Ideas about Women in the earliest printed Dutch vernacular Books. Saints' Lives, Exempla, and their female Readers

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Abstract

In the first instance, the thesis explores ideas about women published in incunables (ca. 1450-1501) printed in the Low Countries. The sources under consideration are female saints’ Lives and exempla printed in the Dutch vernacular. In chapter 1, each source is introduced and scrutinised for its potential contribution to this topic.

Since the sources appeared in the vernacular and published, they were available to lay readers. The second aim of the thesis is to demonstrate that women were among them. In chapter 2, various elements of women’s involvement in Netherlandish book culture are examined. There is enough evidence to suggest that middle class female readers were erudite and interested enough to seek access to the incunables.

Both genres of saints’ Lives and exempla, although diverse, contain similar ideas about women. These ideas are commonly expressed within the framework of the woman’s marital state (virgin, wife or widow) or as mother or daughter. Also included are ideas on the female in spiritual roles (for instance, as bride of Christ). In chapters 3 and 4, these textual images are analysed in depth as topoi.

To indicate to what extent the ideas, most of which predate the fifteenth century, were still valid, a link has been established between ideas and the relevance for the female recipient. An attempt has been made to relate these ideas to aspects of social reality of late medieval laywomen. The thesis infers that many ideas about women within the family were prescriptive and intended for admiration and emulation.

The thesis contributes to many fields of historical inquiry. Although the core of the thesis is embedded in social history (which incorporates the history of ideas and attitudes), elements of the history of the book, the history of the Low Countries, and women’s history are broached as well.
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Abbreviations

B.C. before Christ
BL British Library
c(c). column(s)
ca. circa (about)
d. died
ed(s). editor(s) or edition(s)
et al. et alia (and others)
e.g. exempli gratia (for instance)
fn. footnote
fol(s). folio(s)
ibid. ibidem (the same)
i.e. id est (this is)
ISTC Incunable Short Title Catalogue
KB Koninklijke Bibliotheek
n. note
nr(s). number(s)
n.r. nieuwe reeks (new series)
n.s. new series
OGE Ons Geestelijk Erf
p(p). page(s)
repr. reprint(ed)
St. Saint
trans(s). translator(s)
v. verso
w. without
Notes on translation and foliation

All female saints' names have been anglicised. As a guideline, D.H. Farmer has
been used.¹

I have provided paraphrases for all foreign citations, except for the simplest of
phrases. All translations are mine unless stated otherwise.

Abbreviations and ligatures have been expanded and modern punctuation and
capitalisation have been freely introduced. Evident errors have been rectified
silently. The usage of u, v, w, i en j has been modernised.

A preference has been given to mentioning foliation references by quire
numbering rather than accumulative foliation, when the sources allowed. When
mistakes occur in foliation they have been corrected tacitly. The recto side of the
folio will not be mentioned. The verso side is marked by the letter v.

1 Introduction to the sources

1.1 Purpose of the thesis

The principal purpose of this thesis is to explore ideas about women which were made available in the first printed books in the Dutch vernacular until 1501. This date signifies the end of the incunable era. The books are printed in the Low Countries (the current Netherlands and Belgium). The textual images presented are drawn from female saints' Lives and exemplum collections, all of which appeared in prose.

The roles in which females are cast in these texts are generally connected to family life. Thus, females occur as (potential) brides, wives, mothers, widows and daughters. However, they appear not only in worldly images but also in spiritual images, principally as brides of Christ. In the exemplum collections the women are mostly described in subjective and biased terms. These textual images are accompanied by recommended lifestyles and codes of conduct. In the saints' Lives women are usually portrayed in a more positive light: they are either good or they become so.

Since we are presented with these images revolving around family life, I decided to research the reception side of the texts. I have attempted to establish links between the text and the female consumer of the text, and I have concentrated on the 'common woman' rather than the female religious. As Peter Biller remarks, in the histories of medieval women it is the female religious rather than the common woman who has retained predominance, but it is the latter who is as interesting in her own right. Key questions then will be posed on which ideas of

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2 See, for instance, the recently completed book on the involvement of the regular canonesses of Windesheim with literacy, Scheepsma, W., Deemoed en devotie. De koorvrouwen van Windesheim en hun geschreven (Amsterdam, 1997).

women were conveyed concerning women and marriage, women as mothers and
daughters (including spiritual images), and attention will be devoted to the
potential urban female lay public as well.

The thesis is divided into two parts. Although it can be argued that it is more
logical to deal with the textual images first and aspects of reception later I have
opted to reverse the process. There is a good reason for this: there is a lack of
evidence of direct female interaction with the earliest printed text. To state the
obvious: we are in the dark about her perception of the text. Also, not one single
book within our corpus is published exclusively with a female audience in mind.
And even if female ownership of a book is established it does not automatically
guarantee her ever reading the book. In view of these problems, it is best to
begin by seeing how much one can say about reception despite them.

In this chapter, the sources will be introduced with an eye to female interests.
The second chapter deals with issues touching on the relationship between
women and the media. These chapters will allow for an overall assessment of
accessibility of the female to the (printed) word. In chapters 3 and 4 a selection of
ideas about women is extracted from our corpus, mostly those which appear
most persistently or those which are extraordinary. In chapters 3 and 4 elements
of the relation between the idea and female consumer will be evaluated.

Some conscious limitations should be defined in advance. I have concentrated
on the availability rather than the genesis of ideas. I have not engaged in
comparative analyses between forerunners of the editions which appeared in the
Dutch vernacular. I may have missed out on the subtleties resulting from studying
the transmission process from the written word to the printed word, the process
of dissemination from a small(er) public to a wider public (usually from an
ecclesiastical audience to lay public) as changes in text go hand in hand with
changes in context. Neither have I examined the contribution of the translators
and editors of the Low Countries when they were translating and re-editing the
texts for a Dutch vernacular speaking audience. More often than not the 'original'
texts were reshaped and redrafted when translated into Dutch. In both cases, I have relied on secondary sources when available and when pertinent to our enquiry.

In general, careful consideration and faithful translation were part and parcel of the process of transposing the veritas latina into the vernacular. However, learned elements were passed over or condensed (for instance, passages of a theological nature), etymologies were left out, authorities and explicit cross-references were frequently filtered out, Latin alphabetical tables were not used. Instead, practical suggestions for pious and virtuous behaviour of the laity (the so-called Umakzentuierungen) were inserted. Also, miracles were often added and expanded on.

To recap, I have dedicated this study to female saints' Lives and exempla which were at hand in print in the vernacular in a certain period of time in a certain geographical area.

1.2 Introduction to the genre of the exemplum

Before the sources are introduced separately, it is necessary to explain what use the exempla and female saints' Lives are to enable us to extract ideas from them.

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4 For methodological and interdisciplinary problems associated with this process, see Wackers, P.W.M., 'Buecken die men leest in scolen', Middelnederlandse letterkunde en Latijnse traditie, Misselike tonghe: de Middelnederlandse letterkunde in interdisciplinair verband, F.P. van Oostrom en W. van Anrooij eds. (Amsterdam, 1991), pp. 111-129 and Williams-Krapp, W., 'Laienbildung und volkssprachliche Hagiographie im späten Mittelalter', Literatur und Laienbildung im Spätmittelalter und in der Reformationzeit. Symposion Wolfenbüttel 1984, L. Grenzmann und K. Stackmann eds. (Germanistische Symposien Berichtsbände V; Stuttgart, 1984), p. 699. It should be noted that occasionally etymologies were incorporated in the vernacular translations, as is the case with Sinte Katherinen legende and Die Historie van Sinte Barbara, met die miraculen. (These sources will be introduced below.)

The main issue at stake is to evaluate what the genre of exempla may reveal about women. We turn to genre of the exemplum first.

What is meant by exempla? They consist of a brief narrative with an illustrative purpose set in a specific framework, commonly a sermon. They are used to clarify and demonstrate the truth. They are not 'realistic' case studies of the kind we find in the earliest printed law codes. In the middle ages, they were used to edify theological doctrines; they served to convey the abstract into the concrete. They were intended to catch the attention of the audience, and their flexibility allowed them to be used in various settings. They appear in various guises: as short stories based on secular as well as spiritual material, dialogues, miracles (including those appended to the vitae), vitae (when they appear in exemplum collections) and visions. Among the dramatis personae not only human beings are paraded in front of us but a varied range such as: apparitions (as souls of the departed), saints, deities, animals, etc.

The probative value of the exemplum remained of consequence throughout history. In antiquity, the exemplum was used to demonstrate that an event in the

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7 Somme rurale [Dutch] Somme rurael, by Jean Boutillier (Delft, [Jacob Jacobszoon van der Meer], 19 August 1483) BL shelf mark IB 47126. See, for instance, fol. F1, under exempel, where it is debated whether a brother should maintain his unmarried sister after the death of their parents.
past could serve as a guideline for the future. Gradually, from the early middle ages onwards, particularly since Pope Gregory the Great (c. 540-604), the exemplum was used in tracts and sermons. Large scale usage of exempla came with the preaching of the friars.

When in the early thirteenth century Christendom was threatened by heresy and by internal spiritual decline, the Franciscans and Dominicans went out on their preaching tours. This mobile preaching force was interacting with the 'common people' particularly in an urban environment, relying for their survival on their hand-outs. Even the friars' language became 'heavily impregnated with marketplace vocabulary' and their art of persuasion was reminiscent to that used in commercial bargaining. However, we should not overestimate the connection between friar and town. To communicate their message effectively they preached in the vernacular.

It stands to reason that, when applying exempla, they made use of familiar images to convey their message, and these may stem from oral traditions, from the laity. The images used may even have been extracted from the confessions they heard. Most mendicants were licensed to hear the people's confessions. At the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, invoked to deal with contemporary problems,

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9 Gregory the Great observed that Jesus used comparisons to bridge the gap between the familiar to the unknown. Albert the Great (1206-1280) advocated the usage of a parable in order to highlight specific virtues and to convince ordinary people. For both influential thinkers, see Wailes, S.L., *Why did Jesus use parables? The medieval discussion*, *Medievalia et Humanistica. Studies in medieval & renaissance culture* n.s. 13 (1985), pp. 50-52. Matuszak, J., *Das Speculum exemplorum als Quelle volkstümlicher Glaubensvorstellungen des Spätmittelalters* (Quellen und Studien zur Volkskunde 8; Siegburg, 1967), pp. 57-58 emphasises that in the exemplum the works of God, or the supernatural, were made concrete.


11 See d'Avray, *Preaching*, pp. 216-237, who stresses that other imagery was used as well.

it was decreed that everyone was to confess their sins at least once a year and to perform penance due. Soon collections were compiled consisting of a broad range of exempla to assist the preacher in his quest. The laity was informed with catechetical literature (such as on the seven capital sins and the Ten Commandments) about sinful behaviour, which, in the fourteenth century became increasingly available in books written in the vernacular. It also influenced the genre of the exemplum collection: some are specially geared to assist the individual sinner with regard to confessional practice (such as the Boec van der biechten, introduced below). Many collections used in this thesis result from mendicant concern.

With the aid of indexes, divided into Gospels preached on Sundays and later into rubrics or handy arrangements of topic in alphabetical order, which were appended to the exemplum collections, the priest could promptly select a topic which would be apt to serve as an illustration to the content of the planned sermon. Of course, in our sources the exempla were incorporated into vernacular collections that reached far beyond their homiletic point of origin and hence became known to a wider public in other contexts than originally intended.

Furthermore, the comical exempla, which served to generate laughter from the audience appear to have been more abundantly used. Either dwelling on the horrors of hell or attempting to amuse, they must have caught the church audience’s attention. The exempla used brought the genre into disrepute and complaints were soon heard. Already in the thirteenth century Vincent of

14 Not only were mendicants involved in the gathering and writing of exempla, but Cistercians and secular clergy as well, see Schmitt, J.-Cl., ‘Recueils franciscains d’exempla’ et perfectionnement des techniques intellectuelles du XIIIe au XVe siècle’, Bibliothèque de l’école des Chartes 135 (1977), pp. 9-10.
Beauvais warned against copious use of Aesop's fables in sermons, which stimulated laughter rather than penitence and devotion.\(^{17}\) Reformers reacted against exempla particularly used in the sermons preached at Easter.\(^{18}\) In 1528, the Council of Sens forbade the preachers to mention old wives' tales: *aniles fabulae*.\(^{19}\) It is of importance to emphasise this point since the presentation of comical situations could lead to gross exaggerations.\(^{20}\) This should be borne in mind when conclusions are drawn about the reality-factor contained within them.

It has not proved an easy task to establish a framework for female representations based on our exemplum collections. The main avenue of enquiry used by many researchers for women in exempla is closed since the vernacular exemplum collections are not furnished with indexes based on alphabetical lists, preventing searching on words such as 'woman', 'girl', 'widow', 'chastity', 'marriage', etc.\(^{21}\) This suggest *inter alia* that the earliest printed vernacular exemplum collections were not intended to be used first and foremost by preachers. As a guideline I have used De Voos's book on exempla and legends, but unfortunately his interest in legends does not amount to much and the description of exemplum collections is rather brief and at times incomplete.\(^{22}\) De

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\(^{18}\) Although evidence mostly dates from the sixteenth century, objections must have been raised before, Fluck, H., 'Der Risus Paschalis. Ein Beitrag zur religiösen Volkskunde', *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 31 (1934), p. 189.

\(^{19}\) Van Oostrom ed., *Vertellen*, p. 97.


Bruin, who has devoted one chapter of his book to legends and exempla, does not supply any useful examples since his book is based solely on manuscript material, none of which had appeared in print before 1501.\(^{23}\)

Scholars outside the Low Countries have not included much of our corpus either. Stith Thompson, whose aim was to supply a comprehensive register of materials of all kinds of traditional narrative, has incorporated only one exemplum collection of our corpus, i.e. the *Aesopica*.\(^{24}\) Frederic Tubach fares a little better by incorporating more of our collections, but since many of his references are extracted from De Vooys, it becomes a circular exercise.\(^{25}\) In order to prevent falling back on a small (and incomplete) amount of indexes, and since none of the above is written with women's history in mind, it was necessary to sift through all the exemplum collections myself in an attempt to pinpoint those in which women within the family play a key role.

That exemplum collections are a fruitful source for women's history cannot be doubted. Rudolph Schenda outlines the importance of research into exempla.\(^{26}\) The dissemination and the way in which exempla worked, as well as the contribution to the *Geschichte des Volkslebens*, the history of the common

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\(^{23}\) Bruin, C.C. de, éd., *Middelnederlands geestelijk proza* (Zutphen, 1940), chapter iv.


\(^{25}\) Tubach, F.C., *Index exemplorum. A handbook of medieval religious tales* (Folklore Fellows Communications 204; Helsinki, 1969), pp. 524-528 has incorporated in his list of primary sources the *Gesta Romanorum* and *Seelentrost*. The *Historia septem sapientium Romae*, *Aesopus* and *De Vooys*, *Legenden en exempelen* are mentioned under secondary sources. For a critical review on Tubach (whose work is described as 'controversé mais indispensable') see, Berlloz, J., 'Introduction à la recherche dans les exempla médiévaux', *Les exemples médiévaux. Introduction à la recherche, suivie des tables critiques de l'Index exemplorum de Frederic C. Tubach*, J. Berlloz et M.A. Polo de Beaulieu eds. (Carcasonne, 1992), pp. 15-73, quotation on p. 28. The article is most useful in providing an updated bibliography (particularly for French sources). Of our selection of sources only the *Gesta romanorum* features in the book (see also below).

people can be studied. This thesis assists in these quests since it aims to offer parallels between the text and audience with reference to women. Tubach points to the psychological differentiation in medieval exempla: although woman is still portrayed as the embodiment of the evil resulting from the Fall, which reflects her image in a religious sense, she is also portrayed in marital disputes and is, as such, secularised. Exempla show insight into the religious life and devout practices of women, and into their marital relations. Also, their lifestyles, social ranking, kinship and family relations can be studied through them. Furthermore, various types of women (both represented within the family or as a particular category, for instance, poor woman, ill, sinful, etc.) are placed within various spatial scenery (home, city, countryside). Thus, women appear in a variety of settings, amongst which the city, and they appear in 'secular scenes' which may catch the interest of the lay reader.

1.2.1 The exemplum collections

Where possible I have discussed the broad context in which the exempla appear. For each book I have consistently looked at the introduction in which the potential reader is frequently addressed by the author/compiler or printer. In this way we may envisage for whom the book was intended or advertised. For each collection I have briefly evaluated the usage of female images which are shown in the exempla.

28 Biller, 'Woman', pp. 132-135. In his discussion on Caesarius von Heisterbach's Diaologus miraculorum (1223-1224), Biller has shown that an interesting residue is left when leaving out exempla in which the religious appear.
29 Berlioz and Polo de Beaulieu, 'Exempla', p. 43 and p. 53.
31 The prologues in the earliest printed books in the vernacular often mention the reason the book was printed, see Vermeulen, Y. G., Tot profijt en genoegen. Motivering voor de produktie van Nederlandstalige gedrukte teksten, 1477-1540 (Groningen, 1986), pp. 46-52. Vermeulen's first concern lies with the motivation of the printers, not with the audience.
1.2.1.1 *De ludo schachorum* [Dutch] *Dat scaecspel*, by Jacobus de Cessolis

Jacobus de Cessolis, a northern Italian Dominican, wrote the allegorical treatise on the Latin version in 1300, in which a tyrant features who could not bear to be criticised by his subjects. The moralising work is interspersed with exempla. A master invented the game of chess to point out the duties of the king in a non-offensive manner. In it, the hierarchy of worldly seculars, represented by the chess pieces, is discussed (but the clergy is excluded). The work was very popular throughout western Europe in the mid and later middle ages.

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32 When I refer to the *editio princeps*, I mean it to be the first edition in Middle Dutch. Instead of supplying endless *compendiae*, which the interested reader can easily look up himself, for instance in *Catalogue of books printed in the XVth century now in the British Museum* (12 vols., 1908-1985, London, 1962, annotated, photo-lithographic repr., 1967), IX, *Fascicule 1 Holland*, Fascicule 2 *Belgium*, introduction by M.G. Painter and Thienen, G. van, ed., *Incunabula in Dutch libraries. A census of fifteenth-century printed books in Dutch public collections* (Bibliotheca bibliographica neerlandica XVI-I, XVII-II; 2 vols., Nieuwkoop, 1983), Il. I think it more helpful to refer to secondary sources or modern editions which often supply short descriptions of contents. I have made extensive use of the experimental cd-rom *INCIPIT* version 1994-1995 which was very kindly put at my disposal both at the BL and The Hague KB. The paper copy of part of the information contained on the disk is known as the ISTC, which is also kept at both institutions. When information from *INCIPIT* is stated between square brackets it means that scholars are uncertain about the accuracy of the information conveyed. I have consistently used round brackets when introducing place of publication, printer and dates in the sources. In general, I have copied the entire titles which appear in *INCIPIT* to serve as a rapid reference for the language of the Dutch forerunner. In cases where titles are not shown in *INCIPIT*, I have added the information. Occasionally, I have harmonised titles. For the *Scaecspel* I have used the *editio princeps* (Gouda, Gerard Leeu, 2 October 1479) BL shelf mark IB. 47320. In total, there are three Middle Dutch editions extant. For bibliographical details, see *Catalogue British Museum* IX, pp. 32-33. Information on manuscripts and editions is supplied by Jansen-Sieben, R. ed., *Repertorium van de Middelnederlandse artes-literatuur* (Utrecht, 1989), pp. 187-188.

The Middle Dutch version is different from the Latin. The vernacular text differs from the original in subdivision, contents, omissions and other exempla have been added. In the vernacular version, the rules of the game are not mentioned or they are reduced, instead morals are expanded on. In each chapter a state of the hierarchy is addressed such as king, queen, knights, ordinary folk, merchant, innkeeper and the text outlining their duties and obligations furnished with exempla.

Herman Pleij points to the interesting fact that burgher groups have been inserted in the vernacular text, which do not appear in the Latin versions. This is indicative of the intended audience. It is not clear whether Franco, also mentioned in the incunable, who finished working on his manuscript in 1403, has been responsible for these alterations or whether he merely copied or translated. As it stands in the vernacular, the code of conduct and the societal role of the individual is emphasised, thus providing the lay person with a pattern for a way of life. In fact, two different versions have been printed. An adaptation of the Scaecspel by the Dominican court chaplain Dirk van Delft (ca. 1365-?), originally part of a larger work, appeared in print too.

According to the explicit the book seems to have been intended for a male audience, but the prologue clarifies that the book is printed for anyone (yghelijck mensche) whatever their status in order to conduct his life to profit his soul.

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34 Other fragments of text have been inserted in the Dutch compilation which resulted in a different composition. For changes in relation to the exempla, see Herwaarden, J. van, 'Dat Scaecspel'. Een profaan-ethische verkenning, Wat is wijsheid? Lekenethiek in de Middelnederlandse letterkunde, J. Reynaert et al. eds. (Nederlandse literatuur en cultuur IX; Amsterdam, 1994), pp. 305-306.


37 For the abridged text by Dirk van Delft I have used [Zwolle, Johannes de Vollenhoe, about 1478/79-80] BL shelf mark IA. 48112. This version will be referred to as Scaecspel (abridged). For bibliographical details, see Catalogue British Museum IX, p. 82. See Daniëls, L.M.Fr. ed., Meester Dirck van Delf, O.P. Tafel van den kersten ghelove, naar de handschriften uitgegeven, ingeleid en van aantekeningen voorzien (Tekstuitgaven van OGE IV-VII; 4 vols., Antwerpen, Nijmegen, Utrecht, 1937-1939), for Dirk's full version of the Scaecspel. It has been argued that the text has a separate identity and should not be
afterlife). Of particular interest to our study are not only the exempla in which females feature in a wide variety of roles, but also the discussion of the role of the Queen - alternated with that of women in general -, and the information supplied about households. On another level, women may also have been interested in the game of chess and were not excluded from playing chess. Indeed, the game was often part of the estates of late medieval burghers.

1.2.1.2  **Kaetspel gemoraliseert, by Jan van den Berghe**

The author Jan van den Berghe (ca. 1360-7 October 1439) was a member of the Flemish landed gentry who worked subsequently as reeve and councillor at the Council of Flanders. His decision to write the book was made at a dinner party in Bruges with the knight Jan van Uutkerke when the conversation turned to the appraisal of the Scaecspel. The knight became Jan's patron and the work was finished on 23 December 1431. It is one of the few sources which has not been translated from another language into Middle Dutch.
The intention behind this collection, which consists of about one hundred exempla, was to explain the workings of the judicial procedure of Flemish customary law in the format of a moralised ball game. The book is divided into four parts: the reason the book was written, how the game relates to justice (and judges in particular), the virtues of the judges and the conclusion. It is written in moralised prose which has been described as unappealing. Jan also appears to have been forgetful: occasionally the allegorical sense of the judicial system is not used at all.

In general, the construction of the chapters is similar: a short introduction is followed by one or more exempla, after which, more often missing than present, a general statement in allegorical sense about the ball game follows. For instance, in the chapter on how the judges should conduct themselves in marriage it is explained, that the judge should not commit adultery. This is followed by five exempla and supplemented by Jan's own observation that some judges are corrupt because they love certain women. These women cloud the official's judgement and they influence the duration of court cases. Presumably, these exempla are aimed at men primarily, but undoubtedly they interested women too.

There are various exempla in which women feature both from antiquity and the Old Testament, who may be held up to women. In the next chapter, a provenance shows that a secular woman owned a code of law. Women could have been interested in tracts written with a legal intention because their work (about which more in the next chapter). Also, the title may have appealed to

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44 Debaene, Volksboeken, p. 256 and Roetert Frederikse ed., Kaetspel, p. XVIII.
45 Kaetspel, fols. n5-n6v. It is not made clear who these women were, perhaps they were sent by the accused to influence the judge, or they may have been the defendants themselves or perhaps they were not involved in the cases and represented the liaisons which the judge may have had outside wedlock.
women: the game was very popular in the Low Countries, indeed ball games turn up in exempla.\(^{46}\)

**1.2.1.3 Historia septem sapientium Romae [Dutch] Historie van die seven wise mannen van Romen\(^{47}\)**

These or similar exempla travelled to the west from the east, perhaps by visitors to the Holy Land or crusaders, and enjoyed a wide popularity throughout the middle ages.\(^{48}\) Indeed, the stories were so popular that they are depicted on contemporary wall hangings.\(^{49}\)

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\(^{46}\) For ball games which feature in the exempla, see the exemplum of the dancing woman who is accidentally killed by a ball hit during a game which seems to refer to golf ('colven'), *Sterboeck*, fols. r1-r1v; it is also mentioned in *Bienboeck*, fol. s7 (both sources will be introduced below). Another example is that of the young man, who after having accepted a ring from his girlfriend, puts it on a finger of Mary's statue for safe-keeping because he is invited to play a ball game, Van Oostrom ed., *Vertellen*, pp. 31-33. The rules of playing the medieval *kaetspel* (based on the incunable) are explained by Bondt, C. de, 'Heeft yemant lust met bal, of met reket te spelen?' *Tennis in Nederland tussen 1500 en 1800* (Hilversum, 1993), pp. 20-22. The game's popularity is witnessed by statutes limiting the places where games could be held, and by street names still extant, Roetert Frederikse ed., *Kaetspel*, p. XXI. It was also a pastime of the court of the county of Holland, Oostrom, F.P. van, *Het woord van eer. Literatuur aan het Hollandse hof omstreeks 1400* (Amsterdam, 1987), p. 28.

\(^{47}\) There are five incunables extant, I have mainly used the *editio princeps* (Gouda, Gerard Leeu, 25 July 1479). The incunable is kept at Göttingen, but I was fortunate to be able to consult a facsimile of it at the Documentatie Centrum Neerlandistieken at the Universiteit van Amsterdam, shelf mark F11. I have also used the second edition (Delft, [Jacob Jacobszoon van der Meer], 13 January 1483), kept at Utrecht, Universiteitsbibliotheek, shelf mark Squ 377 (3) rarl. The latter edition will be referred to as *Seven mannen* (Jacobszoon van der Meer). See also Botermans, A.J. ed., *Die hystorie van die seven wijse mannen van romen* (2 vols., Haarlem, 1898), II, whose edition contains the text reprinted in newly cast letters based on the original. Another text is available in modern print, but it is witten in verses, Stallaert, K. ed., *Van den VII vroeden van binnen Rome. Een dichtwerk der xiv de eeuw* (Ghent, 1889). A Dutch manuscript version and incunables have been furnished with a bibliography by Runte, H.R., J.K. Wikeley and A.J. Farrell, *The Seven Sages of Rome and The Book of Sindiband. An analytical bibliography* (Garland reference library of the humanities 387; New York, London, 1984), pp. 33-38.

\(^{48}\) For descriptions of the contents, see Debaene, *Volksboeken*, pp. 198-205, Bree, F. de, 'Gheraert Leeu als drukker van Nederlands verhalend proza', *Een drukker zoekt publiek. Gheraert Leeu te Gouda 1477-1484*, K. Goudriaan et al. eds. (Oudheidkundige kring Die Goude 23; Delft, 1993), pp. 63-69, and for the incipit, see Vermeulen, *Profijt*, p. 81. The work was printed as soon as printing was invented, Stallaert ed., *Vroeden*, p. 20. There are different exempla in various historical periods, languages and traditions, but they are constructed in a similar framework, see e.g. Gilleland, B.B. trans., *Johannes de Alta
The exempla are set in a certain framework. After the death of the emperor's first wife he appointed seven wise men to look after his son. When his second marriage remains without issue, the son is invited back to court, but warned by the masters that he should not speak for seven days. The empress does not succeed in eliciting one word from him and she attempts to seduce him. When he does not yield to her advances she accuses him of rape, which is punishable by the death sentence. Each day one of the masters and the empress in turn tell an exemplum. On the eighth day, the son speaks for himself.

The total amounts to fifteen exempla, each exemplum is supplemented by an 'explanation'. In the exempla of the masters the empress is blackened, and vice versa. After each exemplum related by the empress the emperor decides to have his son killed, a sentence only to be staved off by an exemplum of a master; after each exemplum of a master the emperor decides to spare his son and do away with his wife.

The incunable in the vernacular was especially intended for lay people (leke luten). Women are on the whole portrayed as deceiving and totally untrustworthy. The emperor's weakness and indecisiveness or the empress's cleverness in citing exempla matching both quality and quantity of those of the masters, is not brought to the explicit attention of the public. Of particular interest to us is the virulence with which women, who in the explanation are compared with the wicked empress, are described generally. Antifeminism is rife in this collection.

Silva, Dolopathos or The king and the seven wise men (Medieval and renaissance texts & studies 2; Binghampton, 1981), pp. xvi-xix.
Seven mannen, fol. a2.
1.2.1.4 **Gesta Romanorum** [Dutch] *Die geesten of geschiedenis van Romen*

This exemplum collection, perhaps drawn up by a Franciscan, saw the light of day probably either in England or Germany in the mid to late thirteenth century. The actors are, or are thought to have been, 'Romans'. In general the genre of the Gesta were regarded as deeds of the seculars. Debaene suggests the Geesten must have been perceived by a medieval audience as an historical work rather than to be assigned to any other genre. However, that proves difficult to maintain when the structure of the text is studied.

The vernacular incunable consists of about one hundred and eighty exempla, each exemplum being followed by an allegorical explanation, with a specific moral tagged on at the end. Although the exemplum frequently has a secular content, the figures or actions are perceived as symbols and they are explained.

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51 I have used the *editio princeps* (Gouda, Gerard Leeu, 30 April 1481) The Hague KB shelf mark 170 E 24; in total three incunables are extant. There is no modern edition in Dutch; for a German edition of selected passages, see Weiske, B., *Gesta romanorum* (Fortuna vitrea 3 und 4; 2 vols., Tübingen, 1992), II. She also briefly discusses the contents of a selection of exempla, Weiske, Gesta, I, pp. 199-215. For a modern Latin edition, see Oesterley, H. ed., *Gesta romanorum* (Berlin, 1872). See for (German) keywords and titles for each chapter respectively, Oesterley ed., Gesta, pp. V-VIII and pp. 692-697.

52 For brief descriptions, see De Voogs, *Legenden en exemplen*, pp. 348-349 and Brummel en Liebaers eds., *Oude drukken*, nr. 27 (based on a Latin edition printed by Gerard Leeu). On place of origin, and on author and date, see Weiske, Gesta, I, p. 30 and p. 182.


54 Debaene, *Volksboeken*, p. 248.

55 Although the table of contents counts 182 exempla, note that exemplum nr. 137 is omitted both in the table and in the book itself. The content of exemplum nr. 137 is inserted under nr. 164 in the incunable. So, as a matter of fact, the incunable contains 181 exempla only, the same as the modern editions of Oesterley ed., Gesta, and Gräße, J.G.Th. ed., *Das älteste Märchen- und Legendenbuch des christlichen Mittelalters oder die Gesta Romanorum* (Wiesbaden, 1847, unveränderter Neudruck, 1971). For a discussion on and comparison of various modern editions, see Velay-Vallantin, C., 'Gesta romanorum', *Les exempla médiévaux. Introduction à la recherche, suivie des tables*
into a theological context (particularly into a salfivic context) where the moral duties of the Christian are stated as well.\textsuperscript{56} Even if an exemplum has a moral or ethical meaning the application changes its original idea.

Modern researchers are not impressed by the allegorical explanations. The transference of the figures and actions to a symbolic level is erratic, inconsistent, far-fetched or even absurd, and repeatedly the explanation exceeds in length the text of the exemplum.\textsuperscript{57} The content of the exemplum may have been perceived as 'historical', but the reinterpretation of the figures or actions draw the Geesten into a homiletic sphere. The 'dear children', so often addressed in the explanation, is an indication of this. The book could easily have served as a book of meditation as well. Of course, the reader was not forced to read both parts in conjunction. The exemplum 'works' on another level than the application. It combined the action-packed stories with a more austere function. It served both to amuse and edify.

A female public was not exempted, the incunable was intended to assist in the instruction and salvation of people (\textit{menschen}) whilst dealing with virtues and sins.\textsuperscript{58} The Geesten is of importance to our study because women feature abundantly in this collection.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{56} critiques de l'\textit{Index exemplorum} de Frederic C. Tubach, J. Berlioz et M.A. Polo de Beaulieu eds. (Carcasconne, 1992), pp. 245-261.
\textsuperscript{57} De Bree, 'Leeu', pp. 74-75. For elements of allegorical application and morality, see Weiske, \textit{Gesta}, I, pp. 172-183.
\textsuperscript{59} Gesta, fol. a2 and Vermeulen, \textit{Profijt}, p. 84.
The book consists of several parts. The first is dedicated to Aesop's life (sixth century B.C.) and contains short stories, or 'histories', attributed to him. After this follows a large collection of fables in which chiefly animals appear as actors. The collection amounts to about hundred and eighty exempla (including the 'histories').

The Aesop in the incunable edition was translated into Middle Dutch using the French Aesop of the Augustinian doctor of theology, Julien of Lyon. He in his turn had adapted it from the German by the physician Heinrich Steinhöwel, whose Aesop was published in the 1470s. It was very popular throughout western-Europe and that is not surprising. Not only is it amusing to see animals having to cope with common situations humans may find themselves in, but it also appeals to the 'ordinary man' since it highlights typical human weaknesses in a humorous way. The witty fables are written in short sentences and are easy to comprehend. The moral is spelled out at least once, usually at the very

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60 In fact, the complete title of INCIPIT reads: Aesopus. Vita, after Rinucius, et Fabulae, Lib. I-IV, prose version of Romulus [Dutch] Add: Fabulae extravagantes. Fabulae novae (Transl. Rinucius). Fabulae Avianl. Fabulae collectae [Dutch]. No Dutch title is provided by INCIPIT, but Catalogue British Museum IX, pp. 27-28, refers simply to it as Vita et fabulae. The latter also contains bibliographical details on the edition kept at the BL. I shall refer to it as Aesop. There are two incunables extant. I have used the second edition (Delft, Hendrik Eckert van Homberch, 27 April 1498) BL shelf mark IB. 47233. For composition of the book, see also Blackham, H.J., The fable as literature (London and Dover, New Hampshire, 1985), pp. 36-40. Fortunately, the first part of the incunable, containing the witty stories of Aesop's life, is available in modern Dutch, see Kuiper, W. en R. Resoort transs., Het ongelukkige leven van Esopus (Amsterdam, 1990).

61 I have drawn on Schippers, A., Middelnederlandse fabels. Studies van het genre, beschrijving van collecties, catalogus van afzonderlijke fabels (Nijmegen, 1995), pp. 185-192, and Kuiper en Resoort transs., Esopus, pp. 82-108. Schippers is thorough in her research and has supplied a description of the manuscripts and prints for every collection of fables she mentions.

62 For an introduction to the genre of fables, see Bachrach et al. eds., Encyclopédie, III, p. 195, and Dekkers, M., Bestiarius. De eenhoorn, meermin, aspidochelone, manticore, mosseleend, pegasos, sater en andere fascinerende dieren uit de middeleeuwse beestenboeken (Amsterdam, 1977), pp. 9-12. Wackers, Waarheid, chapter 1 and chapter 2, points out that speaking animals transgress two boundaries: possession of reason and the ability to use language.
beginning and often a practical wisdom is added too. In this way, the story becomes immediately relevant to everyday life.

The incunable was intended for all people (menschen), and it served both to please and instruct. There are many examples in which mothers (and fathers) are exhorted to educate their offspring and, on the other side of the coin, youth is warned to take heed of their parents. In the collection of fables mother animals often feature in scenes taking care of their offspring, and females also appear in scenes where their fickleness and talkativeness are criticised. Also of importance is Aesop's dealings, as a subordinate slave, in a household situation where he outwits his philosopher-master as well as the latter's wife.

1.2.1.6 Dialogus creaturarum moralisatus [Dutch] Twespraec der creaturen

The authorship of this fable book has been ascribed to Nicolas Pergamenus and also to the Milanese physician Mayno de Mayneri (d. 1370). No manuscripts have been known to survive in Middle Dutch, which suggests that the matter of the exempla may have been relatively unknown before publication, but the familiarity of the animal stories attributed to its popularity. It was reprinted

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63 See Vermeulen, Profijl, p. 87, based on the editio princeps (Antwerp, Gerard Leeu, 12101485). The reference is also found in his second edition, Aesop fol. a2.

64 There are five editions extant, of which I have used the third (Delft, [Christiaen Snellaert], 2 November 1488) BL shelf mark IB. 47162. For bibliographical details of this incunable, see Catalogue British Museum IX, p. 22. Unfortunately, a modern Dutch edition does not exist, except for Gerritsen, W.P. ed., Dialogus creaturarum, dat is Twespraec der creaturen (typescript, Utrecht, 1982). The English edition printed dates from about 1530, see Kratzmann, G. and E. Gee eds., The Dialoges of Creatures Moralysed (Medieval and renaissance texts 4; Leiden, New York, København, Köln, 1988). The editors speculate that the early modern edition is probably based on the Latin edition which Gerard Leeu printed in 1491. For the Latin edition, see Gräbe, J.G.Th. ed., Die beiden ältesten lateinischen Fabelbücher des Mittelalters des Bischofs Cyrillus Speculum sapientiae und des Nicolas Pergamenus Dialogus creaturarum (Tübingen, 1880).

not only in Middle Dutch but also in various European languages. The actors who occur in these fables are of all sorts: humans, animals, plants, precious stones, metals, celestial bodies, the elements, etc. The book has an encyclopaedic ring to it and it must have been of more value in relation to natural history than Aesop, but it is nevertheless didactic-moralising.

The material is arranged in one hundred and twenty two chapters, but often other exempla are interspersed (adding to the total amount of exempla) in the discussion of the moral. The moral follows after each dialogue. Theological or allegorical intermissions are lacking which makes it easy to read and understand. There is an emphasis on the narrative. The jolly woodcuts in the incunable make it a pleasure to open this book.

The prologue states that the book was deemed of profit to preachers (predikaers) and all good sensible folk (goeden verstandigen menschen). The Twespraec is of importance to us because of its blatant antifeminism, but it is employed in a comical fashion. I cannot imagine a medieval audience keeping straight faces when hearing or reading the exempla, and therefore perhaps taking it all with a pinch of salt. Also, but this a minor detail, there is one exemplum which is explicitly directed towards women.

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66 Debaene, Volksboeken, p. 245.
67 Twespraec, fol. A1v. It is uncertain whether the editions in Middle Dutch were used primarily by the clergy. Schippers, 'Boeck', pp. 164-166.
68 Twespraec, fol. g1, a monkey snatched the adorned hat from a lady's head, and consequently she felt shamed en public. 'Ende dit liet god so gescien om alle vrouwen te leren'. (God made this happen to teach all women). Tearing off a woman's hat appears to have been a standard insult, see Meyer, G.M. de, met medewerking van E.W.F. van den Elzen, Min en onmin. Mannen en vrouwen over hun omgang aan het einde van de vijftiende eeuw (Hilversum, 1989), p. 31. In the preceding exemplum, based on similar lines, an ugly female crow steals plumage from other birds to dress up at a wedding but, to the crow's dismay, all the feathers are reclaimed, Twespraec, fol. g1.
1.2.1.7 *Speculum sapientiae* [Dutch] *Parabolen*, by Cyrilus

The author of these ninety five fables is unknown. Contenders are Cyril, archbishop of Jerusalem (ca. 315-386), Cyril of Alexandria (ca. 376-444) and Cyril of Thessalonica (827-869); the oldest known manuscript in Latin, probably written in northern Italy in the mid fourteenth century, is assigned to Friar Boniohannes de Messanensis. The book was predominantly popular in southern Germany, Bohemia and Austria.

It is divided into four books, each book representing a particular virtue: wisdom, humility, justice and temperance. The long dialogues, usually between the animals but also, less frequently, between the elements, celestial bodies, parts of the human body, etc., serve to exhort the reader to live a virtuous life. Many protagonists are female. The learnedness of the author radiates through the work, and the exempla leave a rather more grave and sincere impression than the witty *Aesop* and *Twespraec* fables.

The dialogue in the exemplum revolves regularly around one character having a bad intention and another character attempting to dissuade the first from his or her purpose with a long and learned speech. It stands out from the rest of the other exemplum collections discussed in this study since in general no exhortations are made with reference to the afterlife of the soul, but it states the detrimental effect(s) to the person in this life.

Lelij observes that the animals who feature in the stories are chosen at random. I feel similarly about the sex assigned to the animals, with a few exceptions. The

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69 There is one edition extant. I have used (Delft, [Jacob Jacobszoon van der Meer], 20 June 1481) The Hague KB shelf mark 169 G 51. The book is also known under the Latin title: *Quadripartitus apologeticus*. A modern edition, based on a manuscript (ca. 1475), supplemented with incunable text, is provided by Lelij, C.M. ed., *De parabelen van Cyrilus* (Amsterdam, 1930), pp. 1-129. For the Latin edition, see Graße, *Fabelbücher*.

70 See the introduction to Lelij ed., *Parabolen* and Schippers, *Fabels*, pp. 147-158, who concurs in general with Lelij.


72 Lelij ed., *Parabolen*, p. XXXVII.
exceptions are found under the heading of 'temperance', highlighting the virtues of chastity, in which exempla appear featuring the serpent (in this collection the consistent embodiment of 'evil') and the she-monkey (who usually symbolises 'foolishness').

On the whole, specific virtues or vices attributable to the female as reflected in exempla from other collections are missing. The message conveyed is of more importance than the gender of the animal.

The book was originally intended for the author's 'dear son', but the characters repeatedly refer to their antagonist 'brother' or 'sister'. Compared to other fable collections, relatively many animals have the female gender. Perhaps it was initially intended for a mixed monastic or semi-religious audience. However, tips on how to lead a virtuous lifestyle appealed to a lay audience too.

1.2.1.8 Bonum universale de proprietatibus apum [Dutch] Der bienboeck, by Thomas Cantipratensis

The prolific Dominican author Thomas van Cantimpré (ca. 1200-ca. 1270) was born and bred in Kamerrijk (Cambrai), and attended university at Paris. A

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73 The exempla will be used in the following chapters. Though not all she-monkeys are foolish in Middle Dutch literature, see, for instance, the monkey Rukenau who defends her nephew Reynaert in the Middle-Dutch Reynaerts Historie as discussed in Wackers, Waarheid, p. 131 as well as Wackers, P.M.W., 'Words and deeds in the Middle Dutch Reynaert stories', Medieval Dutch literature in its European context, E. Kooper ed. (Cambridge studies in medieval literature 21; Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, 1994), pp. 140-141.

74 Parabolen, fol. A1. If the author was a member of the clergy then a spiritual son was addressed.

75 Schippers, A., 'Ethiek in de Middelnederlandse fabelbundel 'Parabelen van Cyrilus' ', Wat is wijsheid? Lekenethiek in de Middelnederlandse letterkunde, J. Reynaert et al. eds. (Nederlandse literatuur en cultuur IX; Amsterdam, 1994), p. 336.

76 There is one known edition (Zwolle, Peter van Os, [15 January] 1488). I have used the copy kept at the BL shelf mark IB. 48134. A modern edition has recently been published, but the text is not based on the incunable; the edition also contains bibliographical details of the incunable, see Stutvoet-Joanknecht, C.M. ed., Der byen boeck. De Middelnederlandse vertalingen van Bonum universale de apibus van Thomas van Cantimpré en hun achtergrond (Amsterdam, 1990), pp. 95*-98*. More bibliographical information by Catalogue British Museum IX, p. 84.

77 Information about author and his works is found in Bachrach et al. eds., Encyclopédie, IX, p. 278. A short description of contents is supplied by Brummel en Liebaers eds., Oude drukken, nr. 69, and De Voys, Legenden en exempelen, pp. 30-34. It is counted among the artes-literature by Jansen-Sieben ed., Repertorium, p. XIV and p. 191.
chapter from his *De natura rerum*, an encyclopaedia, served as basis for the text of the *Bienboeck*. The learned friar wrote the *Bienboeck* in Latin, and he relates the community of the bees to the community of human beings, and in particular to the monastic community. There is some truth in Van der Vet's opinion that the exemplum was deemed of more importance than the cohesion of sermon versus exemplum. It was written at the behest of the *magister-generalis*, who called for anecdotes to be collected by the members of his order, and the popularity of the book spread quickly throughout western and central Europe. It was Thomas's intention to show how one could live a virtuous life in order to gain a better life in the hereafter. The chastity aspect is naturally addressed frequently (in a book originally intended for the religious) and a book about bees was a good choice since bees were thought to multiply without sexual intercourse.

The book is divided into two parts, which deals with those in command (25 chapters), and those subject to it (66 chapters). Each chapter contains a sermon which is, more often than not, followed by exempla which include miracles. Mary also appears often in exempla, showing Thomas's special veneration for her.

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80 An extremely handy survey of short contents of exempla is supplied by Stutvoet-Joanknecht, ed., *Byen boeck*, pp. 349-373. In her survey she counts 262 exempla. In the incunable 39 exempla are left out, and one is added. The exempla omitted are those featuring Jews, visions, miracle of the Host. De Vooy, *Legenden en exemplen*, p. 33, fn. 4, adds devils and heretics to this list. On the excluded exempla featuring Jews, see Stutvoet-Joanknecht, C.M., 'Een zeldzaam teken van begrip voor het jodendom in de Noordelijke Nederlanden in de vijftiende eeuw', *In de schaduw van de eeuwigheid. Tien studies over religie en samenleving in laatmiddeleeuws Nederland aangeboden aan prof. dr. A.H. Bredero, N. Lettinck en J.J. van Moolenbroek* eds. (Utrecht, 1986), pp. 87-108. She mentions that offensive exempla were occluded not because there was less suspicion of Jews in the northern Low Countries (where the incunable was printed), but because of contacts between biblical Humanists and Jewish intellectuals which had led to new insights in Jewish cultural thinking. This in turn shows that in the printing process some views thought to be offensive were occasionally paid heed to (as was sometimes the case in connection with reference to women, as will be shown in the next chapter).
The prologue does not state for whom the book was intended. The book is of particular interest for our purpose since many women feature in the exempla, however in the sermons women are not addressed. Many exempla are drawn up from Thomas's own experiences as a confessor in the southern Low Countries, and the book adds a local flavour to our collection, albeit one of thirteenth-century life. However, it was deemed important enough to be printed in the fifteenth century, so it must have contained information which was thought appropriate and of interest. Apparently, it was read avidly by women in the vernacular within the circle of the modern devotion.

1.2.1.9 Seelentrost [Dutch] Der sielentrost

The Dutch incunable is based on the text of the German Grosser Seelentrost of ca. 1350. The Sielentrost was particularly popular in north-western Germany and in the western and eastern Low Countries. The unknown author or compiler was probably a Dominican.

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81 For the author's personal involvement in the exempla, see Stutvoet-Joanknecht, ed., Byen boeck, pp. 43*-44*. He also based the exempla on stories heard from other friars. The laity occurs in nearly half of Thomas’s stories, a quarter of which are women, and of the laity about forty percent are city dwellers, see Murray, 'Confession', pp. 292-293.


83 There are no fewer than eight editions known. I have used the second: (Utrecht, [Printer with the Monogram], 7 May 1479) The Hague KB shelf mark 168 E 31. There is no modern edition in Dutch. There is a modern edition of a German equivalent by Schmitt, M. ed., Der Grosse Seelentrost. Ein niederdeutsches Erbauungsbuch des vierzehnten Jahrhunderts (Niederdeutsche Studien 5; Köln, Graz, 1959), however the arrangement of and contents of the exempla in the Dutch incunable and Schmitt's edition are frequently dissimilar.

The Sielentroest is a catechetical work: the material is arranged around the Decalogue. The author 'dear father' answers questions of the 'dear child'. After each commandment is introduced the explanation follows in the form of exempla, instructive material (leren), prayers and questions posed to the confessor (naturally, we focus on the exempla). The exempla, about two hundred, consist of short stories, drawn both from the Bible and secular histories, legends and miracles. In general, the reader is not furnished with practical tips but rather overloaded with guidelines towards a moral-ethical behaviour. Strong emphasis is laid on virtuous behaviour and good intentions. Compared to most other exemplum collections much information is borrowed from biblical sources (or secondary works on biblical sources such as the Speculum humanae salvationis, introduced below).

The book was intended to be read and heard by all people (menschen), and, so it is stated, it was easy to comprehend. It could be utilised not only as a handbook for confessors but certainly also as a guide for sensible and devout lay folk. Indeed, the addition of prayers in the vernacular suggests it was primarily intended for the laity, assuming that even an uneducated priest would at least be familiar with prayers in the vernacular.

Of particular interest to us are the exempla supplied with the Third Commandment (observe the sabbath day, to keep it holy), the Fourth (honour your father and mother), and the Tenth (you shall not covet your neighbour's wife). These commandments contain respectively information about the condemnation of unmarried girls dancing on holy feast-days; relations between

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85 See the table in the Sielentroest, fols. 1-9.
86 Schmidt ed., Seelentrost, p. 140*.
87 It drew not only on the Speculum but on other works too, such as the Legenda aurea and the Vitae patrum, Deschamps, 'Sielen troest', pp. 113-114.
88 Sielentroest, fol. 1.
mothers and daughters which are mostly supplied in the form of female vitae (treated here as exempla); and a discussion of marriages which feature in the Old Testament (David and Bathsheba, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca). The exempla which contain the female vitae seem to be borrowed from the Legenda aurea, and do not supply information on any holy woman, past or contemporary, whose fame was geographically tied to the area in which the Sielentroest proved popular.

1.2.1.10  **Boec van der biechten**

This anonymous work, of which there seems to have been no direct forerunner in another language than Middle Dutch, and which probably dates from the fourteenth century, seems to have acted as a sequel to the Sielentroest. The exempla consist mainly of miracles and visions.

Although it too is a catechetical work, it is differently organised. Its confessional purpose is heavily emphasised: it explains how the individual should prepare for confession, what to confess, and how to confess. Frameworks for sins to be confessed are employed, amongst which feature the seven capital sins, Decalogue, the seven works of mercy and the sins against the Trinity as well as the five senses. Almost every sin or virtue mentioned finishes with an exemplum; in total there are about thirty five exempla.

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90 Three books are extant; I have used one of the second edition (Delft, [Jacob Jacobszoon van der Meer], 30 October 1480) BL shelf mark IA. 47114.
91 A scanty summary is supplied by Brummel en Liebaers eds., *Oude drukken*, nr. 29 and De Vooy, *Legenden en exemplen*, p. 59, who points to the rarity of the exempla. For a short description of contents, see Bange, P., *Spiegels der Christenen. Zelfreflectie en ideaalbeeld in laat-middeleeuwse moralistisch-didactische traktaten* (Middeleeuwse studies Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen II; Nijmegen, 1986), pp. 86-87 (under the heading *Spieghel der biechten*) and Palmer, 'Seelentrost', c. 1038. Apparently, a modern edition is extant, but unfortunately this has not been published, and it is not based on the incunable. See Deschamps, 'Sielen troest', fn. 34, and the appended bibliography to Palmer, 'Seelentrost', cc. 1037-1039. In Biechten, the Decalogue is discussed as well, here we find one of the several references which mentions the *Boek van de thien gheboden* 'where you will find more [information]', Biechten, fol. cc9v.
92 Biechten, fols. aa8v-aa7v.
The book is written in order that 'we' may reach the city of Jerusalem (heaven).\textsuperscript{93} The book could of course have been used by priests, but it was undoubtedly meant for lay folk. For instance, the lay audience is deliberately kept in the dark in the discussion on the capital sin of lust because those who 'read or hear it being read may sin worse'.\textsuperscript{94} Also, the reader is advised to think in advance what to say to the priest and how to behave during confession. The exempla in which women feature are rather austere.\textsuperscript{95} This gives a rather threatening message to the book: confess your sins and alter your lifestyle before it is too late. However, all is not lost, God is merciful and true contrition of sins is stressed. References to the contrite Mary Magdalene (1st century) occur more than once and one of the longest exempla in this book is reserved for the story of the remorseful Mary of Egypt (5th century).\textsuperscript{96}

1.2.1.11 \textit{Ars moriendi} "Quamvis secundum philosophum tertio Ethicorum ..." [Dutch] \textit{Dat sterfboeck}\textsuperscript{97}

The book attempts to show how the devil tempts those who are ill, and how Christ and his mother comfort them.\textsuperscript{98} In the fourteenth century, Jean Gerson

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{Biechten}, fol. aa1.
\item \textit{Biechten}, fol. bb8.
\item For instance, under the sense of smell features an exemplum of a woman who, throughout her life, likes to be surrounded by pleasant scents. When she falls ill and smells unpleasant, she is abandoned by her friends to die alone, \textit{Biechten}, fols. dd1v-dd2.
\item The exemplum is discussed under sins against the Holy Spirit (pre-meditated sins committed without necessity), \textit{Biechten}, fols. ee3-ee5.
\item There are three editions extant, two editions by two different printers appeared in the same year. I have used one of these first editions (Delft, Christiaen Snellaert, 1488) BL shelf mark IA. 47166. For bibliographical details, see Catalogue British Museum IX, pp. 21-22. This incunable should not be confused with \textit{Ars moriendi} "Cum de praesentis exilii miseria mortis transitus ..." [Dutch] \textit{Leringe om salich te sterven}, which cannot be considered an exemplum collection. Unfortunately, only the latter incunable has appeared in Dutch in a modern edition, but the introduction preceding the edition is useful for a description of the genre, see Geus, B. de, et al. eds., \textit{Een scone leeringe om salich te sterven. Een Middelnederlandse ars moriendi}, uitgegeven, geannoteerd en ingeleid (Publikaties van de vakgroep Nederlandse taal- & letterkunde van de Rijksuniversiteit te Leiden 12; Utrecht, 1985).
\item \textit{Sterfboeck}, fol. a1v. For remarks on intended audience and function of the incunable I have relied on Lips, E.J.G., 'Huden gesont, morgen doot'. 'Troost en dreigement in het Sterfboeck of die conste van sterven (1488)', \textit{In de schaduw van de eeuwigheid}. Tien
wrote an *ars moriendi* for his aged dying father in French (which was later translated into Latin), which was thought to have given the genre a great impetus. The genre is closely associated with a book such as *Die vier uutersten*, in which death, judgement, purgatory and hell, and heaven feature. The genre was popular throughout north-western and southern Europe. The topography in the exempla in this *ars moriendi* suggests that it its focus lay in the Rhineland and Germany.

The book gives the impression that it ought to be read or heard on the deathbed. This is emphasised by the woodcuts depicting good and evil forces battling it out for the soul of the nearly departed who lies troubled in his bed. Not surprisingly for an *ars moriendi*, devils play a part in the exempla (of which there are about thirty), and their main purpose is to act as seducers and tormentors. In the later middle ages demons were increasingly feared, which had its repercussions on this sort of literature. The book may certainly have acted as a guide during lifetime. Stress is laid on good works and good intentions.

Usually, the exemplum is preceded by a text, varying in length, explaining a sin or virtue and exhorting the audience not to stray from the Christian path. The exemplum itself is introduced in frightening terms in an attempt to catch the audience's attention. After each exemplum the audience is urged to take the message to heart. The book emits a sense of desperation in its message to alter sinful lifestyles immediately. The apparent doom and gloom served as an extra incentive.

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99 Latin: *Cordiale quator novissimorum*, which was also a popular book judging by the relatively great number of editions in the vernacular, see INCIPIT. For a description, see Bange, *Spiegels*, pp. 141-142.

The book is intended for any Christian (een ygelic kersten mensche) preparing for the end of life.\textsuperscript{101} It is important to us for several reasons. Like other collections such as the Twespraec it contains many antifeminist exempla, but the matter featuring in the Sterfboeck is situated within a rather more serious context, and the exempla are not presented as amusing messages.

Women are accused of corrupting men's thoughts.\textsuperscript{102} Old women are suspected of witchcraft (oude toeveressen), and they are referred to as 'daughters of the devil', enticing good folk away from God and delivering them to him, their master.\textsuperscript{103} When women appear in the exempla they are repeatedly possessed by devils, and this is written about at some length (unlike similar exempla printed in the Bienboeck).\textsuperscript{104} There is one rarity among the exempla: in a rather lengthy dialogue the tormented soul of Prevento (sic) which ended up in purgatory, convinces her female friend Adoptata to change her lifestyle for the better.\textsuperscript{105} The latter agrees after the torments in purgatory are expatiated on.

\textsuperscript{101} Sterfboeck, fol. a1v.
\textsuperscript{102} The statement is followed by an exemplum in which a vain lady condemns no fewer than three hundred warriors to damnation. She had served them a St. Gertrude's drink at a farewell cocktail party, but because of her vanity all the knights had died with improper thoughts, Sterfboeck, fols. t1-t1v.
\textsuperscript{103} Sterfboeck, fol. b5v.
\textsuperscript{104} See, for instance, the two women, possessed by devils, who are involved in a shouting match in church, Sterfboeck, fols. c6-d1v, and the knight who agrees to take a possessed maiden with him on his travels, Sterfboeck, fols. e5-f1.
\textsuperscript{105} Sterfboeck, fols. k5-l3v. Palmer, N.F., 'Preventa und Adoptata'. Eine erbauliche Klosterlegende aus dem 15. Jahrhundert', Poesie und Gebrauchsliteratur im deutschen Mittelalter. Würzburger colloquium 1978, V. Honemann et al. eds. (Tübingen, 1979), pp. 290-303, discusses the female monastic as main recipient for this exemplum. However, the fact that the exemplum is also inserted in an \textit{ars moriendi} for 'any Christian' shows it had gained a wider audience, perhaps under influence of the modern devotion (a movement which will be discussed in the next chapter). Purgatory was a \textit{Straf- und Reinigungsplätze}, Dinzelbacher, P., \textit{Vision und Visionsliteratur im Mittelalter} (Stuttgart, 1981), p. 102. In it, the sinner had to pay for trespasses committed when alive which had not been settled. The punishment seen to be meted out, was severe.
1.2.1.12 Miraculen Onser Liever Vrouwen

It is possible that a Latin or French forerunner of this collection, of about one hundred and fifteen exempla, was in existence. The exempla follow each other without any comment of the compiler. They do not appear to be arranged in any particular order. Many exempla relate to scenes in which 'brothers' occur, but they are not assigned to one particular religious order.

This book containing the miracles of Mary is different from the miracle books which were kept at churches which were meant to register the miracles which were attributed to a particular saint. Neither is this a miracle collection appended to a vita or related to a particular event in the life of Mary nor a sheet or booklet published to celebrate the viewing of Marian relics at a particular church on a holy day. Commonly, when miracles are mentioned in miracle registration books they were either wrought away from the church, after someone in need of a miracle had requested the help of a particular saint and had succeeded in their quest, or the miracles occurred in situ at the bidding of a particular miracle-working statue of Mary at the church. These miracles were

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106 There is only one edition known ([Delft, Jacob Jacobszoon van der Meer and Mauricius Yemantszoon, between 10 January 1477 and 20 November 1479]). I have used The Hague KB shelf mark 169 G 44. The order in which the exempla appear has been collated with the modern edition of the Katwijk manuscript, see Voors, C.G.N. de ed., Middelnederlandse Marialegenden. Onser liever vrouwen miraculen (2 vols., Leiden, 1903), II, pp. LXVIII-LXXII and compare with volume I.

107 For a short description of contents, see De Voors, Legenden en exempelen, pp. 62-63.

108 See Verrycken, A., 'Naar een analysemodel voor middeleeuwse miracelverhalen', Hoofsheid en devotie in de middeleeuwse maatschappij. De Nederlanden van de 12e tot de 15e eeuw. Handelingen van het wetenschappelijk colloquium te Brussel 21-24 oktober 1981, J.D. Janssens ed. (Brussel, 1982), p. 211. Books which were kept at sites, and which have a distinctly archival character, were used to register miracles. Verrycken has devised a method to dissect these miracles (dividing them into components such as information about illnesses, place of pilgrimage, expression of collective mentality, and external information). The miracles noted in the registers have a separate character, different from the miracles found in our corpus.

109 A Life of Mary as such does not exist. For an early edition of a list of relics (which usually also contained a list of indulgences to be earned), see Heilichdomme ende reliquien van O.L. V. te Wavere, printed 1483-1484, and Liebaers, H. ed., De vijfhonderste verjaring van de boekdrukkunst in de Nederlanden. Tentoonstelling in de Koninklijke Bibliotheek Albert I. Catalogus (Brussel, 1973), pp. 385-387. These editions rarely survived the ostentio.
performed in the environment of the church and appealed usually to the devout living within the action radius of the saint. The exempla in Miraculien however, are not geographically restricted, as a matter of fact place-names are seldom mentioned, and as such it could appeal perhaps to a wider public than the miracles wrought at a specific location.

The book is intended for those who admire Mary and seek her help, but no specific group of people is mentioned. In general, she assists the powerless who have already shown a certain dedication to her before they requested her assistance, usually in their avid prayers or by not sinning on Saturday (dedicated to Mary). Originally, it may have been intended for the religious, but there are good reasons to suggest that some miracles had a particular appeal to women.

Many of the miracles in the incunable centre around topics of interest to women. Mary plays a role in marriage. She features in mystical marriage arrangements as the bride. She aids women whose husbands are about to harm their wives. Mary assists mothers whose children have had mishaps (being ill, missing, presumed murdered, dead, etc.). She especially helps those who are pregnant and in dire straits.

There is another reason to suppose that women were interested in Mary’s miracles. Despite the divergence in genres of the Miraculien collection and the miracle books kept at the churches there is also some congruence. Recently, some scholars have shown that women were the predominant beneficiaries of the miracle-working statues of Mary, and their ailments were of a specific female nature (in particular those involving births). Thus, a female interest in the

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110 Miraculien, fol. a1.
incunable cannot be excluded. Mary's actions in this incunable were difficult to
imitate, instead her actions were to be admired.

1.2.1.13 Speculum humanae salvationis [Dutch] Spiegel der menselijker behoudenisse

This collection, which was very popular throughout Europe, was probably the
work of a Dominican, who may have lived in south-western Germany and dates
from the second decade of the fourteenth century. It is counted among the first
published works in the vernacular in the Low Countries. Strictly speaking, it is not
an incunable, but a block book (copied from a block and not printed with
moveable type). The combination of text and picture (not unlike the editions of
the Biblia Pauperum) may explain its popularity. The lay-out is helpful for those in
need of assistance in reading the text.

The topics, which are set in a more or less chronological framework, deal with the
story from the Fall, Mary's life, Christ's life and death, the day of judgement, hell
and heaven. In it, the audience is told how to achieve redemption: mainly by
believing in Christ and Mary. Each chapter consists of a woodcut under which a
short prose text features containing an exemplum or a story, drawn from the

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Nederlanden gedurende de late middeleeuwen. Een eerste aanzet, In de schaduw van
de eeuwigheid. Tien studies over religie en samenleving in laatmiddeleeuws Nederland
aangeboden aan prof. dr. A.H. Bredero, N. Lettinck en J.J. van Moolenbroek eds.

There are three editions surviving. I have used the editio princeps ([The Netherlands,
prototypography, about 1474-75]) BL IB. 47000 and another, more complete, third edition
(Johann Veldener, Culemborg, 27 September 1483) BL IA. 48302. I shall refer to the
latter as Spiegel (1483). For bibliographical details, see respectively Catalogue British
Museum IX, p. 2 and p. 95. The latter contains three additional chapters (nr. 25, nr. 28
and nr. 29). A modern edition is available but it is based on an early fifteenth-century
manuscript composed in verses, Daniëls, L.M.Fr. ed., De spieghel der menscheliker
behoudenisse. De Middelnederlandse vertaling van het Speculum humanae salvationis.
Naar het handschrift uitgegeven, ingeleid en toegelicht (Studiën en tekstuitgaven van
OGE IX; Tielt, 1949).

For a short description, see Bange, Spiegels, pp. 83-85 (her information is based on the
verse Speculum) and Daniëls ed., Spieghel, pp. LVII-LIX.
Bible, the Apocrypha or profane history. The exemplum is set in a typological framework; in general, the facts or actions mentioned in the Old Testament prefigure those of the New Testament. Tips are given on how to conduct a true Christian life based on the discussion of some of the sacraments and Ten Commandments in order to be saved in the future. This setting ties together past, present and future and emphasises men's position in the grand scheme.

The book was published to teach the unlearned (tot leringhe der ongheleerder), to aid clerics (clerken) and the laity (leken). Of importance is Mary's role based on the Apocrypha, in particular her adolescent activities when she resided in the temple before she married Joseph (her lifestyle was held up as beneficial example to young women, as will shall see in chapter 4). Her married life to the ancient Joseph is also spun out. The discussion of the sacrament of marriage, and married couples are furnished with mainly biblical examples. The relation between Adam and Eve in connection with apportioning blame of the Fall is mentioned too.

The non-biblical motives have been listed by Daniëls ed., Spieghel, pp. XVIII-XIX. Many deal with aspects of Mary's life.

A concise account is supplied by Hollander, R., 'Typology and secular literature: some medieval problems and examples', Literary uses of typology from the late middle ages to the present, E. Miner ed. (Princeton, 1977), pp. 3-19. Although he does not discuss typology used in exempla and saints' legends, his comments are nevertheless valid. The matter of typology may seem difficult to comprehend and far-fetched but, as Hollander explains, it is really a natural form of human thought and we all live with some kind of awareness of recurrence.

Spiegel, fol. 1v.
With this interesting collection of exempla we have arrived at an author with a humanist background: the German lawyer Albertus de Eyb (1420-1475). During his studies at the Italian universities of Pavia and Bologna he became interested in Roman culture and humanism. In this didactic work, also known as the Ehebüchlein, he weighs the advantages of marriage against the disadvantages. He uses clear and concise sentences, and the contents cannot have been too difficult to comprehend. He knits his exempla together with short introductions and comments.

The book consists of three main parts in which these questions are addressed: whether a man should take a wife or not, how and why the world and people have been created, and how to celebrate a wedding. The majority of the short exempla occur in the first part, those which are longer occur in the second part. It is sometimes a laborious task to extract the exempla from the prose where many sayings and pieces of wisdom (almost all perfectly furnished with their sources) are on offer.

It may be deduced from the question addressed in part I that the book was intended solely for men contemplating marriage. However, the introduction makes it implicitly clear that women are not to be excluded: it states that

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117 I have used the only edition known: ([Deventer, Richard Rafraet, between 1493 and 6 June 1500]) BL shelf mark IA. 47670. For bibliographical details, see Catalogue British Museum IX, p. 56. There is no modern edition in Dutch, but there is an edition based on the German version: Herrmann, M. ed., Deutsche Schriften des Albrecht von Eyb. Das Ehebüchlein (Schriften zur Germanischen Philologie 1-4; Berlin, 1890). The arrangement of the paragraphs of parts I and II of the modern edition is slightly different from that featuring in the incunable.

118 For De Eyb, see Klecha, G., 'Albrecht von Eyb', VL, I, I, cc. 180-1860 and for the role of lawyers (and for De Eyb in particular) in humanism, see Spitz, L.W., 'The course of German humanism', Itinerarium Italicum. The profile of the Italian renaissance in the mirror of its European transformations, H.A. Oberman and T.A. Bradley eds. (Studies in medieval and reformation thought 14; Leiden, 1975), p. 395. The Ehebüchlein is discussed by Hiller, J.A., Albrecht von Eyb, a medieval moralist (The Catholic University of America studies in German 13; Washington D.C., 1939), pp. 112-156.
everyone (men) shall be taught how to conduct oneself within the marital state. Ultimately, the question whether a man should marry is answered in the positive and De Eyb paints an ideal picture for us: a marriage based on love and friendship resulting in a family of contented children devoted to their loving parents.

Before he arrives at this conclusion the audience must face some of the most antifeminist exempla drawn from depths of classical scholarship. However, he also adds positive ideas about women. In his balancing act on the pros and cons of the marital state De Eyb also devotes a chapter to the praise of women. In it, he mentions many women from antiquity. Although the chapter does not contain any exempla he refers in it to a contemporary female, Barbara of Brandenburg, who was married to Marquis Louis III of Mantua, to whom we will return in the next chapter. Most importantly, De Eyb addresses issues of late medieval and early modern family life within a humanist framework.

1.2.1.15 *Vitae sanctorum patrum*, sive *vitas patrum* [Dutch] *Van den leven der heiligen vaderen*, by Hieronymus

The biographies of the anchorites who lived in the Egyptian desert in the fourth century, leading their ascetic life in solitude, are the subjects of this book. Although Saint Jerome (ca. 341-420) made only a small contribution to the collection of biographies, which was later appended to other works, it is his famous name which remained associated with the *Vitae patrum* throughout the centuries.

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119 Ehebüchlein, fol. a2.
120 Barbara is mentioned rather late in the incunable, Ehebüchlein, fol. h3.
121 There are three editions known, but the versions differ. For an accurate description of the contents of the two different versions, see Catalogue British Museum IX, p. 34 (Leeu) and p. 85 (Van Os), and also Brummel en Liebaers eds., Oude drukken, nr. 9 (Latin edition), and nr. 80 and nr. 87, and De Vooy, Legenden en exempelen, pp. 13-18. I have used the editio princeps ([Zwolle], Peter van Os, 01041490) BL shelf mark IB. 48140. There is no modern Dutch edition in existence.
In principle, I have excluded all exempla which are appended to or included in the *vitae* of holy males. However, in the third part of the edition by Peter van Os it is clearly stated that a separate collection of exempla and sayings from the Desert Fathers is recorded, and as such it ought to be included in our discussion. Although the table of contents lists about sixty exempla in the third part, there are about twice as many gathered in it. The exempla, mostly rather brief and to the point, follow each other without any text connecting them.

The third part of the *Vitae patrum* is intended for 'any good Christian' (*yghelic goet kersten mensche*). Indeed, the virtues mentioned are not only important for the religious but also for the laity. In general, a deep-seated fear of the female sexuality permeates the book. In the majority of the exempla women are depicted as temptresses of the brothers. Women feature in lead roles and they are virtuous religious or they become so and female penitents are also mentioned. Exempla in which women occur are the transvestite Marina (no date) who followed her father into his monastery, the holy harlot Thaïs (no date) who became a bride of Christ, and a southern Low Countries flavour is added by Beatrix, the runaway nun from Brabant, who lived a sinful life before returning to the convent.

1.3 Introduction to the genre of female saints' Lives

Historical interest in female saints' Lives which have appeared in the Middle Dutch vernacular is fortunately picking up. At first sight, the genre is not very

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124 *Vaderen*, Marina's legend features on fols. C5v-C6v, Thaïs on fols. D2-D2v and Beatrix on fols. D2v-D3.

125 See Carasso-Kok, M. ed., *Repertorium van verhalende historische bronnen uit de middeleeuwen. Heiligenleven, annalen, kronieken en andere in Nederland geschreven verhalende bronnen* (Bibliografische reeks van het Nederlands historisch genootschap 2; Page 44
inspiring. The female saints' Lives are highly stereotyped and thematic and contain worn-out patterns. Although every saint could serve a specific and usually different purpose (alleviate one certain kind of pain, assist in one specific task for which they were renowned, etc.), a common archetype was followed. The veracity of the Lives is generally low, particularly that of the early saints' Lives, which were often written centuries after the events occurred or supposed to have occurred. Therefore, emphasis should not be given to the saint as historical person, but rather what one believed or was invited to believe about her, or to study the function of the saint and her life at a certain place in a certain time. A saint could be venerated during her life, but was also beneficial when dead. Upon her birthday in heaven, the day of her death, she would acquire access to Jesus, usually as his bride, to intervene with Jesus on the sinner's behalf.

Traditionally venerated saints were allotted different characteristics and other types of saint appear to suit changing and changed tastes of church and society. Once Christianity took hold and the virgin martyrs no longer died for the faith, contemporary saints became venerated too. The personality of the

newly venerated saint became increasingly important, and with it the description
of the way she lived her life. Gradually during the later middle ages married and
widowed saints appear, but they remain a small faction only. These married or
widowed saints commonly lived their lives outside the cloister walls and they are
often associated with the mendicant orders to whom they turn for guidance.

The legend of the saint was only part of the process of official recognition by the
papacy. In Vauchez' scholarly masterpiece, with its emphasis on papal
canonisation procedures, the procedure is outlined.\(^{129}\) Officially, a new
prospective saint needed a following who would hand in a *petitio* accompanied
by a *vita et miracula*, an *informatio* (an investigative document by pope or legate)
and a *publicatio* which coincided with a *translatio*: the raising of the saintly body
to another, often more visible, place.\(^{130}\) However, not all the saints in our survey
are saints in the true sense of the word, i.e. not all were recognised by the Holy
See. Suffice it to say that this may have been of secondary importance to a
medieval lay audience, which was interested in the saint's efficacy rather than in
her official recognition. Occasionally, the saint had been venerated locally only
and had not received a saintly or beatified status.

Nevertheless, many saints (official or not) were supplied with a *Life*. A neat
summary of the various components which may be included in the *vita* has been
provided: the origins of the saint, birth (occasionally accompanied by a celestial
sign, as Jesus' birth was), childhood, education, piety, martyrdom (usually in
graphic detail), *inventio* (discovery of the relics or body, rise to miracles),
*translatio* (as seen above), and the miracles (often stereotyped).\(^{131}\) Many Lives

Contrast Kleinberg, A.M., *Prophets in their own country. Living saints and the making of
sainthood in the later middle ages* (Chicago, London, 1992), chapter 2, who points out
that the papacy was not much involved in the majority of cases of saint-making.

\(^{130}\) De Grijs, 'Heiligen', pp. 18-19.

\(^{131}\) Boyer, R., 'An attempt to define the typology of medieval hagiography', *Hagiography and
medieval literature*. Proceedings of the fifth international symposium organised by the
centre for the study of vernacular literature in the middle ages. Held at Odense University
are imbued with aspects of the *imitatio Christi*. All these literary elements are useful. Martyrdom is of interest because the virgin saint, more often than not, died as a bride of Christ.

Missing in this summary is the component of marriage. In many female saints’ *Lives* this issue was accompanied by highly dramatic scenes, either when the saint was supposed to marry or supposed to engage in marital relations with her newly-wedded husband. Marriage and the assumption of marital relations were regarded as incompatible with saintly virginal life, and with the preferred state of religious life.

The grand scheme of the Lives survived unchanged, but the details are more variable. The legends are rich sources for conveying details on family life as they contain ideas on marriage, sexual practices, infertility, childbirth, care of infants, relationships between mother and daughter and domestic roles.\(^{132}\) Virtues and good qualities are outlined. Life within the family relies on 'biblical models', the one most frequently based on that of the Holy Family consisting of Mary, Joseph and the child Jesus.\(^{133}\) Sometimes, the extended family of Christ, through St. Anne (1st century), known as the Holy Kindred, was used to show the importance of familial relationships.\(^{134}\) The elements making up the life of the young female


\(^{133}\) Scherf, Y., 'Zij was mooi en goed en zij hield van Christus. Onderzoek naar de mogelijkheden van heiligenleven als bron voor de geschiedenis van vrouwen van de zesde tot de twaalfde eeuw', *Vrouw, familie en macht. Bronnen over vrouwen in de middeleeuwen*, M. Mostert et al. eds. (Amsterdamse historische reeks grote serie 11; Hilversum, 1990), p. 273.

\(^{134}\) Brandenbarg, T., *Heilig familieleven. Verspreiding en waardering van de Historie van Sint-Anna in de stedelijke cultuur in de Nederlanden en het Rijnland aan het begin van de moderne tijd (15e/16e eeuw)*, (Nijmegen, 1990), pp. 138-140.
child and adolescent are also mentioned, and although highly thematic as well, they contain models of imitation for medieval girls.

Weinstein and Bell point out various aspects in the legends of women as opposed to those of men. Since women could not pursue clerical careers or engage in active missionary work in the field or in preaching, most women saints fall outside these scopes. Women are portrayed in acts of extreme asceticism, and extreme penance, and often experience supernatural powers. Women are frequently perceived as healer and helper saints. Sometimes, saintly women had married Christ who had appealed to them as bridegroom.

Despite their legends appearing in print in the Low Countries, the vast majority of the female saints does not originate from the Low Countries but belongs to an 'international' corpus of saints. Nor are any of the saints contemporaries of the second half of the fifteenth century. Thus, the Lives cannot be used to study attitudes towards contemporary female saints, nevertheless patterns of veneration do emerge. However, not all saints whose Lives have appeared in print could have claimed equal attention and demanded similar devotion. Occasionally, their Life in print consists of a very short text. The fact that they appeared in print, particularly as part of a large corpus of 'international' saints, does not guarantee that they were indeed venerated or popular in the Low Countries. It could even be argued that they are not worthy of much attention as

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135 In spite of the authors' insistence that 'variety, not uniformity, characterised the childhood of saints', it appears in their book that set patterns and topoi were used in the legends; see Weinstein D. and R.M. Bell, Saints and society: the two worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700 (Chicago, London, 1982), p. 19 for citation, pp. 19-47 for children, and pp. 48-72 for adolescents. Indeed, the period of youth belongs to the most stereotyped and succinct part of the vitae, Jong, M. de, 'Merovingische en vroeg-Karolingische heiligenlevens als spiegel van kindertijd en jeugd', De heiligenverering in de eerste eeuwen van het christendom, A. Hilhorst ed. (Nijmegen, 1988), p. 42. Although De Jong writes about legends in which boys feature, her observation also rings true for girls.

136 Weinstein and Bell, Saints, chapter 8.

137 In contrast to the subjects of the studies of Kieckhefer, R., Unquiet Souls. Fourteenth-century saints and their religious milieu (Chicago, London, 1984) and Kleinberg, Prophets.
models for emulation. Also, not all the Lives of venerated saints appeared in print, and not all those whose Lives were in existence in manuscript made it to the printing press.

To obtain a flavour of aspects which may have interested a fifteenth-century vernacular reading female lay audience, we should highlight the elements of the incunables which have been published in separate editions. These sources are introduced below in some detail, with the exception of the incunable dealing with St. Dympna van Geel, whose vernacular Life has unfortunately not withstood the ravages of time.

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138 See, for instance, the five-odd sentences which form Praxedes's legend (1st-2nd century), Passionael (to be introduced below), somerstuc, praxedis, fol. n6.

139 One way of studying the disparagement is to look at depictions in art from the second half of the fifteenth century, at the time that the first printing presses were active. One example should suffice. St. Wilgefortis, alias St. Ontcommer, grew a beard spontaneously to escape marriage. Her legend did not appear in print but she was clearly venerated in the third part of the fifteenth century, as witnessed by a contemporary wall painting of her at the Buurkerk at Utrecht, Deijjk, A. van, Middeleeuwse kerken in Utrecht (Clavis kunsthistorische monografieën V; Zutphen, 1988), p. 27, and Goosen, L., Van Afra tot de Zevenslapers. Heiligen in religie en kunsten (Nijmegen, 1992), pp. 268-270.

140 Despite the availability of some vitae of twelfth- and thirteenth-century locally venerated female saints from the southern Low Countries, (see the various entries in McDonnell, E.W., Beguines and beghards in medieval culture, with special reference on the Belgian scene (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1954), pp. 575-585 particularly under 'Jacques de Vitry' and 'Thomas of Cantrimpré'). Yet their legends did not appear in print. We can only surmise the reasons for their not having appeared in print. Up to a certain point, it seems quite arbitrary what was printed. Also, literary tastes may have changed. Some manuscripts must simply have escaped the printer's eye. External pressures should not be excluded. Beguines, for instance, may have been charged with non-conformity after the Council of Vienne (1311-1312). (We will return to the Council in the next chapter.) This may explain why the fourteenth-century Delft beguines deliberately remained silent about beguine Gertrui's stigmata and lactation, although a vita was in existence, see Bredero, A.H., 'De Delftse begijn Gertrui van Oosten (ca. 1320-1358) en haar niet-erkende heiligheid', De Nederlanden in de late middeleeuwen, D.E.H. de Boer en J.W. Marsilje eds. (Utrecht, 1987), pp. 90-91.

141 For Legenda S. Dymphna in Dutch ([Antwerp], G[ovaert] B[ac, not before 21 September 1500]), see Goosen, Afra, pp. 127-128 and Koyen, M.H., 'Krankzinnigenzorg. St. Dimpna en Geel', Spiegel Historiael 9 (1974), pp. 514-521. For her legend in Latin by Peter Cameracensis, a canon of Saint-Aubert at Cambrai, see Brummel en Liebaers eds., Oude drukken, nr. 85. It was based on popular tradition. The saint was reputed to have been a daughter of a heathen Irish or British king. After the death of his wife, he was advised by his courtiers to remarry, but he would only wed someone who resembled his wife. Dymphna alone met this condition, but she refused him and fled with her confessor to Antwerp and Geel. Her father followed her and beheaded her in a fit of insanity, possessed by the devil. St. Dymphna was called on in cases when possession by the devil was feared and in cases of insanity. Medieval sufferers were boarded out with local
1.3.1 The female saints' Lives

In this section only those saints who have been deemed worthy to appear in a separate incunable edition will be discussed. The majority of saints, whose Lives have appeared in the *Legenda aurea*, will be introduced in the following chapters when their legend conveys useful aspects, but it pays to devote some attention to the *Legenda aurea* itself as a collection.

1.3.1.1 *Legenda aurea sanctorum, sive Lombardica historia* [Dutch] 

*Passionaei, Winter-ende Somerstuc*, by Jacobus de Voragine

The Dominican Jacobus de Voragine (ca. 1228-14 July 1298) compiled a collection of about one hundred and eighty saints, and he added moveable feasts. His sources were various: the Latin and Greek Fathers, the apocrypha, families in Geel, sometimes for the rest of their life. In the second half of the fifteenth century a small hospital, with only one room in it, was built to accommodate some of them. Perhaps in order to promote the cult site printed editions of her legend, both in Latin and the vernacular, were warranted.

There are eight surviving editions. I have used the *editio princeps* (Gouda, Gerard Leeu, 1478) BL shelf mark IB. 47306 and IB. 47407; and Leeu's second (enlarged) edition (Gouda, Gerard Leeu, 1480) The Hague KB shelf mark 171 D 37 and 171 D 38. For bibliographical details of the first edition, see *Catalogue British Museum* IX, p. 31. I have also used another edition (Utrecht, Johann Veldener, 12 September 1480) The Hague KB shelf mark 168 E 30, which contains an additional selection of legends. Henceforth the edition of Leeu of 1478 will be referred to as *Passionaei*, his edition of 1480 as *Passionaei* (Leeu, 1480), and Veldener's edition as *Passionaei* (Veldener). A translation of the majority of female Lives has appeared in modern English, Granger Ryan, W. *trans.* Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend* (2 vols., Princeton, 1993). Another useful survey (for collections of legends rather than monographs) is by Williams-Krapp, W., 'German and Dutch legendaries of the middle ages: a survey', *Hagiography and medieval literature*. Proceedings of the fifth international symposium organised by the centre for the study of vernacular literature in the middle ages. Held at Odense University on 17-18 November 1980, Odense, H. Bekker-Nielsen et al. eds. (Odense, 1981), pp. 66-75. See Williams-Krapp, W., *Die deutschen und niederländischen Legendare des Mittelalters. Studien zur ihrer Überlieferungs-, Text- und Wirkungsgeschichte* (Tübingen, 1986), p. 53, fn. 1, for snippets of saints' Lives which have appeared in Dutch in modern editions. The bibliography appended to the thesis will refer the reader to additions to these. It would have been very constructive if all saints' legends had been published in editions such as that by Lagerwey, E. en B. Kruitwagen eds., *Legende van Sinte Willebroert. Gereproduceerd uit het Passionaei Winterstuc gebruikt door Gheerart Leeu ter Gouda, 31 juli 1478* (Maastricht, 1940) or Jongen, L., 'Heerlijk-helder-heilig. Een kort, Middelnederlands leven van de Heilige Clara', *Madoc B* (1994), pp. 149-158.

This paragraph is based on the introduction to Granger Ryan trans., *Legend*, I. On the author's life in his order, see Fleith, B., *Studien zur Überlieferungsgeschichte der
and oral sources (particularly used in the miracles). Only about one fifth of the legends are dedicated to female saints. The collection was translated into Dutch probably by a Carthusian from Herne between 1358 and 1388.\footnote{144}

The first edition in the vernacular, printed in 1478 by Gerard Leeu, shows a division of the corpus in a 'winterpart' and a 'summerpart'. The first starts off with All Saints, the latter with Easter. In the edition some female saints are added to Jacobus's original Normalcorpus (as detailed by Barbara Fleith).\footnote{145} Female saints' Lives which were appended to Leeu's next edition (1480) are St. Anne, St. Clare of Assisi (1194-1253) and Eutropia (5th century), who features in a supportive role in the legend of her brother Nicasius of Reims. It is interesting to note that both Anne and Clare were honoured with separate editions before 1501. This suggests, from a reception point of view, that the twosome were in vogue in the fifteenth century.

Veldener's edition of 1480 was embellished with Usuard's Martyrologium, mentioning the names of many female saints, but only a few saints' Lives were added from this calendar.\footnote{146} It appears that Veldener, from Würzburg, introduced some of traditionally venerated saints in Germany rather than the Low

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Williams-Krapp, \textit{Legendare}, p. 54.\footnote{145}

For her list, see Fleith, \textit{Studien}, pp. 432-433. Female saints' Lives and feast-days added are: Apollonia, Barbara, Bridget of Sweden, the feast of the Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Dorothy, Gertrude of Nivelles, Prisca and Scholastica. An extant Latin edition of the \textit{Legenda aurea}, which was complemented with a written recluse's necrology shortly after her death in 1514, Horst, K. van der, et al. eds., \textit{Handschriften en oude drukken van de Utrechtse Universiteitsbibliotheek}. Catalogus bij de tentoonstelling in het Centraal Museum te Utrecht ter gelegenheid van het 400-jarig bestaan van de bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit 1584-1984 (Utrecht, 1984), pp. 75-76. In this way, a biography was added of a recently departed locally known holy woman Sister Bertken of Utrecht.\footnote{146}

Usuard, the ninth-century monk of Saint-Germain-des Prés, compiled a \textit{Martyrologium} containing names of saints who had died during the first centuries of Christianity.
Countries. His 'winterpart' starts with 1st of January, the 'summerpart' with 1st of July, arranged according to the calendar. Among the female saints' Lives added features St. Kunera (4th century). She too was attributed a separate, more elaborate edition.

Leeu's prologue mentions that any one (elc mensche) who reads it shall receive great contentment. Fleith mentions that the Latin legends were used by preachers for their sermons, by the religious and in schools, whilst the early translations were received by the laity, who must have read it in private too. It was extremely popular in the Low Countries in the vernacular, and the urban laity were among the recipients. Artists were directly inspired by the legends.

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147 (including corrupted names and insignificant legends), see Dubois, J., Martyrologes d'Usuard au martyrlogie romain (Abbeville, 1990), p. 212.

Female saints' Lives added are: Afra of Augsburg, Brigid of Ireland, Euphrosyne, Eugenia, Kunera, Sophia and her three daughters, Thecla of Iconium and Walburga, abbess of Heidenheim. Many had a long tradition of veneration in Germany, see (under the entries of their name) Goosen, Afra. However, the saints belonged to a European corps. Walburga, for instance, was also venerated locally at Tiel and Zutphen, Post, R.R., Kerkgeschiedenis van Nederland in de middeleeuwen (2 vols., Utrecht, Antwerpen, 1957), II, p. 238. The first records referring to the church of St. Walburga at Zutphen date back to the mid eleventh century, Bastemeijer, A., 'De zesde kerk van bisschop Bernold van Utrecht. Oorsprong en betekenis van de St. Walburgskerk te Zutphen’, Madoc 9 (1995), pp. 8-22. Kunera will be discussed below.

148 Passionael, somerstuc, fol. a2v.

149 Fleith, Studien, pp. 37-42.

150 '... the Legenda aurea was translated into no vernacular more often than into German and Dutch... ', Williams-Krapp, W., 'German and Dutch translations of the Legenda aurea', Legenda aurea: sept siècles de diffusion. Actes du colloque international sur la Legenda aurea. Texte latin et branches vernaculaires à l'Université du Québec à Montréal 11-12 mai 1983, B. Dunn-Lardeau ed. (Cahiers d'études médiévales, cahier spécial 2; Montréal, Paris, 1986), p. 227 and p. 230 for the recipients.

1.3.1.2 **Historie, getijden en exempeien van St. Anna**¹⁵² and **Historie van St. Anna**,¹⁵³ by Jan van Denemarken

Fortunately, we can share the fruits of Ton Brandenbarg's studies on the cult of St. Anne, who has counted these incunables among his sources.¹⁵⁴ The **Historie, getijden en exempeien van St. Anna** and the **Historie van St. Anna**, both written in Latin by the priest Jan van Denemarken and apparently both translated by Wouter Bor, a Carthusian at Arnhem.¹⁵⁵

The Dutch priest Jan van Denemarken (d. ca. 1454) from the northern Low Countries started writing the **Historie, getijden en exempeien** in 1486 to actively promote her cult to devout people, expressing his wish for all to know that Anne helps the needy.¹⁵⁶ The first book consists of three parts: her legend, a book of hours, and seven miracles. The second book contains the penitential life of Anne, that of her parents, nearly twenty miracles and a few prayers. A revelation attributed to St. Bridget of Sweden (1303-1373) is also included in which Anne is recommended as special patron to married people.

In the later middle ages, the stories about Anne were separated from those on the Virgin Mary. From the thirteenth century onwards, visual images came into

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¹⁵² There are five editions known, I have used the first edition (Antwerp, Gerard Leeu [between 9 February 1491 and 1492]). INCIPIT does not mention the author of this incunable. I have consulted a facsimile of the original kept at Darmstadt (in the Hessische Landes- und Hochschulbibliothek) at the Instituut voor Neerlandistiek, Universiteit van Amsterdam, shelf mark H24-H25.

¹⁵³ There are two editions extant of **Historie anna**, I have used the first edition ([Zwolle], Peter van Os, 7 September 1499) kept at Ghent, Universiteitsbibliotheek, shelf mark Res. 457. There are no modern editions of either book.

¹⁵⁴ The contents of **Historie, getijden, exempeien anna** are discussed in an English summary see Brandenbarg, **Familieleven**, pp.10-11. The contents of the **Historie van Sinte Anna** by the Carthusian Pieter Dorlant (1454-1507) printed in 1501 (this date falls outside our chronological parameter) are neatly summarised by Brandenbarg, T., 'St.-Anna en haar familie', **Tussen heks en heilige. Het vrouwbeeld op de drempel van de moderne tijd, 15de/16de eeuw. Nijmeegs museum 'Commanderie van Sint Jan', P. Bange et al. eds. (Nijmegen, 1985), pp. 111-112. The composition of no fewer than three separate legends during the second half of the fifteenth century shows that Anne was a tremendously popular saint.

¹⁵⁵ Brandenbarg, 'Anna en familie', p. 105.

¹⁵⁶ **Historie, getijden, exempeien anna**, fol. a2v and fol. a7v.
existence of three generations of mother Anne, daughter Mary and grandchild Jesus. A continuous stress was laid on Anne's maternal and grandmotherly roles as well as her widowhood. Many women can identify with her as spouse, mother, grandmother, educator and widow.

The importance of an elaborate ancestry is to trace Christ through the female line because Christ had no biological father on earth. In this way, Christ's maternal ancestry is traced further down and Anne's mother Emerentiana makes her appearance as well. The Carmelite friars were quick to 'adopt' Emerentiana who was said to have joined the Carmelite order when they were still stationed at the Holy Land. In the first half of the thirteenth century they had obtained a foothold in Valenciennes, near the southern Low Countries. The Carmelites were successful preachers in the Low Countries.

In the fifteenth century, Anne's family became increasingly extended in literature, by virtue of her three marriages. Van Denemarken defends Anne's trinubium (after Joachim's death she remarried twice), by stating that she was still fertile. Together with her children and through her sister Hysmeria, Anne was related to many apostles and saints, among whom the bishop of Maastricht, St. Servatius (4th century). The devotee was presented with a Holy Kindred in which Christ's immediate family was modelled on that of the worldly family. The devotee and her family could identify with this family. Indeed, Mary and Jesus could be reached through Anne, according a little rhyme added at the very end of the incunable.

Anne is of particular importance to the Low Countries since many narratives about her spread from these regions. Of significance to us is that the

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157 Historie, getijden, exempelen anna, fols. b3v-b4.
158 'Wilde wesen marien vrient, So siet dat ghi haer moeder dient, Diendi haer met goeden betrouwen, Jesus ende maria en latens niet onvergouwen' which translates: 'To become a friend of Mary, serve her mother, if you serve her well, Jesus and Mary will reward you', Historie, getijden, exempelen anna, fol. 14v.
159 Early cult sites are situated in Limburg, Dresen-Coenders, L., 'Machtige grootmoeder, duivelse heks. Speurtocht naar de samenhang tussen heksenvervolging en de verering
incunables stress Anne's exemplary life and convey information about familial responsibilities. In the miracles she is portrayed as a compassionate intercessor, assisting in matrimonial and fertility matters and she comes to the rescue of unfortunate widows. Topics of interest are obviously those which concern the late medieval family life such as Anne and Joachim as an infertile couple, Anne as wife, grandmother and widow. She serves as a positive example for secular women in all states of life.

The Historié, getijden en exempeien of St. Anne is intended for all folk (alle menschen). The Historie van St. Anna does not refer to any specific audience, but the majority of the exempla feature secular folk, which is of course a strong indication that it was intended for the laity.

1.3.1.3 **Legenda beatissimae virginis Barbarae** [Dutch] **Die Historie van Sinte Barbara met die miraculien**

This incunable contains the Life of Barbara (d. ca. 303), her Passion as well as eighteen appended miracles. Its author is the Augustinian hermit Jan van Wackerzeele (near Louvain). His version of the legend is a late fourteenth-century compilation of various sources. In 1392, he had visited Piacenza in Italy, where Barbara's relics were situated, for research. In the second half of the fifteenth century more additions were made to the legend.

In the legend, the young heathen Barbara dedicated herself to her study, pondered about the existence of the pagan gods, wrote to Origen (4th century)
and subsequently converted to Christianity in secrecy.\textsuperscript{164} In a vision, she was baptised by John the Baptist. Her father built a tower for her to live in after she had declined to marry, but when he learned she had become a Christian he delivered her up to the magistrate, had her tortured, and finally beheaded her. He was struck by lightning and died a sudden death.

Aspects which are of interest are the saint’s studiousness and auto-didactic approach and her relation to Jesus as his bride. Her prayer before she joined her bridegroom Jesus in the afterlife, near the time of her execution, made her a patroness of the dead, particularly those who had experienced a sudden death (as was the case with her father) and had departed without having confessed.\textsuperscript{165}

In the Sielentroest, Jesus even guarantees the effectiveness of the saint’s last prayer: all sinners who contemplate Barbara’s martyrdom will be forgiven.\textsuperscript{166}

Legends of St. Barbara have recently been viewed with a monastic audience in mind.\textsuperscript{167} Within these communities, particularly in the southern Low Countries, her legend spread fast and was often copied. Certain female communities sought a firmer measure of clausura, principally to devote themselves to study.\textsuperscript{168} Indeed, elements from Barbara’s Life could be used to promote such study. Although in the incunable it is not mentioned who the intended audience was (and this may have consisted of female communities) the personages which appear in the

\textsuperscript{164} For a description, see Brummel en Liebaers eds., \textit{Oude drukken}, nr. 86, and Goosen, \textit{Afra}, pp. 54-56.

\textsuperscript{165} Although the beneficiaries were usually dead there is an exemplum of a person kept alive. See the miracle which had befallen a servant maid who lay buried under the rubble of a collapsed tower, \textit{Barbara}, fols. g6v-h1. She survived long enough, by the grace of Barbara, to confess and take the sacrament after which she died. \textit{Sielentroest}, fol. 89.


\textsuperscript{167} Prims, P., \textit{De kloosterslot-beweging in Brabant in de xvde eeuw} (Mededeelingen van de Koninklijke Vlaamsche Academie voor wetenschappen letteren en schoone kunsten van België klasse der letteren jaargang VI,1; Antwerpen, Utrecht, 1944), demonstrates that, on the one hand, Carthusian ideals were strived after and, on the other hand, the spiritual appeal of the mendicant orders was felt to be in decline.
miracles consist of lay folk, and this is a strong indicator that they must be counted among the legend's readership.\(^{169}\)

1.3.1.4 **The legend of Bridget of Sweden. The legend of Catherine of Vadstena, by Peter of Alvastra\(^{170}\)**

The incunable contains a compilation of St. Bridget of Sweden's *Revelations* (which she received principally from Christ and Mary); a tripartite division of the canonisation bull of pope Boniface IX followed by a brief *Life* of Bridget (but not marked as such at the beginning of the legend), which in turn is followed by a confirmation of the canonisation bull by Pope Martin V; a comprehensive legend of Bridget's daughter Catherine of Vadstena (d. 1381), the *Leven Katarinen*, follows.\(^{171}\) Our interest lies with both lady saints.

Bridget's *Life* will be discussed first. The compiler distinctly views the information as a legend of Bridget. He refers to it as such in the introduction of the incunable, as well as at the end of the tripartite system.\(^{172}\)

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\(^{169}\) Recipients of her assistance as mentioned in *Barbara* are merchants (fols. f6-f6v and h2v-h3), urban dwellers (fols. g1-g3 and g6-g6v) and the servant maid (fols. g6v-h1). None of the recipients of Barbara's miracles mentioned female monastics. Barbara was also extremely popular in Germany, judging by the manuscripts and early printed editions, Reuter, E., 'Barbara', *VL*, I, cc. 601-603.


\(^{172}\) *Birgitten*, fol. a1v and fol. A1. It is worth making this point since INCIPIIT omits to mention the inclusion of the saint's legend.
In the incunable Bridget's concentrated Life appears to be included. It was composed by her two confessors, the Cistercian Prior Peter Olavsson, also known as Peter of Alvastra, and Augustinian Master Peter Olavsson, also known as Peter of Skänninge, a musician and theologian. Apparently, they put it hastily together as they prepared to leave Rome to accompany the saint's remains to Sweden. The brief legend may in turn have been revised by Alphonsus Pecha, bishop of Jaen, who had also guided Bridget's spiritual development and had edited part of her Revelations. The latter did so with her canonisation in mind.

Based on hagiographic schemes, Bridget's legend starts with her parents expecting her birth, and ends with Bridget's posthumous miracles. The legend informs us about her childhood, her married life and the death of her husband, her visionary activities, pious lifestyle, charitable works, her stay at Rome, the work involved with founding her order and her death. She founded the Brigittine Order based on her idea of the early Christian community consisting of nuns and priests and lay brothers. The priests were to be scholars and preach to the laity and nuns alike.

Bridget's legend is followed by that of her daughter St. Catherine. The text earmarks Peter of Alvastra as author. The legend contains many details: it tells of her married life, and the time spent with Bridget in Rome, and her involvement in the process of her mother's canonisation. Catherine became the first abbess of the small community of Vadstena. The mother and daughter relationship comes particularly to the fore in Catherine's Life.

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173 The authorship question is discussed by Tjader Harris ed., Birgitta, pp. 14-16.
Thus, both legends tell of the saints' childhood, their marriage and subsequent widowhood. It is not exactly stated for whom the legends were intended. The humanist Jacob Canter, compiled a Latin edition of the *Revelations* for the printer Gerard Leeu, on which the Dutch incunable appears to have been based. In the introduction, it is mentioned that the *Revelations* are intended to stir the hearts of Christian folk (*kerstene menschen*). In the section introducing the canonisation and legend of Bridget she is referred to as 'our worthy patroness', suggesting the compilation was intended in the first instance for use within the Brigetine Order. In Catherine's legend recipients are not mentioned.

### 1.3.1.5 St. Catharina de Alexandria [Dutch] *Sinte Katherinen legende*[^179]

Catherine of Alexandria (4th century) was an immensely popular saint in the middle ages. The legend tells the story of the young royal virgin saint who despised marriage, because she was a bride of Christ, and who refused to honour pagan gods. She managed to persuade fifty philosophers to convert to the Christian faith and was subsequently condemned to die on a wheel.

The *Sinte Katerinen legende* printed by Bac, relies in part on the *Passionaei*, but also contains the story of the saint's birth and her life until the death of her father (King Costus of Cyprus) and this part is attributed to the Dutch Carthusian author Pieter Dorlant (1454-1507). In the incunable version the circumstances

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[^176]: Canter's sister was a Brigetine nun. He probably travelled to the Brigetine nuns at the Mariatroon convent at Dendermonde to view their hand-copied version of the *Revelations*, see Liebaers ed., *Verjaring*, p. 48 and Vermeulen, *Proft*, p. 92.

[^177]: Opusculum, fol. a2.


[^179]: There are two editions extant, I have used the dated edition: (Antwerp, Govaert Bac, not before 3 July 1496) BL shelf mark IA. 49965. For bibliographical details, see Catalogue British Museum IX, p. 203.

[^180]: It was thought that anyone who turned to her for help would never do so in vain, Goosen, *Afra*, p. 92. In chapter 2, the appeal of Catherine's intellectual side will be highlighted and, in chapter 3 her closeness as a bride to the bridegroom Jesus.

[^181]: Knust, H., *Geschichte der Legenden der h. Katharina von Alexandrien und der h. Maria Aegyptiaca nebst unedirten Texten* (Halle a. S., 1890), pp. 121-122 also mentions the *Nova Historia* as one of the sources of this particular incunable. For Pieter's work on the
surrounding her conception, birth and youth in the royal household, the death of her father, her eremitical education, and her mystical marriage with Jesus in a series of visions are dealt with. These details are missing in the legend of the *Passionael*, which starts at the moment she hears the Christians, who are about to be martyred, sing which led to her conversion. In both versions, the dispute with the fifty philosophers and her *Passion* are treated. Her intercession with Christ for the sinner was thought to be very effective since she had successfully argued with the philosophers and also by virtue of her being his bride. Although the incunable is not addressed to anyone, she would undoubtedly help anyone. Her body was supposed to have been transported by angels to Mount Sinai where many pilgrims visited her tomb.  

1.3.1.6 *Legende en leven van Sinte Clara*, by Thomas de Celano

The incunable edition of the legend of St. Clare is based on the Latin legend attributed to the Franciscan Thomas de Celano (ca. 1200-ca. 1260). After St. Clare (1194-1253) had heard St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) preach she became imbued with his ideas. The main part of her legend tells of her struggle and efforts to establish the second order of St. Francis, also known as the Minoresses or Poor Clares. No posthumous miracles are appended.

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184 On Thomas de Celano, see Bachrach et al. eds., *Encyclopedie*, IX, p. 278. On St. Clare, see Ruh, K., 'Klara von Assisi', *VL*, IV, cc. 1175-1178.

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The legend shows the saint's life of extreme poverty and devotion to the religious life. The poverty factor is important and could be regarded as a reaction to pecuniary advantages that life in the cities brought to enterprising business people and their families. In a reaction against the new riches obtained in the prosperous cities, the religious poverty movement was embraced by those from upper layers of the cities. In this respect the urban environment of the thirteenth-century Low Countries was similar to that of northern Italy. Ermenturdis of Bruges corresponded with St. Clare in order to establish a convent based on Clare's ideals.\(^{185}\) But Clare's influence continued to be important in the later middle ages. Contemplation, study and interest to follow the evangelical life are key factors in the northern part of the Low Countries of the second half of the fifteenth century.\(^{186}\) Clare's legend must have appealed to seculars as well as the religious.

Although the *Life* is not dedicated to any specific audience there are certain elements in it which could appeal to secular women. The legend tells of her birth and youth at the family home, and of the struggle in her flight from home as well as that of her sister Agnes. Her devotion to the Eucharist and the Holy Cross fits into the devotional practices of the mid and late middle ages, which may also have stimulated female piety at home.

\(^{185}\) The pope allowed Ermentrudis of Bruges to establish no fewer than eleven convents, Roggen, H., 'Het Brabantse Umbrië. Volgelingen van Clara van Assisi in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden,' *Clara in de Nederlanden 1193-1253*. Museum voor Religieuze Kunst Uden 24 april - 26 juni 1994, L.C.B.M. van Liebergen en W. Prins eds. (Uden, 1994), pp. 44-46. In chapter 3 we shall return to the religious poverty movement in which urban women were involved.

St. Kunera (4th century) is known in the medieval diocese of Utrecht, but not so much outside the Low Countries. She was one of the eleven thousand virgins who supposedly went with the British St. Ursula (4th century) to Rome on a pilgrimage. (However, in the legend of Ursula in the Passionaei, Kunera is not mentioned.) When, on their return, the virgins were ambushed and killed by the Huns at Cologne, Kunera escaped martyrdom and was saved by Radboud, King of the Rhine. He took her to his palace at Rhenen where she lived such a virtuous life that he handed her the keys 'of all his things'. The Queen became jealous and together with her maiden murdered Kunera with a scarf and they buried her in the stables. Upon his return home from a hunting party the king's horses refused to go in the stables. A dramatic woodcut portrays both the murder and the unwilling horses. After a miracle with burning candles indicating the place where her body lay buried, she was duly discovered. The Queen was driven mad by her husband and committed suicide. He converted his palace into a church dedicated to the virgin. Her relics, among which the scarf, stayed in the church at Rhenen until the early seventeenth century.

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187 In fact, this incunable contains the prologue as well. There is one edition extant, which I have used ([Leiden, Govert van Ghemen, between 1496 and 1504]). The incunable is in possession of the Hessische Landes- und Hochschulbibliothek in Darmstadt. I have consulted the microfilm made available to me at The Hague KB shelf mark OD 445. The version in the Passionaei (Veldener), somerstuc, kunera, fols. NN6-NN7v is rather brief compared to this incunable. For bibliographical details and description of the book, see Kronenberg, M.E., 'Een onbekende 15e eeuwse druk van Sinte Kunera's Leven en Passie', Het boek 20 (1931), pp. 331-344, and for main characteristics, see Debaene, Volksboeken, p. 257. There is a facsimile of a later edition (ca. 1515): Dat leven ende die passie ende verheffinghe vander heiligher maget sinte Kunera, zonder plaats en jaar (c. 1515), w. ed. ('s-Gravenhage, 1902). The incunable on which the latter edition is based has been transcribed by Combrink, J. ed., Dat leven van Kunera. Getranscribeerd, van annotaties en een inleiding voorzien (Historische heuvelrug-reeks I; Rhenen, 1988).

Kunera's cult may have had an impetus after the discovery of a churchyard in Cologne in the mid-twelfth century which allegedly contained the remains of the virgin martyrs and their retinue and which stimulated devotion towards these martyrs. Kunera was of course not among them, but she appears to have been venerated in the Low Countries and the Rhineland before the fifteenth century. To add to Kunera's *Life* a semblance of truth and extra holiness is the fact that the trustworthy St. Willibrord (658-739) makes an appearance. He is actively involved in her *translatio*, by personally taking spade in hand, digging up her remains and the scarf she was strangled with. Radboud (690-719) has been identified as a King of the Frisians who had a residence near Rhenen. The legend has composite elements from various centuries.

It is not clear who wrote the *Life* and *Passion*, but there was a Latin precursor. The dates which are cited in the miracles range from 1380 to 1446. At Rhenen a guild was established in her name in 1392. The brothers and sisters bound themselves to sing vespers and follow a mass on set times of the week, to bury their members and pray for the souls of the departed. Papal legate Nicolas of Cusa, sent to the Netherlands to deliver papal indulgences in the aftermath of the Holy Year 1450, left a licence to the church to parcel out indulgences to those

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189 Kunera, fol. a1v. The same woodcut was later used in a book on horses, showing Kunera but with the scarf etched out, Kronenberg, M.E., 'Later gebruik van een der Kunera-houtneden', *Het boek* 21 (1933), pp. 287-290.

190 Apparently, the place of her cult attracted many pilgrims at the end of the early middle ages, see Berbée, P.A.J.S., 'Bedevaart' en 'pelgrimstocht' in Nederland. Over oude termen en nieuwe methoden in bedevaartonderzoek, *In de schaduw van de eeuwigheid. Tien studies over religie en samenleving in laatmiddeleeuws Nederland aangeboden aan prof. dr. A.H. Bredero*, N. Lettinck and J.J. van Moolenbroek eds. (Utrecht, 1986), p. 175. However, as witnessed by the late medieval miracles wrought by the saint, it appears that she was venerated in the fifteenth century too.

191 Kunera, fol. b5v.


193 The text of the formation act is transcribed by Iterson, W. van, 'De stichtingsbrieven van het St. Cuneragilde te Rhenen en het ellendige gilde te Eembrug', *Rechtshistorische opstellen aangeboden aan A.S. de Blécourt*, J.B. Wolters ed. (Groningen, Batavia, 1939), pp. 41-53. About forty female members appear to have signed their names on the parchment when they were included in the guild.

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who assisted in the upkeep to the church.\textsuperscript{194} The church had sufficient funds to
start building a tower in 1492. The cult of Kunera flourished from the third part of
the fourteenth at least until the end of the fifteenth century.

The twenty seven miracles which accompany the \textit{Life} and \textit{Passion} are mostly
situated in the Betuwe and the bishopric of Utrecht. Of importance to us are not
those in which Kunera was thought to have performed miracles with an
equestrian background, but those in which she is called upon as a comforter of
people in fear and despair.\textsuperscript{195} Also, historical persons are mentioned, including
Eleanor, daughter of Edward III of England, married to Rainald II (1326-1343),
Duke of Guelders and the Augustinian hermit Nicolaas van Dordrecht. The latter
appears in three miracles and he is actively promoting the saint to a heavily
pregnant woman experiencing a difficult labour.\textsuperscript{196}

Significant topics are Kunera's virtuous life as a virgin saint which earned her the
love and protection of her protector and the miracles. It is not mentioned for
whom the incunable was intended but it served to better its audience.\textsuperscript{197} The laity
feature predominantly in the miracles, and this suggests that the legend was
intended for them.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[194] A transcription and a Dutch translation are appended by Haakman, \textit{Rhenen}, pp. 300-301.
\item[195] The church appears to have received funds from pilgrims.
\item[196] \textit{Kunera}, fol. a2.
\item[197] \textit{Kunera}, Eleanor appears on fols. c1-c1v; Nicolaas and the pregnant woman on fols. d3-
d3v, Nicolaas and the parents who save their blaspheming insane son by displaying
devotion to Kunera on fols. c5v-c6; Nicolaas and the parents who save their blind child by
having it put into contact with the saint's scarf on fols. d1-d1v. The Augustinian hermits
offered spiritual care to craftsmen in particular, Axters, S., \textit{Geschiedenis van de
Augustinian hermits from Dordrecht were active in Utrecht, Rhenen and Zaltbommel,
Het ontstaan van bedelordekloosters voor ca. 1310 te Dordrecht, Middelburg, Zierikzee
en Haarlem, alsmede enige aspecten van de plaats van deze kloosters in het stedelijk
leven en daarbuiten gedurende de middeleeuwen} (Hollandse studiën 10; Dordrecht,
1977), p. 47. It enabled them to promote local saints to local people.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
1.3.1.8 *Leven van Liedwij, die maghet van Schiedam, by Johannes Gerlach* 198

The fifteen-year old Liedwij van Schiedam (1380-ca. 1432) was the unfortunate victim of a skating accident. 199 She became partially paralysed, prone to many horrible diseases, and was bed-ridden until her death. Her Middle Dutch legend, written before 1436, contains the story of her suffering and spiritual consolation and ascent. 200 It is quite exceptional to find a local saint venerated in the fifteenth century Low Countries to such an extent as Liedwij was.

Although the Middle Dutch version is attributed to Jan (abbreviation of Johannes) Gerlach, who was her kinsman, its authorship is contested. 201 It is unknown who commissioned her legend. It may have been the church masters of Schiedam, who may have kept a version of it at the chapel where Liedwij was buried where she wrought miracles and where a miracle recording book was kept. Perhaps the tertiaries of the local St. Ursula convent commissioned her *Life*; Liedwij was after

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198 There are three editions in existence. I have used the *editio princeps* (Delft, [Jacob Jacobszoon van der Meer or Christiaen Snellaert], 03 March 1487) The Hague KB shelf mark 169 G 62. The medieval *Life* has been edited with parallel translation in modern Dutch by Jongen, L. en C. Schotel eds., *Het leven van Liedwij, de maagd van Schiedam. De Middelnederlandse tekst naar de bewaarde bronnen uitgegeven, vertaald en van commentaar voorzien* (Middelnederlandse tekstedities 2; Hilversum, 1989, 1994). Three Latin legends have appeared as well. They were written by Hugo regular canon of the St. Elizabeth monastery at Rugge near Den Briel, Thomas a Kempis and friar-preacher Jan Brugman, see Jongen en Schotel eds., *Liedewij*, pp. 16-17 and pp. 109-110. For Thomas a Kempis's version of the *Life*, see Mercator, J. trans. en ed., *Het Leven van de Heilige Lidwina van Schiedam door Thomas van Kempen. In het Hollandsch overgezet* (Amersfoort, 1924). For aspects of Jan Brugman's *Life* of the saint, see Dijk, A. van, *Jan Brugman als biograaf van de heilige Lidwina* (Universitas catholica lovaniensis tomos xv. 7; Rijswijk, 1948). These men obviously attempted to promote her cult to a wider (international, Latin reading) public.

199 For a short description of her legend, see Goosen, Afra, pp. 232-233.


201 Both Hugo's Latin *Life* and the Middle Dutch *Life* have sources in common. It seems that Liedwij's confessor, Jan Woutersz., has had a hand in the compilation of the Middle Dutch text, on which Hugo's *Life* relies too. Jan Gerlach was just one of the sources used by Hugo, Jongen en Schotel eds., *Liedewij*, pp. 110-113. In all, it is not known who authored her Middle Dutch legend.
all buried in one of their robes. The incunable does not reveal for whom the book was intended or printed. Recommended meditative practices (to contemplate on the passion of Christ in order to forget her own suffering) point to the influence of the modern devotion. Her Middle Dutch Life does not contain any posthumous miracles.

Aspects of importance are the circumstances surrounding her birth and a short description of her youth spent in the town of Schiedam as a member of impoverished nobility. The legend also describes in some detail the relationship with her mother. Also, she was a charitable person who supplied food and money to the poor. Jesus appears to her as a crucified child who changes into a bleeding host, and she lactates. The legend contains some traceable historical events.

Of all the saints mentioned in this thesis, Liedwij died nearest to the time of the invention of the printing press and her Life viewed in relation to the printing press reveals something special. Apparently, the church masters of the church of John the Baptist, where she was interred, decided to print books (not only those of her Life) to defray the cost which a canonisation process would entail. The priest Otgier Nachtgael, working at Schiedam, was prepared to put the Latin Life of friar Jan Brugman (ca. 1400-1473) on a newly established printing press. This was also advantageous since it would promote her cult to a wider public. However, her cult was only officially recognised as late as 1890.

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1.4 Conclusion

Both the exemplum collections and the female saints' Lives are rich sources for ideas about women. Both genres contain many ideas about women modelled on images of women in the family. The exemplum collections appear in various frameworks and settings, which may influence the choice of ideas used and affect the messages conveyed within them. The Lives follow the same well-trodden path of hagiography. They show the effectiveness of the female saint, sometimes by virtue of her marriage to the bridegroom Christ. In the later middle ages, the saint's intercessory role is increasingly emphasised. The legends which appear in separate editions are of relatively new saints or of older saints fitted in a new jacket, or those whose cults have been recently (re)established. Although it is impossible to base any firm conclusions on this small sample, in general, some saints' Lives hold up aspects of life for admiration and emulation, and stress the help supplied by the female saint to the devotee, or contain role models for secular women. From a reader's point of view, there are topics which a female lay reader can identify with. Women are never excluded from prologues in or introductions to the incunables. However, was the common woman erudite and interested enough to access the books? This will be discussed in the next chapter.
2 Women and the media

In the previous chapter individual editions of female saints' *Lives* and exempla which appeared in the vernacular were discussed. Both genres have been considered for their inclusion of ideas about women. The incunables have been evaluated to assess the context in which ideas about women were pronounced as well as the audience they intended to reach. Secular women belonged to this audience. It was concluded that the involvement of the common woman in book culture needed attention.

This chapter addresses issues involved with access of secular women to the book. The process of conveying ideas about women revolves around certain basic questions: how should ideas about women be interpreted, what was printed, what was read, who could read, who owned books and in what environment? The questions posed in this chapter are set within the wider context of late medieval Low Countries' book culture in its colourful diversity. For this reason, some examples involve manuscript books (so not solely incunables), and other female reader groups (so not only lay women). Occasionally, when evidence is scarce for the Low Countries, a glance will be cast across its boundaries.

Although the following discussion concentrates on the secular female in an urban environment our sources ought not to be viewed within too narrow confines. Reception of the genres was not restricted to an urban environment or a particular reader's group. There is an overlap between secular and religious tastes inherent to the genres. There is also common ground of noble female interest and what the 'common woman' was presented with. And, of course, the messages conveyed are of interest to male readers.
2.1 Interpreting medieval ideas about women

In a discussion about ideas which appear in the legends and exempla some attention must be devoted to ideas about women in the period more generally. The two following paragraphs deal with interpretation of modern historiographers and with medieval ideas. Later on in this chapter, when we discuss the urban environment, a paragraph will deal with ideas about women within the city specifically. The picture which emerges is crude and painted with only a few strokes of the brush. It only serves to establish a flavour of ideas surrounding females, and it will serve as a springboard for ideas elaborated on in chapters 3 and 4.

2.1.1 Historiography

Contemporary interpretation of medieval ideas about women has overwhelmingly concentrated on the medieval idea of the inequality of the sexes. In modern historiography when discussing ideas about medieval women, many construct arguments around the dichotomies between female and male. Whether adding a modern dimension to the medieval tripartite system of warriors, worshippers, workers, namely that of women (Shahar); or emphasising women's literary efforts (Waithe, Wilson); or determining her legal rights (Gunning); or studying her everyday life (Duby and Perrot, Gies, Opitz, Labarge), as well as women's work (Howell), the theme of the inequality of the sexes is always with us. Although

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we are warned not to discuss women's history in polarities and dichotomies, power relationships are part and parcel of women's history. Indeed, it is an integral part of the socio-historical construction of gender. Inequality was a fact of medieval life.

2.1.2 Medieval ideas about women

Medical and scientific views of women deriving from ancient and medieval science show that women's biology and pathology were considered different from that of men's. The elements of earth, water, air and fire were related to primary qualities of hot, cold, moist and dry. These in turn were connected with four bodily juices: phlegm, blood, black bile and yellow bile. The relative proportions of each of these to the other (and also in combination) were thought to have influenced the physical, morphological and psychological constitution of the human being to which astrology also contributed. The woman's disposition was thought to have been cold and wet.

The woman's moist body longed for contact with male dryness, hence women could behave wantonly. In an exemplum, Aronis, who fears his wife Marina will resort to an extra-marital relationship while he is away on business, explains that

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209 '... gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power', Scott, J., 'Gender: a useful category of historical analysis', American historical review 91 (1986), c. 1067.

it is the temperature of his wife's blood which may make her unchaste. Food could remain undigested because of the female's coldness. The womb was thought to lead a life of its own: it could wander around in the female body when menstruation did not occur, when it was sexually not satisfied or not reproductive. The wandering womb could lead to hysteria, which particularly affected virgins and widows. Frequently, women were thought to have been sexually insatiable, particularly when already introduced to the dry male body. Unruly and disorderly behaviour could result. The majority of exempla deal with unruly (usually unchaste) female behaviour.

Within the church and theological thought a complementary picture emerged. St. Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225-1274), for instance, following Galen and Aristotle, perceived woman as a deficient man. Although her spiritual and ethical equality was stressed, the man was viewed as an active force and the woman as passive force. Man was created in the image of God, but she was modelled from Adam's rib. While man represented the higher authority, the 'brains', woman represented the 'flesh'. He was superior, she was inferior. The male is associated with the higher rational soul, woman is identified with the anima, the lower sensible soul. It is her nature, her physical beauty that lures men away from the proper realm of thought to her realm of matter.

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210 Ehebüchlein, fol. g2v. A novella was also printed in Middle Dutch, Pennink, R. ed., Twee uit het Latijn vertaalde Middelnederlandse novellen. 1. Pseudo-Petrarca, Teghen die strael der minnen. 2. Petrarca, Hystorie van Griseldis met Latijnse teksten (Zwolse drukken en herdrukken voor de Maatschappij der Nederlandse letterkunde te Leiden 43; Zwolle, 1965).


Eve was the great wrongdoer: she had ruined paradise for all mankind. Mary was the exact opposite, she made it possible for mankind to be saved. She was impossible to imitate: she remained a virgin after giving birth. In complex imagery she became mother of the church and Christ's bride.

Sexual feelings needed to be combated by the clergy. Not only monks tucked away behind monastery walls but also secular clergy were in danger of unchaste feelings. The latter were in close contact with female parishioners or housekeepers. The housekeeper and lover of a secular cleric is transported to hell, with the authorial comment that the woman will be punished but the priest more so.\footnote{Sterfbocq, fols. t2v-t4.} Regular clergy were tormented by seductresses: an old hag, for instance, offering the services of a young woman, tempts St. Anthony in the desert; a motif which occurred increasingly in late medieval art.\footnote{Anthony and the women were also depicted on a painting featuring a married burgher couple in the early sixteenth century. In this setting, Anthony probably symbolises the steadiness of their marriage, Ettes, B.J.C., 'De 'vleeselijke becoringe' van Antonius de Kluizenaar', Helse en hemelse vrouwen. Schrikbeelden en voorbeelden van de vrouw in de christelijke cultuur. Catalogus tentoonstelling Rijksmuseum Het Catharijneconvent, Utrecht, M. Caron ed. (Utrecht, 1988), p. 37.}

The picture above tells only half the story. Not all medieval thinkers thought alike, and some valued women positively.\footnote{Blamires, A. et al. eds., Woman defamed and woman defended. An anthology of medieval texts (Oxford, 1992), chapter 8, cites authorities with a chronological range from the eleventh into the fifteenth century, and examples by Bot, Verering en verachting, pp. 66-77. Utley, F.L., The crooked rib. An analytical index to the argument about women in English and Scots literature to the end of the year 1568 (Contributions in languages and literature 10; Columbus, 1944) lists authorities for the sixteenth century as well. See also the recent positive re-evaluation of Thomas Aquinas by Gunning, Rechten, chapter 1, in which she emphasises that Thomas viewed the female as inferior to the male but nevertheless as an individual with a ratio and the freedom to make her own choices. But contrast Bußmann, M., 'Die Frau - Gehilfin des Mannes oder eine Zufallserscheinung der Natur? Was die Theologen Augustinus und Thomas von Aquin über Frauen gedacht haben', Auf der Suche nach der Frau im Mittelalter. Fragen, Quellen, Antworten, B. Lundt ed. (München, 1991), p. 126, who discusses Thomas's biogenetische Vorstellungen. She stresses that there was a great difference between the active male and the passive female in Thomas's thinking; a view copied indiscriminately from his teacher Albert the Great.}

\footnote{Sterfbocq, fols. t2v-t4.}

\footnote{Anthony and the women were also depicted on a painting featuring a married burgher couple in the early sixteenth century. In this setting, Anthony probably symbolises the steadiness of their marriage, Ettes, B.J.C., 'De 'vleeselijke becoringe' van Antonius de Kluizenaar', Helse en hemelse vrouwen. Schrikbeelden en voorbeelden van de vrouw in de christelijke cultuur. Catalogus tentoonstelling Rijksmuseum Het Catharijneconvent, Utrecht, M. Caron ed. (Utrecht, 1988), p. 37.}

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rib); and 'in place' because he was created outside paradise and she within.\textsuperscript{216} Christ chose a woman, soon to be married, to become his mother.\textsuperscript{217} Only a wife was able to persuade her husband to better his behaviour.\textsuperscript{218}

Also, other images appear more frequently than those which were held up before. The emphasis shifted to the portrayal of sinner-saints whose life provided a model for the female secular sinner. As mentioned in the previous chapter, in 1215 everyone was to confess his sins at least once a year and to perform the penance imposed. The increased emphasis attached to the role of the secular female sinner in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is striking.\textsuperscript{219} The example of the repentant sinner saint may have helped the laity to act less sinfully, but in particular its purpose was to show that God was a forgiving God. Another image that had changed was that of the Virgin Mary. She was no longer seen as the inimitable but she was portrayed as the loving mother of Jesus, a protector and mediator of all. In chapter 4, she proves a prominent figure in assisting mothers who experienced trouble with their children.


\textsuperscript{217} Spiegel, fol. 15v.

\textsuperscript{218} Farmer, S., 'Persuasive voices. Clerical images of medieval wives', \textit{Speculum} 61 (1986), pp. 517-543. I have not encountered any exempla which deal with a woman persuading her avaricious and usurious husband (an image which would fit well into an urban environment) to change his ways.

2.1.3 Male authors and female readers

Undoubtedly, there is a fair degree of gender-marked writing in our sources (and it is of importance to recognise this, if only for the figure of the widow or old woman whose role appears to have developed into that of the early modern witch), however, it should not be blown out of proportion.

Although it is impossible to test the 'female experience' straight from the female herself, the ideas from the sources were held up as imitable or admirable examples for all. In dealing with male-authored texts, we would be hard-pressed to discover the 'historical existence of real women and their experience of selfhood', but equally we would be in trouble attempting to find anything like that about men. More important perhaps is to concentrate on the sources in an historical era. Some legends or part of legends are particularly pertinent since they were written in the later middle ages (for instance, Historie van Sinte Barbara, Leven van Liedwij, and the editions solely based on St. Anne), and reflect ideas and images about women which were prevalent at the time of writing. The saints' Lives and exempla reflect the importance of what must have been of interest to the late medieval public consisting of men and women.

Another obstacle to gender-marked writing may result from the absence of female authors, to which we return below. Orality, the pre-eminent medieval mode of female expression, is treated less favourably in a society which uses writing to convey its ideas. Orality is of the utmost importance for women's history, because it reflects the women's shaping of their own culture.

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As Ria Lemaire emphasises, medieval women took part in their own culture, for instance composing songs which often accompanied their communal work (such as washing, drawing water, etc.). In their work they create their very own 'positive' female role models; models which are missing in the sources written by males. Women had different views from men too, and the men's view is represented as the view of mankind. She also points out that ever since the invention of printing, with its roots in a male dominated written culture, the male's idea of womanhood as expressed in popular books spread faster than ever before, and women remained excluded. The written sources themselves are also seen as a display of an exclusively male interest. Women were deliberately excluded from written sources. However, it does not matter here whether we agree or differ on the impact of the mode of female expression oral or otherwise. What we must take on board is that males did have a hand in our saints' Lives and exempla, but we are not presented with a one-sided predominantly negative view of womanhood.

Ideas about women are varied in our sources. De Eyb's Ehebüchlein is a good example, where the question posed in the book (shall a man marry or not) leads to a substructure contrasting women's strong points with bad habits. Most importantly, he concludes that marriage is the preferred state for human kind (which implies that women were not that bad). Another example is found in

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223 Lemaire, R., 'Inleiding', Ik zing mijn lied voor al wie met mij gaat. Vrouwen in de volksliteratuur, R. Lemaire ed. (Utrecht, 1986), pp. 9-41. However, someone must have put pen to paper at some stage otherwise we would not have known about these ideas. See also Bolton Holloway, J. et al., 'Introduction: the body and the book', Equally in God's image. Women in the middle ages, J. Bolton Holloway et al. eds. (New York, San Francisco, etc., 1990), pp. 1-23, that women avoided male models and preferred to chose female identities.


226 See Schmitz, P., 'De manmentaal van Emma Bovary', Vrouwen in taal en literatuur, K. Korevaart ed. (Amersfoort, Leuven, 1988), p. 144, who argues that the image of women is a myth created by men and that the male's view of womankind is negative, one-sided, and dangerous since it is presented as the norm.
Aesop where his master, the philosopher, as well as his wife are ridiculed. For instance, Aesop loathes his philosopher-master’s disconsolate attitude after his wife has left him. The woman had returned to her parents as a result of one of Aesop’s practical jokes. Aesop manages to persuade her that the master is about to marry another woman. She turns straight home to prevent it from happening. The inconsolable master and his quickly forgiving wife are both ridiculed.

Furthermore, as Julia Boffey points out, male and female authors wrote about similar topics, particularly when writing edifying literature. Both genders were influenced by ‘a kind of androgynous inspiration’. Beatrice Gottlieb wonders whether it could be shown that contemporary female authors had written for women the effect would have been dissimilar to that written by men for women. Furthermore, in principle, if an author’s name is not mentioned it is impossible to conclude which sex composed or compiled or translated.

Of course, women may have interpreted texts differently: for Boccaccio (1313-1375) Leontium was a brilliant philosopher but became a courtesan who threw away womanly shame; to his contemporary Jean de Montreuil she was a Greek prostitute who dared to criticise the great philosopher Theophrastus; to the fourteenth-century author Christine de Pizan, she was a great philosopher who was quite famous in her time. Not everything was clear-cut either; the interpretation of the story of patient Griselda serves as an example. Medieval

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227 Aesop, fol. b5.
231 *Kaetspel*, fols. f6-g6v. A novella was also printed in Middle Dutch, Pennink ed., *Novellen*. 

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folk had difficulty interpreting the story. Was Griselda's patience and obedience meant to be emulated by women and to what extent or was the message intended for all? Also, it cannot be ruled out that women identified with male literary figures, and vice versa.

Although a few examples are known of disgruntled well-read ladies and males' awareness of them, the less sophisticated common woman could very well have been in agreement with certain ideas expounded on her. On top of this, women may have helped to disseminate these ideas. Women were involved on various levels with book culture in the late medieval Low Countries and as such contributed to the continuation and perpetuation of some of the attitudes they were presented with.

There is no question that certain male authors, translators, compilers and also printers were aware of female's objections. Whilst defending themselves it is occasionally stated by male translators or compilers that they were duty bound to reflect the contents of their sources as truthfully as possible.

An example of this awareness is that of Jan van Boendale (1282-1350), who changed his view. In one of his works dedicated to Agnes van Cleve, wife of the viscount of Brussels, he elaborated on his remark, made in the past, that all women were equally bad. He had meant only common women and not noble

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Another striking example is that of Caxton. When a French version of the *Dictes and Sayengs of the Philosophers* was translated into English by Earl Rivers, he had omitted 'certayn and diverse conclusions towchyng women' (a set of antifeminist proverbs and exempla attributed to Socrates). Caxton enquired whether 'some fair lady' had persuaded Rivers not to include the passage. Caxton subsequently restored the passage and printed it so that it could be removed 'wyth a penne race [scratch] it out or ellys rente [tear] the leef oute of the booke'. Caxton had thus made a detachable appendix.

### 2.2 The printing press

#### 2.2.1 Continuation of female interest

Though our emphasis is on the 'common woman' as literary recipient rather than the female religious or noble woman, it must be noted that there is an overlap in common themes in female literary interest before the advent of the printing press and afterwards.

Herbert Grundmann shows the importance of a female audience in connection with the rise in (German) vernacular literature. Biblical, spiritual and saintly themes were in apparent demand. Female patronesses, usually noble ladies,
possessed the resources to request works to be composed or translated. Traditionally, noble lay women were involved in the shaping of literature in the vernacular, in particular of edifying texts. However, whenever names of patronesses are mentioned it should be treated with caution.

Fortunately, a small list has been compiled of female patronesses residing in the Low Countries who, until the beginning of the fifteenth century, were apparently involved in commissioning translations into or compositions in Dutch vernacular literature. Saints' Lives, edifying literature, but also secular works (such as *Vanden Vos Reynaerde*) are on the list. In general, noble females are shown to have commissioned male authors and evidence from the Low Countries is consistent with that of Europe. Women from other walks of life were involved in the creation of Dutch literature. In the Low Countries, some authors served patrons who are mentioned as their lady-loves, or a devout virgin, or (noble) religious.

Female patronesses remained important in relation to the printing press. In his *Ehebüchlein*, De Eyb profusely praises Barbara of Brandenburg. Heinrich Steinhöwel's translation of *Aesop* in German (on which the Dutch edition is

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People in high positions were mentioned as well in the hope of attracting their patronage, see Holzknecht, *Patronage*, p. 155.

For the list, see Hogenelst en De Vries, 'Scone', pp. 345-346. Other examples are found in Van Oostrom, *Woord*, pp. 296-297.

At least, he praises her profusely for her linguistic knowledge of German, -referred to as *duytsch*, French, Latin, and Greek, as well as literature: poets and the 'natuerlicken meesteren', *Ehebüchlein*, fol. h3.
indirectly based) was dedicated to Eleanor, wife of Duke Sigismund of Tyrol. Margaret of York, Duchess of Burgundy, encouraged Caxton to complete the translation of Raoul Lefèvre's *Le Recueil des histoires de Troyes* into English. A copper engraving shows Caxton offering a book to Margaret. Caxton printed it (perhaps as early as 1473) and it was the first printed book to appear in the English language.

There is also a convergence regarding visual images in manuscript books and incunables. The manuscript books of hours are 'tailor-made' to reflect the image of the patron, but not surprisingly, no such personalised pictures are printed in incunables. None of our incunables was printed with only one particular female reader in mind. The best that can be said is that the earliest printers attempted to continue certain themes already known, which may originate from a female side. In the *Hours of Catherine of Cleves* the birth of Eve from Adam's rib is depicted, and a woodcut in the *Spiegel* shows a similar scene. Also, women's responsibility for children's education is featured: in the *Hours of Catherine of*

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245 Caxton is thought to have printed it at Bruges, see INCIPIT.
246 Marrow, J.H. et al., *The golden age of Dutch manuscript painting* (New York, 1990), p. 69. In the *Hours of Mary of Burgundy*, the Duchess is sitting in an open casement window which looks directly into the choir of a Gothic church. She is probably reading the *Obsecro te* (I beseech thee), since the letter 'O' is clearly shown. She gazes down at the scene in the church, see Harthan, *Books*, p. 110. Catherine of Cleves is depicted kneeling in front of the Virgin, see Marrow, *Golden*, p. 148 and Liebaers, H., *Noordnederlandse miniatures. De gouden eeuw der boekverluchting in de Noordelijke Nederlanden*. Catalogus tentoonstelling Brussel, Koninklijke Bibliotheek Albrecht I, 18 september-16 oktober 1971. Tentoonstelling door A. Broutens samengesteld, door H. Liebaers ingeleid (Brussel, 1971), nr. 27.
247 Adamson, J.W., 'The extent of literacy in England in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: notes and conjectures', *The Library* 10 (1930), p. 188: 'The smaller works printed by Caxton and his immediate successors seem to appeal to the habits and tastes of women rather than those of men; either way, they were not peculiarly men's books'. Unfortunately, the author does not supply any evidence to support his view.
248 This scene has been interpreted as depicting Eve's subordinate status as described by Groag Bell, 'Book owners', p. 147, but, as we have seen, the scene can be interpreted in several ways.
Cleves an illustration shows a schoolmaster with his pupils (in the case of Catherine it meant she had to find a teacher for young sons). Similar scenes are found in woodcuts, for instance, a woodcut shows Mary working at her loom in the living room with the child Jesus sitting next to her with an open book on his lap. This also shows the responsibility of the woman in the education of her children (unless it is intended here to show that Jesus was actually teaching Mary).

A reading Virgin Mary also features strongly, both in the personalised Hours and the incunables. The Hours of Katharina van Lochorst (member of a fifteenth-century patrician family in Utrecht) and the book of hours by the Masters of the Delft Half-Length Figures, show Mary reading at the annunciation scene. Some examples which appear in the incunables of Mary reading will be discussed below.

How can it be determined that women were interested in certain books? Some inventive scholars have speculated on secular women's tastes. Susanne Hull's discussion is based on books whose titles were meant to attract women, or which were dedicated to them, or whose subjects dealt with those within a woman's provenance (e.g. cookery, needlework), or those which contained separate sections on women's duties or roles, or contained histories or biographies of famous women (but she has not included those of a hagiographic nature). Diane Bornstein's choice of collection concentrates on medieval courtesy books: books dealing with etiquette and instruction intended for secular readership by

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250 On Lochorst, see Liebaers, Miniaturen, nr. 28 and Marrow, Golden, p. 159. On the other manuscript book, see Marrow, Golden, p. 194.

251 Hull, S.W., Chaste, silent and obedient: English books for women 1475-1640 (San Marino, 1982), pp. ix-x.
women as well as men. \(^{252}\) Cornelia Niekus Moore discusses various genres of literature which may have been read in a secular environment. \(^{253}\) Among literature for secular women she counts catechisms, Bible and Bible excerpts, prayer books, female saints' Lives and books which deal with the married state (although De Eyb's Ehebüchlein is not cited amongst them). She also mentions the books of virtuous example, among which rank the German Seelentrost and fables. In short, our corpus fits in neatly in this company.

In the past, literature has often been studied taking as point of reference text analysis and intentions of the author. \(^{254}\) Other solutions are needed to determine female interest. Since there are only a few references of female ownership of Dutch vernacular incunables and readers' reactions are lacking, to approach the text from a readers' point of view proves a good solution.

Hans Robert Jauss identifies literary genre or text group as an expression of art which can be discussed in terms of aesthetic experience. The concept of genre is evaluated into the aesthetic realm. The reader's Horizon of Expectations is taken as point of reference. The degree of literary aesthetic sophistication of the reader determines her interpretation: the higher the reader's experience, the shorter the distance between her Horizon of Expectations and the text within a text group. \(^{255}\) But it is not even necessary to read the text in order to determine the text group of the earliest printed sources. As Vermeulen points out in relation to the presentation of the book, for instance by studying the title page, the printer tempts the customer with his motives (in the form of possibly recommending the

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\(^{252}\) However, she also broadly defines them as 'didactic literature meant to serve as a guide for secular life', Bornstein, D., *The lady in the tower. Medieval courtesy literature for women* (Hamden, Connecticutt, 1983), p. 11.

\(^{253}\) Genres cited by Niekus Moore, C., *The maiden's mirror. Reading material for German girls in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries* (Wolfenbütteler Forschungen 36; Wiesbaden, 1987), chapter 4. Since her book deals with sixteenth-century Germany, many of her ideas on women's reading are based on reformation and counter-reformation ideals.

brevity, novelty, entertainment value or usefulness of the book). This helped the reader quickly to evaluate what the book was about and to which text group the book belonged, before it was actually read. A few significant words, frequently accompanied by a woodcut, assisted the reader in determining the genre.

By concentrating on what the text says to and about the reader, Jauss defines questions and answers in the communicative sphere and he relates them to the place in life of the individual. We can pose questions to our saints' Lives and exempla: how can virtue become visible in (wo)man, what does the past teach me about the future, what am I getting into when I take on this role? The sources supply admirable and imitable behaviour, and lead to self-recognition. These observations ought to be borne in mind in the following chapters.

2.2.2 The printing press as medium

Although generally the invention of the printing process has been regarded as a new discovery, Michael Clanchy rightly describes the process as a 'culmination of a millennium' of literary culture. Nevertheless, the effects the printing press brought about as medium of mass communication were unparalleled, both in conveying similar unadulterated information and in its rapid circulation. The appearance of the printed vernacular book in turn became known to an ever growing lay public which increasingly demanded information in their own language, in easily comprehensible prose. Books could be sold and a profit

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256 See Jauss, H.R., Toward an aesthetic of reception (Theory and history of literature 2; Brighton, 1982), T. Bahti trans., in particular chapter 3.
257 Jauss, H.R., 'The alterity and modernity of medieval literature', New literary history 10 (1979), especially the overview on pp. 228-229.
260 Prose was thought to convey the truth and was valued for its directness; the usage of prose (as opposed to rhyme) also signifies the transition from listening to reading,
could be made, and it can even be said that the town dwellers had established a new relation (*neuartiges Verhältnis*) with the book.\(^{261}\) Also, inhibiting effects of restriction on circulation of the Bible for instance, had yielded to the commercial world.\(^{262}\)

Books printed in the vernacular *en masse* (for a large reading public) and on paper instead of expensive parchment must have been cheaper than individually commissioned manuscript books.\(^{263}\) The latter were painstakingly copied out and embellished with painted miniatures or pen flourishing. The printed books were cheaper but still remained luxury items. The main problems for the researcher are that prices of incunables are shrouded in mystery and disposable income of common women in the later medieval period is not well known either.\(^{264}\)

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To start with the costs faced by the printer concerning his equipment (press, type, and good quality paper or parchment and thick ink) are not well known, Febvre, L. and H.-J., *Martin*, *The coming of the book. The impact of printing 1450-1800* (London, 1976), D. Gerard trans., pp. 109-115. Pettas, W., 'The cost of printing a Florentine incunable', *La bibliofilia* 75 (1973), pp. 67-85, supplies a few examples of these costs and adds the factors of composition of the book, salaries of workmen and distribution. See also Hirsch, R., *Printing, selling and reading 1450-1550* (Wiesbaden, 1967), pp. 27-40. Edider de Roover, F., 'New facets on the financing and marketing of early printed books', *Bulletin of the business historical society* 27 (1953), pp. 222-230, stresses the role of merchants in the instigating, financing and marketing of books. Geldner, F., 'Bücherfestpreise in der Wiegendruckzeit?', *Archiv für Geschichte des Buchwesens* 15 (1975), cc. 1289-1292, points out that the buyer sometimes paid extra for the book to be bound and embellished (for instance by rubricating). It is impossible to estimate the buying power of women when it comes to the acquisition of books. For income of medieval women, see Williams and Echols, *Pit and pedestal*, pp. 239-240. The authors state that in addition to the little information known about the income of urban women, monetary values fluctuated which makes it difficult to estimate their disposable income in real terms. For general information on salaries, in particular in the county of Holland, see Noordegraaf, L.,
Although it has been contended that written texts are static, stable, and less flexible than oral literature, in other words that the message became more autonomous and more definite, it must be pointed out that part of our corpus was disseminated in the vernacular by word of mouth (of the preacher) who relied on written (or printed) versions. In his sermon, he could throw in exempla to his heart's content, or use a saint's Life on her particular feast-day.

What then was printed? About three-quarters of incunables from the Low Countries were printed in Latin, but increasingly printing in the vernacular gained ground not only in the Low Countries, but everywhere in Europe. Based on extant titles it is apparent that in the Low Countries classics, grammars, and texts dealing with philosophy and texts of a scientific nature appeared in Latin. About one half of all the incunables printed in the vernacular is involved with these topics as well. And 'religious texts' account for nearly the other half printed in the vernacular. Of the latter those of a devotional nature took up half of that total:

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Hollands welvaren? Levensstandaard in Holland 1450-1650 (Bergen NH, 1985), pp. 187-188. The standard of living was low in the last quarter of the fifteenth century. Noordegraaf pleads for increasing archival research to establish earnings. When this is performed our insight into female income will be greatly enhanced.


Although most (thirteenth-century) sermons survive in Latin, they could be translated in any vernacular, d'Avray, *Preaching*, pp. 90-95. Zieleman, G.C., 'Preken als litterairedocumenten', *Boeken voor de eeuwigheid. Middelnederlands geestelijk proza*, Th. Mertens ed. (Amsterdam, 1993), pp. 70-86, has also discovered hybrid forms of sermons (Latin and the vernacular), and asserts that although sermons were composed to be read aloud, the preacher could take the liberty of making oral *ad hoc* alterations.

featuring religious fiction, religious biography and moral theology (among which I count our sources). The production side as well as the consumption side are intricately interwoven in the printing process. Printers must have published with the intention of selling many copies to a large public which had apparent need for books. But, of course they did not always succeed. Also, the main problem with determining the popularity of books manufactured by the printing presses is that we deal with extant copies only and we cannot measure the number of books printed in any one edition. The evidence is ragged, an 'average' edition could have ranged from two hundred to a thousand copies. A reprint of a text therefore does not always indicate that a text was very successful since the edition may have been small in the first place. On the other hand, it has recently been reconfirmed that whole editions have disappeared.

Whereas it has been contended that the earliest centres of printing were not established in university towns frequented by the impecunious students, but in cities involved in commerce and trade since 'learning and diligence is no

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268 Catalogue British Museum IX, p. ix and pp. xv-xvi. The general survey, based on extant titles, is still very useful for an overall impression. The main problem is that titles used for specification are not mentioned in the genre survey. More recently, emphasis is laid on the usage of bibliometrical methods (counting printed words in editions) as the availability of titles and genres does not give insight into the quantity of printed words. Using this method, the relative importance of the printer can be estimated, see Vervliet, H.D.L., 'Humanisme en typografie: de introductie van de romein en cursief in de Nederlanden (1483-ca.1540)', Boek, bibliotheek en geesteswetenschappen. Opstellen door vrienden en collega's van dr. C. Reedijk geschreven ter gelegenheid van zijn aftreden als bibliothecaris van de Koninklijke Bibliotheek te 's-Gravenhage, W.R.H. Koops et al. eds. (Hilversum, 1986), in particular p. 320, and Heijting, W., 'Succes becijferd. Een bibliometrische analyse van het fonds van Geraert Leeu', Een drukker zoekt publiek. Gheraert Leeu te Gouda 1477-1484, K. Goudriaan et al. eds. (Oudheidkundige Kring Die Goude 23; Delft, 1993), pp. 204-223 and the latter's bibliography. A good overview of fifteenth-century Dutch (predominantly) vernacular literature printed is summarised by Kruitwagen, B., 'Wat men in de Nederlanden las in de 15e eeuw', Bibliotheekleven 10 (1925), pp. 41-58, pp. 51-58, pp. 87-95 and pp. 102-111.

269 Eisenstein, Press, I, p. 11.

270 Kok, Houtsneden, I, pp. 21-22, who has described the wear and tear of the wood blocks in subsequent editions and studied the journey of the blocks from one printer to the next.
substitute for ready cash', in the northern Low Countries books were printed in cities which hosted institutions with scientific or learned interests and monastic centres. These presses disseminated books in Latin but also in the Dutch vernacular: such as at Den Hem, Deventer, Utrecht, Culemborg, Nijmegen, 's-Hertogenbosch and Zwolle. Also, the fledgling towns of Delft, Gouda, Haarlem and Leiden maintained presses in the Dutch vernacular. In the southern Low Countries only relatively few books in the vernacular were published, such as at Antwerp, Audenaarde, Bruges, Brussels, Ghent, and Hasselt.272

The vernacular press was relatively absent in the southern Low Countries. In the south, a more sophisticated and spoilt public may have preferred luxurious manuscript books to the simple standardised printed books. The abundance of scriptoria in Brussels, for instance, may count for the fact that there was only one press established here,273 though it may not have been uncommon to print de luxe versions for noble patrons.274 Another explanation is that the southern Low Countries concentrated on printing in Latin and other languages, as Gerard Leeu did when he moved from Gouda to Antwerp. The books printed here were probably sold on foreign markets as well.

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271 Steinberg, Printing, p. 18.
272 The interested reader can easily look up the various titles which appeared in the towns mentioned with INCIPIT.
2.2.3 Female authors in print

No identified medieval female author from the Low Countries appeared in print before 1501. Women who can be identified and whose work was printed before 1501 are few and far between. A compilation of Bridget of Sweden's *Revelations* was printed in the Dutch vernacular. Bridget's literary activities were extremely popular in Europe. Female authors in print are in short supply – like female authors generally. There is a definite lack of female authors in print, resulting from the lack of female authors in general.

In our incunables occasionally female 'authors' are referred to. Mercella, servant of St. Martha of Bethany (1st century), was supposed to have written Martha's legend. 'Authorities' from a higher level make their appearance as well. One of the eleven thousand martyred virgins assists St. Joseph-Herman in composing a 'history' or song in honour of Ursula. She changes into a dove (image of divine inspiration) who conveys the words into his ears. Other virgins sing words for him to note down. Although St. Perpetua (d. 203) has left an autobiographical narrative, the version of her legend in the *Passionaei* is narrated in the third person singular.

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275 See Basse, M., *Het aandeel der vrouw in de Nederlandsche letterkunde* (2 vols., Gent, 1920-1921), I, pp. 9-46. There had been exceptional authors about, see Vanderauwera, R., 'The Brabant mystic: Hadewijch', *Medieval women writers*, K.M. Wilson ed. (Manchester, 1984), pp. 186-203. See also the new edition of Thiébaux, M. ed., *The writings of medieval women. An anthology* (Garland library of medieval literature 100, series B; New York, 1987, revised ed., 1994), which does not contain any authors printed in the Dutch vernacular before 1501, with the exception of Bridget of Sweden. The literary fruits of Christine de Pizan's pen were in print in Europe. The Book of Hawking, Hunting, and Heraldry, also known as The boke of St. Alans, commonly attributed to Dame Juliana Berners was printed in English. Berners's name is missing in INCIPIT. On Berners's activities, see Lone, E.M., 'Some bookwomen of the fifteenth century', *The colophon* 11 (1932), (p. 5). In Latin appeared an oration of the fifteenth-century Cassandra Fidelis, as well as the fourth-century female author Proba Falconia (whose work is praised by De Eyb, *Ehebüchlein*, fol. h2v). INCIDENT lists over 40 different editions of Bridget's works in Latin, German, Italian and English. 279 *Miraculen*, fols. 69v-70v. For a description of Perpetua's biography, see Shaw, B.D., 'The Passion of Perpetua', *Past and present* 139 (1993), pp. 3-45, and Petroff, E.A., *Medieval women's visionary Page 88
It may not have been uncommon for women to have been engaged in activities as translators. The fifteenth-century English aristocratic laywoman Dame Eleanor Hull translated psalms, prayers and meditations from French into English.\(^\text{281}\)

### 2.2.4 Female printers and booksellers

It was my intention when I first looked at the subject of female printers to discover whether their printed corpus differed from that of their male colleagues. Perhaps women printers would be more likely to publish female authors than their male colleagues? Unfortunately, there are too few female printers for inferences of this kind. Since evidence from the Low Countries is scarce, we look abroad to put the region in context.\(^\text{282}\)

As in all medieval professions, wives of artisans would have assisted their menfolk in the workplace. It is not certain whether women were actively involved in the physical preparation of books, although there is evidence that a woman was involved in typesetting together with a male.\(^\text{283}\) Possibly the women assisted in translating or checking the typesetting or rubricating. Some must have had an in-depth knowledge of the business since they were able to carry on the publishing business in the absence of their husbands. Some printers' wives originated from publishing milieux.\(^\text{284}\) Wives became increasingly involved in the


\(^{283}\) See Cockx-Indestege, E., *Mathias van der Goes en het Boexken van der officien ofte dienst der missen van Simon van Venlo* (Antwerpen, 1985), pp. 7-8, who speculates that Mathias van der Goes's wife was related to Jacob Jacobszoon van der Meer and, when widowed, she married Govaert Bac. Guyone de Viart successively married three printers; her first husband was Johann Higman, of Dutch origin, who printed in Paris in the 1490s, see Lenkey, S.V., 'Printers' wives in the age of humanism', *Gutenberg-Jahrbuch* (1975), pp. 332-334.
publishing business if their husbands were no longer able to carry on, either temporarily, for instance when he was incarcerated, or more typically, on a more permanent basis, as widow. There is no evidence to suggest that women established themselves as printers, probably because it was a rather expensive business to start up. Evidence is scarce and vague.

More is known about nuns involved with printing. This activity is an extension of their illuminating and writing activities, but sometimes with a commercial rather than devotional flair added to it. For instance, Giovanni Boccaccio's Decameron (of all books!) in Italian and grammars to be used at schools were printed by Dominican nuns at Florence. Father Confessor acted as treasurer and overseer of the presses. But, nuns more commonly printed devotional woodcuts, paralleling motifs which also occur in printed books, particularly in the saints' Lives. However, it is not known whether the nuns would design, and physically print, colour and cut themselves, but some must have been actively involved.

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285 Lone, 'Bookwomen', (p. 2), as did the wife of Erwin vom Stege, who printed or may have caused to have printed her husband's Dialogue super libertate Ecclesiastica, whilst he was imprisoned by the city council of Cologne for writing it. But see also INCIPIT (using the title Olverium super libertate ecclesiastica) where the printer is stated as unknown. I have checked INCIPIT's printer's and publisher's category for 'widow', but most examples supplied post-date the incunable period, and I have only included those which do not. Examples of books printed by or caused to have been printed by widows before 1501 are La règle des marchands, printed at the instigation of Jaquette Lebée, widow of Jean Hérault at Provins in 1496. Roland van den Dorpe's widow may have printed Van Nyeuvert, Looheit ende Practike, hoe zij Vrouw Lortse verheffen at Antwerp between 1496 and 1501. See Lone, 'Bookwomen', (p. 3), for Beatrice van Orroir, widow of Arend de Keyser, who is supposed to have printed a peace treaty.

286 Lone, 'Bookwomen', (p. 4). INCIPIT gives the information on the printer as Apud Sanctum Jacobum de Ripoli and places it between brackets indicating the information ought to be treated with caution.


288 In 1466, the canonesses of St. Augustine at Mechlin were presented with a press by a laywoman joining the convent (unum instrumentum ad imprimendas scripturas et ymages), see Meyer, M. de, Volksprenten in de Nederlanden 1400-1900. Religieuse, allegorische, satirische en verhalende prenten. Speelkaarten, Ganzen-en Uilenborden, Driekoningenbriefjes, Nieuwjaarsprenten (Amsterdam, Antwerpen, 1970), p. 13.
The simple woodcuts without any substantial length of text added to them would usually portray scenes which involved Christ's life, Mary's life, and saints.\(^{290}\) Of the so-called *papirren hilgen* (paper saints), the Brigittine nuns in the Low Countries promoted 'their' saints St. Bridget and St. Catherine of Vadstena in particular.\(^{291}\) These sort of prints, not solely manufactured by nuns,\(^{292}\) were prized for their protective value. They were used as amulets worn on the body, and displayed in living rooms, pasted on trunks, walls and chimney breasts. The laity could obtain the *bildekens* (small illustrations) on pilgrimages as souvenirs or simply buy them at home. These prints would stimulate the laity to pray and ponder about sinful behaviour and death;\(^{293}\) a similar result as with books.

Women were also active in bookmaking crafts: they were bookbinders, illuminators and booksellers, often combining these jobs. To mention only a few examples from the Low Countries from the fifteenth century which represent the various levels of female involvement in producing and selling books: in 1478, the St. Bavo church at Haarlem acquired a book from Cijl, daughter of Jacob van Schoten, which may have been expensive since it was paid for in three instalments.\(^{294}\) Between 1476 and 1489 two women ran a bookstore in Bruges; they sold finished manuscripts, and produced books on commission.\(^{295}\) In the

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\(^{293}\) De Kreek, 'Mariënwater', p. 17.

\(^{294}\) Wüstefeld, W.C.M., 'Haarlemse kerkmeesters als bestellers van boeken', *Middeleeuwse handschriftenkunde in de Nederlanden*. Verslag van de Groningse codicologendagen 28-29 april 1988, J.M.M. Hemmans ed. (Grave, 1989), p. 296. It is not clear whether she had actually been involved with producing the book or whether she was just selling it.

\(^{295}\) Williams and Echols, *Pit and pedestal*, p. 56.
university town of Louvain, a certain Metta auctioned an entire library of *Magister Jan van Groenbeke.*

2.3 *Influence of the modern devotion*

In the northern Low Countries, a movement of clerics and laymen attempted to live an active religious life. This movement tried to imitate the ancient spirit of devotion, and relied on the examples set by the first Christians, apostles and the Desert Fathers. The modern devotionalists expressed themselves in some, for our purpose, interesting aspects. They promoted the reading of certain books in the vernacular and advocated certain reading habits. Their type of devotion was suitable for anyone.

Although the paragraph heading optimistically refers to the influence of the modern devotion as common denominator of the influence we are attempting to map out below, this movement is to be viewed as a continuous part of historical processes. No historical process or trend is created in a void. In particular, the mendicant influence should not be relegated to the side lines. It is after all the mendicants who wrote or compiled many of our sources long before the fifteenth century and, of course, they continued to preach in the fifteenth century.

Geert Groote of Deventer (1340-1384), the main protagonist of the modern devotion, was a trained university scholar. He stayed with the Carthusians at Monnikshuizen near Arnhem for some years after 1374. He was impressed by their lifestyle revolving around solitude, poverty, prayer, spiritual exercises and manual work. Among this work ranked the copying of books, which were

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296 Belle, A. van, 'Het boekenwezen aan de Leuvense universiteit in de xvde eeuw', *Archives et bibliothèques de Belgique* numéro spécial 11 (1974), p. 546. Though the university of Louvain was established in 1425 it did not possess a library until after 1627. Scholars probably owned books themselves. Metta may have auctioned a substantial library.

occasionally sold to the laity.\textsuperscript{299} When Groote preached he carried his chest of books with him. Should the laity not believe his word, he could show them the books of the Church Fathers as irrefutable truth.\textsuperscript{300} His books brought him into contact with the first Christian communities of the apostles and the Desert Fathers.

Groote then transposed some ideals of the first Christian communities to the groups that he and his followers established.\textsuperscript{301} The female communities would typically consist of semi-religious women living in especially adapted houses. The Sisters of the Common Life, although living a religious life in a community, participated in secular society, they depended on their work for maintenance and had to buy provisions.\textsuperscript{302} The Sisters also wrote tracts, but most works which originated (such as their \textit{vitae sororum}) within their own circle were principally intended for use there.\textsuperscript{303}

The Brethren in particular copied edifying literature but also translated it into the vernacular. They wrote to support themselves, and would sell their copies to the laity.\textsuperscript{304} Groote translated the monastic \textit{Devote Getijden} into the vernacular. It


\textsuperscript{299} For involvement of Carthusians with books, see Gumbert, J.P., 'Over Kartuizerbibliotheken in de Nederlanden', \textit{Archives et bibliothèques de Belgique} numéro spécial 11 (1974), pp. 159-186.

\textsuperscript{300} Pegel, R.H., 'Heer ghy neemt uselven bij der noes'. Prediking voor leken in de stad Utrecht in de vijftiende eeuw', \textit{Jaarboek Oud-Utrecht} w. nr. (1992), p. 84.

\textsuperscript{301} Aspects of the ideal of seclusion and religious atmosphere are discussed by Lourdaux, J., 'Kartuizers - Moderne Devoten. Een probleem van afhankelijkheid', \textit{OGÉ} 37 (1963), pp. 402-218.


\textsuperscript{304} Of course, other contemporary ideas towards copying books remained in use as well. The Franciscan approach towards copying books for the laity, for instance, was different: they were not allowed to accept rewards for it because of the poverty ideal. The copies
was his intention that the laity could assist towards their own salvation, that they would help themselves by following the guide lines set out in it for their spiritual welfare.\textsuperscript{305} God had, after all, also called the simple laity to him, according to Johannes Pupper van Goch (d. 1475), rector of the convent Thabor near Mechlin.\textsuperscript{306}

The influence of the modern devotion on the laity and lay book culture still awaits a rigorous and coherent examination,\textsuperscript{307} but some relevant observations can be made. The Brethren lent books to the laity, educated (male) youngsters, and discussed simple religious topics with the laity on Sundays and holy days.\textsuperscript{308} Sisters were recruited from the burgher population and they stayed within the city.\textsuperscript{309} Although there were many opportunities for contact between the modern devotionalists and the laity it is not clear to what extent there was contact between Sisters and Brethren on the one hand and burghers on the other.\textsuperscript{310}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[305] were intended for the benefit of the Franciscan community, see Ooms, H., 'Boek en boekenbezit bij de Minderbroeders in de Nederlanden tijdens de middeleeuwen', \textit{Archives et bibliothèques de Belgique} numéro spécial 11 (1974), p. 382.
\item[310] Mertens, Th., 'Geert Grote schrijft aan Ruusbroec dat hij als een vrek op boeken aast', \textit{Nederlandse literatuur, een geschiedenis}, M.A. Schenkeveld-van der Dussen ed. (Groningen, 1993), p. 76.
\end{footnotes}
In connection with our corpus, the printers followed the path also trodden by the modern devotionalists by supplying moralising and didactic works. The printers published books such as Twespraec der creaturen, Cyrillus's Parabolen and Aesop. Related to these texts are the exemplum collections with moralised contents such as the Scaecspel, Kaetspel, Historie van die seven wise mannen van Romen and the Sielentroost. Occasionally, a particular saint was promoted such as Pelagia (no date), the penitent saint, whose legend was disseminated by the modern devotionalists.

That laywomen were recommended to read saints' Lives and books dealing with vices and virtues is shown by a story of Johannes Busch, brother of the Windesheim congregation. When a Dominican lector publicly preached that lay people ought not to have books in the vernacular, Busch tackled the lector's prior. Between them they agreed that simple lay people, 'men and women', ought not to have access to the Sentences 'and the like', but that they should read 'moral books of vices and virtues, of the incarnation, life and passion of our Lord, of the life and holy conversation and martyrdom of the apostles, martyrs, confessors and virgins, and homilies and sermons of the saints ...'. The laity should read devotional works and also the Scriptures, according to Gerard Zerbolt van Zutphen, Brother of the Common Life. Also, Gerard considered it imperative that lay folk were informed about capital sins and the Ten

314 Although Gerard's corpus was traditional and orthodox, some nineteenth-century Protestant historians argued that by promoting reading in the vernacular Gerard contributed to making the peoples from Europe inwardly free, which in turn facilitated the break with Rome, Gerrits, G.H., Inter timorem et sperm. A study in the theological thought of Gerard Zerbolt of Zutphen (1367-1398), (Studies in medieval and renaissance thought xxxvii; Leiden, 1986), pp. 3-5. See also Bruin, C.C. de, 'De moderne devotie en de verspreiding van de volkstaalbijbel', OGE 59 (1985), p. 349. The earliest printed Bible in the Dutch vernacular consisted of the Old Testament only, the Psalms and New Testament were excluded. Apparently, printing a Bible in the vernacular meant a high investment and time.
Commandments. Readers could read whatever they wished with a devotional content as far as the choice of texts matched the reader's competence. However, it was not necessary to burden them with more difficult material (hoeger materien). He discouraged the reading of secular works such as the History of Troy because it would not lead to salvation.

Text comprehension was high on the agenda. Of course, the importance of understanding texts had been advocated long before the modern devotion was ever heard of, because understanding the meaning of a text was thought to lead to higher levels of contemplation, and in the end salvation. The vernacular was regarded as a step in the right direction for a better understanding which brought the reader closer to God.

Also, and here an element of Carthusian spirituality shines through, the ideal of humility and simplicity was combined with language. The mother tongue is the language of humility, of the innocent child, whereas Latin can be regarded as Vatersprache (literally: father speech). The vernacular language became a mode in which the individual approached God and the saints, and the mode in which they communicated with the individual. An early example is that of the Cistercian Bernard of Clairvaux (ca. 1090-1153) who had been greeted in Gallico aperte by the statue of Mary whilst the Salve Regina was being sung.

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320 Orbán, 'Invloed', p.110.
Of particular importance in the modern devotion were textual passages dealing with the trials and tribulations of Christ's life and death, which was believed to lead to moral self-renewal. It is not surprising that there is a causal relation between the stimulus of the modern devotion and passion iconography. Although these texts are a large part and parcel of the entire corpus of Dutch incunables, they are not included in our corpus. Nevertheless, it is useful to emphasise this aspect since it shows the devotional reading practices of women.

Also, references which appear in some of our female saints' Lives contain spiritual bridal imagery. It will be easier to comprehend the imagery when regarded as part of the magnitude attached to texts dealing with Christ. After death, the (semi-)religious would approach Christ's bedroom where the heavenly groom waited. In life, the bridal mystique was facilitated through the written text: the way to the bridegroom Christ was through repeated pious reflections on his life, assisted by short prayers and examination of their individual conscience. However, it was not always necessary to ponder over texts, Christ's image was used as well. His bearded handsome face was well known. Of utmost

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322 The remarkably high number of incunable editions of the *Epistelen en Evangelïën* and stories on Christ suggests that an appetite for them must have been built up before they were put on the printing presses, Moolenbroek, J.J. van, 'Dat liden ende die passie ons Heren Jhesu Cristi' een bestseller uit het fonds van Gheraert Leeu in vijftiende-eeuwse context', *Een drukker zoekt publiek. Gheraert Leeu te Gouda 1477-1484*, K. Goudriaan et al. eds. (Oudheidkundige Kring Die Goude 23; Delft, 1993), pp. 81-110.

323 Women feature predominantly as readers of prayer cycles based on the life of Christ, see Webber, Ph. E., 'Varieties of popular piety suggested by Netherlandic *Vita Christi* prayer cycles', *OGE* 64 (1990), pp. 205-207.


325 Caron, M., 'Het beeld van Christus in de vrouwenkloosters en bij de zusters van het Gemene Leven', *OGE* 59 (1985), pp. 464-466, who points to the letter of Lentulus (a third-century Roman consul) in which Christ is described. Christ is depicted on fifteenth-century paintings, among which a diptych showing Christ on one panel and a copy of the letter on the other panel. Women prayed in front of the paintings.
importance is the suggestion that imagery used by religious women was on similar lines to that of secular women.\(^{326}\)

Not only was certain material used, but special reading customs were advocated too. Books, including saints' legends, were used by the individual to meditate on her lifestyle and alter it for the better (correctio vitae) using polarisation schemes.\(^{327}\) However, the specific notion of meditation seems not to have been used,\(^{328}\) rather the reader had to 'eat the text again' (ruminare).\(^{329}\) The individual approach was lauded; reading was advocated as a solitary pursuit. As Thomas a Kempis would have it: 'in angello (sic) cum \(\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\)\(^{330}\) These reflections could easily be combined with household chores, as is shown in the events which occurred in daily life in the religious houses of the modern devotion. For instance, the cook of the Florenshouse talked to himself about Christ's life and passion above his cooking pot, and he sometimes stirred his pot in a kneeling position. A Sister of the Common Life imagined that her washing house was the stable at Bethlehem and the stone tub was the crib in which the Christ child lay\(^{331}\). They put to use devotional material combining it with their imaginative powers whilst performing their chores.


\(^{327}\) Weiler, 'Praktijk', pp. 34-37. The method of self-examination consisted of meditating on binary schemes. One such scheme is virtues and vices, and saints' Lives were of course pre-eminently useful.


\(^{329}\) See the conversation between the ruminating ox and the inquisitive pig in Parabolen, fols. b3v-b4. The ox explains that ruminated food makes the soul pure. It is concluded that a wise man ruminates (wedercauwen) his knowledge or the acts he performs in daily life.


The process of reading and reflecting was not restricted to the modern devotion, it was also recommended by the Dominican Alanus de Rupe (1428-1475). Using exempla, miracles and legends, it was his intention to promote praying techniques for ordinary folk.\(^{332}\) This stimulated the upsurge of the rosary in the late medieval Low Countries and the Rhineland, in which St. Anne played such an important role.\(^{333}\) The reader was exhorted to pray the rosary daily.\(^{334}\) The usage of books was concomitant, which is clear when it is remarked that those who cannot read are advised to pray an *Ave Maria* for each picture in the book and then to reflect on the life and passion of Christ.\(^{335}\)

### 2.4 Some medieval attitudes towards the word

Sometimes books were regarded as magical and protective objects by women (not dissimilar to the protective value attributed to (printed) illustrations, as already seen). Contact with a saint could be made through the physical appearance of a book. Simply having a book on the Virgin Mary at home was thought to have been a guarantee for safe childbirth and it was claimed that those who read about St. Margaret of Antioch's (no date) martyrdom had an easier childbirth whenever it was read especially in her honour.\(^{336}\) Indeed, copied parts of her legend seem to have been presented to pregnant women in the form of amulets.\(^{337}\)

The protective value of 'sacred words' is demonstrated by the practice of the priest writing down a prayer on parchment, then rinsing the ink off with holy water.

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\(^{332}\) Boer, B. de, 'De souter van Alanus de Rupe', *OGE* 29 (1955), p. 376.

\(^{333}\) Brandenbarg, *Familieleven*, pp. 102-103.

\(^{334}\) Boer, B. de, 'De souter van Alanus de Rupe', *OGE* 30 (1956), p. 157. It doubtful whether the laity could spend three times fifty Ave Maria's every day.

\(^{335}\) Boer, B. de, 'De souter van Alanus de Rupe', *OGE* 33 (1959), p. 153, cited from the so-called *Exempelboek*.

\(^{336}\) Green, *Listening and reading*, p. 159.

and serving it up to the woman in childbed to ease her labour. A woman plagued by a devil is rid of the culprit by writing the names of Mary and Christ on a rod. A more mundane example of the book as protective object is the commemorative message contained in it in remembrance to the donatrix.

Busch learnt about a friar who in his sermon had expressed disapproval of certain women. They surreptitiously hide books in the vernacular beneath the altar cloth, in order for mass to be said over them. Afterwards they remove the writings and 'make with other people many incantations, divinations and auguries'. A similar anxiety is voiced by the Sterfboeck where the First Commandment (you shall have no other god to set against me) is breached by all who believe that certain texts (scriffen ofte ... brieven) protect against water or fire.

In spite of these examples of illicit usage of books, the written word was viewed as possessing a definitive authority. Indeed, the illicit practices may be a symptom of this attitude. In a society living in fear of sudden death without having been confessed, the day of judgement was feared. On this day, the scroll would be read in heaven (Revelation 5:1), to determine those who would be saved. The power of the written word and sins are mentioned in the sources. A devil noted down the gossip of people in church during mass, but since they were so verbose he quickly ran out of parchment. In a vision, Liedwij diddled a devil out of a letter which contained a sin a woman had committed. The possession of the letter ensured the woman’s fate was in the devil’s hands, as the devil explained. But the woman had already confessed and penance had been done, therefore

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339 Sielentroest, fols. 37v-38.
340 Deanesly, Bible, p. 102.
341 Sterfboeck, fol. b5.
the devil had no claim to the letter. \(^343\) A sinner who writes down his sins finds them wiped out after placing it on an altar dedicated to Mary Magdalene. \(^344\)

Occasionally, references to letters written to heavenly dignitaries occur. In 1456, the fraternity of Our Lady at 's-Hertogenbosch buried one of their members with a letter addressed to St. Peter, with the advice that the member deserved to go straight to heaven. \(^345\) The Utrecht recluse Sister Bertken (d. 1514) was buried with a Latin letter detailing her good works and her exemplary way of life, duly witnessed by ecclesiastical dignitaries. \(^346\) The letter was also probably intended to be read in the next world.

2.5 The urban environment

2.5.1 Saints’ Lives and exempla as urban literature

The question of the existence of urban literature as such has been addressed by various scholars. Ursula Peters, who examined literature in western and middle Europe emphasised that literature in the city did not originate there, but that fact does not stand in the way of reception of these texts within the urban environment. \(^347\) The same seems to ring true for the printed exemplum collections and female saints’ Lives, none of which seems to have been written up by seculars within secular society. That is not to say that these genres originally intended for religious instruction are not of interest to a lay audience. The basic

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\(^343\) Liedwijk, fols. c8v-d1.

\(^344\) Passionael, somerstuc, maria magdalena, fol. n5v.

\(^345\) Post, Kerkgeschiedenis, II, p. 246, fn. 1.


ethics expounded in these genres become the ideological platform for Christian lay-ethics.\textsuperscript{348}

Herman Pleij, however, has shown that literature was produced as well as received in the city and by burghers of the southern Low Countries, even before 1400 (the \textit{ante quern} of Peters).\textsuperscript{349} An urban reading public was in place before the advent of the printing press (the social classes for whom literacy played a role will be discussed below), producing and reading their own literature. He also stresses that literature circulating in the late medieval Low Countries played a dynamic role in the fostering of middle class values of practicality and utilitarianism.\textsuperscript{350} But as J. Reynaert points out, the reception of the texts with so-called burgher values could occur outside the burgher circles, notably among aristocrats.\textsuperscript{351} In general, our sources probably originated in a non-urban environment, but the ideas pronounced in them could easily be transferred to an urban environment to be read by lay readers.

Although a corner of the veil has been raised in the first chapter by showing that the laity (which must have included women) were addressed in our corpus, it has been contested for whom the earliest vernacular printed books (particularly those of an edifying nature, among which I count female saints' \textit{Lives} and the exemplum collections) were actually intended. Pleij suggests that parish priests and the laity were the primary audience of the earliest printed books,\textsuperscript{352} whereas Mertens, reacting to Pleij's ideas, supposes that monasteries and the semi-

\textsuperscript{348} Reynaert, J., 'Leken, ethiek en moralistisch-didactische literatuur. Ter inleiding', \textit{Wat is wijsheid? Lekennethiek in de Middelnederlandse letterkunde}, J. Reynaert et al. eds. (Nederlandse literatuur en cultuur IX; Amsterdam, 1994), p. 27.


\textsuperscript{351} Reynaert, 'Leken', pp. 18-19.
religious were the main recipients, since most manuscripts containing similar material have been found in possession of monastic and semi-religious audiences. Also, he suggests that monastic themes would not have caught on with a lay public, which was more interested in topics involved with family life such as marriage, adultery, raising children, etc.

Against this, it may be said that books in lay bourgeois hands would certainly have a much smaller chance of ultimate survival. In (semi-)religious circles, books were looked after by the individual sister or safely tucked away in libraries with especially appointed custodians to take care of them.

Despite the care of the custodians however, many book lists have not survived the ravages of time, as medieval monastic catalogues were often fixed to walls, and many books of monasteries perished in disasters such as the first years of the Spanish occupation, pillages, zealous Protestant reformers who sold 'popish books' by the pound weight, and the French occupation in the late eighteenth century.

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354 Moll, W., De boekerij van het St. Barbara-klooster te Delft, in de tweede helft der vijftiende eeuw (Amsterdam, 1857), p. 6; Dijk, R.Th.M. van, De constituties der Windesheimse vrouwenkloosters vóór 1559. Bijdrage tot de institutionele geschiedenis van het kapittel van Windesheim (Middeleeuwse studies Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen III-1 en III-2; 2 vols., Nijmegen, 1986), I, p. 366 and Van Dijk, Constituties, II, pp. 773-774, and Lingier, C., 'Boekengebruik in vrouwenkloosters onder de invloed van de moderne devotie', Boeken voor de eeuwigheid. Middelnederlands geestelijk proza, Th. Mertens ed. (Amsterdam, 1993), p. 287. Even a convent of reformed prostitutes, such as the convent dedicated to Mary Magdalene at Hoorn, possessed some sort of library for which the sextoness and the mater were responsible, see Meinsma, K.O., Middeleeuwse bibliotheken (Zutphen, 1903), pp. 110-111. For rules and regulations of libraries in detail, see Christ, K., 'Mittelalterliche Bibliothekordnungen für Frauenklöster', Zentralblatt für Bibliothekswesen 59 (1942), pp. 1-29. In general, the tasks of the woman librarian were: to keep a list, lend books to the sisters (whilst taking into account the competence and spiritual needs of the individual), check books for damage, examine manuscripts for errors made in the sisters' copying, to acquire more books, and regulate the borrowing of books to outsiders. She must have been fully literate.
356 Meinsma, Bibliotheken, p. 197.
century (especially in the southern Low Countries),\textsuperscript{357} which makes it virtually impossible to reconstitute the contents of a particular library. But there is much useful information left (to which we return later).

It is not necessary to exclude a potential interest of the laity in our corpus. After all, burghers were part of the sacral community, religious and urban life are intricately interwoven. We can view ordinary citizens in the background of paintings in which Mary and Joseph feature.\textsuperscript{358} Relics of female saints were kept in city churches and processions were arranged in their honour, which was attended by the laity. Religious feast-days, which included saints’ days, regulated working life.\textsuperscript{359} Work stopped to allow citizens to participate in communal processions (frequently accompanied by carrying around relics in the city). The day was considered a Sunday on which laymen should rest from labour and attend mass. In the late middle ages, emphasis was laid on Mary, Christ, and saints who were in close contact with them (such as Christ’s bride St. Catherine of Alexandria). Those who continued to work risked a fine from an ecclesiastical court.\textsuperscript{360} The laity attended churches dedicated to a saint. Saints also gave their names to guilds and confraternities.\textsuperscript{361}

Many female saints whose legends feature in the \textit{Passio deae} have urban roots or grow up in the city, though many belong to the city patriciate or nobility (and are

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Klamt, J.-C., ‘Gewone mensen op grote pleinen’, \textit{Gewone mensen in de middeleeuwen. Bundel studies aangeboden aan F.W.N. Hugenholtz ter gelegenheid van zijn afscheid}, R.E.V. Stuip en C. Vellekoop eds. (Utrechtse bijdragen tot de mediëvistiek 7; Utrecht, 1987), pp. 219-253, who gives examples and concludes that by including ordinary citizens in works of art they became important members of a worldly ‘Heavenly Jerusalem’.
\item Certain church courts were vigilant since the fines proved to be a money spinner, Verhoeven, G., ‘Kerkelijke feestdagen in de late middeleeuwen. Utrechtse en Deiftse kalenders’, \textit{Historisch tijdschrift Holland} 25 (1993), p. 160.
\item Trio, P., \textit{Volksreligie als spiegel van een stedelijke samenleving. De broederschappen te Gent in de late middeleeuwen} (Leuven, 1993), p. 164, see, for instance, table 1.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
as such not 'common women'). Husbands and fathers find their wives and daughters parcelling out their inheritance or riches to the urban subclasses.

Not all saints are rich. Liedwij’s father, Pieter, for instance, belongs to the impoverished nobility and is forced to work as a night watchman in Schiedam.

Occasionally, a female saint protects the city.

Secular urban women readers could easily identify with female saints or place the events that occurred in the stories within the surroundings of the city. As Green has shown legends were part of the life of the urban laity. Many exempla are set within the context of the city. The dangers of the city for women are outlined in the sources: the city offers occasions for meeting men from all walks of life. Women on windowsills bordering the street are in particular danger. The window reflects the boundary between private, sheltered life and public life. St. Thecla of Iconium (1st century) refuses to leave her window for three days. She is seduced by St. Paul’s preaching in the house opposite, and now refuses to engage in marriage. A young woman trapped in a marriage with an old husband finds herself in need of diversion, sitting in a window and singing into the street, attracting a young man who promptly falls in love with her. In another exemplum, the young wife attracts no fewer than three suitors. The street is a meeting place: an amorous young man seizes his chance to kiss boldly the Duchess of Athens’ daughter while she takes a stroll with her mother in

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362 Some saints of whom it is mentioned in the Passionael that they were raised in a city are Agatha, Agnes, Dorothy, Justina, Margaret and Prisca.
363 Clare donates her inheritance to the poor, Clara, fol. bb2v. The Roman Anastasia gives away riches of her husband to prisoners, Passionael, winterstuc, anastasia, fol. o4v.
364 Liedwij, fol. a2.
365 Clare repelled two attacks on Assisi, Clara, fols. cc1-cc2. On one occasion she took the container with the host (symbol of Christ) out of the church.
366 Green, Listening and reading, pp. 103-105 and p. 220.
367 Hallissy, M., Clean maids, true wives, steadfast widows. Chaucer’s women and the medieval codes of conduct (Contributions in women’s studies 130; Westport, Connecticut, London, 1993), chapter 7, discusses the importance of architectural spaces for women. Particular apertures, such as windows, were considered a risk to a woman’s virtue.
368 Passionael (Veldener), somerstuc, tecla, fols. OO6v-OO7.
369 Geesten, fol. v1.
370 Seven mannen, fols. g4-g4v.
the city. There are many messengers around who can quickly convey messages from eager lovers.

The sources mention female sinful behaviour, such as showing off sumptuous gowns to as many people in the city as possible, and they mention that prostitution was frequently committed within the city walls. Also, female earners are punished, usually for their greed (one of seven capital sins). A female usurer, for instance, who had died becomes possessed by a devil who makes her hands move as if she is counting money; she was excluded from the Christian community by being buried outside the churchyard. Even a woman of good repute (who had accumulated her fortune by honest means and not, say, by usury or prostitution) who has her earnings buried with her cannot rest in her grave and keeps the parishioners awake with her screams because she is being burnt in the afterlife.

Equally, in the cities repentance was shown. The holy prostitute St. Thaïs, who had made her fortune inside the city, burns, converted to a better life, her sumptuous goods in a symbolic act for all to see in a public place. Late medieval 'ordinary women' could sympathise: they burned their decks of cards and perhaps also other games (such as chessboards) in the market place after attending penitential sermons.

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371 *Kaetspel*, fols. k2v-k3. The Duchess is angry and asks for the young man's life but her husband places it in perspective: the youngster is motivated by love. If we are to kill those who love us, what are we to do with our enemies?

372 See, for instance, the old woman in the *Passionaer, somerstuc, theodora*, fol. l6v.

373 *Passionaer* (Veldener), *winterstuc, affra*, fol. N7; *Passionaer, somerstuc, pelagia*, fol. r5v; *Passionaer, somerstuc, maria van egypten*, fol. a6v, and *Passionaer, somerstuc, maria magdalena*, fol. m10v (whose sinful life is filled with sensuous pleasures).

374 *Sterfboeck*, fols. h5v-i1.

375 *Scaecspel*, fol. f8.

376 *Passionaer, somerstuc, tays*, fol.r8 and *Vaderen*, fol. D2.

2.5.2 Contemporary ideas on women within the city

At this point, we will return to the topic of medieval ideas about women, but in this section we deal specifically with ideas within an urban setting. This section serves mainly to show that images of women other than those occurring in books were current in the city. Women could mirror themselves in these too.

We only have to look at the statues and stained glass in medieval churches, paintings and the patron saints of guilds. While churches were adorned with heavy wooden and stone statues, late medieval burgher homes contained cheap clay statues of saints and their attributes, such as St. Catherine with her sword (with which she was beheaded) and wheel and St. Barbara with her tower (in which her father kept her locked up).

Furniture like tables could be adorned with biblical scenes. One table, which is unfortunately damaged, shows medallions which are connected with text on banderolles displaying a scene with the wedding at Cana (John 2:2), and which probably would have shown a medallion featuring Mary and Martha of Bethany (Luke 10:38-39). The wedding at Cana was visited by Christ, and it was used by preachers to point out the goodness of marriage and to promote marital love. Martha and Mary exemplify the active and the contemplative (about which more below). A chandelier depicting the Virgin Mary holding the baby Jesus in her arms could adorn the living room, cleverly emphasising the idea that Mary

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378 For patron saints, see the excellent encyclopaedia by Jöckle, C., *Encyclopedia of saints* (London, 1995), German Translation Centre trans.
381 Dubbe, 'Huisraad', p. 20.
brought light into the world. A chaste Susanna was portrayed on pottery, hearth stones and cupboard panels.\textsuperscript{382}

Paintings were probably too expensive for middle class burghers. Woodcuts with pious depictions, as already seen, and also prints with a more mundane flavour, circulated in urban society in the Low Countries and Germany around 1500 as well. They too promoted marital love.\textsuperscript{383} They warn against blind love of men for their womenfolk, such as that of Adam who was betrayed by Eve and Solomon's love for his concubines which led him to worship their pagan idols. Venus is shown instigating the wrong kind of love. Aristotle, was humiliated by Phyllis, and the amorous Virgil, was left dangling in a basket underneath the window by his would-be girlfriend, for the entire city to see.

Cultural expressions too inform us about ideas on women. In 1511, after heavy snowfall, snowmen were modelled by the citizens of Brussels. They included David spying on a naked Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:2), (a love which ended in the death of her husband Uriah), a mermaid (regarded as a lustful creature who lured men to their deaths), a unicorn resting its head in a virgin's lap (symbolising the unique goodness of virginity), a centaur (a lustful creature - partly human, partly animal -) and the repentant sinner saint Mary Magdalene.\textsuperscript{384} City accounts from the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries show that among the two thousand plays researched, nearly all of a religious nature, the marriage of Mary, the annunciation, the birth of Christ and the adoration of the Magi featured.\textsuperscript{385} All these topics occur in our saints' \textit{Lives} and exempla.

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{382} Caron, 'Vrouwen', p. 7.
\textsuperscript{384} We know about this festival from a lexical source: the rhymed text by Jan Smeken of Brussels, see Pleij, \textit{Sneeuwpoppen}, p. 370.
\end{footnotesize}
Shrove Tuesday feasts (carnival) were held everywhere in the Low Countries. The Shrove Tuesday revellers at Schiedam kept Liedwij awake with their horse play (wildelic spelen), as 'they are wont to do'. In Brussels, women (and also men) portraying behaviour not befitting urban morals were invited to join the fictitious Guild of the Blue Boat (Gilde van de Blauwe Schuit). They were invited to board a boat on wheels which would ferry them to damnation. Taking a ride were spinsters unable to attract husbands, young wives married to aged husbands, and women who displayed an erotic interest in men, as well as servant girls who would rather feast than work. In this world-turned-upside-down the theme 'women-on-top', an inversion of sex roles, was one of the most popular. Using bawdy humour questioning social and moral values was not restricted to the Low Countries. The images of women and ideas about them show what kind of female image amused medieval urban society. The entertainment may also have served to let off steam and ward off fears. The ideas we are presented with in our sources, in particular in the exempla, are received within an environment which will have interpreted them as inversions, as grossly exaggerated ideas about women highlighting improper behaviour.

Everyday urban life however, politically, socially and economically benefited from regulated behaviour (we will return to this in chapters 3 and 4). Both city councils and guilds were involved, for instance, with sexual morality. Unchaste sexual behaviour was condemned. This became more clearly defined in the fifteenth

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386 Liedwij, fol. a7v.
389 See also Muir, L.R., Literature and society in medieval France. The mirror and the image, 1100-1500 (London, 1985), chapter 4.
Only people of impeccable behaviour were allowed to become members of guilds (which also included women). It was recognised that good behaviour inside the city led to peace and prosperity. Not only were city council and guild concerned with public decency but also with decent 'civilised' behaviour of the individual. What benefited the individual benefited the community. Good behaviour was rewarded in heaven, which shows yet again that religion and secular life were intertwined.

To recap, from the fourteenth century on there was a recognisable urban literature reflecting its own values which also presupposes that there was a lay public predating the incunable period. Printed saints' Lives and exempla as urban literature for women have not received much attention from modern scholars. They contain many elements which urban laywomen could recognise. Ideas about and images of women were matched by cultural and religious expressions, but also by items and utensils used in the home. All media underline behaviour befitting a good Christian life.

2.5.3 Literate social classes

One of the artificial boundaries of this thesis is that it excludes residents of a religious or semi-religious association, such as beguines or Sisters of the Common Life, as readers. Instead, we concentrate on the secular woman who was part of secular society and of a secular household, either as wife, mother, sister and daughter. Since ideas about women within the family are stated in the books under consideration it is rather evident to suppose that these women must have been part of the intended audience for the passages about them (even though some exempla appear originally directed to warn monks about female nature).

To which class belonged this common woman? It is not easy to define middle class readers.\(^{393}\) It is also notoriously difficult to measure the ability to read and write and it has even been contended that the 'actual level of literacy that is measured is relatively unimportant compared with the suitability of that level as a comparative measure'.\(^{394}\) A uniform and standard measure appears to be the ability to sign one's name. This activity involves both the ability to read as well as write. But it has its drawbacks, for instance, the signatory may have learned to write her name as if it were a drawing, and was not necessarily able to read or write. Also, women stood a greater chance of having been excluded from this particular activity since they were less likely to sign contracts, notarial acts etc. as men.

Zemon Davis has investigated signatures on notarial acts of sixteenth-century Lyon.\(^{395}\) Apparently, a very high percentage of members of the medical profession and printers were able to sign, the percentage was high among artists, taverners and metal workers. The percentages trail off: about half of those engaged in the clothes trade and a low to very low percentage in the lower menial jobs such as gardening and construction workers were able to sign. The marriage registers of Amsterdam (from 1578 to 1800) show that the majority of women and men were able to sign their name, which suggests that many social classes had by now acquired this skill.\(^{396}\) It also shows a gender division: twice as many men than women could sign.

In the late medieval Low Countries civil servants, schoolmasters, guild administrators, and some merchants, considered to be 'half-intellectuals', should

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\(^{393}\) Coleman, J., *English literature in history 1350-1400. Medieval readers and writers* (London, Melbourne, Sydney, Auckland, Johannesburg, 1981), p. 17 and p. 43, has looked at the interests a middle class audience may have had in topics such as piety and concern for social order.


\(^{395}\) Zemon Davis, *Society*, pp. 209-210. Her research is based on signatures of masters and journeymen in Lyon in the 1550s and 1560s.

be reckoned among those who could read and write at least in the vernacular. They also considered it advantageous to have their children educated. But artisans should not be forgotten. Turning to England for instance, records for the period 1467-1476 show also that competence at least in the basics of literacy were found in the group of tradesmen and superior artisans: fishmongers, grocers, haberdashers, barbers, tailors, and joiners.

But the reading of female saints’ Lives of the laity is ridiculed as well. In a satirical play (printed as an incunable), Vrou Lortse is made a saint. It is suggested by the swindlers who promote her newly established cult, that a little book was to be printed with her picture in it to stimulate devotion. Those in particular need of salvation are mentioned in it too, among them middle class people, such as merchants, artisans, financiers, and lease holders.

### 2.5.4 The education system

The first recourse of the child for education was to its mother. Examples of this in our corpus are highlighted in chapter 4. In general, the examples may have served as positive guidelines for mothers at the time the books were printed. The tasks of the medieval educator are outlined by Shahar. First of all, the child was to be raised as a Christian human being according to Christian morals. Secondly, the child was to develop a certain ability in preparation for the future role. Also, the child was to accept the social order, and reflect on God’s will. These values were taught both at home and at school.

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397 For the Low Countries, see Pleij, ‘Betekenis’, pp. 227-263; for the necessity of sons’ education in these socio-economic classes, see Sprandel, Gesellschaft, pp. 192-194.
In this paragraph, we are mainly concerned with institutional education available within the cities for the children of burghers. The three main school types under investigation here are elementary education in the vernacular, Latin schools and universities, and they are discussed by Post. This will allow us to assess to what degree girls were educated. The result can then be related to their being able to read the incunables.

In the 1970s, Nauwelaerts emphasised the need for a history of education of girls. Unfortunately, modern research into medieval education in the Low Countries is lacking, according to Boekholt. Both statements remain true up to this date. Post's book, used frequently by scholars, is particularly useful for his map marking the cities and towns where schools were situated, but many of these schools could not be visited by girls since they were Latin schools.

Research into education segregating the sexes is not easy. The term 'children', as found, for instance, in archival sources, may lead to confusion. It was self-evident that pupils who attended the modern devotionalists' school at Deventer, were exclusively boys, but they are called 'children'. A distinction between the sexes would have been superfluous in medieval eyes. That is not to say that medieval educators were not concerned with girls.

In the later middle ages, cities and their inhabitants became increasingly concerned with education. The city needed a corps literate in the vernacular to assist with the administration of the city. Burghers needed a literate layer for trade and commerce. Although the initiative to educate the laity in great numbers

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401 This paragraph is an abstract of a chapter I wrote on the education system but which could not be included because of the regulations concerning the word limit.
402 Post, R.R., *Scholen en onderwijs in Nederland gedurende de middeleeuwen* (Utrecht, Antwerpen, 1954). All further reference to these three types of education are found in his book.
405 Bot, P.N.M., *Humanisme en onderwijs in Nederland* (Utrecht, Antwerpen, 1940), chapter 1.
can be laid at the door of the Holy See in 1215, and in each parish a school was established (in theory), it appears that in the late middle ages private initiatives were numerous and many schools became privately-run.

A type of very elementary education is the Sunday school, where religious instruction was provided. Fenna Bickes (d. 1458), a female teacher of the convent of Rijnsburg taught daughters of farmers to read and religious instruction on Sundays and feast-days. In Gouda, the chapels of St. Barbara and of Our Blessed Lady were used for education on these days to teach 'poor little daughters'. In the sixteenth century teaching continued here with reading, spelling, religious instruction and prayers. In sixteenth-century Delft, anyone inclined could teach maid servants reading and writing in the vernacular on these days. Teaching the underprivileged was considered a charitable act.

Occasionally, female religious offered instruction to girls. Nunnery schools educated them simultaneously with their novices. For instance, in the St. Elizabeth's convent in Rugge a separate building seems to have been set aside as schola, and until the very end of the middle ages similar references occur. In general, at these convents the trivium (grammar, rhetoric, dialectic) was taught as was music and some medical care. The curriculum did not change a great deal from earlier middle ages.

Semi-religious women taught girls as well. In the thirteenth century, the seven year old Beatrice of Nazareth visited the beguine school at Léau (Zouteleeuw) to be initiated in the liberal arts. In fifteenth-century Breda and early sixteenth-
century Mechlin a large number of young girls attended the school at the local beguinages.\textsuperscript{413} In the counties of Holland and Zeeland, beguine schools existed in the late fifteenth century.\textsuperscript{414} In Groningen, daughters of the well-to-do were placed for a few years with 'den jufferen up Broderkerckhoff.\textsuperscript{415} Here girls were taught embroidery, needlework, spinning and good manners. Apparently, beguines could live out as well. In fourteenth-century Paris, beguine Dame Agnes taught household economics to the young wife of the Ménagier de Paris, and chaperoned her as well.\textsuperscript{416}

The 'schrijfschool' or 'Duytsche school' (the term Duyts refers to the Dutch language and not to the German language), catered for pupils aged from about seven to ten. At this school, where instruction took place in the vernacular, reading, writing and counting was taught. In 1480, at Leiden writing and clergie (probably meaning prayers) were on the curriculum.\textsuperscript{417} Reading in cleyne boecxkens and learning the alphabet was not uncommon. A small ABC book (abecedarium) could contain the alphabet and prayers to be said in the vernacular on set hours throughout the day. Learning to read was less expensive than learning to write.\textsuperscript{418} In general, parents of girls were charged less than boys, which is a clear indication that girls were taught the former skill rather than the latter. Pupils of this type of school came from the middle classes, children of craftsmen, merchants, well-off farmers and schooled workmen.\textsuperscript{419} They are from the same social classes which Pleij tends to associate with the reading public of the incunables.\textsuperscript{420}

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\textsuperscript{413} ‘... de jonghe maegdekens die daer in groot getal ter schole lagen’, Nauwelaerts, \textit{School}, p. 69.


\textsuperscript{415} Post, \textit{Scholen}, p. 164.


\textsuperscript{417} Post, \textit{Scholen}, p. 83.


\textsuperscript{420} Pleij, ‘Betekenis’, p. 243.

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Mercantile schools or French schools were geared towards educating a resource pool for commercial purposes of the city. The 'Fransche school', where pupils aged roughly ten to fifteen attended, subjects were taught geared towards business education. French, reckoning with Arabic numbers, calculating using coins 'in the way merchants normally do' and business correspondence in Dutch and French were on the educational agenda. A hesitant beginning was made in the late middle ages but these schools flourished in the sixteenth century. The earliest example dates from 1482, when in Bergen op Zoom (in the current province of Brabant) Christoffel Du Fresne set up school. Boys as well as girls had access to these schools.

Many cities boasted a Latin school which provided an education for boys, aged from about seven to seventeen. They were taught Latin grammar, were required to speak Latin and sing in the church choir. Classes were conducted in the Latin language for advanced pupils. Generally, girls were not allowed in these schools. They would not require to learn Latin since they were not destined to take on office at church, or follow a further education at university. Some fifteenth-century female religious displayed an intricate knowledge of Latin, which they had acquired before joining the convent. Perhaps they had attended a Latin school after all, or they may have been educated privately at home. Whether they gained their knowledge at school or at home these examples show that women were not totally cut-off from an education in Latin.

The method of learning by rote remained the prevalent method, even far into the early modern period, despite the increased availability of (cheaper) books.
First, the alphabet was learned by heart as a sequential whole, followed by recognising individual letters. Syllables were next in turn, then whole words and phrases. The pupil was required to name single letters, to spell, to pronounce and read aloud. Thus, decipherment rather than understanding was important. Text comprehension was achieved after years of exercise. Since boys remained longer in the educational process, their reading skills must have been more profound. For girls, elementary education would usually signify the end of the road of formal institutionalised education.

From 1425, boys could attend the university of Louvain to receive training as canon lawyers and civil lawyers, theologians, philosophers and medical doctors. This avenue was closed to women. Nevertheless, women could legally be university members. Wives of professors, (serving) maids, cooks in colleges and student houses, errand-girls and so forth were marked as associates, as were scribes, paper- and parchment makers, apothecaries and book-printers.

In 'real life' girls may have gone to great lengths to gain admittance to university. Martin of Leibitz (d. 1464) added in his autobiography a story of a virgin who attended university for two years at Kraków in male attire. Although the story is shaped to fit into a monastic mould (the learned young woman was made an abbess) there may be some truth in it.

Christine de Pizan mentions a tale of a professor at an Italian university whose daughter was occasionally sent by her father to deliver lectures in his stead. She was so beautiful that a little veil had to be hung before her face in order not to

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distract the students from learning. She may have been related to the fourteenth-century canon lawyer Johannes Andreae, who records a similar story about his daughter. Some Italian and Spanish examples show that a handful of women may actually have taught at fifteenth-century universities. It was very exceptional to find any female at university level.

Juxtaposed to medieval ideas about women as outlined above, there is no lack of positive models of female erudition and intelligence. The idea of woman as an intellectual, personified by Catherine of Alexandria, must have been familiar since it was conveyed (by word of mouth) on Catherine's feast-day, which was a holiday (at which lay people were at leisure to attend a sermon). The erudite Catherine disputed with the emperor as well as with his fifty pagan philosophers. She manages to convert all fifty sages. The emperor questions 'the wonder of her wisdom'. St. Catherine was also acclaimed patron saint of the medieval faculty of arts.

Another example is St. Barbara, who, being sent to school by her father, learned the seven arts. This led to her questioning the worship of idols and paved the way for her conversion. St. Eugenia is learned in the arts, she understands Latin, Greek, she knows the philosophers, possesses an excellent memory and is intelligent. St. Sophia, otherwise known as Sapientia (Wisdom), has her daughters educated to the highest standard. The girls had memorised parts of

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429 Power, Women, p. 85.
433 Passionaei, winterstuc, katherina, fols. e1v-e2v.
434 Passionaei, winterstuc, barbara, fols. k5-k5v.
435 Passionaei (Veldener), somerstuc, eugenia, fol. PP3v.
the Bible, and could live up to their knowledge. An extremely original exemplum is that in which a learned female spider occurs who is referred to as female doctor (doctorisse). This is positive imagery of a woman. Wisdom, it appears, is a sign of God's favour and an element of female sanctity in these examples.

The bulk of religious and moral education (Christian duties, spiritual obligations, Ten Commandments, etc.) was available to both boys and girls at home and in the school. It was undoubtedly conveyed through oral instruction, but some reading may have been involved too, particularly for the advanced students and higher up in society. The Psalter occupies a special place. Not only was it used to learn liturgy it was also regarded as compendium of all sacred knowledge, history, ethics, cosmology and eschatology. Other books used for edification consisted of catechism, Bible excerpts, prayer books, books with virtuous examples (such as the Sielentroost), saint's Lives, fables, etc. In short, genres which were available in print. In some schools, girls read saints' legends and Lives of the Desert Fathers of Egypt.

Some printed matter in the Dutch vernacular appears to be tailored towards usage at medieval school. Aesop's fables, for instance, were still widely used by children in the eighteenth century. The woodcut, which accompanies every fable, serves as a visual aid. Each fable is introduced in a few words which contain the animals or persons who play a role. After this follows an incipit with the moral, a middle part which usually contains a dialogue, and an epilogue in which the moral is repeated. However, because of its lay-out this product cannot

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436 Passionael (Veldener), winterstuc, sophie, fols. M3-M3v.
437 Parabolien, fol. a6v.
439 Niekus Moore, Mirror, chapter 4.
have been cheap. Also, many incunables are large folios which are cumbersome
to be handled by children. It is questionable whether children read incunables at
school, even though a Latin version of Aesop was traditionally used at school
and as mentioned in chapter 1, so was the Legenda aurea.

In general then, in 1500 there was ample opportunity to follow elementary
education, even for those from lower down the social scale. Even when girls
remained in education for a shorter period than boys, and even when only taught
to read they must have been able to comprehend at least the basics of a text.
Despite the fact that a woman was not able to display her erudition and learning
in the public realm in such a way that a man could, education was highly
esteemed.

A sensible mother and cultivated wife were regarded as a blessing. A woman
could become a better Christian through learning. In the sixteenth and
seventeenth centuries, when Bible reading was promoted on a larger scale than
ever before, women were stimulated to be able to read and understand the word
of God and teach her children.

However, literacy also served a more secular purpose. Educated wives and
daughters could help with the management of landed property, business and the
household accounts. An educated female was able to negotiate and converse at
the highest level, to find commercial partners, keep the business afloat in her
husband's absence, was indispensable. Travelling husbands could be in contact

\[\text{Augustin, P. et al. eds., Kinderen lazen, kinderen lezen. Catalogus [van de}
\text{tentoonstelling gehouden in het] Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam van 31 oktober 1958 - 7}
\text{januari 1959 (Catalogus Stedelijk Museum 195; Amsterdam, 1958), p. 22.}
\text{For usage of books by medieval children, see Van Oostrom, 'Lezen', pp. 20-21 (for}
\text{school books) and Resoort, R.J., 'Een proper profetelijc boec. Eind vijftiende en zestiende}
\text{eeuw', De hele Bibelebontse berg. De geschiedenis van het kinderboek in Nederland en}
\text{Vlaanderen, H. Bekkering et al. eds. (Amsterdam, 1989, 1990), pp. 43-56. Among the}
\text{books probably read by children are mentioned the legend of Liedwijn van Schiedam and}
\text{the Sielentroest.}
\text{Kuiper en Resoort transs., Esopus, p. 88.} \]
with their wives by letter, as witnessed, for instance, by the fourteenth-century Francesco Datini.

Examples of working wives are painted by the fifteenth-century artist Marinus van Reymerswaele. In *The Tax Collector* the collector is counting coins, his female companion is occupied with the accounts. The account book is situated on her side of the table and her hand rests on a page, while she is waiting until the collector has finished counting. In another of his paintings, *Bankers*, the male has finished counting the silver while his female companion is fully occupied with noting down the amount in the cash register.

For an unmarried woman education provided means of self reliance and survival. There was an ample resource pool of female teachers, lay and religious. Female traders often feature on their own, as money changers, money lenders, innkeepers, drapers, bakers and brewers. In fifteenth-century Germany, some women are mentioned as clerks at court, assessors of pledges, assets, fines, and as middle men and brokers. These are women I tend to associate with an incunable-reading public: affluent enough to acquire them and erudite and interested enough to understand the basics. When reading and education became increasingly important for participation in cultural activities, it is the vernacular which triumphs, and this cannot be separated from a triumph for women.

Foreigners, comparing the literate population of the Low Countries with that of their own country, notice a high degree of female literacy. The Florentine Ludovico Guicciardini, who had lived in Antwerp for some years and who had travelled extensively in the Low Countries, mentioned in 1567 that there was a large number of cultivated folk and that almost anyone in the countryside was

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able to read and write.\textsuperscript{446} The French humanist Joseph Scaliger who lectured at the university of Leiden in the 1590s remarked that the Dutch were admirably literate, and that even the servant girls were able to read.\textsuperscript{447} In 1673, the English Bathsue Makin recorded 'one great reason why our neighbours the Dutch have thriven to admiration is the great care they take in the education of their women, from whence they are to be accounted more vertuous, and to be sure more useful than any women in the world.'\textsuperscript{448} A foundation for these statements must have been laid in the fifteenth century.

2.6 \hspace{1cm} \textit{The woman as reader}

2.6.1 \hspace{1cm} Female literacy

Various levels of readership are discernible. At the lowest level of reading ability the woodcuts could be looked at. In particular the so-called block books, such as the \textit{Spiegel der menselijker behoudenisse}, contain a high proportion of visual images. It has even been asserted that the purpose of block books had nothing to do with dissemination of literacy and were merely there to provide the illiterate with visual concepts of religion.\textsuperscript{449}

At a second level there is aural reading: the ‘reader’ is a listener. Chaucer’s fictitious well-known Wife of Bath is a good example of an aural reader. Her fifth husband, once an Oxford scholar, made her listen to stories from Roman history, proverbs from \textit{Ecclesiasticus} and a book which seems to have been a compilation and contained, amongst others, \textit{Parables of Solomon} and Ovid’s \textit{Art of Love}. Jankin repeated the antifeminist passages time and again which made her angry, she tore out some pages and threw them in the fire, only to receive a

\textsuperscript{446} Van der Woude, ‘Alfabetisering’, p. 257.
\textsuperscript{448} Wiesner, Women, pp. 135-136.
\textsuperscript{449} Clair, \textit{Printing}, p. 3.
box on her ear.\textsuperscript{450} The aural reader, voluntarily or not, was dependent on the reader.

Reading aloud continued. For instance, Kunera's legend is meant to edify all who 'read' it or 'hear it being read'.\textsuperscript{451} Zemon Davis surmises whether women gathered during long winter evenings, the \textit{veillée's}, may have lent their ear to the new medium of the printed books.\textsuperscript{452} The gathering of women in the evening at homes and in barns to spin and chatter was not uncommon in the early modern Low Countries.\textsuperscript{453} Books could have been used for diversion.

Memory remained important to retain texts not only because the written or printed word remained expensive, but also, as Carruthers has discussed, within the literate community there was room for recitals from memory and it was handy to have access to the text without the need to consult the book.\textsuperscript{454} Indeed, texts were accompanied by pictures prompting the reader to recall and to memorise a text. Govaert Bac who published the \textit{Sinte Katherinen legende} used the image of a bird's cage as a printer's mark, meaning that the information should be preserved in the reader's 'memorial storehouse'.\textsuperscript{455} The dissemination of literate


\textsuperscript{451} Kunera, fol. a2.

\textsuperscript{452} Zemon Davis, \textit{Society}, p. 213.


\textsuperscript{455} See Carruthers, \textit{Book}, p. 246 for the usage of metaphors which signify that the memories like birds could be cooped up in a cage. The printer's mark is found in \textit{Katherinen}, fol. f6v. \textit{'t Vogelhuys} was also the name of the house that the printer's wife owned.
culture, or more precisely defined, the dissemination of texts (or variants of them), is therefore not necessarily restricted to books.

Some people have a phenomenal capacity for memorising texts, particularly those which were popular and therefore often repeated. Late medieval female Lollards from Britain, for instance, learnt Scriptures by heart. This means that women who had memorised texts had access to them at their own leisure and by reciting them en public they widened the audience of the 'texts' as well. The dissemination of 'texts' is not restricted to the literate or those who possess books. A mixture of textuality and orality remained when printed books appeared and, arguably, ever since writing became more commonly used.

The 'reader proper', who read and understood the texts presented, belongs to a more advanced level. Between this category and the levels outlined above all shades of reading ability may be found. An exceptional example of a reader proper is the fourteenth-century Christine de Pizan who was an author as well. In her criticism on the Roman de la Rose, Christine complained about antifeminist attitudes displayed in the work. She was charged that she read like a woman, that envy, pride or foolishness led her to misunderstand the work. She

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456 See, for instance, McDonnell, Beguines, p. 374. They may have done so because they were illiterate or they may have feared to be found with incriminatory books. Cross, C., 'Great reasoners in Scripture'. The activities of women Lollards 1380-1530', Medieval women, D. Baker ed. (Studies in church history, subsidia 1; Oxford, 1978), pp. 359-380.

457 It is not necessary within the context of this thesis to discuss more fully the relationship between orality and literacy. Even in an increasingly literate world, reading aloud and memory remained important. See, for instance, the works of Green, Listening and reading, Carnuthers, Book, Clanchy, M., From memory to written record. England 1066-1307 (Oxford, Cambridge USA, 1979, 1993). Sribner, R., 'Oral culture and the diffusion of reformation ideas', History of European ideas 5 (1984), pp. 237-256 emphasises the point that oral communication (preaching in the vernacular, reading aloud and discussing books) remained of the utmost importance even when the printed work became more commonly used. For a concise and intelligent analysis of various strands of thought concerning orality-literacy, see Jong, M. de, 'Geletterd en ongeletterd: zin en onzin van een tegenstelling', Oraliteit en schriftcultuur, R.E.V. Stuip en C. Vellekoop eds. (Utrechtse bijdragen tot de mediëvistiek 12; Hilversum, 1993), pp. 9-31. She concludes that literacy (as equated with modernity) versus orality (as equated with tradition) is no longer tenable. However, the antithesis remains of importance to medievalists, since the literate community consists of dominant social groups.
showed her assertiveness by stating that she was not reading like a woman but as a woman. Christine then read, understood and interpreted texts. She was fully literate to boot, producing a counterattack in writing. She is very exceptional though, both in her literate sophistication and the fact that her case is so well-documented. She cannot be cited as a 'typical' secular female reader.

2.6.2 Attitudes towards female literacy

In the female saint's Lives and exempla female reading is sometimes viewed with suspicion, for instance when married wives are being sent love letters by young men.\textsuperscript{460} It is also associated with pious acts. As a toddler, St. Elizabeth of Hungary (1207-1231) mimics the ability of reading the Psalter in church, but she is too young to be able to read.\textsuperscript{461} Reading becomes a source of play: the apostles' names are written on lots which were drawn in order to pray to the apostle whose name features on it. Whilst consulting the Gospels, St. Theodora of Alexandria (no date) took a decision what to do after her act of adultery.\textsuperscript{462} St. Paula (d. 404), prone to shedding tears even over her venial sins, is urged to spare her eyes to enable her to read the Gospels.\textsuperscript{463} Every day St. Eugenia is moved to tears whilst reading about Thecla's conversion and she finds inspiration in the legend.\textsuperscript{464} Another form of positive imagery is that in later editions of the Passionael many female saints are portrayed with a book in the woodcuts.\textsuperscript{465} Sometimes, the attribute of the book makes sense according to the legend. For

\textsuperscript{459} On Christine's literate abilities, see Schibanoff, 'Taking', pp. 93-101.
\textsuperscript{460} Geesten, one woman is home alone, fol. f2, the other is married to an old husband, fol. v1.
\textsuperscript{461} Passionael, winterstuc, elyzabeth, fol. b8.
\textsuperscript{462} Passionael, somerstuc, theodora, fol. l6v.
\textsuperscript{463} Passionael, winterstuc, paula, fol. l4.
\textsuperscript{464} Passionael (Veldener), somerstuc, eugenia fol. PP3v.
\textsuperscript{465} For the introduction of woodcuts in the Passionael, see Goudraan, K., 'Het Passionael op de drukpers', Gouden Legenden. Heiligenlevens en heiligenverering in de Nederlanden, A. Mulder-Bakker en M. Carasso-Kok eds. (Hilversum, 1997), pp. 82-84. I have consulted Passionael, (Delft, Hendrick Eckert van Homberch, 1499-1500), KB The Hague shelf mark 170 E 15, which also features woodcuts on the title pages of winterstuc and somerstuc respectively depicting a nun reading in a library being visited by Christ, and Mary with a book surrounded by the apostles.

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instance, in the case of St. Scholastica (d. ca. 543), the first Benedictine nun, it was a reference to the Rule her brother Benedict of Nursia had written. In some instances, a saint's learnedness or book usage is not mentioned in the source, but the saint is depicted with one nevertheless.

When looking for attitudes towards women's writing when they appear in the exemplum collections and female saints' Lives it becomes obvious that they are ambiguous too. God inspired the divinely written word. God was not only creator of everything but also author of the Scriptures and made the human writer his tool. In the book which contains her Revelations, as well as her daughter Catherine's legend, St. Bridget of Sweden is depicted filled with heavenly inspiration; she is flanked by heavenly worthies, and inspired by the Holy Spirit - as a dove - while an angel looks over her shoulder, dictating the text into her ear.

Influenced in all likelihood by Giovanni Boccaccio's Concerning Famous Women, De Eyb also lists famous women from antiquity in his book. In his chapter On the praise of women in which he also refers to Barbara of Brandenburg, he mentions women's influence in the arts and literature. He lists Isis, Nicostrata, Sappho, Cornelia, Aspasia, and Proba, all of whom he commends for their interest in the letters respectively for discovering the first letters (boechstaven); discovering Latin letters and syllables; composing poetry; writing of Latin letters; learning and eloquence; re-styling the Old and New Testament in verses reminiscent of Virgil.

Isis also features in Aesop enhancing his skills. She bestows the power of speech on him and the wisdom and knowledge to invent fables and explain

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466 Passionael, (Delft, Hendrick Eckert van Homberch, 1499-1500), winterstuc, scolastica, fol. e2v. For her attributes, see Goosen, Afra, p. 66 and p. 68.
467 See, for instance, the legends of Anastasia, Lucy, Samina and Thaïs.
469 Opusculum, fol. a1. It is probably a reference to the sermo angelicus.
470 Ehebüchlein, fols. h2-h3v.
Empowered by these gifts he is capable of competing with the wisest of the philosophers. In the incunables, Isis is promoted to and singled out as goddess of communication on the oral as well as the written level.

It must have been far from obvious to the medieval reader who these ancient ladies mentioned were and exactly why they should be hailed as examples. Grafton and Jardine, when they came across similar lists in their research on women humanists of fifteenth-century Italy who were applauded by their male contemporaries in similar fashion, mention that learned women were routinely praised in this manner.

There are many instances of female writing associated with negative ideas. It circumvented any involvement (and control) of others. Unbeknown to her doting father Tancredus, Sigismunda writes a letter to Swyfcardus arranging a secret meeting which she inserted into a length of reed. Under the motto to pray with concentration, a she-monkey features who copies books but since she is always eavesdropping or gossiping, her books remain unsold and she dies in poverty. Occasionally, God's hand is seen at work. For instance, Zosimas finds instructions for Mary of Egypt's funeral written in the desert sand near her corpse while she could neither read nor write. It is clear that there is a bivalent attitude towards female literacy.

2.6.3 Vernacular readership

Before the fifteenth century lay reading in the vernacular had evoked responses from the side of the established church. Although literacy in itself did not imply an

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471 Aesop, fol. a3.
473 Ehebüchlein, fol. f4.
474 Twespraec, fol. 15v
inclination to heresy,\textsuperscript{476} it is the type of book that the laity used in the vernacular that alarmed the church. In the high middle ages, even possession of biblical translations could bring about suspicions of heresy. Also, unsupervised reading of the Bible appears to have coincided with discussions outside the church and sometimes even lay preaching, as witnessed by the practices of the late twelfth and early thirteenth-century Waldensians.\textsuperscript{477} The preacher Guibert of Tournai (ca. 1205-1284) resented women speaking in public about their religious beliefs and the Scriptures.\textsuperscript{478} In 1317, the Council of Vienne's decrees were published; beguines were prohibited from discussing and preaching religious matters (\textit{Cum de quibusdam mulieribus}).\textsuperscript{479} Women, of course, suffered from the additional problem that they were discouraged to speak out publicly (1 Corinthians 14:34).

The attitude of the church did not change during the middle ages in general, but a milder attitude was advocated of reading Scriptures (and edifying material) in the vernacular,\textsuperscript{480} as advocated by the modern devotionalists. The church's concerned attitude about the interpretation by the laity of books was not unfounded. Carlo Ginzburg's work on the uncanny interpretations which the sixteenth-century miller from Friuli based on his books, is telling.\textsuperscript{481} Even within the modern devotion it was not readily advocated that women had access to the vernacular Scriptures. For instance, when in the fifteenth century Jacob Huginck

\textsuperscript{476} Even when evidence in some cases suggests that the connection was presupposed by contemporaries, Swanson, R.N., 'Literacy, heresy, history, and orthodoxy: perspectives and permutations for the later middle ages', \textit{Heresy and literacy, 1000-1530}, P. Biller and A. Hudson eds. (Cambridge studies in medieval literature 23; Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, 1994), p. 290.

\textsuperscript{477} Blamires, S., 'The limits of Bible study for medieval women', \textit{Women, the book and the godly}. Selected proceedings of the St Hilda's conference, 1993, L. Smith and J.H.M. Taylor eds. (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 1-12, points to the activities of the Waldensians in and around Metz in the 1190s. Laymen and women circulated biblical translations amongst themselves and discussed them.

\textsuperscript{478} Dalarun, 'Vrouw', p. 40.

\textsuperscript{479} Koorn, \textit{Begijnhoven}, p. 16.

\textsuperscript{480} As long as vernacular writings did not contain heresy, dealt with simple subjects, dealt with subjects in a direct and not figurative way, were written in similar style to that of the doctors of the church, and that the meaning matched the books of saints, there were no objections raised in the Low Countries, Deanesly, \textit{Bible}, p. 94.

left a New Testament and part of the Old Testament to the Sisters of the
Common Life in the Adamanshouse at Zutphen, it was stipulated that it was to be
used by their priest only. In 1486, the archbishop of Mainz resented books
which appeared in translation, such as the books of divine office and missals, as
well as the fact that they were multiplied by the printing press. He thought that
books which were handled by the common people led to the degradation of
religion, 'For who would enable simple and uneducated men, and even women ...
to pick out the true meaning?'.

The Low Countries never experienced the extraordinary measures that the
English monarch saw fit to impose in 1543 when English women were prohibited
by the crown from reading the Bible with the exception of women from the upper
echalons of society. However, even they were not allowed to read it to others.
This shows the underlying fear that 'ordinary' women who were less educated
and less sophisticated were thought to have been in peril of making mistakes in
their interpretation of - in this case - the sacred word. Objections were not raised
when they read other books in the vernacular such as saints' legends.

Clergy and laity were evaluated in terms of being literate, and to be more precise,
of being literate in Latin. Not only was Latin the language used at university but it
was also a sacred language, the language of the church. However, it was not
necessarily available to the female religious. In general, literati were able to

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482 Meinsma, Bibliotheken, p. 288.
483 Deanesly, Bible, p. 125.
484 Wiesner, Women, pp. 125-126.
485 See the wide variety of books mentioned by Riddy, 'Women', pp. 108-109.
486 Many monastic libraries as well as certain beguines possessed books in Middle Dutch
and Latin, see, for instance, the examples supplied by Machiels, J. en P. van Peteghem,
'Incunabelbezit in Zuidnederlandse kloosterbibliotheken. Kan men het incunabelbezit in
Zuidnederlandse kloosterbibliotheken tot rond 1500 samenstellen op grond van de
herkomstvermelding?', Archives et bibliothèques de Belgique numéro spécial 11 (1974),
pp. 327-366. Meinsma, Bibliotheken, p. 196, surmises that Latin books in convents were
intended to be used by priest, rector and chaplain. Late medieval attitudes towards
religious women reading in the vernacular are ambivalent: in the fifteenth century, Poor
Clares were advised not to read books in the Dutch vernacular, see Reijnsbergen,
'Clariussen', p. 59. In 1441, the Chapter of Utrecht forbade teriaries to read any Latin
works, Axters, Vroomheid, III, p. 238.
read and write in Latin, and usually consisted of the higher clergy. All non-clerics are *illiterati* and the laity is only able to communicate in the mother tongue.\(^{487}\) Although the difference and importance between literate and illiterate became progressively less clear,\(^{488}\) secular women who, on the whole, had no access to Latin (and who, of course, were also barred from priesthood) ranked in principle among the *illiterati* in the medieval sense, which by no means meant that they were unlettered.

As readership widened over western Europe on religious as well as social, political and cultural levels larger numbers of people were literate in the vernacular.\(^{489}\) Readers of Germanic languages may well have had a greater need for translations in the vernacular than those for whom Latin was easier to comprehend such as speakers of the Romance languages. For the latter, in particular Italian, Latin differed less from their vernacular language.

In a few cases, vernacular and Latin texts travelled together. The laywoman Heylwich possessed a (manuscript) book of hours (dated 1457) which contained Latin texts as well as Middle Dutch.\(^{490}\) The provenance in a printed Latin sermon collection mentions ownership of Alfert Syl, his wife Lyesbet and their progeny.\(^{491}\) A rare example of women being assisted in the pursuit of the Latin language is found in the gynaecological treatise *Den rosenghaert vanden bevruchten vrouwen* printed by Thomas vander Noot in 1516 (a post incunable). This book, written by Eucharius Rösslin, was intended for pregnant women and midwives,

\(^{491}\) Kronenberg, M.E., *Catalogus van de incunabelen in de Athenaeum-Bibliotheek te Deventer* (Deventer, 1917), nr. 27.
and it contained a list of Latin words with their translations in the Dutch vernacular.\(^{492}\)

Books may also have been useful tools for women in need of learning a different language in case they married outside their own language boundaries. There are some examples of high ranking ladies: Jan van Heelu’s *Rymkroniek van Woeringen* (1291-1294) was either commissioned for or by Margaret of England, to be married into the Brabantine ducal family.\(^{493}\) Mary, the French princess who became Duchess of Guelders, possessed a book of hours in Dutch. Jacoba of Bavaria, granddaughter of Duke Albrecht, ruler of the county of Holland, and wife of Humphrey of Gloucester, possessed books written in English.\(^{494}\) There are other examples from Europe. Anne of Bohemia owned the four Gospels in English.\(^{495}\) And Chaucer may have written his *Legend of Good Women* especially for her.\(^{496}\)

### 2.6.4 Reading habits

The simultaneous action of reading, praying and contemplation was practised at home.\(^{497}\) However, the practice of women reading at home was, of course, not restricted to the Low Countries nor to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Mary is often depicted reading within a domestic setting and this was particular to

\(^{492}\) Vermeulen, *Profijt*, p. 120. According to its prologue the book was solely sold in his printing shop to prevent ‘vileynen’ from acquiring it.


\(^{494}\) Van Oostrom, *Woord*, p. 35. After her death at the castle of Teylingen her English books were sold to an English merchant, presumably because nobody had any use for them in the Low Countries.

\(^{495}\) Coleman, *Literature*, p. 20.


Prayers were often written down and read either at home or in the church. In one (manuscript) prayer book the reader is advised to read the book every day on bent knees. Late medieval secular art must have drawn on realistic and everyday detail. Upper-class women modelled for and on the pious Virgin.

In the incunables, women are presented with similar images. In other forms of art, Mary is also depicted reading. For instance, in a diptych showing the annunciation scene by an anonymous master (dated 1499), Mary's book is placed on a ledge of a screen, while she kneels on a pillow with her shoes cast off, or sometimes she is depicted reading on a prie-dieu. Mary's case is of course special, since her presence in a particular spatial setting is tied in with medieval symbolism.

Mary's reading habits also reflect her special place and purpose in history. For instance, in the annunciation scene she usually reads Isaiah's prophecy of the virgin birth (Isaiah 7:14). Indeed, in an exemplum, Mary explains that she picked up the boec because reading the prophecy of the virgin birth filled her with...
such a profound ardour that she intended to remain chaste in honour of the virgin mentioned in it.\textsuperscript{505}

Mary was also the recipient of reading and contemplative exercises. For instance, the \textit{Obsecro te} (I beseech thee) in which Mary is addressed as \textit{mediatrix}, often occurs in books of hours dedicated to the Virgin and was an extremely popular prayer in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{506} Reading it daily would earn the reader no fewer than hundred days dispensation, with the added bonus that it would be revealed to the reader when the hour of death would strike.\textsuperscript{507} (The reader could then prepare herself beforehand and make amends for sinful behaviour and so be more certain that she would go to heaven.) Of course, these books are prayer books, but saints’ legends and moralising exempla may have been approached in a similar frame of mind.

Small portable books, such as the books of hours, used for religious exercises at home could be carried to church. They contained prayers to be read (or said) during morning and evening and they could be dedicated to the veneration of particular saints.\textsuperscript{508} A secular woman from Zierikzee wrote a message in her book of hours urging those who would find it to return it to her for a reward (which shows that she probably carried it around outside her house).\textsuperscript{509}

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\begin{itemize}
\item In fact, Isaiah mentions a young woman, but in Matthew’s version, referring to Isaiah, it is mentioned that a ‘virgin will conceive’ (Matthew 1:23).
\item \textit{Miraculen}, fol. 94.
\end{itemize}
It was recognised that reading and spiritual exercises could be time-consuming for the secular readers. They simply did not have as much time on their hands as monks had. Gerard Leeu printed an abbreviated version of the seven long canonical hours to accommodate the religious practices of the laity who, by lack of time, could pray the ‘short hours’. In the Reghel der kersten ghelove, part of a printed corpus of guidelines advocating a good Christian lifestyle, it was recommended that the laity read a chapter from the Bible every night, time allowing. In this Reghel, inspired by the modern devotion, reading was regarded as a virtue. And if the laity did not have time to attend mass, five paternosters would do, and after that they should return to their work.

The practice of supplying the laity with simple instructions, set out on a practical and realistic level was not particular to the Low Countries. In the fifteenth-century Opera a ben vivere (Works for Good Living), the wife is advised to retreat to the bedroom after her evening meal for silent reading, praying or meditating. In the late medieval Decor puellarum (Maidenly Decorum) the reader is advised to read a few pages of a pious book for the benefit of the soul.

Medieval books provide a key for our understanding of medieval domestic and personal devotion. The sacred was combined with the profane, religion was combined with utilitarianism. Secular activity was complemented with pious

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514 Carey, 'Laypeople', p. 379.
Already in the thirteenth century, friar Guibert of Tournai presented married women with the picture of Judith meditating on divine truths having withdrawn into her room. In one of the late medieval miracles appended to St. Barbara's legend, a burgher wife at Nijmegen is praying with such intensity and devotion on her knees at home that she does not notice that her deranged husband appropriates a knife with which he attempts to commit suicide.

Secular women were domestic caretakers, they kept the fire going, cooked, and cleaned. A cleansing metaphor, undoubtedly recognisable for housewives, is inserted in the Boec van der biechten. A parallel is drawn between cleaning the soul and the home. Every corner of the home was to be rid of dirt and as dirt was gathered into a heap, so too sins had to be gathered and then confessed. Secular women as well, whilst cooking or washing clothes may have reflected on exempla and female saints' Lives and edifying texts.

Working too was valued for its own sake. The saints provided role models for housewives. Although the idea of Martha and Mary representing respectively the active and contemplative life had its value for (semi-)religious communities, it

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517 Barbara, fol. g1v.


519 Biechten, fol. aa1v.

520 Martha of Bethany was held in high esteem by the semi-religious beguines who were wage earners, see Wehrli-Johns, M., 'Maria und Martha in der religiösen Frauenbewegung', Abendländische Mystik im Mittelalter. Symposium Kloster Engelberg 1984, K. Ruh ed. (Germanistische Symposien Berichtsbände 7; Stuttgart, 1985), p. 359.
could easily serve as a model for secular women.\textsuperscript{521} St. Anne and St. Martha were both venerated as patron saints of housewives.\textsuperscript{522} The Virgin Mary is seen to perform housewifely duties.\textsuperscript{523} Indeed, domestic duties even became valued in the spiritual sense, the most important example being the servant-saints such as the thirteenth-century Margaret of Louvain, or St. Zita of Lucca (who was venerated in Italy).\textsuperscript{524} Secular readers could dwell on the exemplum of the smith in the Scaecspel which is introduced by the quote: 'holy are those who live by working with their hands'.\textsuperscript{525} In an exemplum, a widow, who insisted on being buried in a shroud which she made with her very own hands, is praised and it is concluded that working in moderation benefits both body and soul.\textsuperscript{526} The books reflected ideas and ideals in which secular women could mirror themselves.

We would miss an important point when discussing the reading habits of the laity if we viewed them solely in relation with religion and religious exercises. Olsen has quite clearly shown that reading was deemed of importance to medieval people for several reasons, among which he lists pleasure, 'hygienic justification' (the 'medical' view that reading heightens the emotional state of the audience) and for recreational purposes as well as for solace.\textsuperscript{527}

The mode of reading silently instead of aloud, may have served the laity as well. Individual reading was swifter and internalisation quicker if the eyes only were used without forming words on the lips. The availability of cheaper books would

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{521} Martha is explicitly called waerdinne in the title of her legend, meaning 'hostess' or 'woman of the house'; she served Christ, \textit{Passionael, somerstuc, martha}, fol. 09v. Martha is represented as a housewife, Tigcheler, J., 'Martha en Maria', \textit{Speling} 35 (1983), p. 91.
\textsuperscript{522} Jöckle, \textit{Encyclopedia}, p. 35 and p. 293.
\textsuperscript{523} Bruin, C.C. de, ed., \textit{Tieven Ons Heren Ihesu Cristi. Het pseudo-bonaventura-ludolfiaanse Leven van Jesus Christus} (Verzameling van Middelnederlandse bijbelteksten Miscellanea II; Leiden, 1980). In Egypt, Mary spun and worked with the needle. She took care of Christ's needs.
\textsuperscript{525} Scaecspel, fol. f4.
\textsuperscript{526} Twespraec, fol. i2.
\textsuperscript{527} Olson, G., \textit{Literature as recreation in the later middle ages} (Ithaca, London, 1982), chapters 1-4.
\end{footnotes}
have assisted this process. Reading in private may have become more common in the early modern period, although sometimes women reading on their own ran the risk of being suspected of idleness and seeking sensual pleasure.\footnote{Krol, T., 'Vrouwen en retorica', Vrouwen in taal en literatuur, K. Korevaart ed. (Amersfoort, Leuven, 1988), p. 31.}

2.6.5 Access to books

That late medieval secular women owned (manuscript) books cannot be doubted. As Susan Groag Bell has shown for the fifteenth century, all over Europe the number of book owning laywomen went up as well as their possessions.\footnote{Groag Bell, 'Book owners', table 1.} Systematic research concerning possession of books in the late medieval Low Countries is sadly lacking, but a case can be built up by a quick glance in manuscript catalogues and some secondary literature. Although most references that follow involve religious females’ possession of books we have only extracted information which shows involvement of laywomen. The following paragraphs are intended to show that laywomen were involved in one way or another with Low Countries book culture.

Some secular women donated books to religious houses as a pious deed. Since most did so after the death of the owner it also suggests, \textit{inter alia}, that they possessed and used them during their lifetime. Tine van Grolle, for instance, left a \textit{Maechden Spiegel} to the Adamanshouse in Zutphen. The tertiaries of St. Mary's at Haarlem possessed the Gospels in Dutch, donated by a mother of one of the sisters.\footnote{Boeren, P.C. ed., \textit{Catalogus handschriften van het Rijksmuseum Meermanno-Westreenianum} ('s-Gravenhage, 1979), p. 22. This \textit{Historiebijbel} is an edition based on the translation of the so-called Bible translator of 1360 and the \textit{Historia scholastica} by Peter Comestor (d. 1178).} Frequently, the owner requested to benefit from this pious book donation. In 1453, Alyt Lauwers left an expensive Dutch Bible to a convent of canonesses of St. Agnes near Nijmegen in memory of her parents and her husband.\footnote{Gumbert, \textit{The Dutch}, pp. 59-60.} A Dutch breviary was donated to the convent of Bethlehem near
Utrecht by Johanna, wife of Jan van Walincoerd, with the express wish that the
tertiaries prayed for her family. But also, religious houses benefited from
secular women's book possession. When entering convents, novices or new
sisters could bring books to the community which they had previously used at
home.

But the reverse happened as well. For instance, daughters residing in convents
could copy books for use at their parental home, such as the book of hours that
the Benedictine nun Alheyt van Limberghen finished in 1491 for her mother
Liesbeth who lived at Deventer. The nun Janneke Pinnox from the St.
Elizabeth convent copied St. Barbara's miracles for her parents. She warned
them not to lend it to anyone rashly, however for the love of Barbara they should
not refuse anyone access to it, but Janneke was willing to make another copy.

Some books appear to have been intended for usage of both the female religious
and the female secular. In a fifteenth-century vernacular manuscript in praise of
the religious life and proper comportment, with a heavy emphasis on chastity, not
only was the 'holy virgin' addressed but her (presumably secular and widowed)
mother was admonished to read it too.

Buying books may not have been uncommon. There is evidence that secular
middle class women commissioned manuscript books. For example, widow
Gheertruit Scaden had commissioned a Dutch book with a religious content to be

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532 Gumbert et Lieftinck eds., *Manuscrits*, II, nr. 727. Other laywomen leaving books to
religious establishments are mentioned in Gumbert et Lieftinck eds., *Manuscrits*, II, nr.
385 and 427.

533 Magry, P.J., 'Het Katharijneconvent te Heusden. Een onderzoek naar het boekenbezit en
boekengebruik van een tertiarissenklooster in de late middeleeuwen', OGE 60 (1986), p.
188, who cites examples from Nuremberg.

534 Hermans, J.M.M., 'Laatmiddeleeuwse boekcultuur in het Noorden: zoeken en vinden',
*Boeken in de late middeleeuwen*. Verslag van de Groningse codicologendagen 1992,

535 Lockwood, W.B., 'Mirakelen van Sinte Barbara in Middelnederlandse handschriften', OGE
30 (1957), p. 368.

536 Bergkvist, E. ed., *Dat boec van der ioncfrousacp (sprachlich untersucht und lokalisiert)*,
(Göteborg, 1925), p. 66, strophe 262, lines 8-11.
copied for her, which she donated in 1442 to a convent at Utrecht. In 1498, Gerrit a brother regular from Beverwijk, aged sixty-four and using spectacles, had copied a book of hours for Aef van Bolgerien.

A chance remark made by confessor Nicolaas Christi to certain beguines casually advising them to buy new Evangelie boeckskens may be indicative of a common practice of purchasing books (rather than borrowing them). But even though incunables must have been relatively cheap compared to manuscript books they could still be expensive. However, books did not need to be brand new: second-hand books were in circulation as well. The vernacular manuscript books in possession of the bookseller Wolter de Hoge are thought to have been second-hand, and must have been relatively cheap.

Women bequeath books to other women. Women left books in a commemorative capacity and this is referred to as early as in the thirteenth-century Sachsenspiegel, where books are listed among household items to be passed down. Following this tradition, one Dutch book of hours contained the names of six generations of women.

Alternatively, women may have borrowed from each other or from convents. Statutes of monasteries and semi-religious houses refer to lending to 'strangers' outside the convent. Frequently, they were to leave a written pledge or a security. A manuscript version of the Life of St. Agnes, for instance, was in apparent demand. A Charterhouse nun noted that she had already copied it for the brothers and 'for people from outside who sometimes ask for it and to whom one cannot well give the church lectionary.' In a volume of devout texts in Dutch written by a priest in 1428, it is stated that because the material is weak (probably

539 Naber, Vrouwenleven, pp. 78-79. The beguines were advised that if they would buy, read and study them as well as reflect on their sins, they would be saved.
540 Gumbert, The Dutch, p. 73.
541 Groag Bell, 'Book owners', p. 142.
paper) '... it should not lightly be given out of the house and lent to worldly people, for they are wont to keep books badly'. The manuscript book containing sermons commissioned by Claes van Dorssen and his wife Yde was bequeathed to Bri-\-ggettine nuns at Gouda on the condition that it would only leave the convent for two to three days at any one time.\(^{543}\) And a sixteenth-century message written by sister Duufgen Jansdochter to return the *Leven van Liedwijn* to her at the convent of the sisters St. Dyonisius (regulars at Amsterdam), also points towards the fact that people may have borrowed it from her.\(^{544}\)

Churches possessed books as well. These books could be kept in the church itself, presumably for general use by the public, such as the books chained to the choir in the Buurkerk at Utrecht in the 1440s, but more usually the valuable books were safely stored in a less accessible separate church library.\(^{545}\) It is of course questionable whether and to what extent women would have had direct recourse to them.

### 2.6.6 Secular women owning Dutch vernacular incunables: pertinent examples

The most effective method to demonstrate that someone owned a book is to study the messages of ownership written by the owner. Of course, a provenance is only an indication of possession, not of actual readership.\(^{546}\)

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542 These two examples are by Gumbert, *The Dutch*, p. 75.
544 Jongen en Schotel eds., *Liedewij*, p. 131. She may, of course, have taken it out of the convent herself. I would like to thank Mrs. H. F. Peeters of KB The Hague for dating the handwriting at my request.
545 For examples of church libraries, see Meinsma, *Bibliotheeken*, pp. 91-99; also Wüstefeld, W.C.M., *De boeken van de Grote of Sint Bavokerk. Een bijdrage tot de geschiedenis van het middeleeuwse boek in Haarlem* (Hollandse studiën 24; Hilversum, 1989).
546 See examples of some illiterate female book owners who possessed or were bequeathed books, Meale, C.M., '... alle the bokes that I haue of latyn, englisch, and frensch': laywomen and their books in late medieval England', *Women and literature in Britain, 1150-1500*, C.M. Meale ed. (Cambridge studies in medieval literature 17; Cambridge, 1993), p. 133.
Although evidence of book ownership amongst women from the urban middle classes is not easily found, there are some examples of women who owned Dutch vernacular incunables. Lotte Hellinga points out that among the readers of books printed by Gerard Leeu were remarkably many women. Also incorporated in this section are provenances which date from the sixteenth century; these are frequently based on dating of the handwriting of the owner (and handwriting did of course not change at the turn of a century).

A copy of the *Epistelen ende Evangeliën* was in possession of 'Joffrou Marie Aelbert van Leeuwen's huysvrou'; it had previously been owned by her father. The family is part of the upper echelons of society of Utrecht. Another copy of the same as well as a *Kalendarium* were owned by Agnyes Jaecop Raewen daughter. Otto von Passau's *Boec des gulden throens of der 24 ouden* was in possession of 'juffrouw Augustina van Holland' before she left it at her death to the Convent of Nazareth. The Dutch translation of the *Somme rurale*, a code of law, by Jean Boutillier, was in the possession of Jozyne Triest, widow of Willem van Stapelen. *Teven ons liefs heren Jesu Christi* belonged to the sixteenth-century Jenniken Art Visser 'in den Türksen Keijser' (perhaps a public house). Extracts from the Middle Dutch *De bello Judaico*, and perhaps the *Historie van die seven wise mannen van Romen* and a Middle Dutch tract by Jean Gerson, were owned by the widow 'Joeffrou Floris van Jutphaes'.

Female owners of the female saints' *Lives* and exempla follow. A *Twespraec* (bound with Gerard Leeu's edition of the *Leven der heiligen vaderen*) which had

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547 There is not much evidence; most derives from testaments of widows, Meale, 'Bokes', p. 132. There is also much work involved in the treatment of the provenances; the most time-consuming element is perhaps to retrace the families from which the women originate in order to define their social stratum.
551 Clark, *Collectors*, p. 60.
been presented before 1530 by Diuwer Albertsdochter's godmother to the
Convent of the Eleven Thousand Virgins at Amsterdam.\(^{553}\) A Twespraec bound
with *Der bienboeck* had been left by Beert van Mouswijck in her and her parents'
commemoration.\(^{554}\) A complete *Passio*ael was owned in the sixteenth century by
Maeiken, daughter of Wyllem Bouvens and widow of Wyllem Jan Reyersz.\(^{555}\) Her
family was involved in the legal business at Maastricht. A sole *winterstuc*
belonged to a certain Margriete Bock, and another copy of it by 'Aecht Jacop
Tymansz wijf te Harlem by dat oude gasthuus' (near the old hospital).\(^{556}\) Her
husband Jacob was the church warden of the St. Bavo church.\(^{557}\) In the sixteenth
century, 'Juffrou Barbara Schroot' owned a *Leven van Liedwij*.\(^{558}\) Similar sorts of
books, in particular saint's legends and books of vices and virtues, which secular
women owned, are found in female religious establishments.\(^{559}\) Secular and
religious tastes were alike.

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552 Someren, J.F. van, ed., *Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit te Utrecht. Incunabelen
beschreven door Dr. J. Alblas en uitgegeven met toelichtende aanteekeningen, platen en
facsimiles* (Utrecht, 1922), nr. 220. The books are bound together.


555 Hellinga-Querido, 'Betekenis', p. 20. Clark, *Collectors*, p. 58, reads 'Maerken'.


558 Jongen en Schotel eds., *Liedwij*, p. 129.

559 Compare the list compiled by Deaneasy, *Bible*, pp. 110-115. Some examples from
convents will elaborate the point. In doing so, it ought to be borne in mind that it is not
spelt out by the librarians drawing up lists whether they dealt with manuscripts or
incunables. Since we look at book culture in general, it does not matter here which
medium was used. All titles refer to books in Middle Dutch. Specified as books kept in the
library (as opposed to those kept in the sacristy) and marked as 'books of study', were,
amongst others, part of the *Vitae patrum, Legenda aurea, Lives of Anne, Agnes*
(including miracles), *Barbara* (including passion), Clare, Elizabeth of Hungary, Liedwij,
Ursula and also the story of Griselda (!), a book on the miracles of Our Lady and the
Adamanshous were given a *Sielentroest* and possessed a legend of Catherine,
Doornink-Hoogenraad, M.M., *Adamanshuis een zusterhuis van de moderne devotie in
*Genoogliche en lustige historien. Laatmiddeleeuwse geschiedschrijving in Nederland*, B.
124-125, for the many female saints' *Lives* in possession of the Augustinian canonesses
at the convent of Maaseik. The tertiaries of St. Catharinaberg Oisterwijk possessed a *Life
of Catherine*, Basse, *Aandeel*, nrs. 1.3, 1.26. The Brigittines at Mariënwater/Maria-Refugie
possessed many books among which Bridget's *Revelations*, as well as the legends of
Barbara and Catherine of Alexandria, Kreek, M.L. de, 'De bibliotheek van
'Mariëwater/Maria-Refugie'; *Birgitta van Zweden 1303-1373. 600 jaar kunst en cultuur
2.7 Conclusion

Medieval interpretations of ideas about women in female saints' *Lives* and exempla ought to be set within a wider framework of contemporary medical, scientific, and philosophical thought. A bivalent attitude towards women existed. It was claimed that women were inferior, misled, not as clever or intelligent as men, lascivious and so on, but other ideas about women circulated as well. It would seem that for every claim there was a counterclaim. Although the roles in which females are cast are varied, the inequality of the sexes found in medieval sources in general has influenced modern scholars' interpretation of ideas about women to a large extent. It is however questionable to what extent the medieval common woman objected to the thoughts and ideas she was presented with, especially since she was not invariably portrayed in a bad light.

The printing press was a new medium, churning out books for a vernacular reading public. The manuscript books and the earliest printed books have certain themes in common. The genres which interested noble and rich patronesses before and during the advent of the presses - usually manufactured in sumptuous individualised manuscript books - are repeated by the printing press. The same appetite for saints' *Lives* and edifying literature is classed prominently among them.

Evidence from women's active involvement with the printing presses is scanty: there were a small number of female publishers printing texts, some women were active in printing devotional images, and only a few female authors appeared in print.

Books could be more rapidly and widely distributed than ever before since they were easily copied and must have been relatively inexpensive. They were published with the intention of being sold to men and women who could afford

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them, who would buy them with the intention of reading them. The study of incunables in the vernacular is important because these books allow us an insight into the taste of readers who were untutored in Latin but wealthy enough to buy books. They provide us with a yardstick of literary culture.

The main contribution of the modern devotion in all its diversity to lay book culture is promotion of the vernacular. Also, the reader was encouraged to understand the text which brought her closer to God and salvation. The individual was to assist in the working out of her own salvation, using books of an edifying nature and suitable methods of interiorizing knowledge. A lay appetite was wetted for these books in the vernacular. With the invention of the printing press it was possible, to an extent larger than ever before, for the laity to have individual access to books. Inner piety, practical charity, and self-questioning, were elements which remained in use well into the sixteenth century.  

The common woman as literary recipient is to be found among the middle and upper middle classes of urban society. Ideas about women expounded on in the books were not created in a vacuum. Similar ideas and images of women to those found in literature are mirrored in late medieval urban society. The middle classes are engaged in artisan, administrative and commercial activities. Despite being categorised as illiterati and being presented with divergent attitudes towards female literate abilities, middle class girls appear to have had access to training in literacy. Vernacular readership was not always favoured by the established church, particularly if it concerned biblical excerpts. However, legends and exempla promoted Christian values and they were advocated under the influence of the modern devotion. The reading of books was promoted in the home environment and it could be considered part of domestic spirituality. There is an overlap between religious and secular female reading. Access to books was

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not too difficult and certain women can even be identified as owners of books in the Dutch vernacular. To the books we now turn.
3 Ideas about women in some aspects of marriage

Gradually, in the early middle ages, the Christian church obtained a hold over marriage issues to such an extent that in Europe households became commensurable units. Based on similar Christian morals and regulations, households shared a uniformity based on the unit of husband, wife and children. This chapter deals with the basic unit consisting of husband and wife, the next chapter deals with women in other family settings.

What ideas were a fifteenth century reading public presented with concerning women and marriage? They fall into a few categories which are best discussed firstly by highlighting three conjugal relationships: Eve and Adam, Mary and Joseph, and Anne and Joachim. This allows us to establish a common framework of themes which were considered noteworthy for a medieval audience. Secondly, since medieval women were defined in terms of their marital state it is necessary in order to validate the prevalent ideas surrounding women inside wedlock to discuss other categories as well: those of unmarried women, the virgins, and women who had been married, the widows.

The goals we have set ourselves are to explore ideas about women and to find echoes of textual presentations of women in social practice. In this chapter, an attempt has been made to relate some views of marriage which appear in the sources to aspects of the social reality of the readers. This process is made difficult since 'evidence' of direct female interaction with the text is lacking. Furthermore, stereotypical ideas are difficult to relate to social experience.

3.1 Trends in historiography

A more pressing problem is that there is a chronic shortage of scholarship concerning 'real life' issues of women in the late medieval Low Countries, and in

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particular those viewed from a female’s point of view. It is relatively recently that Dutch historiography turned to these aspects of social history, influenced as it had previously been more by German scholarship. And it is just the attitudes towards women and also female mentalities that we are interested in.

Although Martha Howell’s overview of historiographical trends is informative she does not mention this fairly recent interest in her overview on Low Countries in her discussion on ‘Germanic historiography’ (of which she considers Dutch and Belgian historiography to be a part). This should not be reckoned too heavily against her since the most comprehensive and best bibliographies on women’s history in the Low Countries post-date her article. However, despite recent interest in attitudes we are still not well-informed about female experience. Nevertheless, an attempt is made here to relate the text to the consumer.


3.2 Discussion of various marriages

3.2.1 Eve and Adam

The marriage of Eve and Adam is a good starting point for a discussion on women in connection with marriage. It was the first marriage ever to be instituted by God and the couple made such a mess of things that they were cast from paradise. Medieval people felt they were still living with the consequences of the actions of the first pair. Paradise was lost. People were weak and prone to sinning. It was the task of the church to guide men on the correct path. In our sources, the biblical story is never retold in much detail, it is rather superficially interpreted and frequently in a gender-specific way. This suggests that it was well and widely known.

Since our sources only refer superficially to the paradise story, I have used the first printed Dutch edition of the Bible as a reminder.\(^\text{566}\) It tells us Adam was created from dust, Eve was created from Adam's rib. They were to be fruitful and multiply. Eve listened to the serpent instead of the Lord and she ate from the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil, simply translated as *hout*, and she gave Adam also the fruit. When they were aware they were naked they covered themselves. Eve was punished by God to give birth with pain and she was placed under man's command (*heerscapie*). Adam, because he had listened to his wife, had to work for their keep by the sweat of his brow and henceforth all people were condemned to mortality. Thus, the myth serves to explain the trials and tribulations of daily life. It also explains the lost state of immortality (ability not to die) and impassability (ability not to suffer).

\(^{566}\) Genesis 2 and 3 are printed in the vernacular *Biblia* (Jacob Jacobszoon van der Meer and Mauricius Yemantszoon, 10 January 1477) BL shelf mark I G 47101 and I G 47102 fol. 3v.
Many medieval theologians and moralists devoted attention to aspects of the relationship of Eve and Adam, both inside and outside paradise. The first couple were thought to have experienced the perfect relationship inside: innocent and free from concupiscence. St. Augustine (354-430) commented on the first marriage and his ideas proved influential. In short, he thought that there was a perfect harmony between both in paradise, free of lust and controlled by reason. It was reason which ruled over the sexual organs. Through disobedience and original sin, paradise was lost. In the post-lapsarian world, God had punished people by taking away the control over their will and henceforth desire could reign supreme. Augustine incorporated advice that St. Paul had supplied to the first Christian communities. Through grace that appertains to people through the sacramental value of marriage unchaste feelings could be combated. The sacramental aspect value can be traced back to Paul who had stated that man shall be joined to his wife; which he had called a sacrament (Ephesians 5:32).

Although, according to St. Augustine, no sexual act could take place without unchaste feelings the act was without sin if it occurred solely for the reason given by God: procreation. Indeed, *proles* was one of the threefold good a marriage would bring (the other two are: *fides* and *sacramentum*). Also, within a conjugal relationship one had to fulfil the marital debt, to avoid the partner from falling into sin with another. St. Paul had stated that husband and wife must give to each other what is due to them (1 Corinthians 7:3-4). The argument that marriage is good for *fides*, *proles* and *sacramentum* is partially repeated by the learned De Eyb. He introduced the passage on Eve and Adam showing that marriage is good because it was instituted in paradise, children resulted from it, it was a

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remedy against sin and he recognises the holiness of marriage (although he
does not call marriage a sacrament, but holy matrimony: heilighen echtschap).^^^

What then are we told about the relationship of Eve and Adam and the
apportioning of blame for eating from the Tree of Knowledge? Sometimes Eve
and Adam were equally blamed: they both broke God's commandment.^^^ De Eyb
does not apportion blame but simply mentions that in a pre-lapsarian world Adam
was created in God's image, and Eve in man's image, and that they were to
people the world and enjoy immortality.^^^ In an exemplum, Adam alone is
blamed for people losing their freedom.^^^ In it, the fox usually teases the naked
she-monkey. He now finds the silly monkey fully dressed but tied with a rope, and
he is quick to draw a parallel between Adam's nakedness and freedom in
paradise, and his being dressed and having lost his freedom outside it.

In the Spiegel, Eve was given to Adam as a companion (mede ghesellinne).^^^
Ghesellinne is also used in the first printed edition of the Bible.^^^ In the Spiegel,
Adam ate from the Tree because he loved Eve and did not want to disappoint
her; he yielded to her wish to eat, albeit with some reservation (onwillichlic).^^^
The serpent found the wife 'less cautious' and Adam 'smarter and cleverer' (more
intelligent as we would phrase it today).^^^

The idea that Eve was not created from Adam's head or feet but rather from his
rib, which meant that she was not to be his head nor his slave, but his equal, is
echoed in the Scaecspel, in a discussion on the moves that the chess player is

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568 Ehebüchlein, fols. h1-h1v.
569 Sielentroest, fol. 12.
570 Ehebüchlein, fol. e3v. In the Dutch incunable, De Eyb does not appear to be particularly
positive on Adam or Eve, as is argued by Johnson, S.M., 'Luther's Reformation and
(un)holy matrimony', Journal of family history 17 (1992), p. 277, concerning the German
version. De Eyb praises marriage because it is instigated in paradise, Ehebüchlein, fol.
e8v.
571 Parabolen, fols. i8-k1v.
572 Spiegel, fol. 5v.
573 Biblia, fol. 3b.
574 Spiegel, fol. 5v.
575 Spiegel, fol. 6.
advised to make on the board using the Queen. We are told that women should wear a head-dress in church, and Adam should wear trousers not only to cover his nakedness, but as a sign that he should remain faithful to his wife. The passage is followed by a short prescribed conduct of matrimonial life. Husband and wife should live together with respect for each other and they are responsible to God as well as to society, to all good folk. Although the man is superior by nature and wiser, his wife may be better than he supposes. Should a good wife perchance be cleverer and wiser than her unintelligent (dwaes) husband than she is to rule him. If they are both of the same disposition by nature, they are to be faithful to each other and support each other in harmony.

In the introduction to exempla dealing with men’s resistance to female beauty it is explained that Adam, the burger of paradise, was cast from it because of his wife. Here it is meant that Eve was so beautiful that Adam could not resist Eve’s temptation to eat from the Tree. Because of women, the text continues, sin began and men must die. Even men as strong as Samson, wise as Solomon and holy as David have fallen victim. The exempla mention other men bravely resisting female beauty: Alexander who returns a beautiful maiden (who was part of his spoils of war), when he learnt she was engaged, and in similar fashion Scipio sends back a Carthaginian virgin complete with her ransom which she is allowed to use for her marriage and the philosopher Xenocrates proves his resolve by not allowing himself to be seduced by a beautiful prostitute.

The King of the Bees, Thomas van Cantimpré tells us, rules an obedient people. It was this obedience that Eve and Adam did not keep in paradise and therefore

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576 Scaecspel, fol. b4v. See for this view also Müller, Lehre, p. 315 and Ferrante, Women, pp. 32-35. It is in alignment with the positive ideas on Eve as discussed in chapter 2.
577 See Demyttenaere, A., 'De God van Augustinus en het geheim van de gesluierde vrouw. Enkele passages in een tractaat over de Driëenheid', Vrouw, familie en macht. Bronnen over vrouwen in de middeleeuwen, M. Mostert et al. eds. (Amsterdamse historische reeks grote serie 11; Hilversum, 1990), pp. 195-234. According to St. Paul, the man need not cover his head because he is created in the image of God, whilst woman reflects the glory of man and needs to wear a sign of authority (based on 1 Corinthians 11: 7-10).
578 Twespraec, fol. o6v.
579 Twespraec, fol. o6v. For Scipio see also Kaetspel, fols. n6-n6v.
they were cast out. They, elaborating on lechery and discussing the vice of evil advice, points to Eve as the main culprit: she seduces Adam 'who was perfect in wisdom and beauty'.

Thus, the apportioning of blame is less often equally shared, and sometimes Eve solely is blamed and sometimes Adam. There is not just one or even one consistently persistent interpretation of the nature of the marriage in paradise, but rather there are several variants. Therefore, it is difficult to defend the position that all women were thought to have been equally responsible for Eve's role in the Fall. It is also difficult to observe rising trends on a chronological time scale in that medieval society increasingly apportioned blame to Eve or thinking that her character traits changed for the worse.

3.2.2 Mary and Joseph

Two facets of Mary's conjugal life with Joseph are of particular importance. Her relationship to Joseph changed in late medieval hagiography, indicative of the fact that other models were required for veneration. Also, Mary and Joseph brought the church into some difficulties because, as seen, the sexual act within marriage was considered good because of procreative purposes, but how could the dogma of Mary's perpetual virginity be reconciled with this idea? In consensus-copula debate of the mid-twelfth century some argued that a true marriage was valid by consent only, whilst others pronounced ideas that consent and coitus made marriage. The latter theory is summarised by the decretist Gratian who combined the consensual with the coital theory in his influential

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580 Bienboeck, fol. d2.
581 Bienboeck, fol. p1.
582 Müller, Lehre.
584 This trend is mentioned by Pleij, Sneeuwpoppen, pp. 262-265. However, if nothing else, the sources are too scarce to indicate rising trends.
Concordia discordantium canonum (ca. 1140). But, though not completely, the consensualists triumphed: words in the present tense brought about a valid marriage. The relationship of Mary and Joseph was based on emotional rather than the sexual ties.

Sections featuring in the Passionae on Mary's marriage are based on second-century Apocrypha, where Anne and Joachim, Mary's parents, dedicated her to the temple until she became of age. When she was fourteen she was to be married. But, as she explains, she was incapable because she had vowed to remain a virgin. It was decided to leave a decision to the Lord, and that a husband should be chosen from those who brought a branch to the altar and on which the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove would perch. And only the man whose branch bloomed was to become her husband. At first Joseph considered it improper that he, as an old man, should marry a young woman and he refused to place his branch on the altar, but when he finally did the flower appeared. Prompted by this sign he went ahead with the wedding.

Mary's reasons for marrying are spelt out as well. In the Spiegel, it was God (in this sense Jesus) who preferred his mother married. Had she not married she would have been accused that she was lascivious which had resulted in her pregnancy. Also, she could also use a man's help; this reads like a role reversal of Eve's role in paradise. Also, Christ required a human form. Mary needed a witness in Joseph of her chastity. It is argued that marriage is sacred and, yet again to allow for the unconsummated marriage, it is stated that it is allowed to

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585 For this debate, see Gold, P.S., 'The marriage of Mary and Joseph in the twelfth-century ideology of marriage', Sexual practices and the medieval church, J.A. Brundage and V.L. Bullough eds. (Buffalo, New York, 1982), pp. 102-117.
587 Brundage, Law, p. 274.
preserve chastity within marriage. Also, it is mentioned, those who are married should not despair of their salvation, because it is proven that marriage is sacred and good. Thus, the marriage of Mary and Joseph is here related to the final argument that marriage is good. In the description of the annunciation scene in the Passionael similar arguments are voiced.\textsuperscript{590}

When Mary's cult reached its height between the twelfth and fourteenth century and the human form of Jesus was stressed, Joseph's virginity came under scrutiny. Joseph is described as a senile man, whose desire for coupling had withered.\textsuperscript{591} The simplicity and humility of Joseph had resulted in his becoming a figure of ridicule, a henpecked elderly husband who prepares porridge for the child and washes the dishes. The special attention devoted to Joseph's consideration whether it was proper to marry such a young woman as Mary may point to the fact that disparagement of age between marriage partners was not commended by a late medieval reading public.\textsuperscript{592} This is supported by the exempla in which disparagement in relation to age plays a role, to which we shall return below.

However, in the fifteenth century, the image of Joseph altered considerably. Joseph shed his image of old man. A young man emerged who played the role of caring husband and took responsibility for his share in raising the Christ child. St. Anne rejoices in Mary's choice and emphasises Joseph's strong points: he is chaste, god-fearing, and righteous and she knows him well having shared many meals with each other and enjoyed each other's company as if he were her own son.\textsuperscript{593} Joseph has come into his own. Already in the fourteenth century his feast appeared in the missals of Liège, Louvain and Utrecht, and Jan van Denemarken, wrote not only on St. Anne but he also authored legends of Joseph

\textsuperscript{589} Spiegel, fol. 15v.
\textsuperscript{590} Passionael, winterstuc, onser vrouwen annunciacio, fol. g3.
\textsuperscript{591} He is an old man in Passionael, somerstuc, onser vrouwen gheboert, fol. u1v.
\textsuperscript{592} Brandenbarg, Familieleven, p. 188.
\textsuperscript{593} Historie anna, fols. g8-g8v. In this incunable, Anne's husband Cleophas is identified as Joseph's brother.
and Joachim. The cult of St. Joseph as caring husband was promoted in conjunction with his exemplary role as father.

Jean Gerson and cardinal Pierre d'Ailly worked for Joseph's rehabilitation. The active promotion of his cult may have been a deliberate attempt to stem the tide of feminisation of sainthood, by creating new strong male models as a counterpart for new female saints. David Herlihy links the cult of Joseph to the increasing significance of the family within urban society. Indeed, from the second half of the fifteenth century up to the first half of the sixteenth century Joseph's depiction in art in Germany and the Low Countries is that of provider and protector of the Holy Family. Whatever the reasons, the goals set for the holy husbands such as Joseph were much more realistic than the tasks set to women as reflected by the cult of Mary (such as virginal conception and virginal birth). Mary, of course, continued to occupy her special place.

3.2.3 Anne and Joachim

As explained in the first chapter, St. Anne became increasingly popular in the later middle ages. Since the incunables in which she features have been written so close to the end of the middle ages they are an important gauge to marital relationships of that time. Anne's relationship with her husband Joachim was easier to identify with than that of the lofty, inimitable and ever virginal Mary with Joseph.

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596 Vauchez, Sainthood, pp. 268-269, signalled an increase in the number of female saints in the later middle ages.
597 Herlihy, Households, pp. 127-129.
598 Seitz, Verehrung, pp. 326-332.
Anne’s marriage with Joachim is exemplary. They lead simple, honest and humble lives. They share their goods with the temple, the poor and pilgrims. They are promoters of the caring, sharing and loving conjugal relationship. They display a loving attitude towards each other: Anne thanks Joachim for looking after her well, they address each other in terms of endearment, they are in agreement in their decisions (such as sharing their possessions with the needy), and they live in peace and love keeping the commandments of God.

Anne’s sexual relations play a role: Anne remarried twice after her first husband’s death. Van Denemarcken goes to great lengths to demonstrate that she remarried only because she was still fertile after Joachim had died and could bear children and not out of any libidinous desire. He must have been worried that the image of the pious fertile woman could be confused for a lecherous old female. He calculates she must have been fifty when her last husband died, and since at this age women become infertile, he asserts, she did not marry again. The trinubium of Anne resulted in her having three daughters by three successive husbands.

### 3.2.4 Summary

The audience of the incunables was presented with marital issues. Various ideas regarding women within the conjugal relationship have been addressed in the sources. Speaking in broad terms and based on the incunables under investigation, two elements are noteworthy.

The first element consists of the emotional ties between the spouses. Eve and Adam’s relationship is depicted as strained, perhaps because the authors regretted how much human kind had lost: impassability and immortality.

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599 *Passionaël* (Leeu, 1480), *somerstuc, anna*, fol. C1, and *Historie, getijden, exemplelen anna*, fols. c1-c1v.
600 *Historie anna*, fols. c4-c6v.
602 *Historie, getijden, exemplelen anna*, fol. e5.
Emphasis is laid on the role of Eve who is frequently accused for having a hand in the Fall because of her act of disobedience, but Adam is blamed as well. Stress is also laid on Eve's position in her relation with Adam. On the whole, Eve should be subservient, but Adam should rule her justly. Because of their chaste marriage and the rejuvenation of Joseph, Mary's and Joseph's emotional ties are emphasised. But it is in Anne's and Joachim's marriage that the partners share an admirable and congenial marital relationship respecting and caring for each other.

The second element is the sexual union within marriage. It was tainted with original sin in the case of Eve and Adam. Mary's position was unique, she remained a virgin within marriage (even after giving birth), despite Joseph's rejuvenation. Anne's sexual relationships were important since her fecundity was explicitly mentioned. The two components of the emotional relationship between the spouses and the sexuality of women play a great part in the sources.

3.3 Virginity, marriage, widowhood

The tripartite division of women according to their sexual status, that of virginity, marriage and widowhood, is a topos in the middle ages. It encompasses all secular women. The concept created a sense of order, of belonging to a group, just as men were ranked according to their 'career': work, fight or pray. The behavioural rules derived from the various states were meant to guide women's real life. It was one of the categories used by preachers to communicate their message to females, although other divisions were used as well.

603 ‘... the concept of the three estates and the behavioural expectations for each were so all-pervasive as to constitute a set of shared assumptions, a commonality of opinion expressed in formal legislation and informal social controls', Hallissy, Maids, p. 7.
604 See Casagrande, C., 'De vrouw onder toezicht', Geschiedenis van de vrouw, G. Duby en M. Perrot general eds. (5 vols., Amsterdam, 1992), II, pp. 75-80. Other categories are, for instance, age and social status.
3.3.1 Virgins

In the church, marriage was never as positively valued as virginity. Particularly when a monastic audience was addressed, virginity was praised. St. Jerome had even used a rating system: virginity scored a hundred percent, widowhood sixty and marriage thirty. After she had borne her husband children and after she had been widowed, Elizabeth of Hungary put on a religious habit, her confessor friar Coenraad tells us, lest she should lose the hundredfold fruit. In such a remarkable way her virginity was symbolically restored.

Only female virgins can perform certain special acts. Two virgins can catch an elephant. When Thomas van Cantimpré views a horn in the church at Bruges he assumes it belonged to a unicorn, and reminds us that only a virgin can tempt the animal to rest his head in her lap. Because of her innocence, reminding the reader of the prelapsarian world, a girl can escape from enclosed spaces and handle wild birds.

Mary confers special graces on virgins. Mary is the embodiment of the combination of virginity and sanctity. A young devout virgin who had looked after a dilapidated statue of Mary, lay dying in a humble stable but she was collected by a heavenly cortège to be assumed to heaven. The marital state of the celestial ladies who accompany Mary is marked by their clothes: the striped clothes were worn by chaste ladies who had died as a wives 'but their glory is great'. Those who wear white are virgins who had vowed chastity, and those clad in red, best liked by Mary, were virgins who had died as martyrs.

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605 Based on Matthew 13:4-9. See Spiegel, fol. 15v, where this tripartite system is discussed in connection with the marriage of Mary and Joseph; here it is pointed out that mutual chastity in marriage is better than marriage (with sexual relations).
606 Passionael, winterstuc, elyzabeth, fol. c3v.
607 Geesten, fols. s6v-s7 and Twespraec, fol. k6v.
608 Bienboeck, fols. n6v-n7.
609 Bienboeck, fol. q4v.
610 Miraculen, fols. 77-79.
The virginal state is praised, particularly in the legends of the early medieval female saints. The sensational stories serve to point out the saints’ special status, in particular in imitating Christ's suffering. The legends of these virgins may be regarded as an advertisement campaign for the new Christian faith. The fragile St. Blandina (2nd century) is being extra fortified by God in order to withstand excruciating pain while tortured, and her endurance stuns the public.®

But also in later medieval saints’ Lives, such as that of Liedwij of Schiedam, suffering continues to play a great role. After the saint had fallen whilst ice skating and subsequently suffered various ailments, she was taught by her confessor Jan Pot, who was influenced by the modern devotion, to concentrate on Christ's suffering.612

Virgins go to extraordinary lengths to escape marriage. In order to prevent detection they dress up as men. Jakeline, who was reputed to have met Pope Innocent III, escaped her brother’s intention of marrying her off by swimming out of his reach and dressing up as a male and living as a hermit afterwards.613 Some saints sought refuge in a monastery. Posing as a monk in order to escape marriage has its drawbacks too. St. Euphrosyne (5th century) enters a monastery as Smaragdus, but because of her beauty, even when disguised as a male, the fellow monks started having unchaste thoughts.614 St. Eugenia, who enters a monastery pretending to be Eugenius, is accused of attempted rape by the widow Melantia.615 The widow had unsuccessfully tried to seduce the monk, and now takes revenge by accusing 'him'.

It is especially female saints who are involved with conflicts arising out of their sexual lives.616 Demons occur frequently in our sources in connection with chastity. It is not only a dragon but also a devil who visits St. Margaret in her

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612 Liedwij, fol. b3v.
613 Bienboeck, fols. n7v-n8.
614 *Passionael* (Veldener), *somerstuc*, *eufrosina*, fols. O02-O02v.
615 *Passionael* (Veldener), *somerstuc*, *eugenia*, fols. P08-P08v.
prison. On her question why he tempts so many Christians, he replies that he hates good folk and enjoys seducing them, he also would like to prevent people from being saved.\textsuperscript{617} A most cunning devil makes his entry in the life of St. Justina (ca. 300): he appears to the young virgin disguised as a young lady who wishes to share the saint’s continent life.\textsuperscript{618} The disguised devil argued that it would surely be disobedient (and obedience was just the trait recommended to women) to live in continence and so to act against the Lord’s command to be fruitful and multiply, which, as seen, God had recommended to Eve and Adam in paradise. Although the young saint was sorely tempted, she manages to ignore the devil. The fourth devil appears in the guise of a beautiful young man, who lies on her bed and desires to embrace her shamelessly. The saint could not be persuaded to join him. The function of the devil in these early medieval legends is to tempt ladies to give up their chastity. When they recognise the devil, who personifies the sexual danger which they face, he disappears.

In the legends where a potential worldly lover/seducer/husband/rapist is mentioned he embodies unchristian pagan behaviour. The brave Eutropia, instead of taking flight with the inhabitants of Reims for the pagans, decides to stay at the city with her steadfast brother St. Nicasius.\textsuperscript{619} They are aware that they will be slaughtered imminently, but Eutropia also fears being raped. Not with ‘female power but with divine revenge’ she manages to scratch out a heathen’s eyes and so she dies by the sword and escapes being raped.

But the pagan is often also associated, if not identified, with the idols. For instance, after St. Petronilla (no date) has starved herself to death rather than to marry Flactus, the outraged pagan intended forces her female friend to marry him or worship idols.\textsuperscript{620} She is condemned to starve to death when she is unable to

\textsuperscript{616} Weinstein and Bell, \textit{Saints}, p. 97; about 40\% of female saints, and only about 20\% of male saints.
\textsuperscript{617} \textit{Passiona\’el, somerstuc, margriet}, fol. m1.
\textsuperscript{618} \textit{Passiona\’el, somerstuc, justina}, fol. y2v and Sielentroest, fols. 103-103v.
\textsuperscript{619} \textit{Passiona\’el (Leeu, 1480)}, \textit{winterstuc, eutropia}, fols. aa8-bb1.
\textsuperscript{620} \textit{Passiona\’el, somerstuc, petronellen}, fols. f4-f4v.
choose between the two evils. St. Juliana (early 4th century) will only consent to
sleep with the man to whom she is affianced if he relinquishes his pagan believes
and becomes a Christian.\footnote{Passionael, winterstuc, juliaen, fol. x4v.} St. Ursula is fortunate to be able to strike a deal with
her intended pagan bridegroom: she leaves for a pilgrimage for three years to
Rome to fulfil her dedication to her virginity, while he is persuaded to be baptised
and receive instruction on the Christian faith.\footnote{Passionael, somerstuc, elf dusent maechden, fol. A1.}

The often lascivious bridegroom signifies heathenism, and in most cases, the
young female heroine represents not only virginity but also, in cases of early
medieval saints, the new Christian faith. The virgins are willing to suffer for their
faith to extreme lengths in rape scenes. Rape scenes show the heathen seducer,
the diabolic tempter, in contrast to the female virgin, who has chosen as her lover
Christ himself.\footnote{Gravdal, K., Ravishing maidens. Writing rape in medieval French literature and law
(Philadelphia, 1991), p. 24.} The scenes also serve to demonstrate the omnipotence of God,
who invariably protects the virgin. The virgin never comes to harm in them. When
St. Agnes (d. ca. 350) refuses to marry, because she has taken Christ as a lover,
she is put naked in a brothel, but God covers her with a white cloak.\footnote{Passionael, winterstuc, agniet, fols. f9-f10.} When the
judge's son lunges forward to rape her he is killed and consequently Agnes is put
to death. In another Life, the judge who intends to do his 'dirty business' with St.
Anastasia (d. ca. 304) becomes mad through divine intervention.\footnote{Passionael, winterstuc, anastasia, fol. o5.}
The intended
rape of St. Euphemia (d. ca. 303) is prevented by God's power who renders the
hand of her attacker immobile; she is also threatened by gang rape, but
fortunately she is saved by the chancellor who has been converted by the
heroine.\footnote{Passionael, winterstuc, anastasia, fol. o5.}

The excuse a lady saint often uses to counteract the lascivious bridegroom is that
she is already betrothed or married to Christ the bridegroom. Here we have
moved into the realm of mystical marriage: marriage of the virgin to Christ the

\footnote{Passionael, winterstuc, juliaen, fol. x4v.}
\footnote{Passionael, somerstuc, elf dusent maechden, fol. A1.}
\footnote{Gravdal, K., Ravishing maidens. Writing rape in medieval French literature and law
\footnote{Passionael, winterstuc, agniet, fols. f9-f10.}
\footnote{Passionael, winterstuc, anastasia, fol. o5.}
bridegroom. The honour of metaphorically becoming Christ's bride had been bestowed on Mary first. The marriage between Christ and Mary was couched in terms of the biblical Song of Songs. The Canticle had proved a good source for metaphorical love relationships such as love between Christ and his Church, based on St. Paul (Ephesians 5:25), bridegroom and bride, God and the individual human soul, and the Word and the Soul. The twelfth-century Cistercian Bernard of Clairvaux modelled a series of sermons on the Song of Songs, preached for a public of adult novices and monks who had grown up in the world (as opposed to oblates who entered at a young age) and who were familiar with ideas surrounding marriage.

Our sources show only scanty references to the marriage of Mary and Christ, which may point to the fact that the metaphor of Mary's marriage was no longer of such importance as it had been. In the legend of Mary's assumption a few references to the Canticle are incorporated. The emphasis of the legend lies not on the marriage metaphor but of course on Mary's integral assumption. But she is to do so in the capacity of his Bride: come from Lebanon my bride (based on Song of Songs 4:8), and at the same time Mary is enthroned by her son.

Sometimes, holy women marry themselves to devout followers. Mary offers herself as bride to fervent believers. A young man excuses himself from his wedding banquet because of his intention to complete his devotions to Mary, and she whisks him off to heaven before he is able to consummate the marriage. After a young man has just come into an inheritance and, pressed by his friends, has taken a wife, Mary offers herself as friend and bride and persuades him to

626 Passionael, somerstuc, eufemia, fol. x5-x5v.
629 St. Bernard considered marriage to be the highest form of human love, Farrant, Women, p. 27.
630 Passionael, somerstuc, onser vrouwen hemelvaert, fol. z8.
631 Bienboeck, fol. m6.
leave the wedding feast and join a monastery. The monk Herman of Steinfeld (d. between 1230-1241) is married to the Virgin by two angels. In this way, Mary rewards him for his life-long devotion to her. She even bestows her husband's name on him to celebrate the grand occasion. St. Agnes marries a devout male follower too. In miracles appended to her legend she weds a priest who feels stirrings of the flesh, and in this way prevents him from sinning.

The earliest known account of the most popular mystical marriage of a female saint (apart from Mary) with Christ is that of St. Catherine of Alexandria, which dates from 1337. Although St. Barbara is also venerated as Christ's bride, it is in the legend of Catherine where a mystical marriage is mentioned in detail. In our Sinte Katherine legende the mystical marriage features as well. Catherine only desires to marry a man who is on a par with her concerning beauty, wisdom, lineage and wealth and it proves difficult for her family and friends to find a suitable match for this wealthy and studious princess. Her mother takes her to a hermit to seek advice since they are incapable of locating such a husband. The hermit shows her a statue of Mary with the Christ child on her arm; this is the husband she has been looking for. After she has been instructed by the hermit on matters pertaining to the Christian faith and has been baptised, she weds Christ in a vision. Although in a vision Christ appears as a beautiful emperor aged thirty, she marries him in an other vision when he is a Christ child. In this way the symbolic aspect is stressed. The marriage is referred to as a

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632 Miraculen, fol. 13.
633 Miraculen, fol. 67v. On Herman, see Herlihy, Households, pp. 118-120.
634 Passionael, winterstuc, agniet, fol. s1.
635 Warner, Alone, p. 127. See also Varnhagen, H., Zur Geschichte der Legende von Katharina von Alexandrien nebst lateinischen Texten nach Handschriften der Hof- und Staatsbibliothek in München und der Universitätsbibliothek in Erlangen (Erlangen, 1891), pp. 18-23, for the (Latin) prose version of Catherine's conversion and marriage, which shows similarities to Bac's edition of the Sinte Katherinen legende.
636 Barbara, fol. e5.
637 Katherinen, fol. a5.
638 Katherinen, fols. a6v-b3 and the wedding on fol. b3v.
coronation. Mary holds up Catherine's hand for Christ who puts the ring on her finger. The importance of her marriage to Christ from the point of view of the devout faithful is that they can now rely on the intercession of a bride of Christ, bound to him with a sacred and indissoluble bond. Catherine was part of the heavenly family.\textsuperscript{640}

Contemporary paintings bear witness to the popularity of the theme. The altar piece of the Two St. Johns (the Baptist and the Evangelist) at the Bruges Hospital of St. John is also known as the Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine.\textsuperscript{641} The centrepiece shows not only the two male saints, but also St. Catherine at the moment of her celestial marriage, when the Christ child places a ring on her finger. The painting was executed by Hans Memlinc in ca. 1475. Catherine's marriage to Christ is a theme which is part of a contemporary European movement.\textsuperscript{642}

The iconography of St. Agnes's mystical marriage enjoyed exceptional attention in the cathedral city of Utrecht since the relics of the saint were kept in the local church of St. Martin. It was in this city that two fifteenth-century paintings were produced. A painting dating from the last quarter of the fifteenth century, shows the saint receiving a ring halfway down her finger from the Christ child who is

\textsuperscript{640} von seinen Freunden und Verehrern, w. ed. (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1906), p. 343, who surmises that the laity viewed Catherine's symbolic marriage as a real historical event. This may be the case, but in our source that was not the intention of the author.

\textsuperscript{641} Assion, P., Die Mirakel der Hl. Katharina von Alexandrien. Untersuchungen und Texte zur Entstehung und Nachwirkung mittelalterlicher Wunderliteratur (Heidelberg, 1969), pp. 323-346, mentions another miracle (and variants) in which the saint espouses herself. The \textit{topos} was apparently well-known.

leaning forwards in Mary's arms. Another painting shows the saint, with her lamb in front of her, accepting a ring from the Christ child.\(^{643}\)

St. Agnes tells a young suitor she is already married and sums up to him what a betrothed looks for in a potential husband: noble, beautiful, wealthy, courageous and has the strength to achieve and gives love transcendent.\(^{644}\) His love equals chastity, his touch holiness, union with him virginity. The five benefits she and his other spouses have received are the ring of his fidelity, virtues, the blood of his passion, bond of love and they are endowed with the treasures of eternal glory. It is not surprising the disappointed earthly suitor slinks off to bed suffering from a bout of unrequited love: it is after all impossible to equal Christ. In similar frame of mind, Christ offers himself to a girl who has just confessed to Thomas van Cantimpré. He is beautiful, his intentions are good, he is sweet and he is noble and sole heir.\(^{645}\) These summed-up qualities admired may well reflect in part the qualities a secular woman was looking for in a potential husband.\(^ {646}\)

Most frequently, the legends of the female virgin saints who are referred to as brides of Christ do not feature a mystical marriage ceremony. In the *Passionael* version of the legend of St. Catherine she is simply married to Christ: Christ speaks to his bride and she answers.\(^{647}\) Basilla, a follower of St. Eugenia and an active aid in evangelisation campaigns, refuses to marry her suitor because she is already married to Christ.\(^{648}\) St. Apollonia (d. ca. 249) has her teeth knocked out of her jaws not because she refuses to marry but because she refuses to


\(^{644}\) *Passionael, winterstuc, agniet*, fols. f9v-f10v.

\(^{645}\) Bienboeck, fol. z2.

\(^{646}\) See Bériou, N. and D.L. d'Avray, 'The image of the ideal husband in thirteenth century France', Modern questions about medieval sermons. Essays on marriage, death, history and sanctity, N. Bériou and D.L. d'Avray eds. (Biblioteca di medioevo latino 11; Spoleto, 1994), pp. 31-69, who pose the question whether these idealised notions reflect lay attitudes. It is concluded that the values concur with those mentioned in certain twelfth-century romances in which knights make their appearance. For a fifteenth-century vernacular reading lay public, they appear to reflect admirable and wishful qualities to look out for in a potential husband rather than anything else.

\(^{647}\) *Passionael, winterstuc, katherina*, fol. e3v.
worship idols; it is only when she dies that the reason is given: Christ the groom had chosen her to be his Bride.® St. Gertrude of Nivelles (626-659), daughter of King Pepin, spurns a marriage proposal of a ducal son, to the astonishment of dignities present at the banquet.® In an exemplum, only the prudent virgins who bring oil with their lamps can see the bridegroom whilst the foolish virgins cannot (Matthew 25:1-12).® Only the prudent virgins may attend the wedding.

Marriage with Christ the groom was not restricted to virgins, but married saints could participate as well. However, the topic does not fit in comfortably within the legends because of the dilemma posed: the husband competed for attention with the celestial groom. After St. Elizabeth of Hungary had tied the marital knot it was only when her husband was absent that she was able to spend the whole night in prayer with her heavenly spouse.® An easier arrangement occurs in St. Bridget of Sweden’s legend. Her husband died first and after that Bridget became spiritually active and then was taught by Mary how she could love Christ.®

The mystical marriage to Christ is usually reflected in two types of scene: one is a ‘bed scene’ and the other is in the hour of the saint’s death. As just seen, both scenes are combined in Mary’s ascension. First we shall look at the bed theme. The bed, of course, features in the Canticle (Song of Songs 3:1), where the bride awaits her beloved. When St. Elizabeth as a child has not yet finished her daily recitation of prayers before she goes to sleep, she finishes them in her bed until she has fulfilled her promise to her celestial spouse in that place.® Catherine places the statue of Mary and the Christ child, borrowed from the hermit, in her bedchamber to meditate.® It is in this place that she gets her visions and is married.

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648 Passionael (Veldener), somerstuc, eugenia, fol. QQ4.
649 Passionael, winterstuc, appollonia, fols. u8-u8v.
650 Passionael, winterstuc, gheertrut, fol. z4v.
651 Spiegel, fol. 62.
652 Passionael, winterstuc, elyzabeth, fol. c1v.
654 Passionael, winterstuc, elyzabeth, fol. b8.
655 Katherinen, fol. b1.

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A bed scene is particularly apt for bedridden female saints. St. Catherine of Vadstena, who despite her marriage had remained a virgin, is prevented on her last sickbed from taking the holy communion. She prays daily in preparation for her heavenly bridegroom. At the hour of her death he releases her from her pain and accompanies her to his eternal Last Supper. Although a mystical marriage as such does not occur in the legend of Liedwij of Schiedam, Christ does visit the saint in her bedroom. Jesus revisits her as the image of the crucified Christ-child which changes into a host with the five wounds which is suspended in the air and then lands on her bed.

Bed scenes are not restricted to virgins, a repentant prostitute is forgiven with this apt symbolism. The unmarried young courtesan St. Thaïs, who invites abbot Pasuncius, posing as a client, to share her bed, is made to repent her sins. He has her enclosed in a cell in a monastery where a monk has a vision in which three virgins were watching over a bed adorned with precious coverlets; this heavenly bed belonged to Thaïs! Thaïs' sins had been forgiven.

Another scene of union with Jesus is the hour of the saint's death. The major feast-day of the saint is usually the day she passes on to heaven. In the case of female saints it is also the day in which they are united in matrimony with Jesus in heaven. For instance, when St. Agnes is killed by the sword it is stated that the white bridegroom receives his bride. Just before she meets her death, St. Dorothy (d. ca. 313) expresses her thanks to her soul's lover that he has called her to his paradise and invited her to his heavenly house. It is paradise which is described exhaustively in her Life. To prove that she had arrived there after her death she sends Theophilus apples and roses. According to her biographer, in

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656 Katerina van watsteyn, fols. i1v-i2.
657 Liedwij, fol. b7v for Christ visiting her as an adult, and fols. c1-c2 for Christ as a child.
658 Passionael, somerstuc, fays, fols. r8-r8v and Vaderen, fols. D2-D2v.
659 Passionael, winterstuc, agniet, fol. 110v.
660 Passionael, winterstuc, dorothea, fol. x3.
the hour of her death St. Elizabeth knows that the time has arrived that the God was to call her to the celestial nuptials. 661

3.3.2 Summary

Virgins are depicted as special beings, on whom sometimes magical powers have been conferred. Particularly the virgin saints whose legends date from the first centuries of Christianity reflect the thought that marriage is a threat to their new religion. However, the idea of marriage was not repulsive: many virgins are married to Christ, and, although less frequently, some earthly men were chosen to marry saintly women. Contact with the heavenly spouse frequently occurs in the bedchamber, which underlines the symbolism of the strength of the theories of consent combined with conjugal rites. The hour of the saints’ death converges with her entry in heaven, often as a bride. The mystical marriage of the female saint with Christ is always valued positively in our sources. It is clear that physical virginity is best, but the idea of marriage, in this case to the heavenly groom, is never repulsive.

3.4 The relevance of ideas concerning virginity to secular women

What would a late medieval secular reading public have made of the ideas about female virgins? Who would have felt addressed? Modern scholars usually discuss the reception of ideas and images based on the Epithalamium with reference to the female religious or semi-religious. 662 That is not surprising, since

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661 Passionael, winterstuc, elyzabeth, fol. c6.
662 Ohly, F., Hoehelied-Studien. Grundzüge einer Geschichte der Hoeheliedauslegung des Abendlandes bis um 1200 (Wiesbaden, 1958), pp. 277-302, states that although the Song of Songs was used in various cultural expressions in the vernacular, these in turn were probably used within cloister walls. For Catherine of Alexandria, Agnes and Barbara, see Muller, E., 'Heilige maagden. De verering van maagdheiligen in religieuze vrouwengemeenschappen', Tussen heks en heilige. Het vrouwbeeld op de drempel van de moderne tijd, 15de/16de eeuw. Nijmeegs museum ‘Commanderie van Sint Jan’, P. Bange et al. eds. (Nijmegen, 1985), p. 94, p. 95 and p. 97; and more recently, Vandenbroeck, P. ed., Hooglied. De beeldwereld van religieuze vrouwen in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden, vanaf de 13de eeuw. Paleis voor Schone Kunsten, 25 februari-22 mei 1994 (Brussel, 1994). See also Breure, L., 'De hemelse bruidegom', Spiegel historiæel 15
these (semi-)religious women opted for the alternative of marrying an earthly groom. A pertinent example is that of St. Clare of Assisi who, already loving Christ, marries him at the altar dedicated to Mary.²⁶³

What reasons lie behind the continued importance of the traditional views on virginity in relation to martyrdom? In the later middle ages, there was no longer need for young female martyrs to die for the faith and prove their Christianity since the persecutions had come to an end,²⁶⁴ but secular women, in particular unmarried women, young or not, may well have been influenced by this positive imagery. It is not difficult to draw parallels since the vast majority of the female saints who espoused Christ in the examples in the legends, did not reside in a convent or monastery. In the later middle ages, this imagery could have inspired secular women not to opt for marriage, and think about a 'career' outside the marital state, such as becoming a (semi-)religious woman. Devotional literature might have influenced young women not to tie the marital knot and remain committed to a virginal state.²⁶⁵

The positive and strong imagery of a marriage with Christ the groom could have supported them in difficult times. Male orders displayed a reluctance to accommodate regular forms of religious life for women. Women suffered a lack of support from the thirteenth century onwards when their male counterparts felt increasingly less responsible for looking after their affiliated sisters.²⁶⁶ They felt

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²⁶⁴ See Glasser, M., 'Marriage in medieval hagiography', *Studies in medieval and renaissance history* n.s. 4 (1981), p. 23, who relates this fact to the need for a new type of saint, i.e. the married saint. The traditional ideas surrounding virgin saints were not replaced, however.

²⁶⁵ Southern, R.W., *Western society and the church in the middle ages* (Harmondsworth, 1970, 1990), p. 311, as was already the case in the twelfth century.

²⁶⁶ See Freed, J.B., 'Urban development and the 'cura monialium' in thirteenth-century Germany', *Viator* 3 (1972), pp. 311-327.
they were tied up too much with their sisters in overseeing convents, saying mass, taking confessions, etc., so that they could not follow their own spiritual progress. A similar reluctance is observed by some supporters of the modern devotion. In the Low Countries it was not cheap to enter a convent, and it was sometimes more expensive than providing for a dowry, it was cheapest to enter a community of the modern devotion where no dowry was payable.

Traditionally, refraining from sexual activity was a more certain way to heaven and salvation than being engaged in sexual activity even within the conjugal bond. The married state did not surpass the virginal state. The positive ideas about female virgins may have served the purpose of promoting chastity to unmarried young females. For instance, Thomas van Cantimpré hears a confession of a young woman plagued by an unchaste love for a young man. She is dissuaded from seeing him by Christ who offers himself to her as a lover in her bedroom.

The positive ideas with regard to virginity may not have fallen on deaf ears. It has been argued that in the high and later middle ages there was a surplus of females in the cities, the so-called Frauenfrage. From the early thirteenth century onward, vast numbers of unattached women resided in the cities of the Low Countries, remained unmarried because of men perishing in wars, or opting

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668 Lists detailing gifts to convents on entry and dowries have been compiled by Koch, E., 'Kloosterintrede, huwelijk en familiefortuin. De kosten van klooster en huwelijk voor adelijken vrouwen in zuidoost-Nederland in de late middeleeuwen', *In de schaduw van de eeuwigheid. Tien studies over religie en samenleving in laatmiddeleeuws Nederland aangeboden aan prof. dr. A.H. Bradero*, N. Lettinck en J.J. van Moolenbroek eds. (Utrecht, 1986), table on pp. 255-257. Note that it concerns entry of noble ladies into convents.

669 Weller, A.G., 'De intrede van rijke weduwen en arme meisjes in leefgemeenschappen van de Moderne Devotie', *OGE* 59 (1985), pp. 403-420, states that women from all walks of life entered, from nobles and patricians down to servants.

670 Bienboeck, fol. z2.

671 The thesis concerning the surplus of women is proposed by Bücher, C., *Die Frauenfrage im Mittelalter* (Tübingen, 1882).
for the priesthood, and female longevity. These push-factors combined with the
pull-factor of the religious poverty movement, meant that some unattached
women sought a lifestyle which suited them best. Consequently, in simple
terms, the greater the number of women compared to men, the more difficult it
became for girls to marry.

This view has been somewhat altered by recent scholarship, but there is also
another argument which may be used to account for the abundance of unmarried
women. Hajnal points out the uniqueness of the western-European marriage
pattern, which incorporates elements of a relatively high age at marriage both for
men and women and a high proportion of people who never marry. The pattern

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672 As seen in chapter 1, the religious poverty movement was part of a European movement. This is true for the thirteenth- as well as the fifteenth century. A pattern had already emerged in the thirteenth-century southern Low Counties and northern Italy, Bolton, B.M., *Mullieres sanctae*, *Sanctity and secularity: the church and the world*, D. Baker ed. (Studies in church history 10; Oxford, 1973), pp. 77-95. For fifteenth-century Italy, see Pennings, J., *Semi-religious women in 15th century Rome*, *Mededelingen van het Nederlands Instituut te Rome* n.s. 47 (1987), pp. 115-146. An impressive survey concerning various aspects of the lives of late medieval beguines in the northern Low Countries, is by Koorn, *Begijnhoven*. An insight into historiography on the beguinage as institution is supplied by Ziegler, J.E., *The curtis beguinages in the Southern Low Countries and art patronage: interpretation and historiography*, *Bulletin de l'Institut historique Belge de Rome* 57 (1987), pp. 31-70. Another option was to become a Sister of the Common Life; differences between the two are outlined by Koorn, *Women*, pp. 135-147. The attraction of the devotionalist movement for single women (for the poor as well as the well-off) was that it offered a positive revaluation of chastity and poverty, Hagemeijer, P., *Devote vrouwen in Holland omstreeks 1400*, *In de schaduw van de eeuwigheid. Tien studies over religie en samenleving in laatmiddeleeuws Nederland aangeboden aan prof. dr. A.H. Bredero*, N. Lettinck and J.J. van Moolenbroek eds. (Utrecht, 1986), pp. 224-233.

673 See Ketsch, P., *Frauen im Mittelalter* (Studien Materialien 14 und 19; 2 vols., Düsseldorf, 1984), I, pp. 14-18, who concluded that in general there was a balance between the ratio of men and women. Opitz, C., *Het dagelijkse leven van de vrouw in de late middeleeuwen (1250-1500)*, *Geschiedenis van de vrouw*, G. Duby and M. Perrot general eds. (5 vols., Amsterdam, 1992), II, pp. 274-276, concurs with this view. But compare Ennen, E., *The medieval woman* (Oxford, 1989), E. Jephcott trans., pp. 159-162, who contrasted the work of various researchers using tax lists and concluded that the sex ratio may have fluctuated. She recommended the ratio ought to be established for each city separately, which is a good idea, but cumbersome and time-consuming in its execution.

674 Although he assigned this pattern from the eighteenth- to the twentieth century, he does not completely dismiss it for the (later) middle ages, because data for this period is too scarce and incomplete, see Hajnal, J., *'European marriage patterns in perspective'*, *Population in history. Essays in historical demography*, D.V. Glass and D.E.C. Eversley eds. (London, 1965), pp. 116-120.
suits city life. Although Hajnal does not mention the pattern for the middle ages (mainly because of scarcity of hard evidence), Brundage regards these elements as an explanation for the presence of late medieval 'rigorist sexual doctrines common among theologians and canonists', which assist the young adult in her sexual repression.

Men then postponed their marriage until they were able to support a wife and family. Men married relatively late in life, in their twenties, and it appears they chose women who did not differ much in age. Not only the fact that men had to gain financial security, but also the conviction that spouses had to know each other well before they embarked on marital life, resulted in a relatively high age of first marriage. De Eyb, for instance, warns women not to trust young unmarried men, since it is not beneficial to fall in love head-over-heels, and men are more guilty in their persuasions than women in this respect. The sexual ethic surrounding virginity served nubile people who were unable to marry in attributing a spiritual value to their single status. There must have been a proportion of women who remained single at least for some time waiting for a spouse.

A high proportion of single women are found in cities because in the city single women found the means to support themselves. As long as they were healthy and able they could be employed as maids, textile workers, spinners, traders. Many young women migrated from the countryside to the cities. They were employed in various industries and paid on an hourly or daily basis. Although the evidence is ragged, in the Low Countries there were good employment

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676 Brundage, *Law*, p. 495, although he does not refer to Hajnal.
677 *Ehebüchlein*, fol. b1v.
680 Howell, M.C., 'Citizenship and gender: women's political status in northern medieval cities', *Women and power in the middle ages*, M. Erler and M. Kowalski eds. (Athens,
opportunities for unmarried women, particularly in the 'industrialised' northern Low Countries. Despite this, working opportunities for single women dwindled all over western Europe. Women were also gradually excluded from guild membership. In the fourteenth century, in the wake of the Black Death, there was a temporary lack of workers which had benefited women seeking employment. However, in the fifteenth century, when numbers were sustained and growth started again men now vied for jobs. David Herlihy, writing with the cloth industry in general in mind, also blames the urbanisation with its increasing specialisation and professionalism, which forced women out of their workplace.

Edith Ennen estimates that among unattached women living in single households there was a large proportion of widows and maidservants. These unattached women needed guidance and positive imagery of refraining from sexual relationships. Sexual repression, which must have plagued the young unable to marry, calls for self control. Not only do we find female virgins exhorted to remain chaste but young unmarried males are addressed as well. They were warned about the dangerous nature of women. There is the exemplum of the attractive singing mermaid, for instance, who incites a young man to jump overboard, only to leave him to drown. A gullible youngster falls in love with a

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London, 1988), pp. 41-43, discusses the intensive efforts of the towns in Low Countries to register the female immigrant population.

For women's work, see Quast, J., 'Vrouwenarbeid omstreeks 1500 in enkele Nederlandse steden', w. title, w. ed. (Jaarboek voor vrouwengeschiedenis 1; Nijmegen, 1980), pp. 46-64, Quast, J., 'Vrouwen in gilden in Den Bosch, Utrecht en Leiden van de 14e tot en met de 16e eeuw', Fragmenten vrouwengeschiedenis, W. Fritschi ed. (2 vols., Den Haag, 1980), I, pp. 26-47 and Howell, Women, pp. 70-94. Women found employment in draperies, textile industries, retail trade and large breweries, (the latter particularly in the northern Low Countries). Although opportunities were rife, unmarried women appeared to have been barred from certain guilds.

Other reasons are capitalization (it was difficult for women to marshal capital) and monopolization (established masters preferred their sons to enter the guild), see Herlihy, D., Opera muliebria. Women and work in medieval Europe (New York, etc., 1990), pp. 185-191.

Ennen, Woman, pp. 276-282. They were reckoned to be among the poor underclass.


Twespraec, fols. e2v-e3.
beautiful but deceitful woman who becomes his lover. Even schoolboys in their schoolbooks were cautioned against women who corrupt and who are unchaste.

It was especially the maidservant who needed strong guidance and a positive role model, usually because she was employed outside the family, not subject to stringent control and therefore subject to suspicion. In reality, this fear was occasionally well founded. But even if she could stay within a family context, as appears in the exemplum of the French orphan who works as a servant in the household of her brother, her safety was not guaranteed: she had to fend off one of his friends who intended to abuse her. After the incident because of her bravery, she is invited to work as lady’s maid for the Queen of England. Usually, the servants worked intermittently and were mobile. They could conduct their own wooing. The young unmarried woman was viewed with suspicion. Michael Goodich argues that the female servant could mirror herself in the new genre of the holy housemaid. The fourteenth-century Gertrui van Oosten, daughter of a poor farmer, had migrated to the city of Delft, and had also started her career as a maidservant. After her boyfriend married another girl she started singing divinely inspired songs from the bridges of Delft, espoused Christ the bridegroom and, to the relief of the magistrates of the city, ended up in a beguinage.

It is perhaps somewhat confusing to discuss the provision of dowries at this stage in relation to virginity but it is a problem tied up with women not yet married. De

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686 Geesten, fols. 15v-16.
689 See De Meyer, *Min*, p. 21, on a court case which mentions the loose morals of a servant maid.
690 Bienboeck, fols. p6-p6v.
Eyb devotes an entire chapter to the question of dowry. In it, he attempts to play down the importance of a potential husband requesting a dowry. Poverty may force women to sink to a low level like the women in the exemplum in a port in Africa, where they prostitute themselves in order to earn their dowry. He argues that it is much better to accept a woman without any dowry or a small dowry and find compensation in that she is beautiful, modest, fearful, chaste, wise, virtuous, and of good folk. In short, it is forcibly stressed that virtues and good behaviour of the woman outweigh the importance of a dowry, making it easier for women to contract marriages, and easing the tension for the family with regard to saving up a huge dowry. The difficulties of gathering dowries must have worried medieval daughters as well as fathers. In a charitable act, St. Nicholas of Myra, a popular saint in the Rhineland since the early middle ages, supplies his poor neighbour's daughters, who would otherwise have been forced into prostitution, with dowries. In one exemplum, one of the laws drawn up for the virtue and benefit of an ancient Greek community was that virgins should be married without dowry.

In order to catch reluctant grooms, fathers and their families had to reward them. It was necessary for women or their families to save up for marriage of their female family members. From 1200 onwards sums paid as dowries went up in an inflationary spiral, reflecting that it was by no means certain that all women would marry. But not all virgins desired to remain in that state for ever.

The old Christian virtue of chastity may have assumed a new meaning in burgher society. The city was not promoting consecrated virginity but advocating a chaste lifestyle before marriage. Some late medieval lay authors of the Low Counties

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693 Ehebüchlein, fols. d2-d3v.
695 Passionael, winterstuc, nycolaus, fol. m7.
696 Geesten, fol. cc2v and Kaetspel, fol. h5.
continued to value virginity higher than the marital state if it could be lived in a
chaste manner, which they thought was exceedingly difficult, and marriage was a
good alternative. This does not mean that traditional models did not continue to
exist, even a relative newcomer on the saintly scene such as Liedwij of Schiedam
threatens to mutilate herself rather than to marry when proposed to before her
accident.

3.5 Wives

Saints married not because it was their desire to do so (which would blemish
their saintly record since it could link them with unchaste feelings), but because
of outside pressure. Usually the parents insisted. St. Elizabeth of Hungary
marries not because she likes it but she does not want to oppose her father’s
order. Anne’s mother Emerentiana is doubtful about marriage because she had
read that a virgin would give birth to Christ, which reminds us of Mary who was
reading Isaiah, as discussed in chapter 2. The brothers of Carmel advise her to
marry since through her marriage Christ would be born. It is stated that she only
wanted a husband out of love for God and children.

When the status of remaining unmarried then could not be pursued, a second
best was the solution to live as chastely as possible within the marital bond. This
chaste cohabitation within the context of licit marriage has recently been dubbed
'spiritual marriage', which should not be confused with mystical marriage. On
their wedding night in their bedroom St. Cecilia (3rd century) convinces her

698 Bange, Dresen en Noël, 'Positie', p. 20. The authors discuss the views of some
fourteenth-century writers such as the author of the Dietsche Doctrinale (1345), the city
clerk of Antwerp Jan van Boendale, the physician Jan de Weert and the sprookspreker
Willem van Hildegaersberch.

699 Liedwijk, fol. a3v.

700 Passionael, winterstuc, elyzabeth, fol. b8v.

701 She wished to remain a virgin, in honour to the other virgin, Historie, getijden, exempelen
anna, fols. b4-b4v.

702 Elliott, D., Spiritual marriage. Sexual abstinence in medieval wedlock (Princeton, New
Jersey, 1993).
husband to live in continence. After her wedding St. Margaret (alias Pelagia) escapes. A pious woman forced into marriage by her parents manages to remain chaste. Although the couple share a bed they never touch each other. She is followed by the image of Christ on the cross and whenever she has unchaste thoughts Christ places his hand from the cross on her breast to chase them away.

St. Catherine of Vadstena, who had promised perpetual chastity before she married, ties the conjugal knot to please her father. The chapter heading refers to Catherine's copying the example set by St. Cecilia, which shows the popularity of the ideal of chastity embodied by the latter. Catherine, also in the bedchamber, persuades her newly wedded husband Eggardus to refrain from sexual intercourse for ever. They pray during the night and sleep fully dressed on the floor, even during the cold winter, with a blanket to separate them. Her brother Karel ridicules their 'sheer madness'. When Catherine exhorts Gisela, Karel's wife, to follow her lifestyle Karel objects in an outburst: he fears that he and his wife Gisela will be ridiculed by their people. It was, of course, more difficult for noble and royal stock to refrain from marital sexual relationships since the future of the line depended on children. None of the references in the saints' Lives dealing with abstentions are self-evident, they do not fit in comfortably within married life. It is invariably the wife who seizes the opportunity to persuade the husband to abstain. In these samples then it was important to remain a virgo intacta.

Other legends of married women saints show that sexual intimacy no longer precluded sanctity. St. Bridget of Sweden and her husband live together as 'Sarah and Tobias' when they are first married. But then, after postponing their

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703 Passionael, winterstuc, cecilia, fol. c9v.
704 Passionael, somerstuc, margarita, fol. r7.
705 Bienboeck, fols. t1v-t2.
706 Katerina van watsteyn, fols. C5-C5v.
707 For this paragraph, see Katerina van watsteyn, fols. C7-D1.
708 Birgitten, fols. A6-A6v.
carnal embraces for one year, they wish for a child who is to serve God.
Emerentiana is also likened to Sarah, but in this case she is praised because like
Sarah, she waited for a long time for the right husband Stollanus to come
along. Although Sarah’s story is somewhat dissimilar, the reference to it shows
that it was not unknown, indeed, it also occurs in the *Spiegel*.
St. Elizabeth of Hungary has to promise her confessor Coenraad to keep her marital obligations
whenever her husband wished. This advice is spelt out, firstly, because there
were not many sexually active married holy women, and the church had to find
new ways to reconcile its idea of virginity to that of the married state. Also, as
seen, marriage in itself was deemed good. However, whenever Elizabeth could
she shunned the marital bed, praying all night long or sleeping on the bedroom
rug. Christ proved a rival for her affections. These married ladies then rank
among the saints who were no longer virgins.

Sexual relationships also play an important role in the exempla. One aspect is
that of incestuous relationships. A recurring theme is that of the son who
accidentally marries his own mother and commits incest. The son himself is also
born out of incestuous relationship: St. Alban is born of a liaison between father
and daughter, and (a fictitious) Pope Gregory between brother and sister.
The exempla serve to point out twice the horrors that incestuous relationships bring.

The bulk of the exempla deals with adulterous relationships. Adultery occurred
when a married partner had sex outside the bond of marriage. In the exempla, it
is commonly wives who are associated with adulterous relationships and more
often than not, they are depicted as initiating the extramarital affairs. Therefore

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709 For the passages on Emerentiana’s life, see *Historie, getijden, exempelen anna*, fols. b3v-b7.
710 See *Spiegel*, fol. 16. The story is based on the apocryphal Tobit 7:10-18 and 8. Sarah
married seven husbands but remained a virgin since a demon killed the bridegrooms on
their wedding night. Tobias managed to chase away the demon, and the couple waited
for three night before consummating their marriage. The woodcut is printed on fol. 15v.
711 *Passionale, winterstuc, elyzabeth*, fol. c1.
712 *Passionale, winterstuc, elyzabeth*, fol. c1v.
713 For Alban see, *Ehebüchlein*, fols. k4v-l3v, and for Gregory, *Geesten*, fols. n1v-01v.
the exemplum of the adulterous lady stork, caught by her husband, is specifically
directed at 'all women'.\textsuperscript{714} In a discussion on lust occasioned by sight, the married
Bathsheba is captured in David's eyes; their affair was not only adulterous but it
also led to treason and death.\textsuperscript{715} There are some exceptions of examples
targeted more specifically at men, for instance, in the discussion of the Tenth
Commandment (you shall not covet your neighbour's wife) exempla feature of
David and Bathsheba, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca.\textsuperscript{716} De Eyb is
rather down to earth, mentioning that husbands cannot expect their wives to be
chaste if they are not.\textsuperscript{717}

The theme of adultery is being addressed in widely different settings which reflect
various concerns of medieval society. The reason the wife acquires a lover is not
always mentioned. But in many cases she had been left alone for a long period
of time without the guidance of the husband after which she turns adulterous. A
wife simply forgets her husband while he returns to his native country; wives are
left by husbands who go on pilgrimage; a wife stays at home while her husband
is at battle.\textsuperscript{718} In the \textit{Scaecspel}, a wife is recommended not to receive strangers
particularly not while her husband is absent, lest this should lead to a loss of her
reputation.\textsuperscript{719}

Some exempla consist of simple warnings, such as the 'fact' that adultery is
detectable. In similar exempla both the stork's wife and the lion's wife are
detected by not being able to wash themselves after sexual intercourse with their
lovers.\textsuperscript{720} When a knight suspects his wife is having an affair he arranges for a

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Sielentroest} Sielentroest, fol. 170.
\bibitem{Bienboeck} Bienboeck, fol. c2v.
\bibitem{Sielentroest} Sielentroest, see, for David, fols. 168-169; Abraham, fol. 169v; Isaac, fols. 169v-170. The
two latter exempla deal with each husband passing his wife off as his sister which led to
confusion since both Sarah and Rebecca were perceived to be available to the opposite
sex (based on Genesis 20: 1-14 and Genesis 26: 7-11).
\bibitem{Ehebüchlein} Ehebüchlein, fol. a6.
\bibitem{Geesten} Geesten, fol. b4v; fol. o5 and fol. v2v; fol. p5v.
\bibitem{Scaecspel} Scaecspel, fol. h2.
\bibitem{Geesten} For stork and lion, see, respectively, Geesten, fols. o1v-o2 and fol. ee6.
\end{thebibliography}
cleric to investigate.\footnote{Geesten, fol. g3v.} The cleric can tell that she is in love with someone else by mentioning the lover’s name and feeling her pulse. In an exemplum, it is the product of an adulterous relationship which embodies the ‘evidence’. A son of the Queen of Hungary who had fallen ill, only responded to treatment applied to illegitimate children.\footnote{Seven mannen (Jacobszoon van der Meer), fols. 213v-214.} After the boy was healed, the Queen was forced to admit to the healer that her son was illegitimate.

Often the cleverness of the wife is stressed in hiding her illicit love relationship, underlining her evil nature. A queen, who has craftily disguised herself, is given away in marriage to her lover by her very own husband.\footnote{Seven mannen, fols. g8v-h7v.} In the past, she had cavorted with the lover many a time under the palatial roof. A fastidious wife of a merchant, incites her husband to murder his beloved talking magpie, who was prone to tattling about her infidelities which went on in his absence.\footnote{Seven mannen, fols. c8v-d3.} During her husband’s latest absence she meets her lover and cons the magpie into believing that the weather is bad by climbing on the roof and cutting a hole in it with the aid of her maidservant and throwing water on the magpie’s head. Upon return of the husband, the magpie tells the truth about the wife’s lover and also informs him of the bad weather. After the husband has made inquiries with the neighbours about the state of the weather which, of course, had been fine, he wrings the magpie’s neck. Afterwards he discovers the ladder and the truth dawns on him.

A seductive wife intent on adultery and subsequently spurned is a female to be reckoned with. In a discussion on the Sixth Commandment (you shall not commit adultery) Potifar’s wife tries in vain to seduce Joseph.\footnote{Sieientroest, fol. 134v.} When he does not reply to her advances she accuses him of attempted rape and offers his mantle which she had clutched to draw him nearer as evidence. A similar event happens to the young emperor’s son, who declined his wicked stepmother’s invitation.\footnote{Seven mannen, fol. b1.} After
this she accuses him of attempted rape, setting in motion the framework based on his defence by the seven sages countering the empress's accusations. The wife of Emperor Otto has fallen in love with a happily married count. After he turns her down she accuses him of improper behaviour towards her. Her husband decapitates the count, discovers his wife's hand in the sordid business and burns her at the stake.

An ensuing topic involving female adultery is that of the husband who is doubtful about his progeny, and, in particular, his male progeny. De Eyb admonishes husbands not to doubt their wives when it comes to children. He supplies the exemplum of the doubting husband who stands corrected by his wife. She, in front of the assembled neighbours and family, transfers their son from her hands into his and says: 'I give it to you ... because what you receive as a gift is truly yours'. An emperor questions his wife about her fidelity in relation to the son she has borne him. Although his wife strongly denies adultery he maintains his son is illegitimate because the lad displays an unkind attitude towards him but he is afterwards convinced that the boy is his after the youngster refuses to kill him.

Many exempla deal with the idea of the perfect wife. What traits were admired in wives? Many qualities mentioned are reminiscent of vows taken by nuns in convents (such as chastity and obedience). The traditional ideas about women were difficult to eradicate. A woman then is to be chaste. Lucretia features in many exempla, and she is usually discussed within the context of chastity. This married woman, blackmailed by the emperor's son who threatens to murder her and a man servant and put them in bed together as if he had caught them in flagrante delicto, allows herself to be raped by him. She subsequently commits suicide. Susanna who refuses to accommodate the two judges in an act of lust,
Female silence was praised as well. This topic is reminiscent of God's reason for punishing Adam who listened to his wife and ate the fruit (Genesis 3:17). St. Paul has clearly established a link; it was because of Eve that woman must be a quiet listener (1 Timothy 2:11-14). It is almost exclusively women who are regarded as talkative, garrulous and scandal-mongering. An apt exemplum is that of the husband who, when the boat was sinking and the captain was urging to jettison excess luggage, immediately proposes to throw his wife overboard. Surely, her tongue was the heaviest item on board. In two exempla women feature who, bereft of the power of speech, devise clever ways to continue communicating with their husbands. In the first exemplum, the husband and his wife quarrel about the quality of a strip of land. The wife cannot stop complaining about it, the husband hits her, and cuts out her tongue, but she proceeds in sign language. In the second exemplum, the wife accuses her husband that he is lice-ridden. He gets angry, hits her in front of the neighbours to humiliate her, throws her in the water, tramples on her, but she still manages to move her hands in a way resembling the killing of lice between her nails. It is concluded that many perished by the sword, but even more by the wife's tongue.

A good wife should be tolerant of her husband. For instance, she should not be jealous. It was jealousy which had led the Queen of the Rhine to strangle St. Kunera who was 'best loved' by her husband. Neither should a wife despise her husband as Michal did when David was joyful (2 Samuel 6:16). In a
discussion on the tasks of the chess piece of the Queen, the exemplum of Italia features who tacitly tolerates the smelly breath of her husband. 737 Although De Eyb praises the love and tolerance of Tercia who allows her husband Afficanus to keep a concubine in their house De Eyb adds, by way of precaution, that this level of tolerance is not to be lauded. 738

A good wife assists in her husband's well-being. Melissa feeds her contemplative philosopher-husband who is prone to forget to eat. 739 The sort of care for the spouse's well-being could take other basic forms. A wife, for instance, prays for improvement in her deranged husband's condition. 740 Even the not so woman-friendly Sterfboek contains an exemplum of a good wife married to an adulterous murderer, whom she attempts to persuade to alter his wrongful behaviour. 741 And St. Elizabeth of Hungary persuades her husband to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land. 742

Obedience was also a trait admired in women, perhaps resulting from the interpretation of Eve being blamed for disobedience. In the Kaetspel, Griselda silently and patiently obeys any request of her husband. 743 When he pretends to divorce her because of her humble origin, she even obeys him when he requests her help in preparation for the wedding to his new bride. Another husband tests his wife for obedience by commanding her not to touch inside a hole in the wall in which, unknown to her, he has positioned sharp nails. 744 As soon as he leaves the house she pokes her fingers into the hole, and screams out in pain. He has remained nearby for, of course, he knew what would happen; she is corrected by him and henceforth obeys him for ever. The centaur Satirus tests his wife, half

737 Scaecspel, b3v. It also appears in Twespraec, fol. i4.
738 Ehebüchlein, fol. a5v.
739 Kaetspel, fols. e1v-e2.
740 Kunera, fols. c6v-d1.
741 Sterfboeck, fol. v3.
742 Passionael, winterstuc, elyzabeth, fol. c2v.
743 Kaetspel, fols. f6-g6v.
744 Twespraec, fol. l1v.
human half horse, for obedience. After he chases her from his house for being disobedient in lying to him she persists in her bad ways by committing adultery with a donkey.

In an exemplum, a married woman sleeps with a man whom she mistakes for her husband. Afterwards, when the culprit has disappeared and her husband arrives home, she chides him for having requested sexual obligations on a holy day and tells him to go to church without delay. They both discover what has happened and he forgives her. There is an element of tension created in the exemplum: should a wife be obedient to her husband and sin against her conscience or should she be obedient to the church.

Another topos connected with obedience is that of the authority the husband exercises over the wife. His authority regarding her charitable works and eleemosynary practices is also addressed. The husband of St. Elizabeth of Hungary is singled out for praise by her biographer. Although her husband cannot comprehend her charitable acts, he permits his wife power to do what God pleases, though not without some self-interest, because it serves both their souls' sake. St. Anastasia, parcelling out her goods to prisoners, is confronted by her husband who puts a lid on her activities by starving her and keeping her under close guard. During a famine, a rich wife in Brabant liberally distributes flour to the poor but is only allowed to share out small measurements by her husband. When she continues, the stock is miraculously replenished. It is especially mentioned that during the absence of her husband St. Elizabeth offers the hungry wheat from the store rooms. A wife is not allowed to share her

745 Twespraec, fols. I1-I1v.
746 Biechten, fols. cc6v-cc7.
747 Passionael, winterstuc, elyzabeth, fol. c2v.
748 Passionael, winterstuc, anastastia, fols. o4v-o5.
749 Bienboeck, fols. I2v-I3.
750 Passionael, winterstuc, elyzabeth, fol. c2.
husband's goods with the poor without his prior knowledge lest he may become poor.\footnote{Biechten, fol. ee1v.}

In some exempla and saints' Lives the husband's authority goes beyond the boundaries of propriety. A bachelor king who is so ugly that he cannot find himself a woman to gratify his sexual desire, is accommodated by his steward who offers, unknown to the king, his very own wife to him.\footnote{Seven mannen, fols. e9-g1v.} Although the wife strongly objects she is so fearful of her husband that she obeys. When the king discovers her true identity, the steward is banned from the country. Mary has to intercede for a wife who is being offered to the devil by her husband who had received a treasure from the devil in exchange for his wife.\footnote{Miraculen, fols. 17-18v and Passionael, somerstuc, onser vrouwen hemelvaert, fol. z8.} The wives obey against better judgement.

One of the dangers a man faces when he marries a woman is that she can become his master instead of his companion.\footnote{Ehebüchlein, fol. d2v.} A bossy wife brings unhappiness to a man. A young wife lures three knights into the house whom she promises to sleep with, and then incites her husband to kill them and steal their money.\footnote{Seven mannen, fols. g4-g8v.} Although he predicts trouble, he is browbeaten into it by her. After the deed is done, she then arranges for her brother to dispose of the bodies. She deceives this poor fellow as well. When a fight breaks out between husband and wife, she accuses him in a loud voice that he is a murderer, and by giving themselves away in this manner, they are both put to death.

There are also a few exempla in which two wives occur. Whereas in the Kaetspel there features only one wife who quarrelled with Socrates,\footnote{Kaetspel, fols. i3v-i4. The other woman in his household is his daughter.} both De Eyb and the Twespraec double Socrates's tribulations.\footnote{Ehebüchlein, fols. f1v-f2 and Twespraec fol. i6v.} De Eyb informs the reader that bigamy was the custom of Socrates's country. Not only do the twosome quarrel

\footnote{\textsuperscript{751} Biechten, fol. ee1v.\textsuperscript{752} Seven mannen, fols. e9-g1v.\textsuperscript{753} Miraculen, fols. 17-18v and Passionael, somerstuc, onser vrouwen hemelvaert, fol. z8.\textsuperscript{754} Ehebüchlein, fol. d2v.\textsuperscript{755} Seven mannen, fols. g4-g8v.\textsuperscript{756} Kaetspel, fols. i3v-i4. The other woman in his household is his daughter.\textsuperscript{757} Ehebüchlein, fols. f1v-f2 and Twespraec fol. i6v.}
about him, but they also conspire against him and both throw dirty water on the eminent philosopher's head. De Eyb uses this exemplum to argue that spouses should be patient with one another. The Twespraec discusses the exemplum under the chapter dealing with forgiveness, and the fearsome twosome knock Socrates down. In the Spiegel, Lamech (Genesis 4:23) is scolded by his two wives.\textsuperscript{758} The severity of their actions cannot be doubted: they symbolically represent 'heathenism' and 'the Jews' who flogged Jesus. The examples of bigamous men did not serve primarily to point out that it was unlawful to have two wives, but rather they served to demonstrate the double sorrows a man could encounter when married to two wives. The point could equally have been made with one wife instead of two.

Bigamy is also discussed, tongue-in-cheek, in relation to women's problems in keeping secrets. In an exemplum, the young boy Papirius, who has overheard business discussed by the Senate of Rome, is forced to lie to his mother who attempts to browbeat him into divulging the secret matters to her to satisfy her curiosity.\textsuperscript{759} The boy invents that the Senate discussed whether a husband should have two wives or \textit{vice versa}. On hearing this, the woman immediately musters all women of the town who march to the Senate demanding that a wife should have two husbands.

Disparagement in age is mentioned as well. The exemplum which sums this topic neatly up is that of the impecunious young man married to an old but rich woman and the beautiful young virgin married to a rich old knight.\textsuperscript{760} When the young people meet they fall in love: \textit{ghelijc mint ghelijc} (equal loves equal). The young man kills the old knight because of his cruelty towards the young wife, the old wife dies and the youngsters are free to marry each other and live happily ever after. In another exemplum in which two wives feature married to the same middle-aged husband he becomes bald since the old wife pulls out his black

\textsuperscript{758} \textit{Spiegel}, fol. 44.
\textsuperscript{759} \textit{Geesten}, fols. v5v-v6, \textit{Kaetspel}, fols. l4-l4v and \textit{Scaecspel}, fols. b1v-b2.
hairs to make him look older, and the young wife pulls out his grey hairs to make him look younger.\(^{761}\)

In the exempla it is usually the old husband married to a young woman who is mocked. He is unable to satisfy his young wife in bed and cannot pay the conjugal debt. Often the young wife seeks a lover. A young wife strays from her husband's bed every single night to visit a young man.\(^{762}\) Not only is she adulterous, but she lies when her husband discovers her nocturnal escapades. She turns the tables on him by locking him out one night and leaving him to be caught and accused of adultery. Another young woman complains to her mother who had given her in marriage to an old dotard who proves inadequate in bed.\(^{763}\) According to the daughter her mother is incapable of imagining her daughter's tribulations, because the mother was married to her husband when both were young. The idea of the licentious woman is shown but the husband stands accused as well because he is not able to pay the marital debt.

The element of love in the formation of marriage is mentioned too. For instance, in a marriage the right kind of love is necessary. Love quickly found cannot lead to a lasting relationship. A promise to marry is made a mockery of in the \textit{Kaetspel}.\(^{764}\) It serves to point out the foolishness of the besieged Duchess Remonde who, as soon as she claps her eyes on the King of Hungary, falls in love with him. Although he is an extremely handsome man, he is also the enemy. She communicates to him that if he were to take her as his wife she would surrender her castle. He promises her this, but as soon as the gates are opened the castle is plundered and the Duchess captured. He sleeps with her for one night (to fulfil his 'oath'), after which he hands her down to his fellow soldiers to be raped and tortured. The moral added is not to trust traitorous women! But,
inter alia, it also shows that the love Remonde felt for the beautiful king was of the wrong kind.

The male admirer besotted with his girlfriends or consorts is ridiculed or comes to a bad end. In a discussion on the Sixth Commandment (you shall not commit adultery), exempla follow the recommendation that a husband ought to follow his good wife’s advice, not that of bad ones. Appenien hits her royal lover; Sardanapalus, who behaves like a woman when surrounded by women, is so love-struck that he locks himself in his palace with his wives and commits suicide; in his old age, the wise Solomon is persuaded by his wives to turn to heathen gods. Bad wives turn a man into an effeminate fellow: a wijveric. The wrong kind of love of the male in these cases leads to his being ridiculed or proves self-destructive.

The successful marriage is described by De Eyb, who is important for his contemporary interpretation of marriage. He pulls out all the stops in his praise for marriage: progeny, remedy for sin, the sacramental value, Jesus's first miracle of turning water into wine at a wedding, love, friendship, and he goes on to paint the picture of a happy family. Parents who love each other, and who are in concordance, are to be praised in der heiligen gotlicken echtschap, therefore a man should marry. Immediately underneath follows his chapter on 'the praise of women who are indeed worthy of praise'. The late medieval description of the marriage of Anne and Joachim reflects similar sentiments.

3.5.1 Summary

In the saints’ legends chaste marriages were advocated in a variety of ways. In legends of married female saints there were either no sexual relationships at all

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765 This and the following exempla are mentioned in Sielentroest, fols. 138-143. Appenien is also referred to in the Spiegel, fol. 45v, where she ridicules the ruler by putting his crown on her head. In this way, it is explained, she prefigures Christ who is ridiculed with a crown of thorns.

766 Ehebüchlein, fols. h1-h2.
between the spouses, or they were delayed, or abstained from after a while. But, most importantly, however uncomfortably a sexual relationship fits within the saint's legend, in the late middle ages it does no longer preclude sanctity.

In some cases incest was feared. The vast majority of the exempla dealing with female adultery were often combined with other female traits such as her slyness and seductiveness. Because of her dissipated nature a husband could fear that her children were not his. Not surprisingly, the ideal perfect wife was praised because she was chaste, silent, and obedient. These traits are also admired in a convent. Also, the perfect wife should be tolerant.

A good marriage is founded on the right kind of love, and not the type of love seen in the exempla. Not selfish lust and avarice should lead to marriage, judged by the disparagement in age topos. Neither the self-destructive love of the dotard, nor love quickly found is reckoned to be a good basis for a marriage. The age of marriage partners should not be too different, not only because it may encourage gold diggers to marry a rich elderly spouse, but the elderly spouse proves frequently incapable to satisfy the younger spouse. This then leads to adultery on the part of the younger spouse. A harmonious marital life was advocated.

3.6 The relevance of ideas on marriage to secular women

Although virginity remained high on the church's promotional agenda and certain anti-matrimonial tendencies displayed in the sources and certain misogynist ideas persisted, most women married. Deducing from the exempla and saints' Lives many ideas relating to married women deal with their behaviour within sexual relationships. The underlying rationale of the church in regulating sexual

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768 Jeay, M., 'Sexuality and family in fifteenth-century France: are literary sources a mask or a mirror?', Journal of family history 4 (1979), pp. 328-345.
behaviour, in apportioning degrees of sinfulness, was ultimately to save the souls of sinners who had to do penance if they wanted to be saved.

At the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, it was decided that banns were to be called by the priest to make it publicly known that a couple intended to marry.\textsuperscript{769} Anyone who knew a legitimate impediment could object to the marriage. One of the reasons behind this decision was that, before 1215, married couples who no longer wished to remain together could obtain an annulment by claiming they had 'suddenly' discovered that they were related. They could easily do this, since before 1215, a person could only marry another who was not related within seven degrees of consanguinity (those related by blood) or affinity (which entail those related by second marriage or a sexual relationship). It was relatively easy to obtain an annulment since it was not difficult to prove that the marriage partners were related. If they were not related, but claimed they were, it was almost impossible to check perjury by witnesses. To make it easier to contract a valid marriage, and above all, harder to escape from marriage, from 1215 couples were allowed to marry from the fourth degree upwards.\textsuperscript{770} To make it more difficult to opt out, canon 51 was issued.

Despite its reforming nature there still remained the possibility of contracting marriage without the banns being called. Holy matrimony remained a sacrament which could be bestowed upon one another in private. The marriage would be clandestine, but nevertheless perfectly valid. Problems could arise when one of the partners opted out claiming that a wedding had never taken place, which appears not to have been an uncommon event in the later middle ages.\textsuperscript{771} The

\textsuperscript{769} Douglas general ed., Documents, III, pp. 665-666, canon 51.
\textsuperscript{770} Douglas general ed., Documents, III, p. 665, canon 50.
\textsuperscript{771} For examples, see De Meyer, Min, p. 34 and, for the early sixteenth century, Bange, P. en A.G. Weiler, 'De problematiek van het clandestiene huwelijk in het middeleeuwse bisdom Utrecht,' De Nederlanden in de late middeleeuwen, D.E.H. de Boer en J.W. Marsilje eds. (Utrecht, 1987), pp. 393-409.
presence of a parish priest and witnesses became imperative with canon 10 of the Council of Trent in 1563.\textsuperscript{772}

Behind the regulation of consanguinity, affinity and spiritual kinship (those related to one another through godparents) issues lay the fear of incestuous sexual relationships. In the sources, these issues are dealt with on a rather basic level when mothers become the spouses of their sons. Ideally, these relationships should be sorted out before the wedding takes place and not afterwards.

Although in the sources bigamous and polygamous men are discussed it is never in relation to advocating monogamy, which had been one of the concerns of the church in the early middle ages.\textsuperscript{773} This indicates that these cases were no longer a problem by the time the sources were compiled. One husband should have one wife. On the whole, the exempla in which polygamous men feature show that the husband’s troubles are doubled when having two wives.

Chaste marriages which, in the female saints’ Lives, are always advocated by the wife and seem to be part and parcel of their holiness, were praised. In practice, women did abstain as in the case of St. Catherine of Vadstena who was attracted to the idea of remaining a virgin. But also, if, for instance, she considered her family to be complete (and presumably had had enough of her share giving birth), sexual relations could be ended as St. Bridget and her husband did. It is, of course, the chastity aspect which is the most important consideration, the fact that no children were born was the result. A well-documented example is that of the self-proclaimed mystic Margery Kempe (ca. 1373-after 1439) who, after a vision in which she had viewed heaven, wanted to make certain she would go to this marvellous place after her death, attempted with great difficulty to persuade her husband to take a mutual vow of chastity since she was convinced that their

\textsuperscript{772} Brundage, Law, p. 564.
\textsuperscript{773} Brundage, Law, p. 65 and p. 87.
sexual relationships amounted to incontinence. Taking account of the chastity aspect, married women attempted to live a chaste as possible marriage. At least, parishioners' concerns are reflected in interpolated questions or comments in a few of our sources. The issue of the wife's choice for abstaining or sinning arises out of the dilemma when the husband requested sexual intercourse on days prohibited by the church.

But marriage was basically good, any other setting for sex was mortally sinful. De Eyb stressed in his interpretation of the exemplum of the intelligent Sigismunda that it was because of her father's refusal to let his daughter remarry, and so denying her a natural outlet for female passion in marriage, that she felt that she had to acquire a lover.

Although bossy wives are occasionally mentioned in the exempla, the many instances in which authority of the husband is asserted over the wife ties in with the theme of the 'battle for the trousers', so often depicted in prints from the second half of the fifteenth century. This theme is popular in the milieu of prosperous burghers, judged by the good quality of the prints. The battle for the hose concerned the division of tasks in marital life: the wife's aim is to wear his trousers whilst the henpecked husband does the household chores. The message conveyed in these prints was that it was impossible for a married man

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775 In a dialogue, the priest argues that she should obey; the husband commits a sin but the wife is not to blame, Sielentroest, fol. 145. In the section on the sins against the Son (referring to sins committed in ignorance) in Biechten, fols. ee1-ee1v, the wife is urged to confess all her sins (even those committed unwittingly!). She is said to sin in ignorance while she is obedient to her husband having sexual contact with him on 'holy nights'. Brundage, Law, p. 162 and p. 508, has summarised prohibitions according to early medieval penitentials and later medieval moralistic literature. He mentions prohibitions in force during the liturgical cycle (on Lent, Advent, Whitsun week, Easter week, feast-days, fast days, and certain weekdays), as well as the woman's physiological cycle (during the wife's menstruation, pregnancy and lactation period).

776 Ehebüchlein, fol. 14.

burdened with a domineering wife to alter the situation; it was therefore best to consider carefully whom to marry and then to establish immediately who was head. Many Flemish medieval proverbs mentioned the position which a woman was supposed to occupy: 'a clever woman knows that the hose belongs to the man'. The theme of tug-of-war for power within the household was also predominantly present in many fifteenth- and sixteenth-century farces which, based on an international corpus, were remodelled to accommodate the taste of the burghers in the Low Countries. This theme is not present to a great extent in the international corpus.

The period in which the incunables were produced (ca. 1450-1501) falls between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, when burghers became more aware of their urban identity. As Bot explained, when, particularly after 1400, the cities obtained a tight grip on political and economic policies, men dominated society: they ruled the city and felt they alone were responsible for it, which may have resulted in increased anti feminism within the city. The ideal domestic situation is that in which the powerful husband who is also father rules his wife, family, household and business. The wife and mother of his children was to love the husband, do housework, be subordinate and faithful and raise the children well. The audience of the incunables were dished up tailor-made versions promoted by the church of the perfect wife. It was in the middle and upper echelons of society where the husband earned money and the tasks of the woman were increasingly restricted to household and children where this idea would make an early impact.

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Literature detailing specific tasks and qualities for women was in vogue. The fourteenth-century Goodman of Paris left instructions to his young wife on how to run the household, as did the fourteenth-century merchant Francesco Datini in his letters to his wife, also of tender age. The apportioning of tasks was not clear-cut, although it has been argued that this was often the case. Ruth Kelso mentions throughout her book various protagonists who debated the finer details of several topics related by this point. It is far from certain to what extent women felt compelled to comply with their being restricted to household tasks and the raising of the family only. Without going into much detail, there seems to have been no division between work and living space. In Antwerp, for instance, the male guild member was assisted at home by his wife and daughters, under his supervision. The domestic situation detailed by Lyndal Roper in her book on sixteenth-century Augsburg also mentions that there was no strict division between work-place and dwelling-place. A division of specific tasks was not in place in the seventeenth-century Low Countries, but made an impact when industrialisation on a grand scale took root.

The fifteenth-century press multiplied behavioural rules for the family and marriage for which there must have been a demand. Indeed, sometimes requests were made by secular folk to the religious to write tracts for them on these

783 For the Goodman, see Power, People, chapter 5; for Francesco, see Origo, I., De koopman van Prato (Amsterdam, 1985), K. van Gulik trans., pp. 175-176. On the household and the wife's role in it, see Gies, Women, pp. 184-209.
784 See, for instance, Hall, C., 'De geschiedenis van de huisvrouw', Te elfder ure 20 (1975), pp. 676-704.
786 Pleij, Sneeuwpoppen, pp. 281-282.
788 Leydesdorff, S., 'Kanttekeningen bij 'de geschiedenis van de huisvrouw'. Poging tot een theorievorming van de geschiedenis van de nederlandse vrouw', Te elfder ure 20 (1975), pp. 711-712.
In particular the function of the householder in ruling the household is described in separate and appended chapters. The rule of the husband is not involved with household chores, but rather he is placed in a supervisory capacity. In general, he is to take good care of the family and see to it that the household is well-organised and prudent household management is advocated. But ideas in relation to marriage are discussed as well.

For instance, in the Scaecspel, the householder is advised to check up on his wife’s behaviour. The couple should live in peace and he should not admonish her without reason. In the edition of the Scaecspel based on the author Dirk van Delft, the householder is recommended not to lavish too much money on an expensive wedding. He should also discourage his widowed mother from remarriage lest problems arise in relation to the inheritance of the children, and indeed, in her foolishness she might even marry a young man. In a chapter which deals with the marital state of the judge, the Kaetspel proscribes him to cling to one wife only according to the Ten Commandments. Presumably, it is meant here that he ought not to be adulterous. Aesop admonishes his adoptive son to be kind to his wife, so she does not go astray because of her fickle nature, and not to trust secrets to her. The caring aspect of the householder is summed up in the exemplum of the smith who worked on Good Friday, one of the holiest of days in the church calendar. He was let off the hook by a judge who heard that

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790 Scaecspel, fols. h1v-h2.


792 Kaetspel, fol. n5.
he needed to earn money for his decrepit mother, school-going son and spendthrift wife.\textsuperscript{794}

In the texts in which a female adulterer appears her adultery is a result of the married woman making her own decisions when on her own, or when the pair is mismatched. In social reality, adultery may not have been uncommon, at least judged by some court cases.\textsuperscript{795} It is impossible to describe trends based on little evidence. The fact that many exempla deal with female adulterers rather than male adulterers is reflective of the ideas arising out of the woman's perceived salacious nature (as addressed in chapter 2). Also, because of her fickleness, she may have been deemed to be in need of more guidance and support than a man. In any case, standards set for women appear to be higher than those set for men.

Although it is difficult to generalise, perhaps one of the reasons for the topos of fathers questioning the legitimacy of their sons (rather than their sibling sisters) may be traced to the fact that from the central middle ages a new kinship system came into existence.\textsuperscript{796} Previously kinship was cognatic (or bilineal), now another form was imposed on (but did not replace) the older system: the agnatic (or patrilineal) system. Duby applies the principle to the marriages of the French nobility in the high middle ages,\textsuperscript{797} where inheritance customs had changed. In order to maintain and build powerful blocks of land only the eldest son could marry, thus allowing for the land to remain undivided. He in his turn needed one legitimate male heir to complete the cycle. Thus, the legitimacy of the eldest son was very important. It also meant that younger sons had to find their luck

\textsuperscript{793} Aesop, fol. d3.
\textsuperscript{794} Scaecspel, fols. f4-f4v.
\textsuperscript{795} De Meyer, Min, p. 54. The majority of cases deals with a married woman attempting to retrieve her husband from his girlfriend's house, the minority with a married man pursuing his wife.
\textsuperscript{797} Duby, G., The knight, the lady and the priest. The making of modern marriage in medieval France (Hammondsworth, 1983), B. Bray trans.
elsewhere, preferably with a rich heiress. In many songs and poems it is the
lord's wife, trapped in a loveless marriage, who is the happy recipient of the
attentions of young unmarried males. The lady is virtually interchangeable with
love in lyric.798 In this scheme the idea of female adultery too also comes to the
fore.

Although wider research is required in this area, David Nicholas has shown that
urban inheritance customs in Ghent incorporated cognatic as well as agnatic
lines.799 Sons and daughters were entitled to an equal share of the parental
inheritance. In practice then (at least in places with similar inheritance customs to
Ghent), there seems to have been no reason for fathers to question the
legitimacy of their (eldest) sons only, if they were worried about the extramarital
liaisons of their wives. The topos appears to be one in which literary customs
survive in a society which has no apparent need for them.

Nevertheless, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, municipal governments
increasingly involved themselves with regulating sexual behaviour of the citizens
in order to protect public order and keep the citizens healthy.800 The city
government of Utrecht issued an ordinance on adultery to be publicly read out
thrice annually.801 The new evil of syphilis was also a grave concern when it
made its entry on a grand scale during in the second half of the fifteenth century.
It was also recognised that in order to prevent mothers and daughters of
burghers from falling victim to sexual offenders, it was better to regulate a public
brothel in an orderly fashion. This attitude is reflected in an exemplum where a
young man who has fallen in love with a married woman is advised by his father
to visit a prostitute who subsequently heals him from his interest in the married
lady.802

798 Ferrante, Women, p. 66.
799 Nicholas, Domestic life, pp. 189-198.
800 Brundage, Law, p. 487.
801 De Meyer, Min, p. 54.
802 Ehebüchlein, fol. b2.
In town halls works of art, such as tapestries or paintings, were hung or a ceiling carved (at Katwijk) featuring cunning women in relation to their menfolk, but this was not an attempt to show that women were perceived as being deceitful, adulterous or bad, it advocated lawful marriage and marital fidelity.  

In the late medieval cities of north-western Europe it was not so much the noble young but landless sons of the high middle ages, but the many young male apprentices who remained unmarried until their late twenties. The latter, as discussed, first had to gain financial security. The picture that Rossiaud painted of the youth gangs wreaking havoc on the streets of fifteenth-century southern France appears exaggerated when applied to the Dutch towns. Although youth gangs, the *charivari*, operated occasionally on special feasts in the Low Countries questioning, for instance, the sexual *mores* of certain nubile women, they were regarded as a pest. At least, this is the case if we are to believe Chaucer’s comments on a youth gang in fourteenth-century Flanders.  

I have been able to trace only one moralising story in our sources which contains a gang of young men (*jonge gesellen*) compromising a woman, in this case a married woman. Marina, living in Genoa, was pestered by them: arriving on horse and on foot, singing songs and serenading her day and night under her window, ‘proving their love for her’, while her husband was at sea. It is questionable that ladies were often wooed this way in reality. However, the secular priest Godschalc Rosemondt from Eindhoven, who wrote a confessional in 1517, forbade men to walk at night playing the lute to attract maidens.

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805 Chaucer wrote on the Flemish charivari that they led an unchaste life, gambled, and were gluttonous, Robinson ed., *Chaucer*, p. 196, lines 463-484.  
806 *Ehebüchlein*, fols. g3v-g4.  
807 Moolenbroek, J.J. van, ‘Seksuele onthouding als norm en waarde in laatmiddeleeuws Nederland. Verkenningen in officiële en niet-officiële cultuur’, *In de schaduw van de eeuwigheid. Tien studies over religie en samenleving in laatmiddeleeuws Nederland*.
The humanists, such as Erasmus of Rotterdam (ca. 1466-1536), promoted the idea of marital love, and challenged contemporary negative ideas about women. Michael Dallapiazza discussed some marriage tracts by humanists. He concluded that the humanists attempted to formulate a new ideology taking into account the socio-economic changes of the later middle ages. The wife’s role was viewed in relation to her usefulness to the husband and her function within the patriarchal-burgher society, but reciprocal love and happiness were also stressed. The tracts written by humanists laud marital life and mention the joys of domestic bliss: marriage is the foundation of social order. Erasmus concluded ‘... that all things ... are maintained by the married couple, and without it all things would break apart, perish and slip away.’

3.6.1 Widows and elderly women

The topoi which appear in the exempla and the saints' Lives in relation to widowhood are fairly straightforward and fall typically into a few categories. Also included in this section are elderly women who are not always referred to as widows. As we shall see, one or two of them have children, so these could very well have been married women once. A few of them are described as donning religious clothing, and they probably assumed the widow's mantle on their husbands' demise. They could have made a vow of perpetual chastity at that stage. St. Elizabeth of Hungary, whom we know was a widow, put on a religious habit after the death of her husband. Elderly women who feature on their own and widows appear in similar roles.

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809 Dallapiazza, Minne, especially, pp. 156-159.
810 Herlihy, Households, p. 117.
811 Passionael, winterstuc, elyzabeth, fol. c3v.
The first topos is that of 'after care' for the deceased husband. This may be regarded as a continuation of the involvement of the wife in her husband’s well-being. For instance, a widow pays off the debt of her dead husband who appeared to her in a vision clutching red-hot iron horseshoes in purgatory. Apparently, he had forgotten to pay the smith, and after his wife has taken care of it he may leave for heaven. In an exemplum, a widow features who has just lost her husband in a tournament. She is referred to as 'holy housewife' and prays every day of her life devoutly for her deceased husband whom she has seen in a vision suffering in the afterlife. The once fun-loving husband is punished in similar fashion for the sins committed during his lifetime. Whereas he used to sleep with young virgins after his tournaments he is now embraced by a fat toad on a sizzling hot bed.

A recurring motif is that of the widow explaining her reasons for refusing to remarry. In a chapter warning against unchaste company, a widow turtledove is praised. The turtledove, we are told, is the most chaste among the birds. When her husband was alive she did not desire another bird, after he died she opts to remain unattached. Although she is friendly, she can no longer tolerate the stench of lechery of the other birds and flees their company.

After burying her husband’s body with great dignity, a princess who was happily married to her husband, now finds herself alone. When her friends press her to remarry because she is still young and beautiful she refuses since it will be impossible to equal the love she once shared with her husband but equally it will prove impossible to find such a good, sweet, wise, and rich man as she has had. In the allegorical explanation which follows the woman is compared to the 'bride', the 'soul' and the 'wife' who are loved by Jesus, who has died on the cross for

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812 Bienboeck, fol. x2.
813 Bienboeck, fols. 54v-55.
814 Twespraeæ, fols. i3v-i4.
815 Geesten, fols. m8-m8v.
her. Jesus is represented by her dead husband. The widow is addressed directly: 'do not take another husband, that is, do not love any one else except him'.

In a chapter praising the virtue of chastity, De Eyb shows two exempla of women who prefer not to remarry. Sydo jumps in a fire lit on her instigation whilst thinking about her dead husband. Cato's daughter Marcia, despite having goods, beauty and health declines remarriage.

St. Elizabeth of Hungary, staying with her uncle who wished her to remarry, refuses to comply stating that she has promised to remain chaste, that she would rather mutilate herself than remarry. Not only does she dress in a simple religious habit but she also lives as a pauper and performs charitable acts.

A married emperor, but a tyrant, wants to test his wife for their mutual oath to commit suicide out of love when one of them dies before the other. He pretends to be dead and she thinks she is a widow. When her first suicide attempt does not succeed, and her father wants to prevent a second attempt, she tells him that married folk are like two souls in one body.

Sometimes, widows appear in groups of three whilst denouncing remarriage. The three widows from antiquity Marcia, Valeria and Anna, desire not to marry again. The first is afraid that a new spouse will marry her for her goods and the second because her first husband, although deceased, remains alive as long as she lives. The third because she has had a good husband and is afraid that if her second husband proves to be bad she will suffer, but if she likes him she may lose a loved one again.

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816 Ehebüchlein, fols. b3v-b4.
817 Passionael, winterstuc, elyzabeth, fol. c3v.
818 Geesten, fol. a7v.
819 Twespraec, fol. l2. See also Wilson and Makowski, Wyves, p. 50, who appear to trace these ladies back to St. Jerome.
When a king finds himself at home with three widowed daughters he wishes to marry them off. They all refuse, the first because she has given her virginity to her first husband, the second because no one can equal the beauty of her first, the third because she still considers herself to be married. She tells that her husband's body is hers, and her body is his. The allegorical explanation which follows compares the three daughters with the soul who has been shown the works of the Trinity. Despite the wives' rather fond memories of their husbands in the exemplum, in the explanation the husbands are compared to the devil, no less, and for this reason the widows are admonished not to 'remarry, but remain under the protection of the Lord'.

Another topos is that of the dangers a widow may encounter. She proves to be vulnerable. St. Elizabeth of Hungary, whose husband died on pilgrimage, is chased away by her husband's relatives. She is accused of having squandered their wealth on her charitable causes. As a young desirable widow of noble stock, St. Catherine of Vadstena is continually afraid of being captured by suitors whilst in Italy but with God's help she is forewarned when a count lies in wait for her.

The two versions of the following exemplum serve to show primarily how a recently widowed woman unscrupulously defiles her husband's memory, but at the same time they highlight the dangers of a widow making decisions by herself. A widow camping out near the grave of her recently departed beloved husband falls quickly in love with a man who is guarding a corpse on the nearby gallows at night. When he discovers that a corpse has disappeared from the gallows whilst he visited the widow, she immediately offers to hang the body of her husband in the prisoner's stead. In this way, we are told, she puts a slight upon the love which she once cherished for her husband because of a new love just found.

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820 Geesten, fols. m3-m4v.
821 Passionael, winterstuc, elyzabeth, fol. c3.
822 Katerina van watsteyn, fols. E5-E6.
823 Aesop, fols. h4v-h5.
In the second version, the husband has died out of love for her when he accidentally cut her superficially, thus making her subsequent actions more repelling. In a similar scene as just sketched above, the widow is moved out of pity for the keeper but she also offers herself in marriage to the desperate guardian who immediately accepts. Since the disappeared corpse in this version was dismembered, she willingly mutilates her husband's corpse without hesitation. This is known as the 'widow of Ephesus motif', which serves to underline the repulsive actions of the widow. After they hang it on the gallows and the widow insists her fiancé and she should go to church in order to be properly wed, he tells her that she ought to be ashamed of herself since her husband had died out of love for her. The keeper then beheads her.

Another problem of the widow is that she is defenceless. A widow (wijf) finds herself alone and ill. The woodcut accompanying the exemplum shows an elderly female. She has spent all her money on cures which proved in vain. A plant offers a piece of itself to her as a medicine if she is willing to pray for the plant. The moral inferred is that one should attempt to have good folk pray for you.

St. Anne assists widows who find themselves in dire circumstances. One of the widows rescued by the saint is incapable of rendering the services her lord requests and is thrown in prison and tortured. The widow has no one who will intercede for her except for St. Anne who saves the widow and also claims the lives of the lord's two sons. A statue of Anna-te-Drieën (containing Anne, Mary and Jesus) hits the lord to boot. Anne is shown powerful by virtue of her good connections. Not only is she portrayed as a life saver, but also as a life taker. In

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824 Seven mannen, fols. h7v-i4.
826 Twespraec, fols. d5v-d6. The exemplum is also incorporated in Berlioz, Rire, pp. 126-127.
827 Historie anna, fols. p1-p5v.
another exemplum, a female, thrice widowed, is saved from abduction by St. Anne.  

However, not all widows prove vulnerable or incapable of giving direction to their lives. The widow St. Sophia turns to Rome with her daughters to convert women to Christianity. As soon as she becomes a widow, Claudia, mother of St. Eugenia, assists her holy daughter in the conversion of women to the true faith. In fact, she is even referred to as Saint Claudia. As a widow, St. Paula makes a success of her life by turning increasingly to religion now that her movements are unrestricted. St. Bridget of Sweden is able to travel as she likes after her husband's death. In her daughter's Life, Bridget is described as being without ties and free from worrying about her husband. She was certainly not a powerless widow. In her thirty years as a widow, Christ had revealed to her that widowhood was an estate pleasing to God, even more pleasing than virginity. Her daughter, the widow St. Catherine of Vadstena tirelessly and successfully campaigns for her mother to be declared a saint and for the convent at Vadstena.  

Often widows, like married women, are cast in either positive roles or negative roles. They are either brave and wise or evil. In a discourse on the Fifth Commandment (you shall not commit murder), the role the apocryphal widow Judith is extensively discussed. Paradoxically, a series of exempla follow

828 Historie anna, fols. r5v-s2.  
829 Passionael (Veldener), winterstuc, sophie, fol. M3 and Sielentoest, fol. 16. Although strictly speaking the texts do not mention that the saint is widowed, she was regarded as a patron saint of widows, see Jöckle, Encyclopedia, p. 412.  
830 Passionael (Veldener), somerstuc, eugenia, fol. QQ2.  
831 Passionael (Veldener), somerstuc, eugenia, fol. QQ2v.  
832 Passionael, winterstuc, paula, fol. t3.  
834 Katerina van watsteyn, fol. D2.  
836 Katerina van watsteyn, fols. G1-G2v.  
837 Sielentoest, fols. 115v-118.
featuring brave women putting their own lives at risk murdering brutal warlords. The beautiful Judith is referred to as a 'holy widow', who lives a devout life of praying, fasting, and performing charitable works. She knows how to handle men and makes Holophernes quickly fall in love with her, she plies him with liquor and then beheads him. The exemplum also appears in the *Kaetspel* where her goodness and holiness are pointed out.  

Another positive role is that of the single elderly woman showing her sagacity. An old woman (*out wijf*), wearing a religious habit of some sort, devises a clever plan to recoup a foreign merchant's losses, because she is moved out of pity.  

An old woman (*out wijf*) prays for a tyrant to remain in office.  In the past, she had successfully prayed for his predecessors, who became progressively more oppressive, to be succeeded. By now praying for the worst tyrant she hopes to prevent an even worse ruler to follow him.

Widows are supposed to live a life of goodness in a celibate and devout manner. St. Anne's behaviour as a widow is exemplary. She commands respect, gives to charity, does not care about temporal goods, keeps chaste, never displays her sorrows in excess, serves God, does penitence whilst praying, takes in poor people's children to teach them obedience to God, etc. The old woman who recoups the merchant's losses, as just mentioned, clears the road from stones which may hurt people.  
After two Dominicans were refused hospitality by a priest in Brabant, a charitable old woman donated her coarse bread to them.  

There are also negative ideas about widows and elderly women. Countess Marie of Champagne travels with great pomp and circumstance after her husband's

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838 *Kaetspel*, fols. f2v-f3.  
839 *Aesop*, fols. q1v-q2 and *Geesten*, fols. t1v-t3.  
840 *Ehebüchlein*, fols. c5v-c6, *Geesten*, fol. h3v, *Kaetspel*, fols. h6-h6v and *Twespraec*, fols. o4-o4v.  
841 *Historie, getijden, exempelen anna*, fols. h4v-h5.  
842 In the version of the *Geesten*, fol. t1v.  
843 *Bienboeck*, fol. g2v.
death. When she dies no one mourns her, instead her servants are preoccupied plundering her rich belongings as soon as she is died.

An old woman (*quene*) who is baby-sitting, threatens to feed the child to the wolves if it does not stop crying. An eavesdropping hungry wolf waits patiently at the gate until he nearly dies of starvation. At home, the wolf complains to the she-wolf that women cannot be trusted. Not only is the woman unkind to the child, she does not keep her word either.

Elderly women often appear as matchmakers and the exempla have been related in some depth here to demonstrate their ingenious craftiness. An old woman (*out wijf*), clad in religious clothes of some sort, assists a young man who has fallen in love with a married woman. When he pursues her unsuccessfully the old woman offers her services. It is pointed out twice that for the world this old woman appeared honourable, thereby emphasising her cunning nature. She gulls the married women into believing that God had punished the old woman's daughter by changing the girl into a dog. God had resorted to this extreme measure because the daughter failed to respond to the love of a young man who subsequently died out of love for her. When the wife notices that the dog is crying, which unknown to her has been fed mustard earlier by the sly matchmaker, she is convinced she must now respond favourably to her pursuer.

In Egypt, Palma, her husband, and her neighbours are being deceived by Ida, an old woman (*out wijf*). Palma has turned down a young suitor who consequently has fallen ill out of love. The old hag offers her services to him for money. She pays a priest to assist her in her plan. He must pretend he has received a message from the god Anubius who wishes to sleep with Palma. Palma is only too happy to comply with this honour and after her husband consents she arrives at the temple. She does not recognise the suitor in the dark. It is when she meets

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844 Bienboeck, fols. b2-b2v.
845 Aesop, fol. o3.
846 Geesten, fols. f2-f3.

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him during the day and he brags about his conquest of her that she is aware that she has been deceived.

Following Thomas van Cantimpré’s discussion of Eve’s role in the Fall, as noted above, an exemplum follows. An old woman assists a young man in capturing the love of the young wife of a carpenter. The wife spurns the riches offered to her by a suitor. An old woman offers her assistance. She gains the trust of the young woman by posing as a relative. She then forcefully captures her and locks her in. On her promise to return she is released. Immediately, the young wife musters three strong female neighbours to fend off the old woman. They give the old woman a good thrashing and send her naked on the street. It is concluded that in this way the young woman built up a good reputation in the city, which she would not have done had she accepted the riches and advances of the suitor.

The go-between then is dangerous because she pretends to be pious, but she deceives. It proves difficult for the young wife not to trust her. It is the go-between who dreams up elaborate plans, even using force, to persuade the invariably young married woman to return the advances of the suitor. When, in an exemplum, a man accuses St. Kunera of being a go-between (coppelster), of her bringing together those who should not, he is immediately struck down with insanity. Fortunately for him, brother Nicolaas van Dordrecht is at hand who, with a sermon, compels the parishioners to invoke the heavenly virgin’s mercy. The exemplum, ranked under the sin of blaspheming, shows the negative connotations of the word ‘go-between’. In the legend of St. Theodora, the woman is even dubbed ‘magician’ (toevenaarster). She assures Theodora that God can see during daylight only, paving the way for Theodora to engage in an adulterous relationship with her suitor at night.

847 Scaecspel, fols. f8-g1.
848 Bienboeck, fols. p1-p2.
849 Kunera, fol. c5v. The Middle Dutch word koppelaar means a matchmaker but also a woman who offers opportunity to others to commit lechery, see Vnes, M. de, et al. eds., Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal (27 vols., ’s-Gravenhage, Leiden, 1882-1994), VII, c. 5550.
3.6.2 Summary

The positive ideas that surround widows and elderly women are those embodied by the images of empathising, helpful and pious females. They are moved by the plight of their husbands in the afterlife and assist their fellow Christians. They also appear to be vulnerable, easily beguiled and needy. But the elderly female also displays threatening behaviour and aids the unmarried suitor in establishing relationships with married women. They do not simply assist: it is not the young suitor but the old woman who conjures up intricate plans to attempt to persuade the wives to yield.

Some reasons cited by friends and family for remarriage are that the widow is young, healthy and able to bear children. She possesses the goods to attract a new husband. Also she is beautiful, and judged by Judith, she is well aware how to employ her sex appeal to the advantage of her city. Reasons cited by the widows in return for not wanting to marry again are that no one will be able to equal the good married life they once had or that no one will be able to match the qualities of the first husband. In this way, although not in a conscious effort, the benefits of marital relationships are emphasised. The widow frequently opts for continence and in most cases, when she is not a royal or noble whose marriages aided alliances, she is seldom seriously opposed in this respect.

3.7 The relevance of ideas concerning widowhood to secular women

The demographical composition of late medieval urbanised areas suggest that there were relatively more elderly people than in previous centuries. In particular, the recurring bouts of the plague affected the mortality of the younger people more than the old. Life expectancy for a medieval woman was higher than

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Passionael, somerstuc, theodora, fol. 16v and 'toverste' in Sielentroest, fol. 126v.
for a male after the age of forty.\textsuperscript{852} Then, as now, female longevity was a reality of life. Also, city work could be less demanding, which may have led to an influx from the countryside to the city.\textsuperscript{853} Widowers may have remarried more commonly and more quickly than widows.\textsuperscript{854} Widowers may have preferred 'fresh young maidens',\textsuperscript{855} leaving elderly women on their own. Perhaps twenty-five to thirty percent of widows remarried, the percentage being higher for widowers.\textsuperscript{856} Thus, in the late middle ages the widow and elderly woman may have appeared ubiquitous. The late medieval cities became increasingly involved with the lot of widows as well as orphans, previously protected more by church than 'state'.\textsuperscript{857}

The widow could conduct her own courtship. Financially, with the return of her dowry, and a dower (portion set aside for her for her widowhood by her husband) she had gained freedom. If she had access to capital she could continue her husband's business.\textsuperscript{858}

There were numerous options open for widows. She could reintegrate through marriage, particularly if she had possessions, was young and beautiful or remain temporarily unmarried or became a vowess (similar to the females who appeared clad in religious habits), or gained entry in a religious organisation.\textsuperscript{859} However, the many possibilities available to the widow can also be regarded as a weak spot. That the widow who had to fend for herself is also reflected in reality. As seen, Catherine of Vadstena was nearly abducted. It is unknown how common it

\textsuperscript{852} Russell, J.S., 'How many of the population were aged?', \textit{Aging and the aged in medieval Europe.} Selected papers from the annual conference of the centre for medieval studies, University of Toronto, held 25-26 February and 11-12 November 1983, M.M. Sheehan ed. (Papers in mediaeval studies 11; Toronto, 1990), p. 126.

\textsuperscript{853} Williams and Echols, \textit{Pit and pedestal}, p. 242.

\textsuperscript{854} Herlihy, \textit{Households}, p. 107.

\textsuperscript{855} Herlihy, \textit{Households}, p. 155.


\textsuperscript{857} Opitz, 'Leven', pp. 312-313.

\textsuperscript{858} Anderson and Zinsser, \textit{History}, pp. 424-425. The merchant widow, for instance, had free access to capital.
was for widows to be abducted. A wealthy widow from Zeeland was abducted and forcefully married in the 1440s.\textsuperscript{860}

The church was ambiguous about recurrent marriages. On the one hand, widows were shown the path of consecrated virginity and on the other, recurrent marriages were not attacked because of the sanctity of marriage. However, canon lawyers argued that nuptial blessings for subsequent marriages should not be dispensed.\textsuperscript{861} Van Denemarken comments that women in his day and age (fifteenth century) remarry not to serve God, nor to beget a child, but to satisfy bodily pleasures.\textsuperscript{862} St. Anne remarried for the sole reason that she was still fertile. Remarriage was a topic that did not fit in comfortably in a legend composed in the late middle ages and the utmost is done in order that the reader will not confuse the holy female with a lecherous old woman.

Concerning remarriage De Eyb advises the dying husband not to fret about his wife and children, because the responsibilities will be hers and her future husband 'whom she will indeed take'.\textsuperscript{863} It is the casualness with which he asserts that she will remarry that is remarkable. It is of course not surprising that a widow with children would be on the look-out for a husband to support the household.

De Eyb also informs the reader that to marry a virgin is preferable to a widow since the former is pliable, indeed as weak as wax, he may model an image of her to suit his own, whereas the latter has known another's love and picked up

\textsuperscript{862} Historie, getijden, exempelen anna, fol. h3.
\textsuperscript{863} Ehebüchlein, fol. c4v.
familiar customs. The Scaecspel also reports that it is better to marry a good virgin than a widow since the latter desires to rule over men.

In our sources ideas about widows vary: a balance seems to have been struck between positive and negative ideas. It is the negative ideas associated with widows and elderly women which stick in our mind, because, with the benefit of hindsight, elderly women were among the first to be prosecuted for witchcraft. Pleij highlights the fourteenth-century occurrence of ideas of shrews playing a role in specific Low Countries settings, which suggests that his particular examples originate from this area. In the fifteenth century this spills over into the literary image of the bad old woman. However, in the early modern period, women in the northern Low Countries at least, suffered a comparatively light persecution because of a relatively enlightened attitude.

As Brandenbarg has shown, it is remarkable that Jacob Sprenger promoted the cult of St. Anne as well as condemned witches. In the Malleus maleficarum (1487) written by Sprenger and Henricus Institoris witches were predominantly women. Witches were thought to entertain sexual relationships with the devil, and marry the devil. Witches stood accused of murdering young children or dedicating youngsters to the devil. Women could instigate male impotence or make a husband lust after other women. In this way witches undermined the sacrament of marriage. In the Malleus protection of marriage and social control of sexual relationships were emphasised.

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864 Ehebüchlein, fol. f1.
865 Scaecspel, fols. h1v-h2.
866 Pleij, Wie?, p. 41. He cites, for instance, the example of Moorkensvel.
868 For the role of Jacobus Sprenger, see Brandenbarg, Familieleven, pp. 101-109.
869 Dresen-Coenders, L., 'De heks als duivelsboel. Over het ontstaan van de angst voor heksen en de bescherming tegen heksen', Tussen heks en heilige. Het vrouwbeeld op de
In an agrarian society, elderly women appear to have been more influential than in urban society. Their role in the agrarian community involved assistance in matters of fertility, birth and death. Also, in an agrarian society women performed magic rituals in and around the house with relation to love, impotence and conception. However, in an urban environment the elderly woman became increasingly superfluous. The municipal community and university trained men partly assumed her role. A positive pendant for the elderly secular woman was St. Anne who not only features in her legends and exempla involved with matters revolving around fertility and birth (which we shall see in the next chapter), but, equally important, led an exemplary way of life. She served as a positive role model for the widow.

3.8 Conclusion

In the second half of the fifteenth century women were presented with ideas from the legends of the female saints' Lives and exempla, many of which predated the fifteenth century, which can be related to contemporary female social reality. Women were predominantly presented with ideas about the ties between the spouses in marital relationships and sexual rites which also play a big role in the three well-known marriages of Eve, Mary and Anne.

In certain cities and at certain times an imbalance may have existed when women outnumbered men. The urban environment offered opportunities for single women to sustain themselves. It is in this environment where single female households existed. Men could marry women who had most to offer financially. City dwellers delayed marriage or never married at all. Despite the emphasis and special status of virgins, the subject of dowry and potential marriage remains in

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focus. The ideas pronounced in the sources may have drawn secular women to the religious life, but, more generally, they were ideal for promoting chastity for the unmarried with positive and strong imagery too.

Although the married saints' Lives convey some ideas about women within the conjugal bond, it is in the exempla where women as wives come into their own. Ample attention is given in the exempla to deviant sexual behaviour, incestuous sexual relationships, and female adultery. These topics are not part of a catalogue of errant female behaviour. Although many adulterous women appear in the exempla that is not to say that women in reality were thought to have been adulterous in great numbers. Equally, the sources which deal with good behaviour of women appear to be rather prescriptive than descriptive, and it is far from certain that married women complied with the tasks described and the behaviour outlined.

The many examples from the saints' legends (as one of the many vehicles available) advocating chaste marriages and good behaviour were useful for secular women. On the one hand, women who were in social reality attempting to lead a chaste life may have mirrored themselves on the ideas mentioned. On the other hand, those who were not so strict, could find it useful to do so. Whatever the case, the examples served as a guideline to a better life.

Widows too could mirror themselves in the sources. Although the sources describe the widow usually either as extremely good or exceedingly bad, a balance is struck. The bivalent attitude in society is reflected in the options widows had available in managing their lives to an extent they had never experienced before.

Seen in an urban context, the sources used by the church paralleled the concerns of the city. Orderly behaviour was striven after for the benefit of the community. Although the context of most of our sources had changed over time, the sources fitted in neatly in contemporary society. What had not changed was
that women were told to behave in a certain way and that chastity belonged to all their life stages.
4 Ideas about women as mothers and as daughters

In the previous chapter we evaluated the textual images of females in the context of their marital status: as virgins, wives and widows. In this chapter we deal with the remainder of images of females in a wider sphere: women within the family. Women will be viewed as mothers (primarily of daughters) and daughters (primarily of mothers). Guided by the corpus of female saints’ Lives and exempla where mother-in-law, godmother and daughter-in-law appear less frequently, they will be treated only summarily.

4.1 Historiography on women in the family

Although there is a wealth of secondary sources written on the family in general, there is a concentration on late medieval Italy and when north western Europe is discussed it often concerns the family of noble or royal descent in the eleventh and twelfth centuries or peasant families in the later middle ages.

Monographs on fifteenth-century ‘burgher families’ of the Low Countries are off the beaten historiographical track. Some information about women as mothers and daughters can be gleaned from David Nicholas’s informative book on late medieval Ghent, despite its geographical, chronological and methodological limitations for our purposes.

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873 Duby, Knight.
875 Nicholas, Domestic life. Ghent was a French crown fief, and the northern Low Countries were not part of France. Nicholas uses Ghent records to demonstrate that the family was a social, economic and defensive unit, and does not concentrate specifically on mothers or daughters. He describes the workings of the unit operating within the ‘clan’, but he does not explain what the term entails. He probably borrowed it from J. Heers, and although Heers does not supply a definition either, he appears to have taken the albergo as springboard, see Heers, J., Family clans in the middle ages. A study of political and social structures in urban areas (Europe in the middle ages 4; Amsterdam, New York, Oxford, 1977), B. Herbert trans., p. 11.
Although there is information available on family life, research on the role of mothers and daughters is rather disappointing. Philippe Ariès's book revolves mainly around boys and their fathers. His research material includes educational works, method of instruction and portraits, to the neglect of the mother's involvement in child-rearing. He concluded that society failed to distinguish between adult and child. In his view, it was not until the seventeenth century, that children became highly valued, and that before that time there was no sentiment de l'enfance (concept of childhood). In agreement with him is Lea Dasberg. Roessingh does not mention the role of mothers either.

Similarly, both Lawrence Stone and Edward Shorter concentrated on patriarchal society. Although the latter incorporated some information on motherhood, which he regarded as one element of the nuclear family, he maintained that mother love is an invention of modern times. Affection between mother and child, Shorter asserted, was negligible in the pre-industrial era. Elisabeth Badinter relegated a watershed in the quality of mothering among the middle classes to late in the eighteenth century, basing her conclusions on the care a mother bestows on her child, such as breast-feeding. We will shortly see that breast-feeding was regarded of great importance much earlier.

Els Kloek, who compared and contrasted the views of various family historians, concluded that all agree there was a shift towards a more affectionate society though they are not in concordance concerning the dates and do not attribute it

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\(^{877}\) Although she attributes the emergence of jeugdland (youth land) to the eighteenth century, Dasberg, L., *Grootbrengen door kleinhouden als historisch verschijnsel* (Meppel, 1975), p. 18. At this time, she asserts, children were no longer treated as adults.


to the middle ages. Also, no one attempts to relate it to the position of the woman in society.

Added to these problems are those observed in chapter 2 on modern views about medieval women. We concluded that modern views are often structured by dichotomies, with the exception of a few writers. This in turn gives the modern reader a one-sided impression. In chapter 3, we concluded that specific information about women's social reality or everyday life in the Low Countries is not readily available. There is a real need for more information about everyday life of women within the family in the Low Countries.

Bearing these limitations in mind in this chapter, as in the previous chapter, the attempts to relate the value of the text to the social world of the urban secular burgher woman will again prove challenging. Apart from the historiographical problems of emphasis, chronology and geography there also remains the problem that we have to distance ourselves from our modern concept of motherhood and childhood.

4.2 Women as mothers

4.2.1 Mary and her relatives

Although emphasis here is first and foremost on mothers of daughters rather than mothers of sons it is impossible to discuss medieval motherhood without reference to Mary and her son Jesus. Many literary motifs appearing in female legends and exempla are better understood when studied in relation to Mary.

It was impossible to emulate Mary since Mary's case is particular, both with regard to how she herself was conceived and how she conceived Jesus. To turn to the former first, how could Mary, as perfect future mother of Jesus, have been
born tainted with original sin? The sources are ambivalent on how Mary was conceived, perhaps through her parents' kiss at the Golden Gate or under more mundane circumstances. Since the twelfth century, the concept of the immaculate conception was discussed. In the late middle ages, the Dominican friars believed that Mary, like John the Baptist, had been sanctified only in her mother's womb, while the Franciscans, in closer alignment with popular belief, thought that Mary was also the product of an immaculate conception; that she too was born free from original sin. The issue was still alive in 1500 when the immaculists involved with the support of Anne's cult endorsed the view of Anne's immaculate conception by her mother Emerentiana.

This upwards shift (from Mary to Anne to Emerentiana) emphasised the importance attached to this issue. By stimulating Anne's cult Mary's special coming into being could be more effectively argued. Particularly in the Low Countries depictions in art of St. Anne as mother of Mary and Mary as mother of Jesus were rife (for instance, in their depiction together in the Anna-te-Driëen).

The second peculiarity surrounding Mary is her conception of Jesus. After an angelic visitation and after obtaining Mary's consent, Jesus's body and soul entered Mary's womb together, both perfect and sanctified. The abstract mechanics of the incarnation are difficult to comprehend and to explain. In the Passionæl, the angel explains that the Holy Spirit will shine his light on her. In

has compared and contrasted the views of Ph. Aries, L. Flandrin, P. Laslett, E. Shorter, L. Stone and E. Zaretsky.

Passionæl, winterstuc, onser vrouwen ontfangenis, fol. n4v, mentions that although it took an act of sexual intercourse to conceive Mary (an act of men), the emphasis of the feast of her conception should lie on the conception of her soul (an act of God). Passionæl, winterstuc, onser vrouwen lichtmisse, fols. u2-u2v, recalls that Mary is purged and sanctified in Anne's womb. The version of the Passionæl (Leeu, 1480), somerstuc, anna, fols. C1v-C2, also states that Mary will be sanctified in the womb and relates how after the meeting at the Golden Gate, the couple went home and gained a child. In Historie anna, fols. d1-d1v, the angel tells Joachim that God will sanctify Mary and that in Anne's womb she will be filled with the Holy Spirit; but it is stated too that Mary will remain a virgin just like her mother. The latter statement implies that both conceived free from original sin. In Spiegel, fol. 10, the maculist's version is maintained.

She was born 'boven de loop der natuur'en, Brandenburg, Familieleven, pp. 97-110.

Passionæl, winterstuc, onser vrouwen annunciatio, fol. g3v.
the *Spiegel*, Mary is impregnated by 'heavenly dew' or God's breathing on Mary.\(^{886}\) It was of course Mary's matrilineal descent which is stressed in the Tree of Jesse; in contrast with the usual depiction of a family tree being through the male line, a line of kings.

The difficult concept of Mary's remaining a virgin when conceiving is explained in a sermon praising virginity. Since it was believed in the middle ages that bees reproduced spontaneously, Thomas van Cantimpré uses the life cycle of the bee in an attempt to convince unbelievers (in this case he addresses Jews) that birth, without sexual intercourse, is indeed possible.\(^{887}\)

Some early medieval female saints called upon to defend the new Christian faith, are also faced with explaining the complicated relationships of Mary. For example, in the accompanying exemplum in the discussion on the First Commandment (you shall have no other god to set against me), St. Euphemia explains that Jesus has a father without a mother, and a mother without a father.\(^{888}\) St. Eugenia, accused of being involved in witchcraft, tells to the prefect the very same thing and adds that the father has not carnally known the mother and vice versa, and that his virgin-wife brings him children daily.\(^{889}\)

It is assumed that Mary did not suffer any pain when Christ was born.\(^{890}\) In this way, Mary counteracts the curse put on disobedient Eve. In the *Passionael*, Bernard of Clairvaux is quoted reminding the reader that God had instigated this curse on women to bear children with pain (based on Genesis 3:16).\(^{891}\) Mary, the new Eve, gave birth to Jesus, the new Adam, thereby undoing the wrong Eve

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886 *Spiegel*, fol. 11v and fol. 18. On the latter folio, reference is made to Gideon's fleece which absorbed dew while the ground stayed dry (Judges 6:36-38).
887 *Bienboeck*, fols. m4-m5.
888 Sielentroest*, fol. 17. In the *Passionael*, St. Euphemia is not credited with this statement.
889 *Passionael* (Veldener), somerstuc, eugenia, fol. QQ4v.
890 *Passionael*, winterstuc, onser vrouwen annunciacio, fol. g3v.
891 *Passionael*, winterstuc, onser vrouwen annunciacio, fol. g3v. See Lucas, *Women*, p. 16 for the importance of Bernard of Clairvaux on mariolatry.
had done. Further still, Eve our first mother, is a mother of the mortals, but Mary is a mother of the living.

Since Mary was perceived to be free from the stain of carnal lust and original sin in the act by which she conceived Jesus, it was not necessary for her to be churched. She is praised that she did however go to be purified on her first visit to the temple after giving birth.\textsuperscript{892}

Marina Warner, who has researched the various roles and functions of the Virgin Mary, points to the influence of the friars in promoting Mary’s maternal image.\textsuperscript{893} The mix of the cults of humility and poverty with that of Mary resulted in a more identifiable mother-type for the 'common human being'. The introduction of the 'Christmas manger' in the thirteenth century church confronted the faithful with more or less realistic imagery.

Although Mary was inimitable in certain matters, Mary’s motherhood became modelled on a more human basis as emphasis on Christ’s humanity increased. The attention which shifted from 'atonement-resurrection and last judgement to creation and incarnation' ushered in a new devotion centring on Christ's humanity in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.\textsuperscript{894} Initially under Cistercian auspices, Jesus was no longer depicted as an omnipotent being, but as a helpless and charming child. The Cistercians drew their intake from adults, who were raised within families and not in monasteries as oblates were. Familial pictures would appeal to the adults. The cult of Mary as mother went hand in hand with Jesus as adorable infant.\textsuperscript{895} Jesus is depicted as a sweet, innocent, pure and approachable human child.

\textsuperscript{892} \textit{Passionael, winterstuc, onser vrouwen lichtmisse}, fol. v9v.
\textsuperscript{893} Warner, \textit{Alone}, p. 182.
\textsuperscript{895} Shahar, \textit{Childhood}, p. 18.
Clarissa Atkinson views Mary's motherhood as one predominantly perceived to be filled with suffering and sorrow, with which the reader could identify herself. Ultimately of course, Mary must relinquish her son, for instance in the *Spiegel* where the sorrows of Mary, as *Mater Dolorosa*, were prefigured by Adam and Eve's mourning for their son Abel. But equally, I find that Mary's motherhood is also characterised as a happy one. For example, just looking at the infant and thinking or talking about him brings a smile to her face. Sorrowful or happy, Mary's maternal intimacy and the emotional attachment to her son is crucial because she is made credible in medieval eyes, particularly in her role as *mediatrix*.

In this capacity, in one exemplum, Mary, as Mother of Mercy, had been elevated to the position as protector of the entire sinful humankind. Although the trumpets had already been blown on the day of judgement, she saved humankind from eradication. She showed Jesus her 'virginal breasts' and reminded him that she had nursed him. She single-handedly postponed the day of judgement. The theme of breast-feeding is caught up in complex symbolism, but it also reflects her nurturing capacity and underlines Christ's humanity. Suckling a child was also the act for the common woman to identify with, excluded as she was from emulating the Virgin in matters pertaining to intercourse and birth.

A quick word must now be said about the relationship of Mary with the rest of the Holy Family. The role allotted to her by medieval society must also be understood in relation to that of her other family members. As explained in the previous chapter, leading churchmen remodelled Joseph from an old cuckold to become a positive and sprightly role model as a husband. In the later middle ages, he also served as a new role model as young father of the infant. Joseph, Christ's father.
on earth or rather foster father, had to comply with the criteria of the late middle ages to make Joseph worthy of this extraordinary child. Also, the new Joseph was allocated virtues that resembled those of the members of the burgher class of merchants, artisans and tradesman; Joseph became a true family provider. Reflecting ideals of the later middle ages Mary, Joseph and the infant form a happy family unit.

This unit is also depicted in some works of art, for instance in the painting of *The Meal with the Holy Family* by Jacob Jansz. The family is seated at a table with the child on Mary's lap, she is spooning up porridge for the child to eat, whilst Joseph cuts the rye bread. The emergence of this contented cohesive unit in which emotional domestic relationships are displayed was perceived as ideal.

This nuclear family unit itself was part of a wider family network, that of the Holy Kinship which consisted of Anne's three daughters by three successive husbands and their progeny. The crowded scenes of the Holy Kinship on some late fifteenth-century paintings show Anne, her three daughters and their children or even more relatives. See, for instance, the *Holy Kindred* painted by the Master of the Amsterdam Holy Kindred. Ordinary families could recognise themselves in these credible family relationships.

### 4.2.2 Fertility, conception, pregnancy and birth

As discussed in chapter 3, according to St. Augustine's threefold benefits of marriage, having children (*proles*) is one of the main benefits and objects of tying the marital knot. In most of our primary sources the expected result of medieval

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899 Sterfoeck, fols. 14v-15v.
901 Châtelet, *Painting*, plate 112.
902 Châtelet, *Painting*, illustration 102 and p. 222. The painting shows Anne, Mary and her child, her sisters Mary Cleophas and Mary Salome. Also, Joachim, Joseph, Elizabeth, and the children St. James the Less, John the Baptist, St. John the Evangelist, St. James the Greater and St. Simon are depicted.
marriage would almost always automatically entail raising a family. Refusing to marry therefore equals refusing to become a mother.

Female fertility plays an important role in the sources. For instance, the *topos* of restricting fertility within marriage (how to remain as free as possible from sexual desire and still conceive children) occurs. After childbirth couples may decide to live in chastity as did, for example, St. Bridget of Sweden and her husband who promised each other mutual chastity in perpetuity after they had had eight children.\textsuperscript{903}

Often, when children were desired and fertility was diminished divine intervention was called for. Examples of women who in old age became pregnant are numerous. Emerentiana conceives Anne in her sixties after having been married in her teens.\textsuperscript{904} The angel who visits the lamenting Joachim, cast from worship because of his childlessness, announces Mary's future birth in the *Passionael* and mentions God's assistance to sterile parents.\textsuperscript{905} The angel recalls some precursors: Sarah was ninety years old when she became pregnant, Rachel was barren a long time before she bore Joseph. The author of *Spiegel* compares Hanna's becoming fertile by a miracle, with that of Mary's conception of Jesus.\textsuperscript{906} All these barren women featuring in the Old Testament conceived in a miraculous and divine set of circumstances.

But younger women's wish for conception was granted too. The mother of Catherine of Alexandria only conceived her daughter after a crucifix had been left in the temple replacing pagan statues.\textsuperscript{907} St. Catherine of Vadstena donates a piece of the clothing of her mother St. Bridget of Sweden as an amulet to an unfortunate woman.\textsuperscript{908} The woman in question, who had disappointed her

\textsuperscript{903} Birgitten, fol. A7.
\textsuperscript{904} Historie anna, fols. b2-b2v.
\textsuperscript{905} Passionael, somerstuc, onser vrouwen gheboert, fol. v10v.
\textsuperscript{906} Spiegel, fol. 25.
\textsuperscript{907} Katherinen, fols. a2v-a3.
\textsuperscript{908} Katerina van watsteyn, fols. G7-G7v.
husband by giving birth to seven stillborn sons, is now assured that she will bear a healthy girl. The parents of St. Euphrosyne who fervently desire a child involve themselves in charitable acts. Reminiscent of Anne and Joachim, they serve the poor day and night and they dispense alms. It is only after a large pecuniary gift to the abbot of the local monastery, guaranteeing the abbot's intercession through prayers to God, that the couple duly conceives.

It helps, of course, to rely on the direct assistance of a renowned saint in the tricky business of conception. In an exemplum, St. Mary Magdalene helps a French princely couple to conceive a child through her intercession to God. St. Anne is credited with having cured devout infertile couples in her own right.

Not being fertile may instigate women to behave irrationally. For instance, because she cannot conceive an empress becomes depressed and decides to kill the emperor's only son by his deceased wife. Also, the wife who, disappointed by the lukewarm response of her husband in bed, is pondering taking on a lover, acts partly from her disappointment in not having conceived. As may be recalled, the author Jan van Denemarken did his utmost to demonstrate that St. Anne's motivation to remarry was not because of unchaste feelings, but the fact that she was fecund.

The lecherous goddess Venus, depicted extremely scantily dressed in the woodcut, resorts to requesting a piece from the mandrake plant in order to conceive from her many lovers. Female nakedness reminded the audience that

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909 Passionael (Veldener), somerstuc, eufrosina, fols. NN8-NN8v.
910 Passionael, somerstuc, maria magdalena, fols. n1v-n2.
911 Historie anna, infertile couples feature in three exempla, see fol. n6, fol. o5 (Anne intercedes with God) and fol. s2v.
912 Seven mannen, fol. a5v.
913 Seven mannen, fol. e1.
914 Twespraec, fol. d4. Mandrake plants are associated with fertility in the middle ages, Cadden, Meanings, pp. 210-211.
nudity and sexuality were part of the Fall.\textsuperscript{915} The plant however, refuses to have anything to do with loose women and chases her away. The moral admonishes the reader to be aware of unchaste women.

After conception pregnancy follows, but the long road to confinement is perilous. It is clearly recognised that a pregnant woman is in need of special protection or has special wishes. In the \textit{Bienboeck} an exemplum follows a sermon on virtuousness; in it a charitable abbot saves the life of a pregnant pauper by having an ox slaughtered especially to feed her.\textsuperscript{916} After the meal the ox is miraculously restored to the abbot. Mary saves a pregnant woman who was nearly tempted by the devil to renounce her faith.\textsuperscript{917} She also rescues a pregnant woman from drowning by sheltering her under her cloak.\textsuperscript{918} St. Mary Magdalene prevents a pregnant woman from being shipwrecked.\textsuperscript{919} Sigrid, pregnant with St. Bridget of Sweden, is saved from the same fate because, as is explained to her in a vision after her ordeal, her baby is given to her by God.\textsuperscript{920} St. Clare's mother Ortulana may have gone on pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1192 in a wish to become pregnant, or she may have feared difficult confinement.\textsuperscript{921}Whilst pregnant with St. Clare fearing the perils of childbirth, she prays in front of a cross and is told by a heavenly voice that she shall give birth to a light which will shine on the world.\textsuperscript{922}

Labour is a recognisable separate stage. Eve's punishment for her disobedience was to bring forth children in pain. In an exemplum, warning against ungratetfulness, a serpent in labour tells her yet unborn children to be thankful towards her since she has fed them with her blood, kept them warm, suffered

\textsuperscript{916} Bienboeck, fol. l2.
\textsuperscript{917} \textit{Passionael, winterstuc, onser vrouwen lichtmisse}, fol. u3v and \textit{Miraculen}, fol. 21.
\textsuperscript{918} \textit{Miraculen}, fols. 56-56v.
\textsuperscript{919} \textit{Passionael, somerstuc, maria magdalena}, fols. n5-n5v.
\textsuperscript{920} Birgitten, fol. A5v.
\textsuperscript{921} Clara, fol. aa1v.
\textsuperscript{922} Clara, fol. aa2 and \textit{Passionael} (Leeu, 1480), somerstuc, clara, fol. C3v.
pain and will die because of it. The phoenix is only too glad that she will reproduce upon her death through her ashes. She explains to the serpent who advocates the solace of marital companionship, the conjugal pleasures and the goodness of children, that she is spared many tribulations. She will not have to relinquish her chastity, she will not have to carry a child, she will not have to give birth with pain, she will not have to raise a child, or be anxious about it. The wardens of the prison in which St. Felicitas (d. 203) was delivered wondered how she would cope with the pain that waited her in the Games at Carthage when she had already suffered so much in delivering her baby. Unperturbed, the saint was certain that God would suffer for her.

Saintly intercession helped with the pain and dangers faced by childbirth. St. Margaret of Antioch who is allowed a last prayer before being beheaded, is granted by a voice from heaven that if pregnant women request her intercessory power with God they will be spared the dangers of childbirth. A queen donning a coin with a portrait of St. Anne gives birth with happiness and remains in good health. The Augustinian Nicolaas van Dordrecht recommends a woman in difficult labour, taking her last confession fearing for her life, to pray to St. Kunera. The woman then quickly delivers.

Some mothers are fortunate enough to be singled out to share Mary’s experience in bringing forth a child painlessly. This could happen in two ways. Firstly, a saintly mother is rewarded with a little help from above. For instance, St. Bridget of Sweden, a staunch devotee of Mary, receives assistance from a mysterious woman (probably Mary, but she is not mentioned by name) in the birthing

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923 Parabolen, fols. m1v-m2.
924 Parabolen, fols. n5-n5v.
925 Passionael, winterstuc, perpetue ende felicitas, fol. y4v.
926 Passionael, somerstuc, margriet, fol. m1v.
927 Historie anna, fols. s8v-t1. The story is a subplot in the exemplum featuring Procopius, the student from Prague.
928 Kunera, fols. d3-d3v.
chamber, who vanishes into thin air after the saint no longer experiences pain.\textsuperscript{929} Secondly, mothers giving birth to their future holy daughters were shown not to have suffered. Pieternel, Liedwij van Schiedam's mother, had difficulties in delivering all her children with the notable exception of her saintly daughter.\textsuperscript{930}

Special care for the mother giving birth is also mentioned. In an exemplum, warning the credulous to be vigilant, a wolf offers a sow with birth pangs a place to give birth to her babies, but the sow wisely refuses the offer.\textsuperscript{931} In another exemplum, warning against abusers of the kind-hearted, a charitable female dog offers her home and bed to another dog in labour, and, soon after, is then thrown out by the mother dog and her young pups.\textsuperscript{932} In a charitable act, St. Elizabeth of Hungary cares for a recently delivered mother, donating her maidservant's sleeves as swaddles for the new-born girl.\textsuperscript{933} Liedwij van Schiedam singles out poor women in childbirth for charitable purposes.\textsuperscript{934} She dispenses bread, beer, butter and money to them until they are able to support themselves again.

4.2.3 Maternal responsibilities

4.2.3.1 Guidance for mothers

In chapter 2, a mother's hand in her daughter's education was mentioned, but the exempla also appear to demonstrate how a mother should treat and teach her child.

For example, a mother should set a good example. In an exemplum where teachers are admonished only to teach when they themselves are beyond


\textsuperscript{930} Liedwij, fol. a2v.

\textsuperscript{931} Aesop, fol. f5v.

\textsuperscript{932} Aesop, fol. d5.

\textsuperscript{933} Passionael, winterstuc, elyzabeth, fol. c5v.
reproach, mother crab chides her daughter for not being able to walk in a straight line. Daughter invites mother to give a demonstration, which of course mother, being a crab, cannot do. In an exemplum teaching that the poor should not aspire to equal their social betters, mother frog inflates herself in front of her children in her quest to obtain the size of the ox, but she explodes.

Some pearls of wisdom are thrown in as well. For instance, all children should be treated equally. A she-monkey prefers one child above the other and she protects only her dearest child when being hunted by dogs. When she escapes her least loved child jumps on her back, and so forces her to drop her best loved one. In time, she learns to love the former better than beforehand.

That it is better not to sing one's own praises is made clear in the exemplum of the foolish she–monkey who commends the beauty of her own child to Jupiter, only to be mocked by him. Surely, it is better to be admired by others for performing charitable acts.

A mother should advise her child well. In an exemplum, a concerned mother prays for her silly daughter to become wise. The daughter is aware of her mother's concern. When the daughter sees a man spurring on his horse she begs him to spur her body on too and that her mother would gladly pay for it. The man consequently took advantage of her. Clearly, this mother needed to give her daughter more relevant advice, rather than rely on help from above.

Outside help is not to be spurned. The frustrated but well-meaning mother of St. Catherine of Alexandria, takes her daughter to a hermit to enlist his help to

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934 Liedwijn, fol. d3.
935 Aesop, fol. o4.
936 Aesop, fols. g6-g6v.
937 Aesop, fols. p4v-p5.
938 Aesop, fol. o6v.
939 Aesop, fol. d6v.
reason with her stubborn daughter who refuses to marry and to ask him to locate
a compatible husband.  

4.2.3.2 Practical care

Who is responsible for the physical care of the daughter and who is looking after
the children? Unfortunately, there is not much information given in the sources,
although some topos may be gleaned.

St. Margaret of Antioch is given to a wet nurse. Catherine of Vadstena is given
a wet nurse as well, but she prefers to suckle her mother’s breasts instead of
those of the unchaste wet nurse’s. Refusing to suck from the breast was
considered an early act indicative of the holiness of the infant.

It appears natural for a mother to suckle her own child. For instance, a mother
goat, captured by the wolf, is allowed home to nourish her baby so it will not die
of hunger on the condition that she returns with her young. Of course she does
not return, and the moral added is that it is better to have little in certainty, than
much in doubt.

Nurses do not appear often in the sources. In one exemplum a child is cared for
in the castle by three nurses, one who feeds it, one who washes it and one who
puts it to bed. Even so, their care does not protect the child from being
attacked by a serpent.

Practical guidelines are specified in the Scaecspel where the chess piece of the
Queen is discussed. Although the auspicious heading 'Queen' raises the

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940 Katherinen, fol. a5v.
941 Passioenl, somerstuc, margriet, fol. I8.
943 Bejczy, I., 'The sacra infantia in medieval hagiography', The church and childhood, D.
944 Twespraec, fols. n2-n2v.
945 Seven mannen, fols. b5-b7v.
946 Scaecspel, fols. b2-b3.
expectation that reference will follow to specific maternal tasks, it is in fact parental care (which, of course, includes maternal care) which is discussed. ‘Natural reasons’ dictate that parents should feed and clothe their offspring. Poor parents should teach their children a job, rich parents ought to teach their children wisdom. God will punish those parents whose children are damned. Parents must share their inheritance with their children.

Raising children with a job in mind is also mentioned in the exemplum where Emperor Octavianus is praised for teaching his children a profession.947 His son is taught sports and combat skills while his daughter is taught to make cloth. When raising a son, it is stated, one ought to teach him a profession, but when raising a girl the most important factor is to keep her chaste. However, it is predominantly mothers who are involved with their daughters, as the examples which follow show.

4.2.3.3 Maternal guidance

Having looked at the methods children should be taught in chapter 2, they will now be complemented with examples concerning the material daughters were taught.

For example, Ytaberta gives her daughter St. Gertrude of Nivelles a religious education day and night from the time she was a small child.948 Hence her daughter is wiser than her peers. Clare was taught the rudiments of faith by her mother.949 Although Catherine of Vadstena had been educated from her early childhood, her mother St. Bridget taught her spiritual exercises when Catherine went to Rome to visit her mother.950

947 Twespraec, fol. g6v.
948 Passionael, winterstuc, gheertruut, fols. z4v.
949 Clara, fol. aa2v.
950 Katerina van watsteyn, fol. G4.
Parents ought to impart to their children a religious education and also instil into them Christian guidelines. In a discussion on the seven sacraments in the Boec van der biechten, it is mentioned under the sacrament of baptism that parents should teach their children about the Christian religion (not further specified) and the pater noster.\textsuperscript{951} Under the sacrament of confirmation, it is stated that parents should not let their children die without their being confirmed.\textsuperscript{952} Under the sacrament of the Eucharist, parents are exhorted to show their children how to prepare themselves for confession.\textsuperscript{953}

Girls were taught to behave properly. For example, St. Margaret (alias Pelagia) was watched closely by her parents and taught good manners.\textsuperscript{954}

Sometimes, children regret not having been raised properly by their parents. The most familiar example is that of the son who is condemned to death for theft and accuses his mother for not having castigated him in his childhood, and who on his way to the gallows bites off her nose.\textsuperscript{955} In an exemplum, the tormented soul Prevento warns her friend Adoptata to change her life for the better.\textsuperscript{956} She gives the example of her cousin Kyliana whom she has seen being carried off to hell. Her cousin was cursing her mother for having given birth to her, for not killing her in her early childhood, for nursing her and for not raising her correctly.

4.2.3.4 Miracles

Both child miracles wrought by the female saints, as well as the persons at the receiving end of the miracle are mentioned. The first topic demonstrates the frequency and efficacy of female saints' involvement, and the second topic shows

\textsuperscript{951} Biechten, fol. dd3v.  
\textsuperscript{952} Biechten, fol. dd4v.  
\textsuperscript{953} Biechten, fol. dd5.  
\textsuperscript{954} Passionael, somerstuc, margarita, fol. r7.  
\textsuperscript{955} Aesop, fol. o1v. A similar exemplum featuring a son and his father appears in Scaecspel, fol. b2v and Sielentroest, fols. 129-129v.  
\textsuperscript{956} Sterfboeck, fols. k5-l3v.
in detail who the beneficiaries were. Mary, in her image of mother of all, is a great rescuer of children. I have not discriminated between boys and girls as recipients of her favours, since the examples set a pattern which is continued in particular in the exempla attached to the female saints' Lives. Also, the texts do not always disclose the sex of the children involved.

Mary saves a child from a burning house after it had been blessed in Mary's name when the mother was forced to leave it unattended. Mary releases a son from prison, after the pleading mother kidnapped the Christ child from Mary's statue in the church. A virgin who had promised to live in chastity is sold to a knight by her destitute parents. By virtue of the fact that her name is Mary she is saved from being ravished, and the knight is rid of unchaste feelings.

Some saints follow in Mary's footsteps and assist children in need. The miracles not only give an insight into common ailments and accidents occurring to medieval children, but more importantly, to their parents' emotional requests and responses. This in turn shows the care and love parents bestow on their children in need. St. Brigid of Ireland (d. ca. 525) heals a twelve year old mute daughter and is thanked for this by the girl's mother. A girl is healed at home by St. Walburga (d. 779), to the immense relief of her parents. St. Samina (no date) restores health to the daughter of the house where she intends to take shelter for the night. St. Gertrude appears in a vision to a blind and handicapped girl lodging in a convent at Nivelles, who is with her parents desperately trying to find a physician to heal her. Gertrude tells the girl to visit the church of St. Paul where her bed is being stored; as soon as the girl lies on it she is healed.

957 Miraculen, fol. 35 and Sielentroest, fol. 83.
958 Miraculen, fols. 13v-14, Passionael, somerstuc, onser vrouwen gheboert, fols. u2v-u3 and Sielentroest, fols. 85-85v.
959 Miraculen, fols. 32-32v.
960 Passionael (Veldener), winterstuc, brygida, fol. L5v.
961 Passionael (Veldener), winterstuc, walburch, fol. L7v.
962 Passionael, somerstuc, samina, fol. v6v.
963 Passionael, winterstuc, gheertruet, fols. z2-z2v.
Elizabeth of Hungary performs miracles posthumously. She helps a mother who had carried her lame daughter to the saint's grave and who had prayed there for ten days.

A less grave affliction occurs in a discussion on the Third Commandment (observe the sabbath day, to keep it holy) to a girl who dances all the time. Her worried parents are increasingly concerned with her well-being and they invoke the help, not of a saint, but of a passing brother. He convinces her to stop dancing on earth so she will dance forever with Christ in the afterlife.

The late medieval legend of St. Kunera, whose cult reflects contemporary interests, is positively teeming with miraculous acts performed for anxious mothers (and fathers). It clearly shows a dependency on child miracles. Kunera raises a drowned daughter of distraught parents who had been frantically dragging the well all day after they returned home from worshipping at the saint's church. A mother whose child has drowned in a cauldron promises wheat and wine if Kunera brings back life to her child, and Kunera obliges. She restores the sight of two children whose parents had taken them to her church. A mother spends an entire night in tears out of sorrow for her crippled young daughter. Only when the girl herself invokes 'Mother Kunera', she is cured.

4.2.3.5 Maternal love

There is no commandment for parents to love their children, but there is a commandment for children to love their parents. As seen in the child miracles, it is depicted as natural for parents to love and care for their children. Mothers are emotionally involved with their daughters, and there is a recognition of the special status of children. There is a definite sentiment de l'enfance. Mothers' emotional

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964 *Passionael, winterstuc, elyzabeth*, fol. c8.
965 *Siellentsst*, folks. 52-53.
966 *Kunera*, folks. c4-c4v.
967 *Kunera*, folks. c4v-c5.
968 *Kunera*, folks. d2-d2v.
involvement is most dramatically shown in examples of a mother attempting to prevent her child's death.

A good example of maternal love appears in Solomon's judgement. When two quarrelling mothers were taken before the wise King Solomon he ruled that the child each claimed was hers should be halved. The true mother rather saw her child alive and in a stranger's care than dead, so she consented to give the child away. The wise king then duly restored the baby to the true mother.

Maternal love may take the form of maternal opposition to the daughter's plans. When St. Christina (4th century) refuses to worship the idols and is subsequently incarcerated and beaten at her father's instigation, her mother implores her daughter to change her mind. She tears her clothing, cries and begs her daughter to worship the idols, but Christina cannot be persuaded, not even when further torments follow. St. Perpetua's father implores her in vain on his knees in his and her mother's name not to become a martyr. The couple had even brought her her small child, not yet weaned, to persuade her to worship the idols and not to die as a martyr, but the saint displayed her perseverance.

These examples then show the powerful love the mother fosters for her child.

4.2.4 A variety of motherhoods

The term mother is used to signify a large variety of motherhoods. Such is the strength of the term that it can be used for many purposes.

Occasionally, mothers appear metaphorically. For instance, in convents, the spiritual head was also called mother. The abbess St. Walburga is referred to as huusmoeder (housemother) at her convent at Hildesheim. Mary calls St.

969 Kunera, fol. d5.
970 Sielentoest, fol. 139v.
971 Passionael, somerstuc, cristina, fols. n7-n7v and Sielentoest, fol. 88.
972 Passionael, winterstuc, perpetue ende felicitas, fol. y4v.
973 Passionael (Veldener), winterstuc, walburch, fol. L7.
Catherine of Vadstena her 'cherished daughter', implying that Mary regards herself as the saint's mother.

Mystical motherhood, like mystical marriage, is a topos which frequently occurs. Christine Walker Bynum points to the female influence on thirteenth- and fourteenth-century piety. Whereas male writing concentrates on the Virgin Mary, women show interest in aspects of Christ's humanity, with emphasis on the infant Jesus. Also, God is portrayed as a mother figure.

In our sources, mystical motherhood concentrates predominantly on the nurturing capacity of the 'mother'. It is manifested in the way the 'mother', or holy woman, imitates motherhood. She can, for instance, bring forth milk. It was particularly apt for a virgin to lactate, because as a virgin she was in the exclusive position to imitate the Virgin Mary. In the legend of Liedwij of Schiedam, the holy woman bestows her maternal affection on the Christ child by lactating. Nuptial contemplation had given way to spiritual motherhood: the lover became the infant. Liedwij's breasts swell up, of course on Christmas Eve (1427), and she lactates as a sign that she is 'worthy to seek Christ'. A reliable witness, the widow Katrijn, attests to the milk's nurturing quality: she takes three draughts and is completely satisfied.

This nurturing capacity was literally removed from some virgin martyrs. After St. Agatha's (date uncertain) breasts were cut off she boasted to have a spare pair in her soul which had been reserved for Christ from her youth. St. Barbara's breasts were cut off too. After her decapitation, St. Catherine of Alexandria's

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974 Katerina van watsteyn, fol. C8v.
975 Walker Bynum, Jesus, in particular p. 18. Throughout her book she mentions examples of maternal imagery.
976 Liedwij, fols. e3v-e4v. See also Herlihy, Households, p. 120.
977 These maternal experiences went beyond the intention of spiritual advisers who exhorted the reader to observe Mary and help her care for Jesus, Atkinson, Vocation, p. 163.
978 Passionael, winterstuc, aecht, fol. u6.
979 Passionael, winterstuc, barbara, fol. i6v and Sielentroest, fol. 89v.
A good example of a surrogate mother is Elizabeth of Hungary. Among her many charitable and compassionate acts rank those involving children. For instance, she opens her house for poor mothers and small children. Whenever she is in attendance, the children follow her as 'if they would [follow] their own mother', and she brings them toys. After her husband's death she continues to involve herself with mothers and children: she bathes dirty children, and she takes care of a woman recuperating from childbirth. In a string listing her charitable works it is mentioned that she also becomes godmother to numerous children.

Childminders are to assume maternal responsibilities. A destitute woman, mistreated by her husband, becomes a childminder to earn some money. The husband slays the child and the woman, who is the main suspect, is condemned to be buried alive. The child Jesus is brought in on Mary's arm and he questions the dead child. The truth emerges and the woman is saved.

In a discourse on the Eighth Commandment (you shall not give false evidence), an empress suffers from men from all walks of life bearing false witness against her. The most blatant example is that of the man who falls in love with her, but whose love she does not reciprocate. The empress, when fallen on hard times and turned nanny, is accused by this man who murders the child in her charge. Mary does not restore the child's life but she saves the innocent empress.

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980 Passionael, winterstuc, katherina, fol. e3v.
981 Passionael, somerstuc, cristina, fol. n8 and Sielentoest, fol. 88v.
982 Passionael, winterstuc, elyzabeth, fols. c2-c2v.
983 Passionael, winterstuc, elyzabeth, fol. c5v.
984 Passionael, winterstuc, elyzabeth, fol c2.
986 Sielentoest, fols. 150-153v. The exemplum also appears in Miraculen, fols. 90-92v.
Frequently, when a stepmother is discussed in the sources it is in relation to the sexuality of her stepsons. Other non-gender specific examples occur too. When his master is posed a riddle by a gardener who asks him why some herbs grow better than others the clever Aesop knows the answer. He explains that when a widow with children marries a widower with children her own children will grow better, because she will look after them better. In this metaphor, the earth is mother of the children who require less attention and effort and stepmother of those who do.

Good stepmothers occur too. For instance, when St. Thecla of Iconium has to appear in court because she refuses to reciprocate the advances of Alexander and to honour the gods, a matron provides lodging to her. The matron's recently departed daughter appears to her mother in her dream asking her mother to take on the young woman in her stead. Thecla could then pray for the daughter to heaven. The matron, now promoted to stepmother, refers to the saint as her 'dear daughter', and argues in Thecla's favour at court.

Then there is also the mother-in-law, in this case of the husband of the daughter. When the mother-in-law makes an appearance in texts it is more often than not in connection with 'age-old taboos', and highlighting difficulties separating affectionate from sexual emotions. So too in the following exemplum in which a newly-wed husband is offered a place in the household of his wife's parents. It is soon rumoured abroad that his mother-in-law has designs on him. She attempts to save her reputation by having him assassinated, but she confesses the crime to her priest. When her priest and she argue, he violates the secret of

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987 See, for instance, the wicked empress-stepmother who attempts to seduce the emperor's son by his former wife, Seven mannen, fol. b1. Or see the exemplum of the princely son who loves his stepmother to such an extent that he falls ill because his love is unrequited, Ehebüchlein, fol. c1v-c2.
988 Aesop, fol. b3.
989 Passiônæl (Veldener), somerstuc, tecla, fol. OO8v.
990 Passiônæl (Veldener), somerstuc, tecla, fol. PP1.
992 Miraculæ, fol. 16-17 and Passiônæl, somerstuc, onser vrouwent gheboert, fol. u3v-u4.
the confessional and tells the truth *en public*. Condemned to burning at the stake, Mary saves her because she has always prayed to her.

At first sight, the theme of the 'female as father' appears to fit in rather uncomfortably in an array of maternal themes. However, it is just an elaboration on the theme encountered in the previous chapter, that of the transvestite saint who attempts to escape marriage. In this chapter, the transvestite saint is taken one step further: she is being accused of fathering a child.

The fact that the sex of the saint is revealed at the very end of her legend after her demise, after her long silent suffering, adds to the holiness of the saint. The reader is able to empathise since she is aware from the beginning of the legend that the saint is, in fact, incapable of fathering a child.

The theme of the female as father has parallels with both the *topos* of the transvestite female saint (such as St. Theda who dresses herself in male garb to follow St. Paul's band of disciples, or the female who escapes marriage dressed as a man) and stories in which males are unjustly accused of fatherhood. An exemplum of the latter appears, for example, in *Van den leven der heiligen Vaderen* in which the holy father Macharius features. He is a recluse who is occasionally forced out of the desert to sell his handicrafts for his upkeep. When accused of impregnating a young woman he is beaten and sent on the streets with pots and crucifixes tied around his neck. Although he is not the father, he works hard to maintain both the mother and her unborn child. When the girl is experiencing a difficult labour it is interpreted that she is being punished for past wrongdoing and she finally admits the truth: a neighbour is the culprit. The crux of the story is that the unjustly suffering person places trust in God so that everything turns out well.

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993 *Passionael* (Veldener), *somerkstuc, tecla*, fol. OO8.
994 *Vaderen*, fols. C4-C4v.
St. Theodora then, ashamed of having committed adultery, flees dressed in a man's garb to a monastery where she assumes the habit pretending to be Theodorus. Whilst carrying out duties which take her outside the monastery, she is accused of fathering the child of a loose young woman. Theodora is ousted from the monastery. But she raises the child with patience and humility, feeding it on animal milk, and is allowed to return after a few years when she and the child are enclosed in a cell. After her demise, when it is revealed to the abbot in a dream that she is a female, and as such had been wrongly accused of fathering a child, the saint's holiness is apparent.

St. Marina finds herself in deep water as well. She was, in the first instance, admitted to a monastery not to escape marriage but at the behest of her father. Ever since his admission to the monastery he missed his daughter Marina terribly and had arranged for his so-called son Marinus to join the congregation. Like Theodora she too is unjustly accused, ousted, and she takes care of the child. She raises it with patience earning the respect of the brothers who allow her to return. Upon re-admission she is not enclosed but given the dirtiest jobs to do. That the brother is actually a female is only revealed at the end, when she has already been forgiven by her fellow brothers because she raises the child so well, despite adverse circumstances. This fact tells perhaps more about fatherhood than motherhood and will be elaborated on below.

4.2.5 Bad example and influence, abandonment and infanticide

Apparently not every daughter was loved or raised well. Sometimes, a mother acts as a go-between in her daughter's illicit love affair. The idea of the mother exerting a bad influence on the daughter complements that of the elderly woman or widow who acts as an intermediary. The matter is of course graver, since it is the mother herself who spurs her daughter on to behave improperly instead of a
stranger. For instance, a mother encourages the friendship between her daughter and a young man while her daughter's husband is away on pilgrimage.\textsuperscript{997} When the husband returns unexpectedly, while the interloper reposes in the husband's bed, the mother tricks the husband. The young man is able to escape unnoticed. Together with her daughter she obstructs the husband's view by holding up a sheet that she and her daughter made, for the husband to admire.

A daughter who has been given an old dotard in marriage, asks her mother for help because she is thinking of committing adultery.\textsuperscript{998} Her mother advises her to gauge her husband's reaction first to any of her wrongdoing before taking a lover. The mother encourages her daughter to burn his favourite tree, kill his dog and spoil a dinner party. The long-suffering husband only acts on the last occasion. At the instigation of her husband she is bled by the local barber in order to rid her of her 'bad blood', to such an extent that she nearly dies. She is certainly deterred from taking a lover now.

A bad mother does not discourage her daughter who lives in sin with a priest.\textsuperscript{999} The daughter dies and her body is abducted by a bear in the night. The mourning mother is chided by passing friars that she had not taught her daughter well.

The Queen of the North raises her beautiful daughter with 'venom'.\textsuperscript{1000} Anyone who lays eyes on her risks insanity and anyone who kisses her is doomed. She sends her daughter to Alexander to become his concubine, but Alexander is saved from death by his teacher Aristotle. Alexander immediately packs her off to her mother. In the allegorical explanation the mother is equated with 'abundance

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{997} \textit{Geesten}, fols. v2v-v3.
\item \textsuperscript{998} \textit{Seven mannen}, fols. e2-e7.
\item \textsuperscript{999} \textit{Sielementroest}, fol. 90.
\item \textsuperscript{1000} \textit{Geesten}, fols. b5-b6v. It is not clear whether the Queen raises her daughter literally with venom, or whether it is meant that she raises her badly. In the allegorical explanation, it is mentioned that she taught her daughter to be unchaste and gluttonous. These two properties are then likened to the soul's venom.
\end{itemize}
of temporal items' which leads to death and destruction of body and soul, while the daughter represents 'lewdness' and 'gluttony' which is venom of the soul.

Duchess Remonde gives her daughters a bad example when she, besotted by her love for the King of Hungary, hands over her besieged castle to him.\textsuperscript{1001} The daughters just avoid being raped by cleverly hiding stinking dead chicks at their bosoms, and are left alone because they are smelly.

In an exemplum a daughter is in doubt whether to follow the lifestyle of her father or her mother.\textsuperscript{1002} Her father had worked hard for little yield and suffered a long illness before he died. After he had died, the weather turned so foul that his funeral had to be postponed and the neighbours spread rumours that God did not want to receive him in the afterlife. Her mother, on the other hand, was beautiful, uncharitable, gossiping, lying, unchaste as well as spendthrift. After her demise the weather was fine. It is revealed to the daughter in a dream that her father has arrived in heaven because of his good life on earth and her mother is tormented by devils because of her badly conducted earthly life. The daughter therefore chooses to follow her father's example rather than her mother's.

The exacting mother Bridget of Sweden is reprimanded by Mary.\textsuperscript{1003} Instead of applying herself to yet another prayer session Mary exhorts Bridget to mend the skirts of her daughter Catherine of Vadstena. Catherine, explains Mary, had not only left her beloved husband behind but also abandoned all her kin and friends to be with her mother.

Occasionally, a mother is forced to abandon her children. Motives vary and accordingly the reader's response does. One motive is that used by the widow-

\textsuperscript{1001} *Kaetspel*, fols. i4-i4v. *Vaderen*, fols. D3v-D4. The exemplum also appears in an abbreviated version in the Sielentroest, fols. 91v-92. In the latter, the sins committed by the mother are not dwelled upon. Perhaps it was thought inappropriate in a discussion on the fourth commandment (honour your father and mother), which was after all intended for children, to spell out these sins.

\textsuperscript{1002} *Katerina van watsteyn*, fols. F6v-F7.
saint who, freed from the responsibilities of caring for her husband, seeks to free herself from her children in order for her to follow her religious quest. Maternal love, attachment to children, is regarded as a weakness. St. Paula, setting sail to the Holy Land, leaves a young daughter, about to marry, as well as an affectionate little son standing on the quay.\textsuperscript{1004} It is not easy for Paula who suppresses her emotions by looking up to heaven. The text continues that she leaves behind her motherhood to become Christ's handmaiden. She disengages herself from the love of her children out of love for God and only keeps one daughter, Eustochium, at her side.

After sending away her children, the widow St. Elizabeth of Hungary is able to devote her life entirely to others.\textsuperscript{1005} She prays to God for strength to detach herself from her love towards her offspring. She succeeds at the moment she regards them as fellow Christians rather than her own children.\textsuperscript{1006} St. Elizabeth abandons her own offspring in her religious quest to look after other children, as if they were her own. This is apparent when she opens a hospice. Also, she does not approve of poor folk abandoning their children. When a pauper leaves her child with the saint she recalls the parents and restores the baby to them to raise her themselves.\textsuperscript{1007} In this way, Elizabeth disapproves in others what she herself has done.

Whereas the examples of holy mothers abandoning their children was regarded as 'benign neglect' that of sinful mothers approached 'criminal neglect' and sometimes it even evolved into infanticide.\textsuperscript{1008} In chapter 3, exemples of mothers who accidentally marry their own sons, such as Alban and Gregory, have been mentioned. But before these mothers marry their sons they had abandoned them

\textsuperscript{1004} Passionael, winterstuc, paula, fol. t3v.
\textsuperscript{1005} Passionael, winterstuc, elyzabeth, fol. c3 and fol. c4.
\textsuperscript{1006} Passionael, winterstuc, elyzabeth, fol. c4.
\textsuperscript{1007} Passionael, winterstuc, elyzabeth, fols. c5v-c6.
as babies because they were born from illicit and incestuous relationships.\textsuperscript{1009} Alban is left on a road and Gregory is cast in the sea in an empty barrel. Each boy is left with identifiable material supplied by the mother which is later recognised by their wife who then discovers that she is in fact her husband's mother.

One step further from abandonment is infanticide. It is extremely uncommon to find examples in which the mother actually slays her daughter with her own hands. De Eyb mentions a lady whose town was conquered by the Romans, and who jumps into a fire with her children rather than having them suffer rape.\textsuperscript{1010} It is more common to have examples in which the mother appears not to object to the killing of her child.

In a marriage test Gautier, the husband of Griselda, examines the limits of his wife's obedience.\textsuperscript{1011} At her husband's behest both her baby girl and baby boy are removed from her to be killed because, it is explained to her, she is of such humble origin. She does not dirty her own hands with blood, but she sends the children to their deaths. She wakes her daughter, kisses her, blesses her and requests that the body will be buried. However, the text explicitly states, she appears to show no emotions, she is indeed sorrowful.\textsuperscript{1012} The author or compiler blatantly plays along with the response of the reader. Every one can identify with Griselda's plight.

In fact, unknown to Griselda, Gautier has arranged for his children to be raised by his sister. When Gautier announces his separation from Griselda and remarriage he summons his grown-up daughter to his court while pretending to Griselda that the girl is to be his new bride. When he finally reveals the truth to Griselda that he has tested her throughout life, Griselda faints from happiness and they live

\textsuperscript{1009} For Alban see, \textit{Ehebüchlein}, fol. k5 and, for Gregory, \textit{Geesten}, fol. n1v.
\textsuperscript{1010} \textit{Ehebüchlein}, fol. b2v.
\textsuperscript{1011} \textit{Kaetspel}, fols. f6-g6v.
\textsuperscript{1012} \textit{Kaetspel}, fol. g2v.
happily ever after. In this exemplum, being obedient to the husband supersedes Griselda's love for her children.

Although strictly speaking St. Sophia, also known as Sapientia, does not commit infanticide, she does not hesitate for one moment to volunteer her daughters to be killed for the true faith at her trial.\textsuperscript{1013} Called to justice because of her efforts to convert wives in Rome to the dismay of their spouses, Sophia informs the emperor that she wishes to sacrifice her daughters Fides, Spes and Caritas. Paradoxically, the central idea of a mother sacrificing her child can only work when the reader is able to recognise and emphasise with the love a mother bestows on her children. Only the new Christian faith, incorporated in Christ, is worthy of being offered her most precious gifts, i.e. her daughters. Predictably, the legend spins out the long torturous practices of the daughters and their strength in being able to suffer for Christ. In this way, the examples given in the section on maternal love, where mothers are doing their very best to prevent their daughters from dying are not dissimilar to those examples of mothers sacrificing their children for a better cause.

4.2.6 Summary

Conception and birth are discussed at great length in sources dealing with Mary (regarding both the conception of Mary and of Jesus) and her way of giving birth painlessly. These acts are inimitable and miraculous. They serve to point out the holiness both of Mary and her child.

Female saints are a great aid to mothers and future mothers alike. Saints assist in matters of fertility, conception, pregnancy and birth. Some saints are specialised helpers, others, such as Mary, offer succour in a wide variety of mishaps. Some saintly mothers giving birth can rely on help from above as well as some mothers of saintly daughters.

\textsuperscript{1013} \textit{Passionael} (Veldener), \textit{winterstuc}, sophie, fol. M3 and \textit{Sielentroest}, fol. 16.
The authors rely heavily on exemplary behaviour based on Christian guidelines when they deal with maternal responsibilities. These responsibilities incorporate the physical and psychological well-being of her daughter. There are two main areas of interest. Firstly, the mother receives guidance. Secondly, the daughter receives guidance from the mother.

In the realms of miracles and ultimate sacrifice of the daughter the mother displays emotional response towards her daughter showing her love and attachment.

The term 'mother' is used in such a wide variety of senses, usually with corresponding positive meanings, particularly when it concerns metaphorical and mystical motherhood. An array of maternal responsibilities is assumed by the surrogate mother, childminder, and to a lesser extent stepmother and less still mother-in-law. Godmothers are not discussed at great length. The transvestite female who assumes the role of father of a child that the reader knows is not hers, is praised for raising the child well. These examples show the caring and nurturing capacity of the female, lauded to such an extent in the male that the transvestite was readmitted to the monastery she was ousted from despite having committed the grave sin of having been unchaste.

Bad mothers show how daughters should not be treated and raised. Occasionally, a mother abandons her child. For instance, some widow saints attempt to devote themselves increasingly to the religious life and regard their children as an encumbrance rather than a help. When they abandon their children it is done for the beneficiaries of their (future) ministrations. Nevertheless, some mothers (St. Bridget of Sweden and St. Paula) keep a daughter with them. On the other hand, abandonment of children by more mundane parents is viewed less favourably.

In the sources, the act of infanticide or a mother allowing her child to be sacrificed is not so much condemned as it is sanctioned, but only if it occurs for a
better cause. It is abundantly clear that the public must have been able to associate the deed of the mother with her emotional attachment to her child.

4.3 The relevance of ideas concerning motherhood to secular women

On the whole, in the middle ages, in learned circles a woman's role in the reproduction process was often associated with passivity and negativity.\(^{1014}\) As seen in chapter 2, where medieval ideas about women were discussed, in the process of conception and pregnancy the man was perceived to be the source of life and the woman merely an incubator. The highest soul was infused by God, forty days after conception in case of a boy, eighty days in case of a girl. Reproductive failure was associated more with women than men and the causes of infertility assigned to women were more diverse.

It was important to conceive. De Eyb devotes an entire chapter to the fertility of women.\(^{1015}\) His main anxiety concerns the dealings of the married couple after the wife has given birth. Petrarch is extensively cited to demonstrate how troublesome children can be a strain on marriage. If the wife does not conceive, she is servile, humble and obedient to the man and the couple is able to enjoy peace and quiet. Yet stating his own opinion, De Eyb does not laud childless couples; a man should marry, he asserts, to people the world and perpetuate the human race.\(^{1016}\)

Our sources show saints working miracles. Special saints were set aside to alleviate special female ailments or anxieties. Not every affliction is mentioned in our sources; other sources mention, for instance, that St. Agatha deals with painful breasts, St. Catherine of Alexandria counteracts a shortage of breast milk, St. Margaret, and to a lesser extent St. Walburga, manage women in childbed, and St. Perpetua looks after young mothers.\(^{1017}\) The special treatment received

\(^{1014}\) I have made extensive use of Cadden, *Meanings*, chapter 3 and chapter 5.

\(^{1015}\) *Ehübülchlein*, fols. b5v-b6.

\(^{1016}\) *Ehübülchlein*, fol. e6v.

by mothers who had conceived in a miraculous way, resulted in these mothers being invoked in prayers dedicated to them. Already in the early middle ages, God was implored to assist infertile women in special prayers in which Old Testament mothers Sara, Rebecca and Rachel appear and New Testament mothers Anne, Mary and Elizabeth were called upon.\footnote{Hartingsveldt, E.O., 'De schande van onvruchtbaarheid', Vrouw, familie en macht. Bronnen over vrouwen in de middeleeuwen, M. Mostert et al. eds. (Amsterdamse historische reeks grote serie 11; Hilversum, 1990), pp. 72-77. Hartingveldt appended the text of the Orationes ad missam pro sterilitate mulierem. The prayers date from the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries.}

As in the sources, so too in social reality: pregnancy was a specific and dangerous time at which the woman was to be aided and assisted. It was not uncommon for propertied late medieval and early modern women to draw up a will during their first pregnancy.\footnote{Anderson and Zinsser, History, p. 384, with reference to Venetian women.} It was advocated by the fourteenth-century physician Jan de Weert that priests should spare pregnant woman heavy penitentiary activities.\footnote{Jan disapproved of fasting, see, Eerenbeemt, B. van den, Het kind in onze middeleeuwse literatuur (Amsterdam, 1935), p. 12.}

There may have been a cult of perpetual pregnancy in the Low Countries, which underlines the importance of fertility and also the value attached to children. (The later issue will be elaborated on below.) Christopher Brooke remarks that fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries Netherlandish painters portrayed attractive women with swelling stomachs, even virgin saints. '...folk in the Low Countries reckoned a pregnant woman the height of female beauty'.\footnote{Brooke, C.N.L., The medieval idea of marriage (Oxford, 1989), p. 284, fn. 46.} Brooke describes the portrait of the Arnolfini's, a couple who are apparently exchanging their wedding vows in the bedroom, painted by Jan van Eyck. The well-off couple lived in Bruges in the 1430s. Although the wife looks pregnant, she is merely painted in a voluminous dress in the way dictated by fashion. The bed, a reminder that the marriage was to be consummated, stands next to a chair, where a carving of St. Margaret, aide in matters of childbirth, is depicted emerging from the dragon.
Recently, the painting has been re-interpreted as a scene of betrothal (where the couple promised future consent to marriage),\textsuperscript{1022} making it therefore, \textit{inter alia}, even less likely for the couple to expect a child at this stage.

In general, the primary sources are silent concerning the ordinary practices of pregnancy and birth. The genres of saints' legends and exempla do not easily lend themselves for these concerns. Although Claudia Opitz in her book on thirteenth-century women's \textit{Alltag}, based on the legends of contemporary holy women, has dedicated some paragraphs to pregnancy and birth, she was unable to extrapolate much relevant information.\textsuperscript{1023} We would have been better informed about common practices had men been regular visitors to the birthing chamber.

Pregnancy and delivery was a woman's business, but it also affected her direct environment, and as such it was experienced collectively.\textsuperscript{1024} Women, especially those who were mothers among them such as neighbours, family and friends assisted before and with the birth. Since the birth took place at home they lit the fire and prepared the room. In practice, saints were not the only source relied on for easier confinement. In a special ritual, many doors were opened as an example to the womb to open. And, more unusual, in an attempt to cheer up Barbel, wife of Alard Florsiz., who always experienced long drawn out childbeds, she was visited by trumpeters at her bedside.\textsuperscript{1025} But it was her prayer to Mary of Seven Sorrows at Delft which resulted in an easy delivery.

Birth was surrounded by magical and mystery traditions, close to occult practice. In the late middle ages, midwives were occasionally accused of witchcraft,

\textsuperscript{1022} Hall, E., \textit{The Arnolfini betrothal. Medieval marriage and the enigma of Van Eyck's double portrait} (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1994). I am not convinced that the painting represents a betrothal rather than a wedding scene. By the author's own admission, it is difficult to determine what happened at a betrothal, p. 67. The fact is the couple married at some stage.

\textsuperscript{1023} Opitz, \textit{Frauenalltag}, pp. 188-199.


\textsuperscript{1025} Verhoeven, \textit{Devotie}, p. 111.
particularly if they had failed to save the child.\textsuperscript{1026} On the other hand, midwives were often employed by the urban authorities, and were in attendance at births. In the fifteenth century, a midwife could receive an annual gratuity, free lodging (in a room where the urban poor were to deliver too), and reimbursement of fuel costs.\textsuperscript{1027}

The midwife could even rely on specific literature. The \textit{Liber Trotula}, said to have written by an eleventh-century female physician or midwife from Salerno, in which tips and gynaecological treatments are mentioned, appears to have circulated in the southern Low Countries, but I have been unable to trace a printed book of it in the vernacular.\textsuperscript{1028} Also, evidence is lacking whether the \textit{Liber} was actually used by midwives.

A good example of the prominent role played by midwives is the medieval depiction of the \textit{Nativity of St. John the Baptist} painted by Jan van Eyck.\textsuperscript{1029} The interior of a sumptuously decorated bedroom shows a midwife with rolled-up sleeves handing over the swaddled son to Elizabeth in her bed, another woman sits on a stool at the end of the bed, in front of her a child who points to the door opening (perhaps pointing out that it is time for the father to enter?), whilst the Virgin Mary brings water in a phial to Elizabeth. Mary assumed these


\textsuperscript{1027} Delva, A.B.C.M., \textit{Vrouwengeneeskunde in Vlaanderen tijdens de late middeleeuwen, met uitgave van het Brugse Liber Trotula} (Vlaamse historische studies 2; Brugge, 1983), and Wurf-Bodt, C. van der, 'De vroedvrouw in de late middeleeuwen en de nieuwe tijd', \textit{Spiegel Historiael} 29 (1994), p. 204. As mentioned in chapter 2, a post incunable printed by Thomas vander Noot in 1516 may have been of assistance to both pregnant women and midwives. Although there was interest from male physicians concerning the women's reproductive system, it was thought improper for them to exam women physically, see Rodnité Lemay, H., 'Anthonius Guainerius and medieval gynaecology', \textit{Women of the medieval world}, J. Kirshner and S.F. Wemple eds. (1985), p. 323. Châtelet, \textit{Painting}, plate 15.
responsibilities as midwife, for her cousin Elizabeth too was an old woman. Situated outside the room is Zechariah, reading a book, waiting to be fetched.

Churchings still appear to be the order of the day in the fifteenth century. A reminder of that fact is the recommendation of Nicolaas van Dordrecht to the woman in labour to visit Kunera's church in Rhenen after her churching. The emphasis in the later middle ages had shifted: it was not so much that the mother needed to be ritually cleansed after childbirth, but it provided a way she could thank God for the birth of her child.

After the baby was born it needed to be baptised. The baby was to be rid from the stain of original sin, and become a member of the church and receive a name. Unbaptised, a baby's soul could not be saved. There was a high degree of infant mortality, higher perhaps among baby girls than boys, and even lay people were allowed to baptise babies in articulo mortis. But the practice may have been abused. The Boec van der biechten reckons it a sin, which needed to be confessed, if lay baptism occurred when a priest was readily available. Midwives too were sometimes admonished by church authorities in relation to lay baptism.

Although there are not many examples in our sources concerning spiritual kin, the tasks of the godmother (and godfather) were important. They accompanied the child to church on its first visit, and they assisted in raising the child according to the Christian traditions and religion, and in the absence of parents assumed even greater responsibilities.

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1030 Kunera, fol. d3v.
1031 Warner, Alone, p. 75.
1032 For statistics available on early fifteenth-century Florence, see Anderson and Zinsser, History, p. 383. It is suggested by the authors that girls may have been fed less.
1033 Shahar, Childhood, p. 49.
1034 Biechten, fol. dd3v.
1036 I have relied on Shahar, Childhood, pp. 117-118 and Nijsten, Volkscultuur, p. 130.
Before but also after baptism, the baby could be supplied with amulets such as a rosary or palm branch or a picture of a saint, healing stones, letters with *formulae*, crosses, and holy water placed near the crib. It served to combat the bad influence of witches and devils, and to ensure that the baby would lead a prosperous life. The late medieval *Boec van der Biechten* condemns the contemporary belief in changelings (that the devil replaces a good child with a bad one).

Upon the child's baptism, the mother was often accompanied by other women and after the solemnities they shared a meal. The festivities which accompanied the birth were regulated by some towns. Perhaps in an attempt to prevent wastefulness and extravagance, as well as to prevent excessive borrowing, certain towns tried to limit the number of women who could attend the festivities. On the whole, it is only women who are mentioned in the regulations. The passages from our sources concerning fertility, conception, and birth must have been particularly relevant to women.

Although care of the daughters (and their young brothers) must have mainly fallen on women, our corpus does not convey much information about the care that the mother provides for her children's physical needs (save for wet-nursing). In 'real life' (in this case the household-workshop environment), childcare was so natural a part of a woman's domain that it is barely mentioned; women are always described as wives and never as mothers. Women must have been involved in actions like feeding, bathing, swaddling, keeping the baby comfortable (i.e. making sure it slept, did not cry too much), teaching it to sit and walk, and to talk, and perhaps also to read. These common life concerns do

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1038 *Biechten*, fol. cc2.
1039 Nijsten, *Volkscultuur*, pp. 130-131. Town regulations in Venlo, for instance, restricted the number of women who accompanied the godparents to church to six.
1040 Roper, *Household*, p. 42. Although Roper's book deals with early modern Augsburg after the reformation, household-workshops were very much part and parcel of the cities in the medieval Low Countries.
1041 Shahar, *Childhood*, pp. 77-93.
not of course make interesting reading in legends and exempla and may therefore not be mentioned.

When it comes to the pre-eminent physical need elaborated on in the sources, which is wet-nursing, there is a lack of information to its practices in the Low Countries. Perhaps some general statements may be applied: noblewomen and affluent towns women usually did not suckle their own children, while peasants and the poorer urban echelons were too poor to employ a wet nurse.\textsuperscript{1042} It may even be argued that the mid and lower strata of the urban society where mothers breast fed themselves, there was a closer bond between the mother and child.\textsuperscript{1043} Whilst in Italy wet-nursing was a status symbol for the urban parents of the merchant and upper classes, it appears that in the Low Countries it was never a widespread custom to employ wet nurses.\textsuperscript{1044}

Mothers are involved to a large extent in raising their young children. A mother's task was to raise the daughter with the conventions of the time. The mother was responsible for her daughter's moral and religious education. Books could be at her disposal. In the printed \textit{Spieghel der leken} parents were exhorted to teach the Commandments to their children at home.\textsuperscript{1045} With few exceptions, the sources are generally silent about household tasks allotted to the daughter. At home, the mother instructed the daughter in managing a household, taught her handicrafts and how to clean, launder and cook.\textsuperscript{1046} In short, the mother was to prepare the daughter to become a good wife, housekeeper and mother.

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Uitz1995} Uitz, \textit{Women}, p. 150.
\bibitem{Warnar1989} Warnar, 'Biecht', p. 49.
\end{thebibliography}
Although the beneficiaries of miracles were children, and the miracles as such have justifiably been termed 'miracles for children' by Diana Webb, the miracles were frequently staged at maternal (and paternal) instigation. It shows the love and dedication of the parents towards their child. As Webb mentions in her article, because children mattered to the flock the miracle workers (in Webb's case the mendicants) performed miracles involving children.

Miracle books kept at Marian shrines in Delft (the genre is introduced in chapter 1), reflect the medieval reality that Mary was perceived to be working miracles, especially for children. Verhoeven's interesting observation that a higher number of females than males went on pilgrimage requesting assistance for the health of their child is significant.

Mothers who gave a bad example to their daughters, who did not discourage their bad behaviour, and who did not raise them properly, should like the examples dealing with 'bad wives', be set in the literary framework of the 'world turned upside down'. The reading public could, by reversing the bad examples, comprehend what was really intended. There is however a sting in the tail; these topsy-turvy literary examples may have gained a degree of credibility. Sometimes, in witch trials mothers and daughters were accused simultaneously.

The emotional attachment of the mother to her child shown in the examples which dealt with 'maternal love', comes particularly to the fore in examples in which the mother attempts to prevent her daughter from dying. The cult of the mourning mother, the Mater Dolorosa, Mary who mourns Jesus's death on the

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1048 See Verhoeven, Devotie. The miraculous statues of Mary Jesse, the Holy Cross (miracles wrought here were connected with Mary Jesse), and Our Lady of Seven Sorrows were positioned in the Old Church, and in the New Church that of Our Lady of Sorrows.

1049 Verhoeven, Devotie, p. 135.
cross, made a true impact when the Black Death arrived in fourteenth-century Europe.\textsuperscript{1051} The idea and image of Mary as caring, but also as mourning mother, could have served as an advertisement for mothers not to abandon their dying children, as may have happened when the Black Death or other illnesses took a foothold. Other images such as the Flight into Egypt of the Holy Family or the Massacre of the Innocents may have served as a reminder for parents not to abandon their children.\textsuperscript{1052}

In the description of the variety of motherhood, Liedwij of Schiedam showed such an extraordinary devotion to the adorable infant Christ that she started lactating. She was special in that she lived at home and was not affiliated to a particular order and is therefore an excellent example of a secular woman. There is at least one semi-religious pre-cursor in the Low Countries: the fourteenth-century beguine Gertrui van Oosten lactated at Christmas.\textsuperscript{1053} It was not uncommon in Dutch, Flemish and Rhineland beguinages to have dolls and cribs to assist in devotional practices,\textsuperscript{1054} which undoubtedly assisted in the religious imagery. Mystical motherhood was another way of reaching Christ, if not in his capacity of bridegroom then as a child (but it should be recalled that for symbolic purposes the saints sometimes married Christ as a child). The correlation between the motherhood metaphor and the caring aspect is defined in mystical motherhood.

However, mothers may have abandoned their children. Medieval methods of restricting fertility are not known to us, although speculations have been made about contraceptive methods in the middle ages, neither is there much known about abortion.\textsuperscript{1055} There are no figures available to establish any trends of

\textsuperscript{1050} Brandenbarg, Familieleven, pp. 193-194.
\textsuperscript{1051} Warner, Alone, p. 216.
\textsuperscript{1053} Bredero, 'Gertrui', p. 91.
\textsuperscript{1054} Koorne, F. en M. van der Eyken, Begijnen in Brabant. De begijnhoven van Breda en Diest (Amsterdam, 1987), pp. 18-19.
\textsuperscript{1055} Biller, P., 'Birth-control in the West in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries', Past and present 94 (1982), pp. 3-26. In spite of Biller's attempt to make a 'positive case' that
abandoning and murdering of one's own offspring in the medieval Low Countries. On the whole, it appears that unwanted children were kept within the family. An occasional reference points to the fact that infanticide must have been uncommon. For instance, when in 1487 in Dordrecht an infant was found drowned in the harbour, all female citizens were to be interviewed by midwives in the town's service. The midwives were also licensed to examine any women they suspected. An investigation on such a grand scale seems unlikely to have been staged if infanticide (in this case of new-borns) had been common. It also reflects the severity of the crime. Abandoning babies was punished by the town. The practice was not allowed, even if the child was to be transferred to good hands. An unwanted baby was given the married but childless Marie van Dort. The married woman had pretended to have been pregnant. Both women were punished by the authorities.

The economic necessity of abandoning or killing of children may not have been as pertinent as in the early middle ages, or other parts of Europe, because the mother may have had fewer children since many mothers in the Low Countries appear to have nursed their own babies to a larger extent. And when nursing, fertility reduced. Also, in a burgeoning urban environment where peace was of the utmost importance for trade and commerce with a reduced possibility for war, famine and poverty, it was not necessary to abandon children.

Illegitimate children seem to have been cared for. Nicholas, for instance, has shown that in fourteenth-century Ghent, fathers who sired illegitimate children did admit paternity but mostly only on their deathbed. In wills, fathers often

1056 Van der Wurf-Bodt, 'Vroedvrouw', p. 203.
1057 Van der Wurf-Bodt, 'Vroedvrouw', pp. 203-204.
1059 Nicholas, Domestic life, examples in chapter 8.
recognised and provided for their illegitimate children, who are regarded as blood relations. Some childless wives accepted the bastards from their husbands, and a widow could even become a guardian of her husband's illegitimate children. However, these arrangements could not always be made. Sometimes, children of unmarried and deserted women became the problem of the city.

If children were abandoned they may have found their way to institutionalised foundling homes, established in large western European cities, or smaller establishments. As in our sources, in reality too, tokens were left with abandoned children. They may have served to verify a parental claim for recovery later or to prevent inappropriate marriages.

On another level, a mother may have identified with abandoning her children when, for instance, the baby was with a wet nurse or when it was fostered, or when she was forcefully separated from it. Barbara Newman has applied the empathy factor of the feelings ascribed in the legends of 'maternal martyrs' to those that ordinary women may have felt when being forcibly separated from their children. From Italian sources, she concludes that a widow who felt pressurised to leave her children behind with her husband’s lineage when her own family reclaimed her (and her dowry) for remarriage may have had recourse to these tales. This conclusion is not easily applicable to the Low Countries.

The closeness of immediate family, friends and colleagues is striking in the Low Countries. Children may not have been removed from their mother when death struck. When, for instance, Mathias van der Goes, one of our printers, died in

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1061 Shahar, Childhood, pp. 122-125.
1062 Opitz, 'Leven', p. 294. There were only two small orphanages in fourteenth-century Ghent, suggesting that most orphans were cared for by their families, Nicholas, Domestic life, p. 115.
1063 Boswell, Kindness, p. 418.
1064 Newman, Woman, p. 95.
Brussels in 1487, his children were minors. His widow was alive but colleagues and possibly a kinsman were appointed guardians. In the same year her husband died, she married Govaert Bac (who also ranks among our printers), who had in all likelihood been apprenticed to Mathias. The widow had kept her children.

It must have been common for medieval families to merge and become composed of other members. Death struck often and remarriage occurred. New wives were to care for other mothers' daughters and sons. Just as Mary was part of the family with her half-sisters and their children, over which Anne presided as matriarch, so too mothers of earthly families were composed from other families.

A clear difference, peculiar to the Low Countries, is made between this wider family network (blood relatives) and the nuclear family (mother, father, children), the so-called gezin. P. Hoppenbrouwers supports the idea that the basis for the 'conjugal family' is laid in the late middle ages. Donald Haks ascribes some elements to this 'modern' conjugal family type found in cities in north-western Europe among the middle classes and lower social groups involved in trade and crafts in later centuries. In his research, he discovered that there was little contact with relatives (other than parents, aunts and uncles and their children, brothers and sisters and their children, consanguineous kin and relatives of the marriage partner) and there was a degree of intimacy and equality between

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1067 Hoppenbrouwers, P.C.M., 'Maagschap en vriendschap. Een beschouwing over de structuur en functies van verwantschapsbetrekkingen in het laat-middeleeuwse Holland', *Holland en historische demografie* (Hollandse Studiën 16; Dordrecht, 1985), pp. 69-108. The term 'conjugal family' is probably taken from Donald Haks, whose work is discussed with relation to the middle ages, by Hoppenbrouwers.
1068 Haks, D., *Huwelijk en gezin in Holland in de 17de en 18de eeuw. Processtukken en moralisten over aspecten van het laat 17de- en 18de-eeuwse gezinsleven* (Assen, 1982), p. 7 and pp. 219-221. Another aspect mentioned is free choice of partner motivated by affection. There is a summary in English.
partners and parents and children. David Nicholas rates the nuclear family type as predominant in fourteenth-century Ghent.  

It is not surprising that in the often densely populated cities, the importance of the nuclear family superseded that of the wider extended family. The preponderance of interest went increasingly to the individual, both in social customs, as well as in religion (as observed in chapter 2, in relation to the modern devotion). The life of the nuclear family was juxtaposed with the rest of society. Private life became more distinguished from social life.

By saving the closing paragraph of this part of the thesis for Mary and her closest relatives, we have made a full circle. Just as the immediate relatives of Mary are depicted in late medieval times as a close-knit cohesive unit consisting of mother, father and child living under one roof, so too the 'conjugal family' appears to be the predominant type in the late medieval Low Countries. It is time to turn to another member of this nuclear family: the daughter.

4.4 Women as daughters

Many examples in which daughters feature can be perceived as an elaboration on the topoi addressed in the previous chapter where ideas on the virgin as unmarried woman was discussed. Of course, ideas on the nubile virgin overlap with those of female children as they are modelled in a similar frame of mind. The examples dealt with are relevant to the 'concept of childhood' debate. Our examples show that there was indeed a notion that medieval society regarded children as different from adults. And there was a bond between adults and children, between mothers and daughters, and vice versa.

1069 Nicholas, Domestic life, chapter 9.
Just as maternal themes are sometimes mentioned under parental themes in the sources, so it is with the *topoi* concerning the daughter, which are frequently discussed under the non gender-specific heading of 'children'.

4.4.1 Mary's childhood

The example of the perfectly well-behaved daughter and young woman is entrenched in the story about Mary's childhood spent in the temple.\(^\text{1071}\) Mary is presented to the temple by her mother Anne to thank God for the fact that she had conceived. When dedicated to the holy establishment aged three, she is depicted as a precocious independent girl who ascends the staircase unaided as if she were a twelve year old, while her parents look on. She stays here until her fourteenth year reading, learning and studying Moses's laws (the Ten Commandments) as well as the holy Scriptures. She prefers a solitary existence. She fills her time praying and contemplating as well as cleaning and mending clothes. She is diligent, obedient, good-natured, and eloquent in speech. In short, she is a child but behaves like an adult.

The image of Mary's childhood has been used throughout the centuries as example of perfect behaviour, although hers was not a typical childhood because of her isolation, enclosure, composure and self-discipline.\(^\text{1072}\) Some young saints share similar experiences. The austerity and rigorous penitential behaviour of some girls can be regarded as an early sign of being singled out for a religious life.\(^\text{1073}\) The saints' legends, of course, were written with the benefit of hindsight, and therefore incorporate well-worn *topoi*. For instance, the young St. Dorothy thrives on frugality and humility, she fasts and prays; her lifestyle and wisdom are

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\(^\text{1071}\) Her combined activities and behaviour are outlined (although not all in one source) Historie anna fols. f2v-f3 and fols. f6v-f8v, Passionaer (Leeu, 1480), somerstuc, anna, fols. C2-C2v and Spiegel, fol. 13v.


\(^\text{1073}\) See, for example, Weinstein and Bell, *Saints*, p. 31.
incomparable.\textsuperscript{1074} As a child, St. Clare is virtuous, wears a hair shirt, dispenses alms, fasts, and stays up at night praying steadfastly.\textsuperscript{1075} In short, she lives as a penitent.\textsuperscript{1076} St. Bridget of Sweden refuses to speak for the first three years of her life, after which her speech is perfect; she is devout, she fasts, prays and is involved in merciful acts.\textsuperscript{1077} In an exemplum a hint of holiness is bestowed not so much on a saint, but an 'ordinary' girl, the young sister of a monk. In a vision, she is visited by Mary asking her to serve her, and henceforth she is no longer allowed to laugh or play.\textsuperscript{1078} Her parents are astounded by the virtuous transformation in the behaviour of their young daughter.

Some young female saints shun their inferior peers and excel in learning. Gertrude of Nivelles is learned and she is neither a child in deed or thought; she is wiser than her playmates and does not play with them but instead visits the poor.\textsuperscript{1079} As a child, the devout Elizabeth of Hungary refuses to play with her friends and her manner of praying in church easily surpasses that of her friends.\textsuperscript{1080} She dresses in simple clothing and she dissuades others from making merry, and stimulates them to devote themselves to God.

On a slightly different plane, but still reminding us of Mary's youth and eagerness to learn, are both Catherine of Alexandria and Barbara who spent much of their youth studying.\textsuperscript{1081} As discussed in chapter 2, wisdom is frequently perceived as a sign of holiness.

\textsuperscript{1074} Passionael, winterstuc, dorothea, fol. x1.
\textsuperscript{1075} Clara, fol. aa2 and Passionael (Leeu, 1480), somerstuc, clara, fol. C3v.
\textsuperscript{1076} Leeuwen, B. van, 'Clara penitente in haar jeugd', Franciscaans leven 1 (1986), pp. 16-28.
\textsuperscript{1077} Birgitten, fol. A6.
\textsuperscript{1078} Miraculen, fol. 2v.
\textsuperscript{1079} Passionael, winterstuc, gheertruut, fol. z5.
\textsuperscript{1080} Passionael, winterstuc, elyzabeth, fols. b7v-b8.
\textsuperscript{1081} Katherinen, fols. a3v-a4 and Barbara, fol. a4. In the summarised version of her legend in Sielentroest the passage does not occur; instead ample attention is given to her torture, Sielentroest, fols. 89-89v.
Less stylised and easier to identify with is the late medieval childhood of Liedwij van Schiedam.\textsuperscript{1082} Similar to all young 'trainee saints' she is very pious too. Whenever her mother sends her off to supply lunch to her brothers at school, she always visits the local church of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Like a normal girl, she associates with friends however: her accident, which leaves her handicapped for the rest of her life, happens when she is skating with them on the ice.

\textbf{4.4.2 Filial responsibilities}

A daughter is to care for her mother. St. Lucy (d. 304) accompanies her aged mother to the grave of St. Agnes and after having a dream in which St. Agatha reveals herself to Lucy, her mother is healed.\textsuperscript{1083} As a result, her mother relents to her daughter’s request that she need not marry and allows her to parcel out her dowry to the poor instead.

A daughter should love her mother. An exemplum which appears in many sources is that of the imprisoned and condemned mother who is denied food, but who is fed with the milk from the breasts of her daughter.\textsuperscript{1084} The mother is subsequently released by the magistrate who is moved by a display of 'natural love' and affection between daughter and mother.

A daughter should be a comfort to her mother in her sorrow. St. Euphemia, after her beheading, appears to her grieve-stricken mother reposing on her child's grave, to report that she has arrived in heaven.\textsuperscript{1085} The element of comforting the mother after her demise also appears in the legend of St. Eugenia.\textsuperscript{1086}

\textsuperscript{1082} Liedwij, fols. a3-a3v.
\textsuperscript{1083} Passionael, winterstuc, lucie, fols. n5-n5v.
\textsuperscript{1084} Ehebüchlein, fol. c2v, Kaetspel, fol. k2, Scaecspel, fols. e3v-e4, Sielentoest, fol. 93v, and Twespraec, fol. l4v.
\textsuperscript{1085} Sielentoest, fols. 17-17v.
\textsuperscript{1086} Passionael (Veldener), somerstuc, eugenia, fol. QQ5.
The daughter may even save the mother's soul. Hylaria, the mother of St. Afra (d. ca. 303), is saved through the actions of her daughter. Her daughter introduces a bishop and his deacon, in need of shelter from their pagan pursuers, into her mother's household. Both ladies are sinners living by means of prostitution. Hylaria is sinful to such a degree that, repentant, she remains at the feet of the Christians for no fewer than three hours. She changes her lifestyle and converts to Christianity. The story elaborates the point that even these sinners can count on God's forgiveness.

A daughter can assist her mother with the latter's death. This happens in several ways, and ranges from personal attention lavished on the mother on her deathbed to her intercession with God to assist the mother after the mother's death. Catherine of Vadstena helps her mother Bridget of Sweden who lies on her death bed, and she prays for her mother's safe passage to God and carries her mother's body back to Sweden. A compassionate Liedwij van Schiedam, although ill herself, assists her mother spiritually and in deed with the latter's dying process. Liedwij is absorbed with her mother to the detriment of her charitable works. She starts punishing herself by wearing a hair garment soon after her mother's demise. After St. Sophia buried her daughters Fides, Spes and Caritas in tears she asks her youngest to intercede with Christ in order for her to die soon.

More often the daughter survives the mother. The Boec van der biechten warns the reader not to forget her parents after their demise which could make the difference for the reader of going to heaven or hell. Although the text does not specifically mention it, reference is made to the intercessory power of prayer. The 'promotion' of purgatory in the thirteenth century encouraged such prayers. The

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1088 Katerina van watsteyn, fols. F7v-G1.
1089 Liedwijn, fols. a7v-a8.
1090 Passionael (Veldener), winterstuc, sophie, fols. M5-M5v. In Sielentroest, fols. 16v-17, after having buried the threesome, Sophia prays on the grave for a quick delivery. Biechten, fols. cc4-cc4v.

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departed who had arrived in purgatory could be released to heaven when prayers were said in their memory. Late medieval chantries were set up for this purpose, but the following examples show that daughters were involved too.

Marie of Oignies frets about her mother who has recently died. But she stops when, after her death, the mother appears to Marie to inform her that her prayers are in vain since she has arrived in hell. The mother is hopelessly lost since she had knowingly lived off dishonest gains and never showed contrition. In an other exemplum, a daughter receives a message in her dream from her dead mother. The mother, being tortured by devils, reminds the daughter about the physical pain she had suffered bringing the daughter into the world and in order to compensate her the daughter must assist her mother without delay.

It is not told in the last example whether the daughter complies with her mother's demands, but the trait of obedience was greatly promoted in children. 'Good children should be obedient and pay heed to advice given by parents and friends' reads one of the headings in Aesop. In the exemplum, mother goat warns her baby not to answer the door if the wolf knocks. The obedient baby recognises that the wolf imitates mother's voice and leaves the wolf outside. After the death of her father Pepin of Landen, Gertrude of Nivelles always aided her mother and kept to the commandment to be obedient and subservient.

Not only should the daughter be obedient, but she should honour her parents too. In the following exemplum a daughter-in-law makes an appearance. Especially intended for children 'to exhort them to honour their parents', an elderly couple is mentioned who is being looked after by their son and their daughter-in-law. When the couple's health deteriorates the daughter-in-law

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1092 Bienboeck, fol. y4-y4v.
1094 Aesop, fol. g1v-g2.
1095 Passionael, winterstuc, gheertruut, fol. z5.
1096 Bienboeck, fol. f5v-f6v. The exemplum also appears in the Sielentoest, fol. 91v-92, where more emphasis is laid on the incorrect behaviour of the son.
urges her husband to build a medieval version of the granny flat, so that the old folk will not trouble them too much. Once, when the son and the daughter in law were having goose for dinner, the mother stood in front of the door. He hid the goose so they would not have to share it with her. After she left the goose had changed into a reptile which clung to the sinner’s neck. Although the son is made the scapegoat in the exemplum, it is the daughter-in-law who had incited her husband to arrange for his parents' departure from their own home.

A whole array of admonitions is mentioned when the Fourth Commandment (honour your father and mother) is discussed. Disobedient children or those who sadden their parents are reproached. Furthermore, a child is not to anger the parents, not to ridicule them, be a comfort to them and aid them and to treat them well, to cherish them, and remember them after their demise. In the Sielentoest, in scenes drawn straight from reality, parents are mentioned who have cared for and fed the child, endured poverty and anxieties, as well as suffered from interrupted sleep. De Eyb advises children to honour and love their parents and to be subservient and obedient. He mentions how disobedient and recalcitrant children are undeserving of their caring and supportive parents who try to raise them properly.

Respect towards elders is mentioned too. The following exemplum is specifically directed at children who are disrespectful towards their parents and who shame them. A pig looking for honour and fame, joined a group of sheep instead of a group of his peers. However, he has to be rescued from the wolf by fellow pigs, rather than by sheep.

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1097 Biechten, fol. cc4v and Sielentoest, fols. 85v-98.
1098 Sielentoest, fol. 91v.
1099 Ehebüchlein, fol. c2.
1100 Ehebüchlein, fols. i2v-i3.
1101 Aesop, fol. k6v.
An exemplum shows a daughter who is disrespectful to the distress of her mother. The daughter falls ill, but dies confessed. However, since she had declined to ask her mother's forgiveness, she could be heard screaming from her grave, damned as she was in perpetuity. The exemplum shows yet again the strength of the tie between the daughter and mother.

4.4.3  Bad treatment and matricide

Bad treatment of children towards their mothers is mentioned in the Sielentroest, again under the Fourth Commandment. In a series of exempla children are advised to honour and nourish elderly parents with parallels drawn between animal and human behaviour. For example, a caring mother dog loves and protects her puppy but when it has grown up the young dog loves another in mother's stead and fights its mother for a bone. It is concluded that children soon forget the love and care bestowed on them by their elders. In another exemplum, as long as mother fox is supplying milk the cubs love her, the moment she stops they bite her. Children, it is stated, love their mothers dearly when she gives, but when she stops giving, they in turn cease loving her and wish her dead.

As just mentioned obedience was advocated in children, but occasionally daughters lapse. This can take a mild form only as in the case of St. Brigid of Ireland, for instance. St. Brigid is given the task of churning butter by her mother. However, she decides to donate the butter to the poor and pilgrims because she preferred to please God rather than her parents. But when the time comes to hand over the butter to her mother she is frightened of her mother's reaction. Fortunately, after a prayer she miraculously receives even more butter than her friends.

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1102  Biechten, fols. cc4v-cc5.
1103  Sielentroest, fols. 93-93v.
1104  Passionael (Veldener), winterstuc, brygida, fols. L4v-L5.
Sometimes, the saint is confused to what extent she should be obedient. The purport of the discussion in the Sielentroest is set: the child is admonished to be obedient, indeed disobedience is equated not with a venial but a capital sin.\textsuperscript{1105} The instructive material around which the exempla is arranged elaborates the point that a child should not obey parents if it is against God or if it means the end result is bad.\textsuperscript{1106} Immediately underneath the exemplum follows of the mother who encouraged her daughter to live with a priest.

Liedwij van Schiedam is disobedient to her mother: she had dared to gainsay her.\textsuperscript{1107} Pieternel lashes out at her daughter, in spite of Liedwijd's being bed-ridden. The idea of a mother hitting a child was not lauded by the author, but, as the text continues, Pieternel had a good reason for this. The occasion which brought about Liedwijd's disobedience was that one man was chasing another who hid himself in her bedroom. In an attempt to save the man's life, Pieternel denied the pursuant was in the house, but Liedwijd confirmed it. The miracle which followed was that the pursuer was unable to see the pursuant despite standing in front of him. Liedwijd spoke the truth, and through her action a man's life was saved.

An example of being obedient to God rather than parents is plain in the legend of Thecla, the holy daughter who is plainly disobedient. St. Thecla is so entranced by St. Paul's preaching that she becomes caught 'like a fly in a spider's web' according to her mother Teocletia.\textsuperscript{1108} Teocletia, in tears, attempts to persuade her daughter to snap out of her trance-like state because Thecla is, after all, her only daughter. Thecla remains rapt. Eventually, when Thecla is summoned to the court for her refusal to marry, Teocletia proposes to the judge that he should burn her daughter at the stake as example to other maids because of her disobedience to her parents.

\textsuperscript{1105} Sielentroest, fol. 85v.
\textsuperscript{1106} Sielentroest, fol. 87v and fols. 89v-90.
\textsuperscript{1107} Liedwijd, fol. a4v.
\textsuperscript{1108} Passionael (Veldener), somerstuc, tecla, fols. 006v-007.
In an exemplum, the young noblewoman Lolanda is being prepared for marriage but she kindly petitions her mother that she may become a nun. Her mother, absorbed by household tasks, fails to notice that Lolanda quietly escapes into a chapter house where she surreptitiously takes the vows. When her mother discovers that her daughter has become a nun she seizes her daughter violently, takes her home and places her under house arrest. Lolanda continues to live here as a nun, she only lacks a habit. After three years she is finally allowed to retire to a convent.

In these examples disobedient daughters were obstructed by their mothers in their attempts to turn to the religious life. The examples point out that although the daughter is disobedient, it serves a good purpose. The saint perseveres against all the odds to follow her own chosen path, her own religion. The powerful influence that the mother exerts over her daughter is negated by the new religion.

Some daughters treat their mothers in a less than perfect way, but I have only been able to trace one example of matricide in our corpus. The exemplum states that even the greatest sinner with sins of the magnitude of Mary Magdalene, may be forgiven by God after doing confession with true contrition. In the exemplum, the daughter sleeps with her father, and when her mother scolds her for it she kills her mother. Subsequently, she also kills her father when he discovers she has killed the mother. After confession the daughter dies of remorse, but before the confessor has absolved her. A voice from heaven, however, reassures the church community that the daughter has arrived in heaven.

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1109 Bienboeck, fols. n8v-o1.
1110 Biechten, fols. aa2v-aa3v.
4.4.4 Summary

Mary is the best example of perfect childhood and filial behaviour. Many young female saints follow in her footsteps. A daughter was to care for, assist, love and comfort her mother. Occasionally, a daughter was called upon to assist in matters pertaining to her mother's death. Sometimes, a daughter's intercessory powers are preferred by the mother instead to those of saints. A daughter was to be obedient, subservient, and she was to honour the mother. Comparatively, the topic of obedience is treated most frequently and exhaustively. The permissible extent of disobedience is explored. The worst sinner, on a par with Mary Magdalene, is she who kills her mother. Again, a perception of the emotional bond between daughter and mother becomes a necessity to enable the reader to interpret the ideas presented in the texts.

4.5 The relevance of ideas concerning daughters to secular women

The ideas and thoughts pronounced on the behaviour of the perfect daughter run parallel to ideas which predominantly touch on Mary's childhood and that of the daughters, some destined to become saints. The legendary and stylised childhood of the holy daughters shows that the child behaved as a quasi senex, as a miniature adult. If in reality all daughters behaved well, these examples held up to them would be superfluous.

Unfortunately, we will never know to what extent daughters would have felt compelled to follow the examples set, although they were repeated to them in ad status sermons (directed at a specific social group, in this case, unmarried girls) too. In medieval Europe, preachers directed sermons at girls illustrated with examples from female saints' legends. Preachers would advocate chastity, discuss the perils of make-up, and prepare the girls for the
marital state and admonish the audience not to laugh in church. A subclass of children may never have heard these messages in the first place.

It is debatable for which age category the various aspects of perfect childhood were held up (and therefore for which age category the examples were intended). Although there was a definite idea of stages of childhood in learned circles as described by Shahar (*infantia, pueritia, adolescentia*), in the vast majority of female saints' *Lives* and exempla it is not determined specifically. It was probably more important to find suitable material according to the marital state of the daughter, rather than addressing specific age groups.

A confessant may have been as young as seven years of age, confessing the sin of avarice (a child's indulgence in relation to sweets). However, there was no consensus among the clergy concerning the first age of confession, one of the obstacles being the delicate questioning of the child without telling about sins she had not been aware of before.

Many examples are placed within the framework of the Fourth Commandment. Ever since Moses received God's commandments among which ranks the Fourth Commandment to honour the parents, it was 'officially' recognised that children needed admonishment in this respect. After all, there is no commandment for parents to honour their children. But when studying the examples in the sources and the comments made in the accompanying texts, a general flavour emerges rather than an outlined specific set of sins, as is the case with women of various

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1111 Swanson, J., 'Childhood and childrearing in ad status sermons by later thirteenth century friars', *Journal of medieval history* 16 (1990), p. 322.

1112 For a subclass of urban young female prostitutes, thieves and beggars, see Löhmer, C., *Die Welt der Kinder im fünfzehnten Jahrhundert* (Weinheim, 1989), pp. 193-195. It is not made clear whether these children were orphans.

1113 See Shahar, *Childhood*, pp. 21-31. The stages lasting from birth to seven (the latter marks the age when the child is able to express herself and make choices), from seven to twelve for girls (the latter marks the onset of puberty), and the third stage from twelve onwards. Although the upper limit of the period of the third stage was vague for both sexes, it was usually upon marriage that girls transcended from the third stage into full adulthood.

marital states (as discussed in chapter 3). It would appear that in the incunables, children's eyes and ears were protected.

Children were to cherish, comfort and love their parents and to care for them. Children were regarded as an investment for the future, they were to accept responsibility for the upkeep of the parents when they were no longer able to look after themselves. Perhaps is was necessary to reiterate the recommendations found in our corpus, since De Eyb deems it necessary to comment on fifteenth-century contemporary society when he mentions that when hungry parents tie the 'breadsack' around their neck they are better received in a stranger's house than in their children's house.\textsuperscript{1115} Though, as a matter of fact, daughters (and daughters-in-law) cared for their elderly parents. As in the exemplum so too in social reality, in Ghent, old mothers surrendered properties to their children and their spouses in exchange for lifetime support.\textsuperscript{1116} In the \textit{Ehebüchlein}, the ailments of old age were recognised (stinking breath, runny nose, deafness, rotten teeth, suffering from tremors, temperamental, mean, sad, cantankerous, looking back to the past and not to the future);\textsuperscript{1117} viewed in this light old folk must have been a burden. The examples supplied in the incunables, particularly those in which the daughter patiently and with consideration deals with her mother, for example on her deathbed, and in the afterlife, gave the medieval carer something to hold on to.

The issues at stake concerning care of elderly parents in the Low Countries may have differed from other parts such as southern Europe. Firstly, in a nuclear family unit (mother, father and children) without extended family residing under the same roof, relatively more responsibility was laid on the shoulders of the children. Secondly, since inheritances were shared among all siblings (brothers and sisters) in a partible inheritance system not all the children may have felt

\textsuperscript{1115} Shahar, \textit{Childhood}, p. 176.
\textsuperscript{1116} \textit{Ehebüchlein}, fol. d5v.
\textsuperscript{1117} Nicholas, \textit{Domestic life}, p. 178.
\textsuperscript{1118} \textit{Ehebüchlein}, fols. ii4-ii4v.
compelled to support and care for their elderly relatives. In a system of impartible inheritance and primogeniture, it would have been common for the main beneficiary to care for the elderly parents. Whereas the impartible inheritance system suited an agrarian as well as a warrior society (where the ground or power base remained intact and went to the oldest son), the partible inheritance system was more suited to life in cities and towns. It may have been difficult to decide which child would take in or care for mother or father.

The attributes admired in a good daughter may be used for other purposes than solely outlining the relationship with her mother. For instance, the traits praised in her behaviour towards her mother (such as respect, honour, comfort, love and obedience) are similar to those greatly appreciated in a married woman in her behaviour towards her husband. Although boys must have been taught these traits as well in their behaviour towards their parents, girls must have felt particularly addressed.

Being obedient also played a role in the household. Girls from middle class families were expected to help out in the household.\footnote{Mitterauer, M. and R. Sieder, \textit{The European family. Patriarchy to partnership from the middle ages to the present} (Oxford, 1987), K. Oosterveen and M. Hörzinger transss., p. 103 and Löhmer, \textit{Kinder}, p. 189.} The older daughters of the family had to chop wood, cook (which could take hours) and look after their siblings.\footnote{Dasberg, \textit{Grootbrengen}, p. 31.} Daughters could mirror themselves in Brigid of Ireland (God negated her disobedience by supplying her with churned butter for her mother), and Liedwijk van Schiedam (bringing food to her brothers at school). These daughters helped out in the household.

Also, the qualities of respect, honour and obedience in the child’s relation towards figures of authority at home, are reflected in the qualities in maintaining the proper social hierarchical order too.\footnote{Shahar, \textit{Childhood}, p. 169.} Within an urban setting the admirable behaviour of the Virgin Mary, exercising self-control and displaying
proper behaviour, fits in well. This behaviour contains key elements in what Norbert Elias describes as *Prozess der Zivilisation*.\(^{1122}\) When, in order to survive, outside constraints become less important (war, violence), mutual dependency of people rises and with it the significance of people's regulation of their 'affective life'. Elias ranks self-discipline, self-control and self-restraint among the most substantial factors in the regulation of people's emotions. In this way then, children trained in correct behavioural attitudes towards their parents in private, could utilise their training outside the household, in the larger society of the town, in public.

But urban life was prone to tensions, in particular those evolving from the demands and fluctuations of the economy. This in turn may have resulted in a nostalgia in the form of an idealised childhood. The medieval 'life in the fast lane' striving after materialism and wealth led to a wish for different systems of existence, those which involved innocence and freedom from material gains.\(^{1123}\)

The friar Jan Brugman also picked up on the image of the innocent and sweet child. In a sermon, Brugman, who also authored a Latin legend of Liedwijk, commented on the special state of childhood. There is a saying, still employed in the Low Countries today, which recalls the longevity of his sermons: 'talking like Brugman'. His fame preceded him, wherever he preached he was certain to draw large crowds. In the sermon, he affectionately reflects on children's small stature, their innocence, the dependence on their parents and the mess they make when eating. He uses the special state of childhood to bring to the attention of the faithful that they should approach God like children.\(^{1124}\) Thus, the concept of the innocent and adorable child served as a vehicle for the adult to communicate with God.


\(^{1123}\) Herlihy, 'Essays', p. 241.

The idealisation of late medieval childhood is also reflected in the celebration of the Feast of the Holy Innocents, a reminder of the innocent children massacred at King Herod's instigation. The celebration highlights the emotive value of attachment of mothers to, in this case, their innocent sons. The feast was celebrated near Christmas, already a charged time in the Christian calendar. The massacre, showing mothers protecting their babies from the brutal killers, also features in the Flight of St. Elizabeth, a painting attributed to Hugo Jacobsz. In the scene, Elizabeth and her fleeing son are saved by an opening mountain. Zechariah, refusing to say where his son is hidden, is martyred in the background. In woodcuts featuring in the incunables protective mothers cling to their children.

As observed, pregnant women in the Low Countries seem to have lived in a society which depicted pregnancy in a fashionable way, thereby emphasising their fertility. How were children and daughters perceived in the late medieval Low Countries? There is not enough material available to make any comparisons, but there is a definite impression of a child-friendly society.

A special saint was invented for children. Saint Nicholas, whom we have already met previously when he was distributing dowries to three daughters of a family, is the friend of children and adolescents par excellence in the Low Countries. Also, the many child miracles invoked by parents, and, in particular the late medieval saints' compliance (such as Kunera's), show that children were highly valued.

In towns, medieval children participated in cultural life. Although boys celebrated the boy bishop festivities (when the local bishop was temporarily deposed by a

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1126 Châtelet, Painting, illustration 133.
1127 See, for instance, Dat leven ons heren Jhesu Christi, fol. g4v. Other examples are by Kok, Houtsneden.
1128 Van den Eerenbeemt, Kind, pp. 142-143.
boy), girls participated in specially organised events. For instance, in a medieval play on Mary's Joys, Mary's stay in the temple was mimicked by a three-year old, flanked by four friends who accompanied Mary to the establishment. In a late medieval procession in Venlo, organised in honour of Mary, girls were dressed up by the devout beguine Beelken Segers, who also maintained order among them.

Children were not barred from public events. Many young children flocked to Liedwij's wake, some who complained they could not view the holy body properly, were raised by the crowd. They were treated to white bread afterwards and sent home. A very young child displayed such extreme piety and devotion, that those who kept vigil wept.

Moving from the late middle ages into the sixteenth century, the individual within the family acquired an increasingly distinct personality of its own. Individualism is at the root of the problem incorporating the view that adolescent behaviour in the later middle ages was different from that of the eleventh- and twelfth-century teenager. Within nuclear families with such close and emotional ties adolescent problems were aggravated and often resulted in the 'triumph of the rebellious teenager' in sexual matters and career decisions.

The examples of the disobedient daughters (particularly those who refuse to marry and refuse to worship the idols, or like lolanda who secretly takes the vows) who are disobedient, but for what they perceive to be a good cause, are easily transposable to the mind of a medieval rebellious teenager.

1129 Van den Eerenbeemt, Kind, pp. 185-186.
1130 Nijsten, Volkscultuur, p. 52.
1131 Liedwij, fols. f6v-f7.
1132 Weinstein and Bell, Saints, pp. 67-68.
4.6 Fathers

It is not sensible in a discussion on daughters to leave out fathers completely. Up to a certain extent any demarcated framework of research is artificial, but the sources are too explicit on fathers for them to be ignored.

As observed in the Vitae patrum, the female, considered to be a male, is lauded in raising a child so well, that she as contrite sinner was readmitted to the monastery. This must have served as a positive example to some fathers. There are other exempla which make obvious that children matter to their fathers. In some sources, fathers are punished for errant behaviour through their children. Although reprimanded by his wife, a man continues to hunt on feast-days, and consequently he begets a child with a dog's head inclusive of droopy ears. A father who curses his crying toddler is punished by the devil who spirits the child away. She is returned after seven years, neglected and incapable of speech. A father is punished for doting on his only child, neglecting his charitable duties, and consequently he is punished by an angel who smothers the child.

Not only do the sources give advice to the householder in his role as husband, but also as a father. Since middle class fathers were home more often than fathers from noble households (except for travelling merchants), they may well have been in need themselves of advice on how to handle their daughters.

Fathers were given information on how to handle their fickle womenfolk. De Eyb advises that the daughter, for instance, should be kept chaste and he recommends that she should not be allowed to dance or be in too much company, that she should stay at home occupied with needlework and that 'her leash' should not be too long. In the Scaecspel the householder and his wife ought to set a good example for their children, and he should raise them

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1133  Bienboeck, fol. s7v.
1134  Geesten, fol. aa7.
1135  Geesten, fol. m7v.
1136  Ehebüchlein, fols. a6-a6v.
rigorously. Also, the householder should make certain that his daughter's bedroom is locked so that no one can enter it.

4.7 Conclusion

Mary's role as mother is exemplary, but she is difficult to imitate. Mothers are emotionally attached to their daughters, which is mirrored in the miracles she requests for the daughter and, in the ultimate case, the suffering she experiences when the daughter is about to die. Motherhood is so strong a notion that it is used in a wide variety of senses. Only when this strength is understood by the reader is she able to comprehend that mothers who abandon, sacrifice or kill their daughters do so for a better cause. For instance, Griselda does not object because obedience to her husband supersedes the love for her children and, in St. Sophia's case, because only Christ is worthy of such an offer. (In contrast, infanticide of boys serves to point out concerns surrounding incest.)

The majority of common women married and bore children. In the absence of advanced medical understanding and help, problems surrounding fertility, conception, pregnancy and birth were subject to saintly intervention and intercession as well as magical traditions. Not much is known about the practical solutions surrounding these problems, but it appears to have been predominantly 'women's business'. For this reason, and the fact that it is women only who are equipped to give birth, passages in the sources must have been relevant to them.

Although in the sources mothers are seen to raise their daughters according to Christian guidelines, set good examples and bestow physical and psychological care on the daughter, practical guidelines are only supplied scantily. That is not surprising, since the sources reflect the miraculous and the extraordinary, and do not lend themselves to dwell at any great lengths on these matters.

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1137 Scaecspel, fols. h2v-h3.
1138 Scaecspel, fol. h4.
Turning to daughters, Mary is yet again the paragon of virtue as a well-behaved daughter. Some girl saints attempt to mimic Mary's childhood. The caring attitude of the daughter towards her mother is scrutinised in the sources. Mention is also made of praiseworthy qualities in the daughter, in particular obedience. The emotional bond between daughter and mother comes to the fore in the example (one of its kind) of the girl murdering her mother. She is considered to be the worst of all sinners.

Examples of well-behaved daughters were held up to daughters in real life in sermons. It is not clear how psychologically adapted for particular age categories the examples were, but the gist of them must have filtered through.

Good qualities of respect, honour, care and obedience admired in the daughters are useful for an array of functions. Daughters appear to have looked after their mothers in old age. The qualities also reflect those which shape the ideal wife's behaviour towards her husband. They are useful when the girl is to work in the household. Furthermore, qualities learned at home may be used in a wider environment in the town, regulating behavioural tendencies.

The idealised, bordering on the doting, childhood promoted by the church served to stress Christ's humanity, his and his mother's approachability, and helped the secular woman in her attempt to approach Christ as a child herself. These textual images must have been recognised, since children were highly valued in the late medieval Low Countries.

When the western European marriage pattern gained ground, the cohesive family unit became increasingly important in cities of the Low Countries. One of the goals of the family, headed by the father, assisted by the mother, was to raise children in an orderly fashion. The female saints' Lives and exempla played an important role in this process.
5 Conclusion

Both genres of exempla and female saints’ Lives have proved fruitful sources for harvesting ideas about women, particularly those within a family setting. The evaluation of each of the sources showed that in many the laity is mentioned as readers. Women, although on the one hand seldom specifically addressed, but on the other hand never positively excluded, must be counted as part of the lay audience.

The genres were familiar to the laity; they had been used for centuries, and continued to be used, by preachers in sermons to the laity. The genres, although divergent, contain similar ideas about women. The ideas were recognisable for a secular female public. By filtering out textual images of laywomen rather than religious women, we show that an interesting residue is left for medieval secular middle class women to identify with.

It cannot be denied that gender-marked writing occurred, but some modern historiographers, who dwell on medieval gender polarities, exaggerate. We should also bear in mind that not all ideas about women were negative or that all women were portrayed as either exceedingly good or incorrigibly bad. It is questionable whether middle class women were as aware of antifeminism or dreary stereotyping as modern readers are. Women could contribute to perpetuating these ideas about them when studying women's involvement with book culture. Women were surrounded in everyday life with images and ideas promoting similar values to those which occur in the books.

The influence of the modern devotion (and similar previous and concurrent movements) with its interest in the spiritual well-being of the laity, its usage of the vernacular and promotion of certain reading habits is important. In particular, the individual's responsibility for her own salvation is of significance.
Within city boundaries the middle class seized the advantages which education and literacy had to offer. There is evidence that middle class girls were educated at schools. It was not necessary to be fully literate (i.e. to be able to write as well as read) in order to understand the ideas expressed in books. Reading was also regarded as part of domestic spirituality. The sources, although had originally been intended to be read in an ecclesiastical environment, share their literary tastes with secular readers. Women at home could combine the ideals promoted by the modern devotion and also mirror themselves in models for emulation. They could mix domestic duties with recreational diversion. Women could be erudite and interested in the books.

Accessibility to books within the city was not prohibitively difficult. Books were available in the vernacular and cheaper than before (although we are not informed either on prices of our genres or on (female) disposable income on books). There is evidence that secular middle class women owned books. However, possession of books and accessibility does not indicate that they were read. Books were borrowed from religious establishments by the laity, books were still hand-copied by the religious for the laity, books were bequeathed and they were occasionally available in churches.

Although they took a variety of forms, were placed in different settings, and were presented in different genres, ideas about women within the family are remarkably uniform. A unifying factor is that of chastity. In a subservient relationships (wife-husband or daughter-mother) other elements (obedience, silence, tolerance, care) are promoted as well. Another feature is that emotional ties between the woman and other family members are often mentioned. In particular in the sources dating from the later middle ages, marital happiness and an idealised family life (which includes childhood) are discussed.

Certain topoi are relegated to certain stages of womanhood (for instance, adultery is by definition mentioned in connection with married women rather than virgins). Such is the strength and versatility of the genres that ideas and
messages still have a validity and relevance, although they predate the incunable era (which stands to reason, because otherwise they would probably not have appeared in print: a mass communication medium).

Unfortunately, the history of fifteenth-century social reality for middle class secular women in the Low Countries is too ragged to make any sweeping statements about the influence of books. If historians and specialists in related fields delve into records and publish on 'real life', I am confident that more points of contact can be established. With the ideas presented in this thesis, we can argue in general that the sources were valid and pertinent to secular women, they were prescriptive and useful for admiration and emulation.

With few exceptions, the sources are part and parcel of an international corpus rather than that of the Low Counties specifically. Though the thesis contributes to various fields which I found myself drawn into, I hope to have inspired particularly non-Dutch readers to involve themselves in the rich and diverse culture of the late medieval Low Countries. In the future, in a concerted effort, some gaps may be closed.
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