parsons, \textit{Eleanor of Castile}, 1-2, 6-7.
\textsuperscript{72} Shortell, “Erasures and Recoveries,” 1
the royal establishment while bolstering both her image, income, and legacy in the Middle Ages.
In 1405, French poet and author Christine de Pizan (1364-1430) wrote a book titled *Le Livre de la Cité des Dames* (*City of Ladies*). The text is included in a presentation copy made for Isabeau of Bavaria (1371-1435), the consort of King Charles IV of France, which is now housed in the British Library in London (London, British Library, Harley MS 4431). Many of Christine’s texts are preserved in deluxe illuminated copies made for her elite audience. The manuscript is lavishly provided with various decorative elements, and also includes three miniatures that depict women actively engaging with the built environment.

The most prominent image in the book is the one that depicts Christine de Pizan and the personifications of Reason, Rectitude, and Justice (Fig 6). In the book, Christine as the protagonist can be easily identified as she is clad in a long blue dress and a starched white headdress. The illumination is split in two parts: the left-hand side of the manuscript depicts Christine de Pizan with her hand resting on an open text as she stands on a checkered floor on the opposite side of a long table from three crown-wearing figures that represent the personifications of Reason, Rectitude and Justice. All of the figures are grouped together under a gray and gold veranda-like structure. The right-hand side of the illumination depicts Christine de Pizan, once again, as she uses a trowel to spread cement and prepare for the placement of a stone. Rectitude, identifiable by her long red gown and golden crown, bends to lay a stone on the same area that Christine recently prepared. The

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73 From British Library Website: http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Harley_MS_4431
women work together on a courtyard lush with grass to finish laying the stones of a wall of which most has already been assembled.

One of the links found throughout each of the illuminations in this autograph manuscript is the adaptation of the built environment which serves as a metaphor for Christine’s larger project: to construct a metaphorical environment for the purpose of protecting women against the attacks of men. She relied on academic resources to add to the discourse surrounding gender politics of the Middle Ages, and constructed a community for Medieval women through her City of Ladies. The circumstances under which Christine produced her book showcase her valiant efforts to create a safe space for women while advocating for their strength and independence. Her book, *City of Ladies* provided the opportunity to advance her career, help her claim agency, and position herself within the framework of the design world in the late fifteenth century. By using and manipulating a centuries-old architectural trope, she disseminated knowledge by focusing her book on building a city to house and protect women while simultaneously highlighting women’s involvement in the building trades through the intentionality behind the design of her manuscript. This chapter examines how Christine de Pizan was able to deconstruct an established trope and reconstruct it for her own purposes, subsequently contributing meaningful insight to the design world of the Middle Ages.

**Life and Works**

Christine de Pizan was an accomplished French poet and author who mastered the literary and scholarly conventions of her time in order to produce highly valued texts that

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74 From British Library Website: [http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Harley_MS_4431](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Harley_MS_4431)
demonstrated her command of contemporary Latin and vernacular wisdom in the Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{75} She was born in Venice and was the daughter of Thomas de Pizan, a physician and royal astrologer to the King of France, Charles IV.\textsuperscript{76} Though not much is known about her early education, according to Hindman, she may have “had more schooling, at least of an informal sort, than was usual for girls in France. Growing up in the palace of the king and ‘nourished on his bread,’ Christine passed a happy childhood.”\textsuperscript{77} At the age of fifteen she married a man named Etienne du Castel; however, after ten years of marriage and in close proximity to her father’s death, she was widowed and left with three children to support on her own at the age of twenty five. As a woman with connections to people and places of an elite status, she was able to provide for herself and her family by producing works in poetry and prose, and presenting them to a variety of royal patrons. The patriarchal confines through which women had to navigate during the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries made it difficult, in some cases, to achieve recognition for their work. However, Christine was able to position herself within an idealized space and help support her goals by way of her intellectual ability.

It is through literature that Christine de Pizan was able to cement her legacy and showcase her ability to cleverly disseminate knowledge about a range of issues pertaining to women and society in the Middle Ages. Many of her works focused on women’s perspectives including \textit{Le Livre de Paix (The Book of Peace)}, \textit{Le Livre des trois vertus (The Book of Three Virtues)}, \textit{Le Livre du duc des vrais amans (The Duke of True Lovers)}, \textit{Le

\textsuperscript{76} Bonnie A. Birk. \textit{Christine de Pizan and Biblical Wisdom: A Feminist -Theological Point of View} (Milwaukee, Wis.: Marquette University Press, 2005), 17.
\textsuperscript{77} Hindman, “With Ink and Mortar,” 457.
Livre de l'Advision Cristine (Christine's Vision). L'Epistre au dieu d'amours (Letter to the God of Love). According to art historian Laura Rinaldi Dufresne, Christine, “One of the first vernacular authors to supervise the copying and illumination of her books…produced a vast number of writings for members of the French court between 1390 and 1429.” The breadth of Christine’s involvement with royal courts and patrons can be identified by Hindman’s analysis. She states:

“Some works Christine wrote on commission; others she wrote on speculation. Nearly all her works were written for members of the court: King Charles VI and Queen Isabeau de Baviere of France; the dukes, Louis of Orleans, John of Berry, and Philip of Burgundy; the dauphin and his wife, Louis of Guyenne and Margaret of Burgundy. She seems to have been rewarded well, sometimes with gifts instead of money, for her valiant efforts. This steady patronage by persons in the royal circle indicates that she was taken seriously as a writer. Her books were sent abroad, as well, with the result that offers came to her to serve the court of the duke of Milan, Gian Galeazzo Visconti, and the king of England, Henry IV.”

Book of the City of Ladies

Though Christine produced many literary works during her lifetime, her novel City of Ladies is the most notable book in her oeuvre when considering her work through the lens of the built environment and design world. Christine can be described as what Barbara A. Goodman calls an “authoritative founder” as a result of her multifaceted and metaphorical involvement in city-building including the creative construction process as well as the “physical act of giving birth to these cities.” As stated earlier, the Harley MS

81 Goodman, “The City of Ladies; A Lady of Cities,” 42.
4431 manuscript located in the British Library in London – a presentation copy that contains a variety of her works including a copy of *City of Ladies* – was given to her patron. Established at the beginning of her book, the line between figurative and literal spaces is blurred through the way in which Christine’s ideal City of Ladies is presented. Christine is visited by personifications of Reason, Rectitude and Justice as she begins to fall asleep. They materialize as a way to help Christine work through the difficulties of navigating through a society in which women are poorly represented in both literature and philosophy. This causes her to doubt not only herself but other women’s value, too. The three daughters who appear on behalf of God, their father and the celestial king, grant Christine a charter to commence the construction of the city.\(^{82}\) Led by each of the three personifications and separated into three parts, the book follows Christine on her journey as she works collaboratively with diverse groups of both religious and noblewomen to create a space in which women can shield themselves from the attacks of men.

The book is unique due to its description of the construction of a metaphorical city as well as for its role as an environment that is entirely made by women, built for women, and run by women.\(^{83}\) Judith L. Kellogg describes the foundation of the beginning of the book stating how a remarkable group of mythological and historical women come together to “create a social structure based on feminine intellect, imagination, moral strength, and insight.” She goes on to suggest that not only are these women active participants in the realization of their community, they are also “responsible for creating the technological and institutional foundations of civilized life.”\(^{84}\) Christine de Pizan’s book combines

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\(^{82}\) Goodman, “The City of Ladies; A Lady of Cities,” 43-52.
\(^{83}\) Goodman, “The City of Ladies; A Lady of Cities,” 49.
\(^{84}\) Kellogg, “Le Livre de la cite des dames,” 136.
various concepts including feminist discourse, gender disparities, religion, design, and more to support her argument of women being crucial participants in society. Also, as Rosalind Brown-Grant states, “to both refute the misogynist equation of womankind with sinfulness and to instill a sense of self-worth in her female readers.”85 During a time in which the livelihoods of women were primarily centered around men, this book acts as a space in which women can seek refuge and be among the company of a close-knit group of women who claim agency for themselves by constructing an environment that is tailored to their specific needs. This idea of using a combination of the knowledge and materials that one has at their disposal to create a safe space or idealized environment is a concept that dates back to ancient Mesopotamia.

**Architecture as Metaphor**

*City of Ladies* is a unique work of literature due to the intersection of topics pertaining to women, the built environment, and the utilization of the concept of a centuries-old architectural trope. John Onians addresses the idea of tropes that reference the relationship between people, idealized spaces and architectural elements in an article that discusses the longstanding tradition of the inseparability of buildings, talking and thinking. According to Onians, “What is argued is that the making of buildings and the experiencing of buildings are both associated with distinctive mental operations and that this association is apparent in our use of language.”86 He goes on to suggest that we use architectural metaphors in various aspects of our daily lives because we can easily associate

these concepts to our own thoughts and emotions.° Architecture as a metaphor can be traced back to ancient Egypt, Israel, and many other places in ancient Mesopotamia. As Onians explains in his article, a notable example can be found in a metaphor in the Bible. In a biblical reference that may have been familiar to Christine’s audience, Christ is explicitly identified as “the stone which the builders rejected and which became the corner (Mark, 12, 10) and as a rock (I, Corinthians, 10, 4)” in the metaphors of the Old Testament which are then continued in the New Testament.° Onians argues that verbal architecture was given new importance by Christian writers of the Middle Ages.

Similarly, metaphors can be found rooted throughout the entirety of Augustine of Hippo’s early 5th- century City of God (Fig 7). Literary scholar and writer Ian Almond suggests that “to call City of God an extended metaphor would be an understatement to say the least.”° Consisting of twenty-two books and eleven hundred pages, Augustine uses a lengthy metaphor to examine two distinct cities: one that follows the unchanging laws put in place by God, and one that remains more autonomous by prioritizing their own standards and customs.° Hindman discusses the impact that Augustine’s City of God had on Christine’s book by highlighting the similarities of the illustrations in contemporary manuscripts. Indeed, Christine states that her city is a modern City of God, “one that embraces virtuous women.”° In an article highlighting the peculiarity of women as both architects and physical laborers, in addition to other medieval women working in design

and construction at this time, Goodman briefly discusses the correlation between Christine de Pizan and Dido of Carthage. Goodman suggests that one of the noticeable overlaps within their stories is the concept of women usurping authority to build a city. She discusses the trajectory of Dido’s career as both architect and laborer as she founded and built the city of Carthage where she was a lady and a queen. Goodman highlights Dido’s achievements by reflecting on the praise that Lady Reason gave her in the *City of Ladies* stating, “the way in which she founded her city and acquired and took possession of her land demonstrated her exceptional constancy, nobility, and strength, and without these graces true prudence is impossible.” The comparison between Dido and Christine is explicit as Christine resembles Dido by way of “accepting the transgressive nature” of her actions as she attempts to both build a city and make it so that it is inviting to others.

Comparable to Dido as well as the other authors and producers that came before her, Christine de Pizan situates herself and the *City of Ladies* among those who used architectural elements to construct a metaphor as a means to communicate necessary changes to society and infrastructure in the Middle Ages.

**Intentionality: The Manipulation of an Architectural Trope**

The intentionality and attention to detail found throughout the manuscript highlights Christine’s utilization of an architectural trope while showcasing her desire to present a manuscript for the purposes of not only being an object that would be revered by her patron, but one that could also advance the discussion of women’s issues through a

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93 Goodman, “The City of Ladies; A Lady of Cities,” 42.
95 Goodman, “The City of Ladies; A Lady of Cities,” 53. Goodman is focusing solely on the text. The resemblance of Christine and Dido is not depicted in the illuminations.
creative design and stimulating concept. Four compendiums of Christine’s works exist; however, the copy in the British Library is the only one that includes *City of Ladies*; Hindman suggests that this may have been at the request of her patron. The patronal context is emphasized in the half-page miniature that acts as the frontispiece to the entire compendium. Figure 8 can be best examined through the work done by Hindman in which she details the contents of an illumination that showcases the presentation of the compendium to the Queen herself.

“Within the intimate confines of a bedroom, Christine de Pizan kneels before Queen Isabeau, who is seated on the bed at the left. Christine presents a large gilt-edged book bound in red velvet, studded with five golden bosses, and held closed by two clasps. Clustered in two groups, six ladies-in-waiting witness the event. Two attendants sit on green cushions on the floor close to the queen, and four others remain in the background, two evidently gossiping and one shyly hiding … Homey details enliven the private setting: a greyhound sleeps, his forepaws crossed, on the edge of the bedspread that trails on the cold stone floor; another small white dog sits on the bed next to the queen; and the beige, white, and red carpet that covers and warms the floor bunches untidily beneath the queen’s train.”

Though patronal images were commonplace in the Middle Ages, the inclusion of Isabeau of Bavaria into this manuscript illumination is unique in that she is located within a particularly gendered space; she is positioned in the intimate space of the Queen’s bedchamber, surrounded by her ladies. This collaboration showcases how Christine utilized her literary and design skills to design a metaphorical environment in which members of her audience could situate themselves within a framework to claim agency and

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power, thus, establishing her own agency by being directly involved in the product design of the object.

There is substantial evidence that Christine was intimately involved in the design and creation of the Harley MS 4431 manuscript as many of Christine’s manuscripts were produced under her direct supervision. Though being an established scribe herself, she had a close relationship with two scribes that she collaborated with often. She oversaw their work, occasionally adding catchwords, signatures, rubrics, headings, or sometimes a special dedication when needed.\textsuperscript{98} Hindman continues: “her frequent intervention in the production of manuscripts written by these two scribes indicates, in fact, that the three individuals worked in one location, passing quires back and forth.”\textsuperscript{99} Her intimate involvement in production and design underscores her attentiveness to the scenes chosen for this manuscript.

By juxtaposing architectural imagery with depictions of Medieval women, Christine continued to showcase her desire to refurbish this concept of metaphorical idealized spaces. As stated earlier, the illumination that portrays a bisected image of Christine de Pizan and the personifications of Reason, Rectitude, and Justice is one of the most notable illuminations in the Harley 4431 manuscript. However, there are additional images in the \textit{City of Ladies} that juxtapose women and architectural elements and contribute to the ongoing discussion pertaining to women’s involvement in the built environment of the Middle Ages. In one of the manuscript illuminations, Rectitude leads a small group of women, Christine included, through a Romanesque archway serving as the exterior gate of the city. Behind the women, the decorative and dimensional architecture

\textsuperscript{98} Hindman, “With Ink and Mortar,” 459-60.
\textsuperscript{99} Hindman, “With Ink and Mortar,” 459-60.
of the city remains under construction though nearly complete. In the upper left corner of
the image, a man on the rooftop uses a pulley system to stabilize and hoist materials in an
effort to put the finishing touches on the edifice (Fig 9).

In another image, the virtue Justice stands before a group of “earthly” women
including the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, perhaps Catherine of Alexandria, and other
women saints, mirroring the previous image (Fig 10). Similar to the previous
illumination, this group of women also enters a gate, beyond which the viewer sees the
massing of the buildings and grandeur. This gradual progression in which the viewer is
able to see the development of the city in collaboration with the manuscript text may reflect
Christine’s ability to manipulate design elements for her advantage. Here, Christine uses
her creative and intellectual abilities to design a space where she is not only one of the
primary architects, but also a physical laborer, as she uses both her brains and her hands. These “dual roles,” Goodman states, allow for women like Christine to be considered
founders of their cities and establish themselves as an atypical part of society due to the
rejection of normalcies in medieval society and literature at this time. Kellogg suggests
that, “Christine is then able to analyze and transform the meanings of these configurations
with a view to exposing the inequitable gendering of space, and subsequently to identify
the spaces in which women can shift the balance of patriarchal power.” By using her
book as a platform to reconfigure spaces, though imaginary, Christine modifies a
longstanding narrative that excludes Medieval women from engaging with these projects,
and increases their visibility in these environments.

100 Hindman, “With Ink and Mortar,” 483.
101 Goodman, “The City of Ladies; A Lady of Cities,” 42.
102 Goodman, “The City of Ladies; A Lady of Cities,” 42.
103 Kellogg, “Le Livre de la cite des dames,” 129.
It may be misleading and anachronistic to categorize Christine as a feminist; the concept of feminism was foreign to medieval society. However, Christine’s focus on women’s issues showcases her dedication to rectify the inaccurate narrative in which medieval women found themselves and leads modern scholars to juxtapose her work within the wider framework of feminist discourse. Christine is regularly discussed within the context of feminist scholarship as a result of the themes and motifs that are found throughout many of her works. In a chapter titled “Christine de Pizan and the Debate About Women” in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, Roberta L. Krueger perfectly describes the significance of Christine’s text. Referencing *City of Ladies*, Krueger argues that:

“countering one antifeminist slur after another, like a lawyer refuting false charges with superior evidence, Christine progressively constructs a defense of women’s intellectual and artistic capacities, women’s constancy and resourcefulness, and their fortitude as rulers, wives, mothers, and martyr saints. Debunking centuries of misogynist slander, refuting the notion propagated by Aristotle and elaborated by church fathers and clerics that women are mentally deficient, “soft,” more prone to pleasure, vice, chatter, and a host of other annoying and destructive traits, Christine cites renowned female rulers, inventors, warriors, and learned ladies to argue in no uncertain terms for women’s intellectual capacity and their moral equality, if not superiority, in many respects.”

Krueger argues that the way in which Christine advocates for the respect and agency of women “seeks to create a female textual community that valorizes women’s intellectual and moral worth.” Kellogg expresses a similar sentiment in a comparison between *Le

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104 Hindman, “With Ink and Mortar,” 472.
Livre du corps de policie – another book that Christine was writing around the same time as City of Ladies. She states that the similarities between the two “suggest Christine’s conscious modeling of the Cite des dames on the ideal of a feminine body politic.” ¹⁰⁷ The dimensions of body politic represented in City des Dames can be seen through the “body of knowledge” and the “body politic reconfigured through her city.” By placing women at the center of the architectural metaphor, the patriarchal system in which women are marginalized becomes reconstructed as the women are now the ones responsible for the new social system’s governance.¹⁰⁸ As a result of Christine’s literary accomplishments, philosophy scholar Karen Green states that “If Descartes with his “I think, therefore I am” deserves to be recognized as the father of modern philosophy, then Christine, with her “I think, therefore I am the spiritual equal of a man,” deserves to be recognized as the mother of humanist feminism.”¹⁰⁹

The subject matter expressed in the works of Christine de Pizan gives insight into the anxious and tumultuous nature of women’s experiences in the late fifteenth century. With a goal of challenging her contemporaries to reshape how they viewed women, she used a centuries-old trope and modified it for her advantage to spread her message. By being responsible for “creating the technological and institutional foundation of civilized life” in the book in addition to the standard demands in medieval society imposed upon women, through this idealized space, women are able to gain better control over their environment and create a more purposeful space for themselves.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Green, Mews and Pinder, The Book of Peace, 2.
CONCLUSION

Examining the roles that medieval women played in regards to the design world and the built environment has proved to be a complex endeavor. The investigation of these women helps contemporary scholars understand how they navigated different spaces in their cultural environments. Though the concept of feminism was foreign to medieval society, discussing Christine, along with Eleanor and other medieval women through the context of feminist scholarship, offers another prospective into the lives these women lived and how they were connected to the built environment of the Middle Ages.

By taking the reins of many of the operations within the household, elite women were able to cleverly navigate the societal confines in which they were held to claim some aspects of agency. They were able to provide for themselves and their families increased opportunities for revenue and stronger social and political connections. While Eleanor of Castile’s property acquisitions may have had a negative impact on her contemporary reputation, her influence in terms of interior decoration was important. Similarly, the case of Christine de Pizan was particularly interesting. She was outspoken and used the tools given to her as a result of her wealth and education to disseminate knowledge in order to benefit the lives of not just her, but other medieval women as well.

The image of Christine and the personifications of Reason, Rectitude, and Justice working together to build a solid structural foundation that others can use is reminiscent of the process and purpose of this project as I attempt to contribute to and build on the scholarly foundation that was laid by other feminist theorists and historians. If I were to continue with this research, there are several areas that I would be interested in examining further. First, I would like to research the public perception of Christine de Pizan and her
literary works. There is scholarship that discusses the public perception of Christine and her works; however, due to the time constraints, that scholarship was not able to be a part of this project. Though I am not deeply well-versed in medieval feminist scholarship, I believe that examining how her literary works, specifically *City of Ladies*, were received during her time may be able to give insight into public perceptions of the concept of women participating in construction or design in general.

Additionally, I would like to investigate conditional spaces more in depth. I briefly touch on this subject throughout this thesis; however, I believe that delving into this topic deserves more attention and I would need to examine the lives of non-elite women more intensely. In this thesis, I prioritized the discussion of elite medieval women and queens, only briefly touching on the lives of non-elite medieval women, perhaps partly because there is not an abundance of scholarship on the lives of non-elite women. Having the opportunity to look at various archives and records to gain a better understanding of how these women’s daily lives functioned both inside and outside of the context of the built environment could prove very useful in understanding how women navigated these spaces.

Scholar Shelley Roff discusses the lack of documentation of poorer women throughout her scholarship. She states that “To find women working in this context, one must investigate a wide variety of historical documents, such as municipal rolls and accounts of expenditures, documents of court cases, wills, inventories of wages paid on construction sites, prison records, hospital records, and records revealing cause of death.” She also goes on to state how scribes and clerks who recorded daily transactions often registered women under words like mulier, mullyer, dona, femme, or wench when

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111 Roff, “Appropriate to Her Sex?,” 111.
recording their work and wages. Though investigating these documents may prove to be difficult, it may be worth it to understand the degree in which women were participating in these jobs. Another area that I would want to examine if I were to research this topic further is the physical erasure of women from structures, similar to the case of San-Quentin Cathedral. I find the concept of physically erasing women from structures is incredibly interesting, and I would be interested in tracing any patterns that may arise in relation to religious or secular structures.

Therese Martin describes perfectly the significance behind the examination of medieval women’s involvement in art and architecture. She states that “An appreciation of women’s active roles even within the constrained circumstances of the medieval past can contribute to dispelling the passive acceptance of women’s secondary status in the present.” She continues by stating that “When one takes for granted that “things have always been this way,” is it hard to see that anything else is even possible.” Examining how medieval women maneuvered through gendered spaces, capitalized on their roles in the household, acquired and managed property, and disseminated knowledge as ways to claim agency in the Middle Ages provides an alternate narrative that does not exclude women’s involvement nor diminishes their influences on some of the greatest structures of this time.

112 Roff, “Appropriate to Her Sex?,” 112.
Figure 1. Ludgershall Castle: the new chapel and chamber block constructed for Queen Philippa viewed from the North, 1341-3. https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/ludgershall-castle-and-cross/history-of-the-castle/
Figure 2. Widow’s donor panels from the Glorification of the Virgin window, ca. 1200, Saint-Quentin, former collegiate church (Photo: E. Shortell)
https://brill.com/view/book/edcoll/9789004228320/B9789004228320_005.xml?crawler=true
Figure 3. Peter Drach, Husband and wife carry a keystone that will complete the vault of a church, woodcut, late fifteenth-century. Image can be found in Shelley E. Roff’s article “‘Appropriate to Her Sex’? Women’s Participation on the Construction Site in Medieval and Early Modern Europe.” In Women and Wealth in Late Medieval Europe, edited by Theresa Earenfight, New York, 2010.
Figure 4. The ward of Caernarfon Castle, showing (from left to right) the Black Tower, the Chamberlain's Tower, and the Eagle Tower. Caernarfon, Gwynedd in Wales. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caernarfon_Castle#/media/File:Caernarfon_Castle_1994.jpg
Figure 5. Eagle Tower at Caernarfon Castle in Caernarfon, Gwynedd in Wales. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1863-0110-132
Figure 6. Christine de Pisan, Rectitude and Christine building the wall of the city, Collected Works (‘The Book of the Queen’), Harley MS 4431 manuscript, volume 2, fol. 290r, c. 1410-1414, British Library, London.
http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=harley_ms_4431_f178r
Figure 7. Unknown, detail, Construction of the Temple of Virtue, manuscript illumination from St. Augustine’s The City of God, c. 1475, 45.5 x 31.5. Image found in Janetta Rebold Benton’s book *Art of the Middle Ages*, London, Thames and Hudson, 2002.
Figure 8. Christine de Pizan, Christine presenting book to Isabeau of Bavaria, Collected Works (‘The Book of the Queen’), Harley MS 4431 manuscript, volume 2, fol. 3r, c. 1410-1414, British Library, London.
http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=harley_ms_4431_f178r
Figure 9. Christine de Pizan, detail, Rectitude leads a small group of women through Romanesque archway, Collected Works (‘The Book of the Queen’), Harley MS 4431 manuscript, volume 2, fol. 323r, c. 1410-1414, British Library, London. http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=harley_ms_4431_f178r
Figure 10. Christine de Pizan, Justice, leading the "earthly" women into the completed City of Ladies, Collected Works (‘The Book of the Queen’), Harley MS 4431 manuscript, volume 2, fol. 361r, c. 1410-1414, British Library, London. http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=harley_ms_4431_f178r


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