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**How to Cite:** Harwood, S 2018 'I Will Lead You to the River': Women, Water, and Warfare in the *Roman de Thèbes*, *Roman de Troie*, and Early Chronicles of the First Crusade. *Open Library of Humanities*, 4(2):15, pp.1–22. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.224>

**Published:** 26 September 2018

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## NEW APPROACHES TO MEDIEVAL WATER STUDIES

# 'I Will Lead You to the River': Women, Water, and Warfare in the *Roman de Thèbes*, *Roman de Troie*, and Early Chronicles of the First Crusade

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This article analyses the connection between women, water, and warfare in early chronicles of the First Crusade and two contemporaneous romances from the Old French Troy tradition. It considers the way women are shown providing water to men, using water for washing and cleaning services, and how they inhabit watery spaces. It contrasts the way in which women are overwhelmingly associated with water, while men seem to be associated with land and foodstuffs. It explores the idea that watery spaces are essentially feminised and duties that involve water are almost exclusively the domain of women. Could this feminisation have occurred because water, as well as being essential, could also be dangerous and threatening, mirroring a misogynistic trope that women were also dangerous and threatening? Perhaps the gendering of water in these 12th-century texts can be seen as participating in the larger debate over gender and women that was going on throughout the Middle Ages.

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In 1946, Walter Porges wrote that the presence of women on the First Crusade caused 'grave complications', for along with 'the poor', they formed a 'full complement [...] of incompetents and undesirables' (Porges, 1946: 13–4). His characterisation of women as such was based on the assessment that, with the exception of a few noblewomen and 'a single nun, of less than doubtful morality', the majority of women were simply 'camp-followers and harlots' (Porges, 1946: 13). However, in the 70 years since Porges' rather disdainful analysis of women's contributions to this crusade, subsequent research has revealed that women actually played an important role in crusades and in warfare more generally. Helen Nicholson (1997), Sarah Lambert (2001), Michael R. Evans (2001), and Christophe T. Maier (2004), to name but a few, have shown that women 'took an active role in support of the combatants' (Nicholson, 1997: 349) and indeed 'women's involvement [...] played a large part in making men's crusades happen' (Maier, 2004: 81). They brought water to the soldiers in battle (Lambert, 2001: 8); they were laundresses (Evans, 2001: 45);<sup>2</sup> they nursed the sick (Green, 1989: 44); they were responsible for sewing designs and symbols onto military banners and surcoats (Nicholson, 2004: 108); and they collected ammunition such as stones and rocks.<sup>3</sup> This article builds on the research of these scholars, but focuses only on the connection between women and water during warfare. It uses interdisciplinary evidence from sources that have traditionally been seen as 'historical' (early crusade chronicles such as the anonymous *Gesta Francorum* (c. 1100–1), Albert of Aachen's *Historia Ierosolimitana* (c. 1125–50), and William of Tyre's *Historia Rerum in Partibus Transmarinis Gestarum* (c. 1170–84))<sup>4</sup> alongside two vernacular literary sources: the

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on a paper that was delivered at the International Medieval Congress, University of Leeds, 4–7 July, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Evans' analysis is based on Ambroise of Normandy's late 12th-century *L'Estoire de la Guerre Sainte* and Richard de Templo's early 13th-century *Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi*.

<sup>3</sup> Women gathering stones to be used as projectiles by soldiers are described in: Fulcher of Chartres (1913: Book III, Ch. 17, Paragraph 3); Oliver of Paderborn (1948: 38); *The Chanson d'Antioche* (2011: l. 8936).

<sup>4</sup> Acknowledgement is made here that William of Tyre used Albert's *Historia* and the *Gesta* as sources for his own chronicle, as well as other First Crusade chronicles from Fulcher of Chartres, Raymond of Aguilers, and Baldric of Dol. Indeed, he was largely dependent on their accounts and adaptations. However, Peter W. Edbury and John Gordon Rowe (1998: 48) have argued that William occasionally 'showed that he had understood things better than his sources' and therefore, while he cannot be

anonymous Old French *Roman de Thèbes* (c. 1150–55) and Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie* (c. 1160).<sup>5</sup> *Thèbes* is a translation of Statius' *Thebaid* (c. 45–96), while *Troie* is a translation of Dares Phrygius' *Excidio Trojae historia* (c. 400–500) and Dictys Cretensis' *Ephemeridos belli Trojani* (c. 300–400). The term 'translation' is used in its medieval rather than its modern sense; that is, as Silvère Menegaldo explains, 'qui privilégie le sens sur la lettre, qui ne s'interdit ni de supprimer ni d'ajouter ni de modifier et qui en somme tient plutôt de ce que nous appellerions aujourd'hui une adaptation' (Menegaldo, 2011: 311). For while *Thèbes* and *Troie* follow the basic narrative structure of their classical sources relatively faithfully, they also include multiple deviations and create new scenes and characters that seem to have been influenced by other sources such as Ovid, *chansons de geste*, lyrical poetry, and chronicle accounts of the First Crusade.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Dominique Battles (2004: 30) argues that the overall effect in *Thèbes* is to make 'the story of the Theban war resemble the expedition to Jerusalem of 1095–99'. *Troie's* narrative then picks up from where *Thèbes'* narrative finishes. There is ample evidence from within the manuscript traditions of both texts to suggest that they were often read as historical narratives, providing a link from the Trojan heroes to the Anglo-Norman and French aristocracy,

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used to corroborate material, his selections and modifications based on what he believed to be of relevance or importance are of interest to this article.

<sup>5</sup> *Thèbes* and *Troie* both belong to the popular Old French Troy tradition and are two of the three so-called *Romans d'antiquité* (the third being the *Roman d'Enéas*). They have been chosen for this article for three reasons: firstly, they were composed roughly contemporaneously with several of the First Crusade chronicles in the mid 12th-century; secondly, they themselves show signs of having been influenced by accounts of the First Crusade and other historical narratives (this is discussed in further detail below); thirdly, the fact that they were written in a vernacular language rather than Latin means that they would have been accessible to a different audience than those using the chronicles. Indeed, we know that accounts of great sieges and battles (as *Thèbes* and *Troie* both relate) in Old French became increasingly popular. For example, William's *Historia* was translated into Old French in 1223 and this version appears to have been more widely circulated than the Latin original: there are only 10 surviving manuscripts of the Latin version but nearly 60 of the Old French version (Edbury & Rowe, 1998: 4).

<sup>6</sup> There is a substantial amount of scholarship available on the sources and influences of the *Romans d'antiquité*. See, for example: Salverda de Grave (1910); Faral (1913); Sarolli (1952); Sullivan (1985); Heintze (1988); Gauthier (1992); Petit (2002); Franchet d'Esperty (2003); Battles (2004: 19–38). Following on from Petit's work (2002), my doctoral research explored the extent to which the poets may also have used contemporary historical figures and events as sources for their development of certain characters, particularly the female characters (Harwood, 2017).

by creating genealogies descending from Hector, Aeneas, and Antenor.<sup>7</sup> Given their apparent textual connection to crusading literature and historical narratives, as well as their apparent popularity in the Middle Ages, we should therefore not be shy about using them as sources for investigating the contemporary understanding of the organisation, logistics, and practice of war.<sup>8</sup>

In *Thèbes*, the Argives march from Argos to Thebes (a distance of approximately 150 kilometres) with the intention of declaring war on Thebes' king. The narrator tells us that they undertake this journey at a time when there has been no rain for three months. The narrator makes the direness of their situation clear:

There was such a drought in that land that all creatures were dehydrated.

There was one whole day during which the army could not find anywhere from which they or their horses could drink, not in any valley or any mountain. The Greeks were in a very critical situation; many times did they call on their god to send rain to that land, because they did not know where to find any water. They were in anguish both from the heat on one side, and by their thirst on the other. The chargers, the pack-horses and the palfreys were so weakened by their thirst that they could not take a single step for they were so vanquished and tired. Also the majority of the foot-soldiers

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<sup>7</sup> *Thèbes* is extant in five manuscripts, all of which also contain other Trojan romances, historical narratives, chronicles, or chivalric treatises. For example, in Paris, BnF, MS fr. 375 it is collected with texts that include a chronicle written by Benoît de Sainte-Maure: *La chronique des ducs de Normandie*; in London, British Library, MS. Additional 34114, it is collected with texts that include a *chanson de geste* recounting the Siege of Antioch and the *Ordène de Chevalerie*. *Troie* is extant in 30 manuscripts, many of which contain historical narratives such as chronicles or chivalric treatises. For example, three manuscripts (Paris, BnF, MS fr. 794, Paris, BnF, MS fr. 1450, and Montpellier, Bibliothèque interuniversitaire, Section médecine, MS H.251) also contain Wace's *Roman de Brut* (an Anglo-Norman version of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*); one (Paris, BnF, MS fr. 375) contains extracts from Benoît's *Chronique des ducs de Normandie*; one (Nottingham, University Library, MS Mi. L.M. 6) contains the *Chanson d'Aspremont* (a *chanson de geste* about Charlemagne); and two (Paris, BnF, MS fr. 821 and Paris, BnF, MS nouv. acq. fr. 6774) contain extracts from the *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*. For more on the apparent genealogical links between the Trojans and contemporary medieval society see, for example: Eley (1991); Waswo (1995); Kearns (2002); Morrison (2011).

<sup>8</sup> For more on the link between medieval French literature and the crusades in general (though with no specific references to *Troie* or *Thèbes*), see Trotter (1987).

were almost completely exhausted. The Greeks were not able to suffer any more; they believed they all would die. (*Thèbes*, ll. 2196–215)<sup>9</sup>

The description is reminiscent of similar episodes in chronicles of the First Crusade. Unfortunately, there is not sufficient space in this article to look at all of them, so we will consider just three: one from the *Gesta Francorum*, one from Albert of Aachen, and one from William of Tyre. Of course none of these descriptions take place in the exact geographic location as that of *Thèbes'* action; nevertheless they are all within a region in which we can reasonably assume a similar climate and conditions. Furthermore, they involve different groups of people: a mixture of armed and unarmed pilgrims of varying social status and gender in the chronicles as compared to a battalion of (probably all male) Greek nobles in *Thèbes*. However, their social status does not necessarily have a huge effect on their ability to endure drought. The *Gesta* describes the crusaders' march from Tripoli to Gibeon, during which we learn that they 'suffered very great thirst'.<sup>10</sup> Albert's description of the crusaders' journey is rather more loquacious:

And therefore, overwhelmed by the anguish of thirst, as many as 500 people of both sexes gave up the ghost on that same day—so they say who were there. In addition, horses, donkeys, camels, mules, oxen, and many animals suffered the same death from extreme thirst. We actually found all this out not merely from hearsay, but from the truthful account given by those who also shared in that same trouble: that in that same trial of thirst men and women endured wretched tortures, such that the human mind dreads

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<sup>9</sup> 'En terre vint tiel secheresse|Que toute creature sece.|Un jorné dure entiere|Qu'en l'ost, ne davant ne darriere,|Ne trovent Greu ne mont ne val|Ou il beivent, ne lor cheval.|Molt estoient destreit li Grieu;|Sovent reclamoent lor dieu|Que lor tramette ploie en terre,|Car ne sevent ou eve quere.|Molt les angoisse d'une part|Li chاوز, del autre sei lez art.|Destrier, roncin et palefrei|Rerent si angoissous de sei|Qu'il ne poeient faire un pas,|Tant esteient matez et las.|Et li plusour de ceux a pié|Por poi n'erent tout estanchié.|Greu ne poient mais soffrir;|Toz lez y covenist morir'. Quotations from *Thèbes* are taken from Francine Mora-Lebrun's edition. Translations are my own.

<sup>10</sup> 'Deinde ad urbem quae dicitur Zebari secus mare, in qua passi sumus nimiam sitim' (*Gesta*, Book X, Ch. 36). Quotations and translations are taken from Rosalind Hill's edition of the *Gesta Francorum* and are referenced by book and chapter number only.

to contemplate and trembles to hear of such a pitiable affliction of thirst. For indeed, very many pregnant women, their throats dried up, their wombs withered, and all the veins of the body drained by the indescribable heat of the sun and that parched region, gave birth and abandoned their own young. (*Historia Ierosolimitana*, Book III, Ch. 1–2)<sup>11</sup>

William, using Albert as one of his sources, also gives a description of this terrible march:

Here, overcome by the double distress of intolerable thirst and extreme heat, such as is usual in fiery July, the people began to give way in great numbers. According to report, more than 500 of both sexes died at that time, prostrated by their sufferings from thirst and heat. The story relates further that, as the result of thirst and the raging heat, pregnant women brought forth their offspring prematurely [...]. Men found that their greater physical strength availed them but little. Fainting under the heat and their own exertions, gasping for air with open mouths and distended nostrils, they sought the help of moisture as some alleviation from the intolerable thirst, but found it not. (*Historia Rerum*, Book III, Ch. 16)<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> 'Quapropter, sitis anxietate oppressi, utriusque sexus quam plures, ut dicunt qui affuerunt, circiter quingentos ipsa die spiritum exalauerunt. Preterea equi, asini, cameli, muli, boues multaque animalia eodem fine grauissime sitis extincta sunt. Comperimus etiam illic non ex auditu solum, sed ex ueridica eorum relatione qui et participes fuerent eiusdem tribulationis in eodem sitis periculo uiros et mulieres miseros cruciatus pertulisse, quod mens humana horrescat, auditus expauescat et de tam miserabili sitis infortunio contremiscat. Quam plures namdue fete mulieres, exsiccatis faucibus, arefactis uisceribus uenisque omnibus corporis solis et torridae plagae ardore inaestimabili exhaustis, media platea in omnium aspectu fetus suos enixae relinquebant'. Quotations and translations are taken from Susan B. Edgington of Albert and are referenced by book and chapter number.

<sup>12</sup> 'In qua et caloris immoderati, qualem solet ardens Julius ministrare, et sitis importunae gemina fatigati molestia, coepit populus pene deficere, ita ut promiscui sexus illa die prae sitis anxietate et caumatis intemperantia, plus quam quingenti spiritum dicerentur exhalasse. Accidisse dicitur ea die ... quod praegnantem, praesit angustia et caloris intemperie, ante tempus a natura decretum, foetus edere compellerentur ... Sed et uiris non multum proderat sexus robustior, qui, sudore deficientes et calore, ore patulo, et naribus aera captantes, contra sitis importunitatem quaerebant, quod inuenire non poterant, humoris remedium'. Latin quotations of William are taken from The Latin Library's online edition of the *Historia*. Translations of William are taken from Babcock and Krey's edition.

However, the resolution to the thirst problem is found in slightly different ways if we compare the chronicle accounts and *Thèbes*. The *Gesta*, in the same sentence as describing the thirst, simply says: 'and thus worn out, we reached a river named Braym'.<sup>13</sup> Albert is also very straightforward in his statement that while 'everyone was thus suffering with this plague [of thirst], the river they had longed for and searched for was revealed'.<sup>14</sup> The passive 'aperitur' in the original Latin is ambiguous for it gives us no clue as to the circumstances in which this river 'was revealed'. It appears as if by miracle. William is not quite so ambiguous in his account and attributes the miraculous revelation of this river to God: 'at last the Father of all pity and the God of all consolation mercifully came to the relief of these sufferers from lack of water. A river eagerly desired and long sought was found'.<sup>15</sup> But there is no such ambiguity in *Thèbes*. In this text the leaders of the Argives take it upon themselves to seek out water, and deviate from their route to the beautiful garden of a nearby castle. Here they meet a noble lady named Hipsipyle and ask her if she can help them. She replies:

'I can take you to a small stream that is very clear and pure: known as the River Lannie, that will restore life to you, I believe [...]', she said. 'Lords, stay behind me; I will lead you to the river'. Once she was away from the garden, the distance of four bow shots, she pointed out the water to them with her finger.<sup>16</sup> (*Thèbes*, ll. 2312–5, 2342–6)

Several things are notable about this episode: firstly, this restorative river does not passively or miraculously 'appear', but is precisely described and pointed out by an earthly lady. It is she who is directly responsible for enabling the Argives to find water. Secondly, the Argives do not hesitate in appealing to Hipsipyle herself, although they

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<sup>13</sup> 'Et sic defessi peruenimus ad flumen cui nomen Braym' (Book X, Ch. 36).

<sup>14</sup> 'Omnibus in hac pestilential laborantibus optatus quesitusque aperitur fluius' (Book III, Ch. 2).

<sup>15</sup> 'Tandem omnibus a tanta aquarum laborantibus inopia, misericorditer adfuit pater misericordiarum et Deus totius consolationis. Nam diu optatus et quaesitus multum inventus est fluius' (Book III, Ch. 16).

<sup>16</sup> 'Je vous menasse a une ewete|Que molt par est et clere et nette:|C'est la riviere de Lannie,|Que vous rendra, ceo quit, la vie [...].|Seignors, dist elle, estez arriere;|Jeo vous menrai a la rivere.|Quant fu esloigné del parc|Quatre treitees d'un arc,|L'eve lor moustre oue son deit'.



have come across her purely by chance in the garden of a castle belonging to King Lycurges, a friend and ally of Adrastus. We may have expected Adrastus to appeal to Lycurges for help, but evidently Hipsipyle is considered a viable and appropriate alternative. Thirdly, the river is only the distance of 'four bow shots', which is somewhere between 500 metres and a kilometre.<sup>17</sup> Given that the Argives have been desperately seeking water from the highest mountains to the lowest valleys (even adjusting for poetic licence), it is notable that they are then reliant upon Hipsipyle to point out a river that is comparatively close. There is almost a sense of the supernatural, whereby the river can only be seen once Hipsipyle has pointed it out.

There are three other points in which the vernacular version differs from accounts of women and water in the chronicles. Firstly, this is the only episode in *Thèbes* in which any connection between women and the provision of water is made; this contrasts with the chronicles in which women providing water is, as Sarah Lambert (2001: 9), Susan B. Edgington and Carol Sweetenham (2011: 74) have noted, something of a trope. Secondly, this connection is not made during a battle scene, but only during the movement of men, whereas other narratives tend only to give accounts of women bringing water to the soldiers during the course of battle.<sup>18</sup> And yet *Thèbes*, which may have been inspired by crusading narratives and whose manuscripts show a crusading connection, does not make use of this *topos* even once.

However, in enabling the Argives to access this water, Hipsipyle inadvertently sacrifices the child for whom she is responsible. Her primary role is to care for

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<sup>17</sup> Given that medieval texts are often vague about distances it is interesting to find such a specific reference here. My thanks to Laura Crombie at the University of York and Daniel P. Franke at the University of Rochester for providing estimates on this distance based on 12th-century French bows and arrows.

<sup>18</sup> The *Gesta* describes women bringing water to men on the battlefield during the Battle of Dorylaeum in 1097 (Book III, Ch. 9). The *Chanson d'Antioche* describes the same event (laisse 99) and indeed Edgington and Sweetenham note that women bringing water for the soldiers occurs 'with tedious frequency' throughout the *Antioche* (Edgington & Sweetenham, 2011: 74). Such women also appear in the *Chanson de Jérusalem* (also from the Old French Crusade Cycle) again 'armed with the inevitable waterbottles' (Edgington & Sweetenham, 2011: 74). William of Tyre also gave an account of women bringing water to the fighters on the battlefield during the 1099 siege of Jerusalem. It does indeed seem that women bringing water to the men on the battlefield is a trope of battlefield descriptions, and further suggests that women's presence on the battlefield was not perhaps as unusual as some critics would have us believe.

Lycurges' baby son, Archemore, but when leading the Argives to the river she leaves him in the garden where he is attacked by a snake and dies. The women who bring water to the soldiers in other narratives of warfare do not seem to suffer as a result of their actions, whereas Hipsipyle does: in performing one 'duty' to ensure the soldiers have water, she neglects her other 'duty' of childcare, and is punished. However, Adrastus accompanies her to break the news of Archemore's death to Lycurges, to explain the circumstances, and beg the king's forgiveness. This scene is even chosen for illustration in one of the *Thèbes'* rarely-illustrated manuscripts: Adrastus stands in the centre of the illustration in conversation with Lycurges, who is surrounded by courtiers, while Hipsipyle stands behind Adrastus with her hands clasped in supplication.<sup>19</sup> He is successful in this and Hipsipyle receives no further punishment.

This episode then is very different from the accounts of women providing water to soldiers in other contemporary accounts of warfare, but is possibly all the richer for it. Rather than presenting the duties of women in a simple logistical way, it shows both the sacrifices that may be incurred as the result of performing such dangerous tasks, and the reciprocal duties that the men themselves have in return to the women who have made such sacrifices. This may also be why *Thèbes'* author decided to place this scene away from the battlefield, where it may have been lost in the *melée* of action, or sat awkwardly with the pace of battle-narratives, and instead chose to develop it separately. It may also be characteristic of the romance genre itself; it does not purport to be an eyewitness account but is literally a romanticised version of events. The *Roman* removes women from the battlefield, leaving it as a glorified masculine space, and limits women to domestic private spaces such as homes and gardens. The importance of women and their water-duties is not lost, but it is repositioned and idealised. Perhaps the courtly author of *Thèbes* anticipated an audience for his work that was more equally split in its gender than the authors of the chronicles anticipated for their readers. The *Thèbes*-poet therefore made an effort to highlight and romanticise the vital role of women and water in his narrative. The

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<sup>19</sup> Only two of the *Thèbes*-manuscripts are illustrated: Paris, BnF, MS fr. 60 and Paris, BnF, MS fr. 784. This illustration can be found in Paris, BnF, MS fr. 60, fol. 11.

fact that this woman has a name, a character, and indeed a face in one manuscript, are all aspects that are lacking from the women of the chronicles.

However, if we leave water to look at food, we see a different picture. Women are not presented as having an active role in this aspect of provisioning. Charles R. Glasheen's (2006: 121) study of supplying Peter the Hermit during the First Crusade outlines four ways an army could access food: taking it with them from the outset, purchasing it *en route*, pillaging or stealing, or having it provisioned by a local ally. In *Thèbes*, after the third battle, the Argive army has run out of any food that they had brought with them, the land has been devastated, there are no nearby villages or towns from which to buy or steal, and they are far away from any allies. The new leader of the Argive army, Hippomedon, therefore proposes to take a company of men on an expedition to find food:

He took a thousand well-prepared knights, for he would not return before the end of the week [...]. A great multitude came from the army to go and seek out the food [...]. They rode through the devastated land; and whomever had bread held on to it very dearly: they found nothing on their route, except what they already carried. They rode like martyrs for five days. (*Thèbes*, ll. 7957–8, 7963–4, 7971–5)<sup>20</sup>

When they eventually reach their destination and are able to load up their horses with supplies, they are set upon by the army of the local lord and a battle ensues, in which the Argives are eventually triumphant: 'They have double joy: on the one hand for the food, and on the other for the battle' (ll. 8247–8).<sup>21</sup> It is unclear whether any women are present within the main body of the Argive army, but even if they are, this episode illustrates why it is that women are not able to be involved in the gathering of food in this case. Firstly, those who undertake the expedition must be mounted, for their journey takes several days on horseback over hundreds of kilometres and

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<sup>20</sup> 'Mil chevaliers conreiez meine,|Ne vendra mais de la semaigne [...].|De l'ost eissit molt grant frapaille|Por alere quere la vitaille [...].|Par le guast fait mal chevalchier;|Qui pain y ot, si l'ot molt cher:|En lor rote rien ne troverent,|Si yceo non qu'il y porterent. |Cinc jors chevalchent a martire'.

<sup>21</sup> 'Double joie ont: un de vitaille|Et l'autre fu de la bataille'.

would not have been possible on foot within a comparable time frame;<sup>22</sup> given that it is only knights (all of whom are male in *Thèbes*) who have horses capable of such endurance, this eliminates women from being able to participate. Secondly, the risk of engaging in combat in order both to obtain and then defend the food supplies is clearly high, and *Thèbes* (unlike *Troie*) does not provide examples of female warriors. This gendered division of women having responsibility for water and men having responsibility for food also appears to be supported to some extent by the historical sources. For example, although there is evidence to show that women were employed grinding corn and maintaining markets for fish and vegetables in the camps, it was the men who travelled further distances to procure foodstuffs (Hodgson, 2007: 42; Madden, 2006: 226–7).

There are also signs of this gendered split between food and water in Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Roman de Troie*. This Old French account of the Trojan Wars was written around 10 years after *Thèbes*, and appears alongside *Thèbes* in three of its five manuscripts.<sup>23</sup> Although there are no specific episodes in *Troie* relating to the logistics of gathering or preparing food during war, the structuring of the language itself makes these associations itself. For example, the word 'vitaille' ('*foodstuffs*') appears only 10 times (in over 30 thousand lines) and yet always and only in association with either male discourse or male actions.<sup>24</sup> Firstly, we have the contents of the Greeks' ships,

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<sup>22</sup> The narrative tells us that the expedition rides to the banks of the Danube in Bulgaria, which is a distance of nearly a thousand kilometres from Thebes. Given average marching rates of 10 kilometres per day for a standard mixed group of men and women both mounted and on foot, this would have meant a journey of nearly four months. This calculation is made using Bernard S. Bachrach's metrics on distance, time and speed derived from evidence drawn from the First Crusade (Bachrach, 2006: 43). Even on horseback, covering a distance of 200 kilometres a day is unrealistically ambitious: military cavalry competitions for endurance riding in the 19th-century involved completing 100–150 kilometres a day for three to five days (Dyson, Murray & Nagy, 2012: 288). Even allowing for the possibility that classical or medieval horses were fitter than 19th-century horses it is still unlikely they would have managed this kind of endurance test of 200 kilometres a day for five straight days. The narrative is therefore clearly hyperbolic, but nevertheless, the overall idea is that the distance was manageable for a squad of elite knights, but would not have been for a mixed group that included non-combatants and pedestrians.

<sup>23</sup> These three are: Paris, BnF, MS fr. 375, Paris, BnF, MS fr. 60, and Geneva, Bibliothèque Bodmeriana, Codex Bodmer 18.

<sup>24</sup> Quotations from *Troie* are taken from Constans' edition and are referenced by line number only. Translations are my own.

which are described as being filled full of men and food on five occasions;<sup>25</sup> then we have Troy being described as full of knights and food on three occasions;<sup>26</sup> finally we have two occasions in which food and men are connected in relation to the suffering endured from famine being comparable to the suffering endured in battle.<sup>27</sup> In almost all of these examples, the word 'vitaille' is found in the same clause as a word for men, arms, army or battle. In contrast, there is not a single mention of drinking water in association with men (although of course water is mentioned frequently in the context of the sea and rivers that they navigate). In addition, although plenty of action takes place either on or near water, the only figures who have physical contact with water are female: the sirens who inhabit the seas and try to thwart Ulysses at the end of *Troie*, and Penthesilea, the Queen of the Amazons, who is killed in the final battle of *Troie* and her body thrown into a river by the Greeks:

This is the absolute truth, that [the Greeks] dragged her to the [River] Scamander. We know well, that they threw her into that great and deep water. May God punish them for that!<sup>28</sup> (*Troie*, ll. 24456–60)

We can see the visual importance granted to this scene by the fact that four of *Troie's* 15 illustrated manuscripts chose to feature this scene, which actually makes it one of the most popular scenes for illustration across all *Troie* manuscripts.<sup>29</sup> Two manuscripts also include illustrations of sirens in the water, but in no manuscripts are there any illustrations of men having direct contact with water.<sup>30</sup> We do see men in boats, but of course this is not direct contact, and in fact boats themselves are of

<sup>25</sup> *Troie*, l. 2182, l. 4136, l. 5637, l. 6636, and l. 19317.

<sup>26</sup> *Troie* l. 3681, l. 10459, and l. 24718.

<sup>27</sup> *Troie*, l. 12982 and l. 26615.

<sup>28</sup> 'Ço est la vérité provee,|Qu'en Eschandre la traînèrent,|La savons bien qu'il la jeterent:|G'ert une eve grant e par fonde.|Damedeus trestoz les confonde!'

<sup>29</sup> Illustrations of Penthesilea's body being thrown into the river can be found in the following manuscripts: Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Codex 2571, fol. 149; Paris, BnF, MS fr. 782, fol. 165; Paris, BnF, MS fr. 60, fol. 126; London, British Library, MS Harley 4482, fol. 151.

<sup>30</sup> The two manuscripts with illustrations of sirens in the water are Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Codex 2571, fol. 178 and Paris, BnF, MS fr. 782, fol. 197.

course often given a female gender. In fact the men in two of the illustrations of the disposal of Penthesilea's body are so keen to avoid direct contact with water that they use a stick to push Penthesilea out into the water rather than use their hands.<sup>31</sup> Of course water could be dangerous and frightening, and there are numerous anecdotes of powerful noblemen coming to untimely ends when they come into contact with water that would no doubt have been familiar to audiences of both the *Romans* and the chronicles in the 12th-century. For example, Robert II of Flanders, who had been part of the First Crusade, was later drowned when he fell off his horse during a campaign in Normandy in 1103; William Adelin, the only legitimate male heir of Henry I of England, drowned during the White Ship disaster of 1120; the Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick Barbarossa, drowned in the Saleph River near Silifke Castle in 1190; and Christopher Tyerman's (2006: 511) history of the crusades explains that there was a 'general landlubbers' fear of the sea and sickness'. For texts written at a time when misogyny was not uncommon, it would therefore not be surprising that spaces of water would be feminised, for women could be dangerous and frightening, too. Benoît does not treat the occurrence of food and water in his narrative in the practical way that *Thebes* does, but he does nevertheless maintain an indication that food was a masculine space, while water was a (potentially dangerous) feminine one.

Building on this idea of water as a feminine space, we come to another aspect of women, water and warfare, which is washing and laundry. Washerwomen were the only group of women to receive official authorisation to join the crusades.<sup>32</sup> However, only those who were elderly and unattractive were permitted to accompany the crusaders so as to discourage fraternisation (Ambroise, 1941: 233).<sup>33</sup> Ambroise's account of the Third Crusade goes on to describe such women as 'apes' because they

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<sup>31</sup> These two are Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Codex 2571, fol. 149 and Paris, BnF, MS fr. 782, fol. 165.

<sup>32</sup> For more discussion of washerwomen on crusades, see: Siberry (1985: 44–6); Nicholson (1997: 3–6); Caspi-Reisfeld (2001: 96–7); Hanley (2003: 88–9); Maier (2004: 9–10); Phillips (2018). I am particularly grateful to Dr Phillips for sharing an advanced copy of her article with me.

<sup>33</sup> This stipulation that washerwomen must be unattractive may also have been related to the reputation that laundresses had for promiscuity and the apparent medieval association of laundry work with prostitution. For more on this connection, see Rawcliffe (2009: 157–8) and Karras (1996: 54–5).

also picked the lice from the soldiers' heads (Ambroise, 1941: 233). It is not surprising that we do not find mention of laundresses in either *Thèbes* or *Troie*, for unnamed non-aristocratic characters appear infrequently in these texts. Nevertheless, there is still an indication to be found that women were responsible for the washing of the soldiers and their clothes. After Battle Four of *Troie*, Hector returns to his chambers where his mother, sisters, wife, and other noblewomen meet him and remove all his bloodied armour and clothes:

His mother took him in her arms, while his sisters undid the laces of his helmet and removed it from his head, which was all bloodied with his blood; they took his hauberk from his back; that night he was just to rest and recover. They took off his poleyns. [This was done by] those who loved him. The only thing remaining was his embroidered tunic made of precious silk. His blood was now dried and black and was so stuck to his back that it was very difficult to remove [his tunic]. There was much pitiful crying.<sup>34</sup> (*Troie*, ll. 10219–32)

Despite the blood and suffering, this is a tender and intimate scene. Although the Trojan royal family certainly had many servants in attendance at the palace, and indeed we occasionally see them on other occasions, the task of undressing Hector and removing his bloodied clothes falls to the women. Of course, it is unlikely that these aristocratic ladies would have gone on to wash these clothes themselves, but nevertheless the fact that they take primary responsibility for removing and collecting them does make for a striking scene. It also raises the idea that washing and laundry were not just practical dirty tasks, but could also create a bond between men and women; it may not be an intimate bond in all cases, but nevertheless a relationship that created a moment of interaction and a shared space between sexes. Of course, laundresses did not enjoy a particularly glorious collective reputation. Ruth Mazo

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<sup>34</sup> 'Sa merel prist entre ses braz,|E ses sorors estent les laz;|Del chief li ont son heaume oste|Del sanc de lui ensanglenté;|L'auberc li traient de son dos;|La nuit n'ot guaires de repos;|Ses genoillieres li estèrent|Celes qui de bon cuer l'amerent.|Reniés est en un auqueton|Porpoint d'un vermeil ciclaton:|Li sans de lui glaciez e pers|Le li ot si al dos aers|Qu'a granz peines li ont osté.|La ot mout tendrement ploré.'

Karras (2004: 153) has shown that their representations in contemporary writing and artwork were often ambivalent at best, and they were frequently connected with illicit sexual activity, possibly because they had access to male-only spaces (such as monasteries or colleges) or possibly because they came into contact with intimate apparel. However, Carole Rawcliffe's (2009: 147–69) work on the medieval laundress shows that they were often surprisingly well-remunerated for their work, confirming that despite their reputation, they nevertheless were of great value to certain households and groups of people.

In conclusion, we have seen that there appears to be a particular affinity between women, water and warfare, whether it is in the provision of drinking water, the provision of washing and laundry services, or indeed a place of repose or burial as with the sirens and Penthesilea. Why the literary sources highlight this connection in the way that they do is still a matter for further investigation, but as this article has already suggested, it may be a reflection of the likely audiences for these texts; and in particular, an indication that women probably interacted with texts such as *Thèbes* and *Troie* more than they may have been expected to interact with the chronicles. The role and importance of women could therefore be increased and highlighted to capture the interest of the audience: it could serve as an exemplar to women in the audience on their roles during warfare, and it reminded men in the audience of the importance of women's contributions to their war efforts. Of course a desire to split the roles and responsibilities in warfare down a gender line would not have been surprising during a period when many other activities and occupations were similarly gendered: for example, childcare, cooking, cleaning, nursing the sick, textile production, dairying, and weaving all seem to have been responsibilities typically held by women alone (Schaus, 2006: 856–7). In fact, the association of women with water is not surprising. According to the classical Hippocratic theory of the humors that was later adopted in medieval medical practice, the body was composed of four humors: yellow bile, black bile, phlegm and blood. Each of these corresponded to the four elements: fire, earth, water, air. Women 'were believed to be slightly more watery and therefore more phlegmatic' and this 'excess of water and phlegm in women was viewed with unease and ambiguity' (Howes, 2014, *Watery Offerings*). Also, we can



see this association of women with water across a number of other popular medieval literary texts and traditions; to name but a few: the sirens of mythology were bird-women hybrids in the classical tradition but became fish-women hybrids in medieval retellings;<sup>35</sup> Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which similarly enjoyed a popular revival in the 12th-century, has the example of Cyane dissolving into water due to grief; the House of Lusignan claimed to be descended from Mélusine, the eponym of Jean d'Arras' *Roman de Mélusine*, who partially transformed into a serpent when she bathed in water; the Lady of the Lake is pivotal in numerous episodes of the Arthurian legends, while the unnamed lady of another Arthurian romance, Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvain*, is often referred to as the Lady of the Fountain, simply because of her connection to a magical fountain within her kingdom.

The connection between women and water is therefore a strong one; but why do the literary sources associate women only with water, and not with food? There are no illustrations in any of *Thèbes* or *Troie* manuscripts of women eating or near food, though there are plenty of images of men at mealtimes. There was an underlying belief going back as far as Pliny the Elder in the 1st-century AD that may have had an influence—that the mere presence of a menstruating woman near food could have catastrophic consequences:

It would indeed be a difficult matter to find anything that is productive of more monstrous effects than the menstrual discharge. On the approach of a woman in this state, must will become sour, seeds which are touched by her become sterile, grafts wither away, garden plants are parched up, and the fruit will fall from the tree [...]. Young vines, too, are injured irremediably by the touch of a woman in this state; and both rue and ivy, plants possessed of highly medicinal virtues, will die instantly upon being touched by her. Much as I have already stated on the violent effects of this discharge. (*Natural History*, Book VII, Ch. 13; Book XXVIII, Ch. 23)

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<sup>35</sup> Classical depictions of sirens, for example *The Siren Vase* in the British Museum, show them with wings as bird-women hybrids in the sky, not as fish-women mermaid hybrids in the water.

So to a medieval mind, a woman would probably not have been an ideal companion for gathering food when resources are scarce. Additionally, Richard Almond's (2011) work has shown that although peasant women were in fact frequently involved in food collection and that hunting animals was a universal activity practised by both men and women, women rarely appear in these roles in written or pictorial sources. His conclusion is that 'hunting was a leisure pursuit that emphasised both social superiority and masculine notions of military service. Thus, if hunting was generally conceived of as a "masculine" pastime, then perhaps medieval authors could not accept the active participation of women, so they took the least controversial route and just did not acknowledge them in their books' (Almond, 2011: 148). Maybe we are seeing a similar phenomenon in these romanticised texts as the authors seek to avoid associating women with the hunting and gathering of foodstuffs, so as to protect this as a male space free from the dangers of feminine intrusion. Perhaps the reason that this gendered split appears is therefore not a reflection of historical accuracy, for other sources can disprove that, but a reflection of the wish by these courtly authors to promote what they saw as a more desirable distinction between masculine and feminine. These authors and illustrators may not have been able to impose or implement such gender divides in their actual communities to the extent which they might have wished, but they could do so within the confines of the written word or manuscript illumination. Women certainly had a crucial role to play when it came to water; these texts want to show them in that place, and for them to stay there.

### **Competing Interests**

The author has no competing interests to declare.

### **Author Information**

Sophie Harwood recently completed her PhD in Medieval Studies at the Institute for Medieval Studies, University of Leeds. Her thesis explored women and war in the Old French Troy tradition through the literary and artistic representations of female agency in the *Romans d'Antiquité*. Her research was fully funded by a University of Leeds 110 Anniversary Scholarship. From 2015–17, she taught undergraduate and

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**How to cite this article:** Harwood, S 2018 'I Will Lead You to the River': Women, Water, and Warfare in the *Roman de Thèbes*, *Roman de Troie*, and Early Chronicles of the First Crusade. *Open Library of Humanities*, 4(2): 15, pp.1–22. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.224>

**Published:** 26 September 2018

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