DELIBERATIVE RHETORIC IN THE TWELFTH CENTURY: THE CASE FOR ELEANOR OF AQUITAINE, NOBLEWOMEN, AND THE ARS DICTAMINIS

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ABSTRACT

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Medieval rhetoric has been negatively cast in traditional histories of rhetoric, and the role of women in the history of rhetoric and literate practice has been significantly underplayed and has been remiss in historicizing medieval women’s activities from the early and High Middle Ages. Deliberative rhetoric, too, has been significantly neglected as a division, a practice, and a genre of the medieval rhetorical tradition. This dissertation demonstrates that rhetoric in the twelfth century as practiced by women, was, in fact, highly public, civic, agonistic, designed for oral delivery, and concerned with civic matters at the highest levels of medieval culture and politics. It does so by examining letters from and to medieval women that relate to political matters in futuro, examining the roles created for women and the appeals used by women in their letters. It focuses special attention on the rhetoric of Eleanor of Aquitaine, but also many other female rhetors in the ars dictaminis tradition in the long twelfth century. In so doing, it shows that the earliest roots of rhetoric and writing instruction in fact pervaded a large number of political and diplomatic practices that were fundamentally civic and deliberative in nature. Noble women, and Eleanor of Aquitaine in particular, were actively engaged in prospective decision making at the highest levels of society, their deliberative and hortatory rhetoric mediated by the genre of the letter and the technology of writing. Issues in the historiography of rhetoric that have vexed the field for decades, such as the role of excluded or marginalized groups and their rhetorical traditions, or significant disciplinary lacunae on periods such as the Middle Ages, are addressed with a new analytical framework with heuristic applications, using cultural-historic activity theory
modified from the work of Paul Prior. By using this analytic, the rhetorical traditions of women that have been lost to us can be identified, analyzed and contextualized in the historical milieu they operated in. I show evidence of significant connections to the classical rhetorical tradition are evidenced in letters from and to noble women, and Eleanor’s appeals to Celestine III fall squarely in traditional appeals deriving from deliberative topoi in the Rhetorica Ad Herennium and De Inventione relating to the four primary virtues, and theoretically square with ideas about deliberative rhetoric in the twelfth century which medieval thinkers described as consilium. Eleanor’s letters show how these appeals related to the virtues operated in the medieval rhetorical tradition and pervaded medieval thinking, beginning with Alcuin. The significance and relevance of Eleanor of Aquitaine and noble women in the twelfth century in deliberative rhetoric enriches and explains the women’s roles in the beginnings of composition and its relationship to civic engagement, international diplomacy before 1300, and the idea of deliberative rhetoric itself. Eleanor’s rhetorical appeals are also significant evidence of the history of women and the largely uncharted waters of deliberative processes and hortatory persuasion in the Middle Ages.
“Nothing is so well governed by counsel as is the whole universe” – Cicero, *De Inventione*, 85 B.C.; Alcuin of York, 794 A.D.; Brunetto Latino, *Le Livres de Tresor*, 1354 A.D.

“History is Nothing if Not a Gesture at the Future.” – James J. Murphy
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I. OF LACUNAE, DIPLOMATS, AND *DICTATORES* IN THE TWELFTH CENTURY ................................................................. 1

   Introduction ........................................................................................................... 1
   Medieval Rhetoric and the Deliberative Tradition ............................................. 4
   On the Lacunae ...................................................................................................... 7
   Defining Deliberative Rhetoric in the Middle Ages .......................................... 12
   Women and Rhetoric in the Twelfth Century ................................................. 18
   Diplomatic Activity as Deliberative Rhetoric ................................................. 23
   Methods and Methodology .............................................................................. 32
   Conclusion ......................................................................................................... 33

CHAPTER II. SOCIO-HISTORIC ACTIVITY THEORY AS A METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR INQUIRY IN RHETORICAL HISTORY ........................................... 35

   A Statement of the Historiographical Question .............................................. 37
   Historiography and Methodology: the Nature of the Scholarly Debate .......... 39
   Diplomacy Before 1300: A Deliberative Rhetorical Tradition ....................... 44
   The Medieval Theory of Authorship and Eleanor of Aquitaine ..................... 51
   Noblewomen as a Textual Community ............................................................. 55
   Cultural Historical Activity Analysis as Method in Rhetorical History ........... 58

CHAPTER III. THE RHETORICAL CONTEXT: PERSONS, COMMUNITIES, INSITITUTIONS AND PRACTICES IN DELIBERATIVE SPACE ........................................ 71

   Persons and Actors in Context .......................................................................... 72

   *Celestine and Eleanor* ..................................................................................... 72
Richard I and Henry VI ................................................................. 77
Philip II ............................................................ 79
Communities and Institutions: Noblewomen as Persuasive Agents and Actors ...... 80
Women as Agents of Civic Persuasion .............................................. 82
Women as Civic Actors in the Twelfth Century ............................... 88
Artifacts and Practices: Textual Auctoritas and Diplomacy in the Twelfth Century .......................................................... 93

CHAPTER IV: CONSILIUM: A RHETORICAL PRACTICE IN THE MIDDLE AGES TO TREAT DELIBERATIVE UNCERTAINTY ...................................................... 105

Deliberation and Deliberative Rhetoric to the Long Twelfth Century ............ 114
Thierry of Chartres on Deliberation ................................................. 117
Bernard of Clairvaux’s and Deliberative Uncertainty .......................... 120
John of Saslisbury and Deliberative Systems ..................................... 123
Deliberation and Futurity: the Summa de Arte Dictandi ....................... 124
Albertanus of Brescia and Consilium .............................................. 125
Consilium and Vincent of Beauvais ............................................... 130
Brunetto Latini and Consilium ..................................................... 132
Women’s and Persuasion: Thomas of Chobham .............................. 138
The Tradition of Consilium as a Deliberative Rhetorical Role .................. 139
Deliberative Topoi in the Central Middle Ages ................................. 140
Eleanor’s Letters in the Medieval Deliberative Context .......................... 148

CHAPTER V: ELEANOR OF AQUITAINE AND THE HISTORY OF RHETORIC: A SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT .......................................................... 159
The History of Rhetoric: Conclusions and Future Scholarship ......................... 159
Theory and Methodology in Rhetorical Research: Toward a Methodology of Inclusion
......................................................................................................................................... 165
Women’s History: A Legacy of Literacies ................................................................. 172
Implications for the History of Writing and Literate Practice .................. 173
International Relations and its Practices Before 1300 ............................... 175
The Biographical Implications: Eleanor of Aquitaine ................................. 176
Conclusion ......................................................................................................................... 177

REFERENCES ...................................................................................................................... 180
LIST OF FIGURES/TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure/Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Fig. 1 Cultural Historic Activity System, as Modified to Privilege the Idea of Rhetoric</em></td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fig. 3.1 Known Diplomatic Communiques Surrounding the Crisis of 1193</em></td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fig. 4.1 Major Thinkers and their Theories on the Nature of Consilium</em></td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I: OF LACUNAE, DIPLOMATS, AND DICTATORES IN THE TWELFTH CENTURY

Introduction

Eleanor of Aquitaine was born in 1122 as the Duchess of Aquitaine apparent. Aquitaine, a province of what is today France, had vast economic potential, heavily developed resources, and numerous commercial links to ongoing trade with the Middle East via the French monarchs of Jerusalem and extensive Templar presence (see generally Bull and Leglou). Additionally, the nobility of Aquitaine had sustained a rich tradition of lay literacy, virtually uninterrupted since the Carolingian empire (Thompson 129). Due to the extremely valuable economic and cultural resources in Aquitaine at that time, Eleanor became first Queen of France in 1137. After divorcing Louis VII on grounds of consanguinity, she became Queen of England when she married Henry II in 1152 (Flori 33-35). Both the France of her youth and the Court of Henry II were hotbeds of intellectual and cultural activity. Due to certain political and diplomatic machinations between her and her dynastic progeny who opposed to Henry’s interests, Eleanor was made a virtual prisoner of Henry II, at odds over both sexual and political decisions (118-122). As a result, Eleanor resided at Fontevrault Abbey (among other places) for over a decade, until the year 1189. Upon the death of Henry II, Eleanor acted for a time as the virtual regent of England during the captivity of her son, Richard the Lionhearted, engaging in domestic and international political and diplomatic activity to secure his release (155-171). Eleanor has popularly figured in Annals and Chronicles from her own period and, as recently as 2010, in contemporary stories about the legend of Robin Hood. She died and was interred at Fontevrault Abbey in 1204.

These are the accepted facts about Eleanor of Aquitaine. Many scholars also include in
those accepted facts that Eleanor was illiterate and had no relationship to rhetorical practice in her day. As an illustration of her woeful condition of illiteracy, sometime between 1153 and 1191 she wrote the foregoing in a charter granting certain rights to her daughter, Alix, "Whatever we wish to be stable and lasting, so that it may be more stable and lasting, we commend to the testimony of letters" (“Quicquid volumus esse stabile et firmum, ut stabilius et firmius sit, commendamus testimonio litterarum”) (Eleanor of Aquitaine “Chartes” 340-341). This charter is one of more than fifty Latin documents bearing her name as signatory and author, all of which reflect her directed intent, and many of which constitute rhetorical activity. In spite of her alleged lack of rhetorical prowess and illiteracy, she had extensive personal relationships with some of the greatest rhetors and rhetoricians of her age, including Bernard of Clairvaux, Peter of Blois, John of Salisbury, and Celestine III.

In addition to her position as the signatory of over fifty charters, the author of multiple letters, and a member of a textual community of women in the Twelfth Century, specifically noblewomen, whose cultural and gendered role included persuading individuals and groups at the highest levels of secular and ecclesiastical authority on future actions. She acted in a diplomatic capacity for several kings and at least one Pope, to whom she was recruited for her persuasive powers.

Her exhortative rhetorical activities included negotiating with assemblies of nobles, individually with kings, and at least two popes, both on her own and on the behalf of others. The matters about which she persuaded others related to the resolution of matters such as peace, war, and other civic concerns regarding the collective good of her people. When she died, her eulogist remarked that among her chief qualities was her eloquence. As Jacques Verger tells us, “in the praise he awarded after her death, the chronicler Richard of Devizes calls her eloquent, which, at
that time, would apply poorly to a person among the illiterata” ("dans les eloges qu'il lui decerne apres so mort, le chroniqueur Richard de Devizes la qualifie d'eloquente, ce qui, a cette date, s'appliquerait mal a une personne illiterata") (138). Nevertheless, Eleanor’s illiteracy, and therefore her omission as a possible figure in the history of rhetoric, is often patently assumed.

These biographical details aside, it will be demonstrated in chapter three that Eleanor’s rhetoric in her letters to Celstine III consists of thoroughly deliberative rhetorical appeals and theoretically square with the deliberative genre, within the definition of deliberative rhetoric in currency in her day. Using the Roman and Medieval definition of deliberative rhetoric, which represent a departure from Aristotle, one can see that Eleanor’s appeals to Celestine III fall squarely in the deliberative genre. Eleanor appeals to Celestine about civic matters, namely inter-monarchical relations, and the disposition of the future of both her son, the King, and the Holy Roman Emperor in an ongoing dispute – this much is obvious. The question she addresses is whether the Pope should use his secular or sacred power to intervene diplomatically with the disposition of nuncii or to excommunicate Henry IV outright. But it must be underscored that her advice was rhetorical in nature throughout these appeals. They are deliberative appeals because the choices she suggests are at least two in number, and relate to matters in the future. Eleanor, as we shall see, directs the pope to textual authority in making this decision, largely verses of the Bible, providing him the option of taking consilium either from her own letters or a text in his deliberations. Finally, the common topics (topoi) she utilizes fall squarely in appeals to the four primary virtues – fortitude, temperance, mercy, and justice – which derive from Ciceronian and pseudo-Ciceronian sources, namely De Inventione, the Rhetorica ad Herrenium, and De Officiis, all of which had vast influence on the rhetorical and ethical thinking of her day.

This chapter will explore the existing literature on rhetorical and historical conceptualizing ideas
in Eleanor’s time as reflected in the existing scholarly literature.

Medieval Rhetoric and the Deliberative Tradition

Traditional rhetorical history does not discuss deliberative rhetoric in the Middle Ages, or women’s role in it, in general. Its record is wholly silent regarding Eleanor of Aquitaine. Subsequent chapters will show in great detail how her existing writings, written in association with one of the greatest rhetoricians of her age, formulate arguments derived from classical rhetoric. But, to avoid the appearance of begging the question in this chapter, by merely promising to show how Eleanor was “rhetorical,” what is it at first blush about her life that warrants a regard for her as a notable figure in the history of rhetoric? If we say that rhetoric is, by our co-opted definition from antiquity, the knowledge of all the available means of persuasion, but more importantly, that faculty that permits us to know those means; alternately, if we say that it is a set of cognitive tools for making social change in civil matters; or yet further, if we say that rhetoric is an understanding of good speaking whose aim is persuasion - then it is difficult to not describe Eleanor as a figure whose persuasive influence is well documented in annals and chronicles of her day. But if we settle on a more modern definition of what it means to practice “rhetoric,” let us look at Kenneth Burke’s definition. If rhetoric is “the manipulation of [human] beliefs for political ends....the basic function of rhetoric [is] the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents” (Burke 41). A short list of Eleanor’s most notable rhetorical acts may go a long way to show she was a figure who bears careful attention, to illustrate how rhetoric “worked” in the Middle Ages, and how women used rhetoric in the that time.

Because I address, at some length, Eleanor’s written persuasion in subsequent chapters, consider first that the rhetorical activities of Eleanor of Aquitaine are not limited in any sense to
writing. I marshal to support and warrant my analysis the following episodes from historical sources for consideration. Sometime after 1173, Eleanor was accused of persuading her sons to revolt against Henry I. The chroniclers of her day seem unanimous that it was her persuasive influence that caused the winter revolt (see generally, Flori). After Henry II’s death in 1189, Eleanor spent time in England, directing the jails to be emptied of Henry II’s political prisoners in order to secure their fealty to her son (Brown 14). When Richard’s brother, John of Mortaine, was attempting to undermine Richard’s monarchical authority during his absence on the third crusade, Eleanor went to England to persuade John through her justiciars that if his revolt continued, they would “seize his lands and fortresses and take them into the king’s hand” (Richardson 202). Most significantly, as we shall see, when Richard was ransomed by the Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV, she attempted to persuade Pope Celestine III to excommunicate Henry IV, or diplomatically intercede on her son’s behalf. A brief excerpt of one letter, as translated by Amy Kelly, succinctly demonstrates how Eleanor’s rhetoric was linked to diplomatic and deliberative matters:

What afflicts the church and excites the murmur of the people and diminishes their esteem for you, is that, in spite of the tears and lamentations of whole provinces, you have not sent a single nuncio (168)

As this short excerpt illustrates, Eleanor wrote to Pope Celestine to move him from inaction and determine the outcome of indeterminate future events, the full significance of this statement is discussed below.

Her persuasive activity continued after Richard’s death, when King John requested she intercede on his behalf with certain upstart nobles in France, as additional letter evidence will shows. Eleanor performed all of these acts without armies, as such, or the clear-cut authority of
an appointment as acting regent. To what can one attribute her persuasive power if not
knowledge of the available means of persuasion, or the manipulation of human beliefs for
political ends? If we call rhetoric merely an acquaintance with classical rhetorical precepts, we
must note that Peter of Blois spent months at Eleanor’s court and took no little pains to marshal
his rhetorical knowledge on her behalf. Their relationship is explored in more detail later in this
project. But it must also be noted that the letters he drafted bear indicia of her full participation;
he cites in one letter the personal relationship between Eleanor and Celestine III decades before
Celestine became pope.

History, as James J. Murphy has written, is nothing if not a gesture at the future. History
as a discipline has examined the Middle Ages generally as a series of wars, a series of ideas, and
other, similarly narrow lenses. The past is seen through a kind of camera obscura that is
mediated first by the size of the aperture we see through, and second by the epistemological
underpinnings of what we look for. History is often inadequate for a reader – particularly
intellectual history – because of the disconnect between the lenses of the historians and their
epistemic assumptions. This dissertation seeks to address this disconnect with regard to Eleanor
of Aquitaine.

This dissertation is a result of an initial inquiry made to determine why Eleanor of
Aquitaine was unaccounted for as a gendered rhetorical figure in history, and the history of
rhetoric. This omission is particularly puzzling, since very short orations by Elizabeth I have
been anthologized in collections of women’s rhetorics, such as Available Means edited by
Ritchie and Ronald (49). This chapter will analyze the apparent absence of record regarding
Eleanor’s rhetorical activity and writing in the intellectual, rhetorical, and historical context of
her time, to underscore her importance for illuminating rhetorical history, and her significance to
women in deliberative rhetoric and diplomacy in the Middle Ages generally.

On the Lacunae

The Middle Ages are often mischaracterized as a period where the rhetorical tradition underwent a period of decay, fragmentation and generalized dilapidation. As Georgiana Donavin put it, the rhetoric of the Middle Ages “is typically introduced as a wrongheaded excursion away from classical principles” (51). This pernicious characterization continued with Brian Vickers’ general survey of the history of rhetoric. As Vickers wrote in In Defense of Rhetoric under the heading “Medieval Fragmentation,”

Externally, the classical texts had survived in a damaged and haphazard state; internally, readers atomized what had been transmitted to fit their own needs . . . Whereas, in Aristotle’s Rhetoric, as in the classical tradition generally, the distinction of the three types of oratory—judicial, deliberative, and demonstrative—depended on an external social context . . . in Boethius . . . the three kinds of oratory are now defined according to ethical criteria, independent of the place or time (220 – 222)

These generalizations have been perpetuated and reiterated as recently as 1994, in an article by Peter Munz, who wrote

In ancient times, among the Greeks and the Romans, rhetoric was considered to be of great importance because there was no other way to iron out the clash of opinions. In the Middle Ages people attributed importance to rhetoric . . . because they were courteous to antiquity. They had authoritative books to decide issues, and for people who could not read there were authoritative clergy (122).

This dissertation is not just the story of a woman. It is about the rhetorical activities of a woman
who was a member of a group of similarly situated women, participating in a complex
diplomatic system between the years 1100 and 1250 C.E. This system was often mediated by
writing and was guided, above all, by classical rhetorical principles delivered through the *Ars
Dictaminis*, or letter writing, tradition.

This period is known as “the twelfth century renaissance” or simply “the long twelfth
century.” These years do not fit easily in the template of Vickers or Munz. The Middle Ages are
subject to hasty generalization because they are frequently glossed as a single continuous and
monolithic period of no intellectual development, where there were no periods of significant
social change, and therefore no need for innovations in rhetorical practice. This is a significantly
uninformed perspective, and has extended to the belief that there was no need for a deliberative
rhetoric at any period between the years 400 and 1400 C.E. Similarly, a view of the Middle Ages
as one monolithic period of stagnation lends itself to generalizations about the status of rhetorical
education and literacy of huge groups of people, among them, women and secular authorities,
who are often lumped into a category of non-literacy. The generalizations result in a disciplinary
lacunae that excludes the possibility of studying sub-genres of rhetoric, particularly the
deliberative rhetorical genre. After all, what political speaking about the future could be possible
in an age of illiterate autocratic tyrants, as Munz points out? James J. Murphy noted, when he
opened up the field of medieval rhetorical scholarship in 1974, that the *Ars Dictaminis* deserves
further study because it might illustrate “the comple [mediaeval relations between concepts of
language and the social uses of language” (268). One of the little-studied areas of rhetoric in the
Middle Ages is the complex nature of deliberative rhetorical traditions and their respective uses,
particularly in relation to the *ars dictaminis*.

Martin Camargo has incisively dissected the problems regarding the generalities
prevailing about rhetoric in the Middle Ages. He wrote, “After Murphy’s *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, it was no longer possible to dismiss medieval rhetoric as merely stylistic ornament or merely letter-writing” (27). There has been a growing realization that “classical rhetoric, like medieval rhetoric … permeated a broader range of social practices than those enumerated in the treatises” (22). One prime example of deliberative rhetoric, which included secular institutions and previously excluded groups, is the oral and written rhetorical activity of Eleanor of Aquitaine. But if one were to operate on the scholarly assumptions of Vickers and Munz, there would be every reason to assume the absence of a deliberative rhetorical tradition in the Middle Ages. However, it has been acknowledged that up until the fifteenth century, before the profusion of embassy-structures, diplomatic relations existed squarely within the province of the *ars dictaminis* (Witt 3; Constable 46). This species of rhetoric was, in fact, often in the deliberative genre in the twelfth century, and its practice, both written and oral, admitted women under compelling circumstances. Thus, both the apparent historical absence of women in deliberative international processes of peace and war in the Middle Ages, and the absence of a field of study in deliberative rhetoric in the Middle Ages generally, are results of pernicious generalizations of history that are re-inscribed in the history of rhetoric.

Similarly, the role of women in the rhetorical tradition, in both practice and historical fact, have been the subject of generalizations that are an outgrowth of a lack of documentary evidence and prevailing historiographical assumptions. Christine Mason Sutherland, Cheryl Glenn and many other scholars in the past two decades have called for a re-envisioning of the history of rhetoric to include the immense contributions of women to rhetoric and written discourse. In *Rhetoric Retold*, Glenn provides a lens into medieval rhetorical practices of women, contextualizing her discussion largely in religious terms, discussing “women’s visionary or
mystical writings” as acceptable literary avenues of “literacy and communication in a medieval world that otherwise discouraged women’s academic literacy” (Glenn 93). Professor Glenn’s contributions are of paramount importance, and her book itself has been responsible for incredible advances in scholarship in women’s rhetorics. But by using a wholly ecclesiastical lens in her recounting of women’s rhetorical activity in the Middle Ages, she tells only part of the history, and indeed, the history principally of the late medieval period and often only regarding works in the vernacular, and may just as significantly may be conflating “academic literacy” with the knowledge of rhetoric. Extant records of rhetorical activity by women, notably noblewomen, must be restored to women, just as the rhetorical lives of noble women in the Middle Ages must be restored to rhetorical history. I begin by acknowledging that I elaborate on Professor Glenn’s rich contributions, to the extent that I expand on her observation that “rich and noblewomen” constituted a special status of women. These noblewomen lived ‘in the space between the letter and the spirit” of what Glenn describes as a repressive system (76). But a regrettable generality present in Glenn’s narrative is precisely that its generality. The systems in which women lived in the Middle Ages were not one condition normative to a thousand-year period; the social systems of the Franks and the Saxons differed wildly in the eighth century, and both differed markedly from the systems in Anglo-Normandy or the Holy Roman Empire in the twelfth century.

It is useful to examine why Eleanor of Aquitaine has not been previously studied as a gendered figure in rhetorical history in the Middle Ages. Eleanor’s importance to rhetorical history can be primarily evidenced by her political and diplomatic, generally oral, intercessions in the affairs of medieval states and figures. But documentary evidence exists to establish Eleanor’s importance to rhetorical history, and the history of written discourse, in the form of her
existing textual artifacts, particularly in the context of her *dictaminal* diplomatic writings following the incarceration of her son by the agents of Phillip Augustus, and her record of negotiations with noblemen in the reign of her son King John. These have become conceptually clouded by modern historians due to revisionary assumptions about the nature of rhetoric and literate practice in her time. Beginning late in the nineteenth century, scholars began their analysis of the letters and charters of Eleanor of Aquitaine by simply assuming that Eleanor was for some reason incapable of composing the artifacts bearing her name. This was the beginning of the occlusion of her significance to the history of rhetoric: since that time, few have had occasion to critically examine the contemporary conflation of literacy with rhetoric.

Assumptions about Eleanor’s literacy are stated and restated either because she was a woman, or because many monarchs of that era were illiterate, or because German scholarship in the mid-nineteenth century found that many existing letters were mere exercises by medieval rhetoricians. These assumptions represent a misunderstanding of the complex *technēs* at work in written rhetorical production in the twelfth century. These presumptions are framed by scholars who have marginalized Eleanor as a rhetorical actor in historical discourse, and by extension historians of rhetoric have not had occasion to examine her writing and their context as artifacts in a system of activity. This dissertation’s central purpose is an argument using the narrow example of Eleanor’s letters to show how we can better understand the *ars dictaminis* tradition, particularly as it elucidates deliberative rhetorical practices through diplomacy in the twelfth century. This examination, in turn, can show how these practices illuminate the uses of medieval rhetorical in history. Eleanor of Aquitaine defies historical generalizations about women’s roles in deliberative rhetoric, an example of which is diplomatic processes in the Middle Ages. Eleanor’s biographical details and the facts attending the period in which her writing can be
contextualized illustrate misconceptions about the twelfth century, the literate collaborative
*technes* of her time, and her situation in a socio-cultural textual community.

Accordingly, this dissertation will set forth an argument that addresses the problem of our relative lack of knowledge about women and the rhetorical tradition in the twelfth century and the role of deliberative rhetoric as a theory of diplomatic relations prior to 1300. This chapter addresses a review of existing scholarship about women and rhetoric in the twelfth century, deliberative rhetoric in the Middle Ages, and the rhetorical practice of diplomatic relations in the Middle Ages. After a review of existing literature, there will be a theoretical discussion of how rhetoric can and should be studied a functional activity system, and how other theories fit into this theoretical framework relevant to rhetoric, diplomacy and the twelfth century. Chapter three applies this framework as a modified analytic to provide background regarding Eleanor of Aquitaine's deliberative rhetorical-diplomatic practices, and diplomatic practices generally in the Twelfth Century, of which women were an enormous part. In chapter four, the artifacts, specifically letters and charters, are analyzed, and in the final chapter, conclusions are discussed regarding the implications for deliberative rhetoric in the Middle Ages. But first, let us define terms.

**Defining Deliberative Rhetoric in the Middle Ages**

It is necessary, having described Eleanor’s rhetoric as squarely in the deliberative genre, to define the genre and explain how this was so. Doing so is a critical step in this argument that ought to be addressed briefly here, although a full discussion is best reserved for the fourth chapter of this work. Aristotle defines deliberative rhetoric as when a “political orator offers counsel” who “does not deal with all things, but only with such as may or may not take place . . . matters, namely, that ultimately depend on ourselves and which we have it in our power to set
going” (1359a31 – 1359a39). Aristotle argued that deliberative rhetoric concerned itself with the inquiry of whether a course of action might be useful or harmful. Aristotle’s “five topics” of deliberative discourse include ways and means, peace and war, national defense, import and export, and legislation. While these subjects are, in some respect, relevant to Athenian democracy specifically, and later, to Republican politics, it is a recurrent mistake both in history and the history of rhetoric to confuse deliberative decision-making with democratic, Republican, or other representative forms of government. In fact, people in the Middle Ages made collective decisions without pure democracy or republican representation, which during the Roman republic, largely amounted to aristocratic governance. In the Middle Ages, after the rather arbitrary year 1000 (in fact, there were clearly deliberative assemblies as early as the period of Charlemagne in the mid-eighth-century) political decisions of peace, war, and diplomatic strategy were conducted in writing between monarchs, and generally via chanceries and the developing genre of the letter. Because of the unique political institutions after antiquity, including the concept of excommunication, fealty, and dynastic succession for example – the “five topics” may not be exhaustive. What is an assembly? What is political? The Middle Ages had a very different definition of the private and the public, or the secular and the civil, but one end of this argument is to find a much better categorical definition of deliberative rhetoric as a genre, and to show it was very much alive in the Middle Ages. However, it generally existed among monarchs, nobility, and the pope in making major political decisions.

Aristotle’s definition of deliberative rhetoric is ill-suited to many political climates and, largely, most times when limited to five common topics. As William Covino has observed, when Aristotle discusses the topics appropriate to deliberative oratory, “in the space of scarcely a page, Aristotle has warned against confusing the activity of rhetoric with the explication of subjects;
contradicted his own warning; and limited the arena of deliberation to five subjects . . . whose exclusive importance as the foundation of deliberation is, at least, arguable” (26). But while Aristotle’s definition is limited, another major purpose of this dissertation is to provide more utility for the idea of deliberative rhetoric in medieval contexts. We will revisit this subject at some length in chapter five. But for our purposes, a working definition must assume that deliberative, or *sumbouleutik* rhetoric, concerns writing or speaking about the future related to political matters. This must necessarily involve groups of people and must take place between not less than two participants. Finally, we must consider that *sumbouleutik* communication deals with matters that have not yet occurred with two or more alternative possibilities for action; these alternate courses of action must also be only affected through the potential human agency. As we shall see, Eleanor’s activity fits within this definition. Celestine II was faced with two choices: do nothing about the confinement of Richard, excommunicate the emperor, or intervene diplomatically. The purpose of Eleanor’s argument is to weigh in favor of action and against inaction. While it is absolutely necessary to define deliberative rhetoric as it had eventually developed through the Roman Empire and the Middle Ages, if for no other reason than that Eleanor and her contemporaries had never read Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*. This topic will be addressed exhaustively in chapter four. But for now I will introduce how the rest of the classical tradition, as Eleanor inherited it, played out as an influence to her rhetoric.

Any inquiry about the *dictaminal* tradition and Eleanor of Aquitaine must include an inquiry about the time in which she lived. The twelfth century is unique in the Medieval Period, and a period for which many generalizations about medieval culture and rhetorical practice do not hold true. In the context of diplomatic communication, Malcolm Richardson has concluded that the diplomatic practices of the medieval period, prior to the reign of King John in the
thirteenth century, may have been far more sophisticated than previously believed (19). The twelfth century has been described by John O. Ward as a unique crossroads of literacy where ecclesiastical control of written communication was significantly loosened, and literacy was opened to a variety of people and multiple classes. This bears directly on the likelihood that Eleanor of Aquitaine may have been literate not only in the vernacular, but in Latin, for socio-political reasons discussed in the sections that follow. Yet whether Eleanor of Aquitaine was highly literate in Latin does not eclipse her rhetorical intent, and ultimately such an inquiry becomes irrelevant because of the highly complex implications of literacy and writing practice prevailing in her time. It might be useful in this context to restate Ward’s colorful depiction of this brief period of literacy in the “dark ages” to contextualize and underscore the case of Eleanor of Aquitaine as an illustrative example of noblewomen in rhetoric in the Middle Ages:

Persons from nonliterate backgrounds were thrust into literacy; persons used to oral modes of communication were confronted with texts in which charismatic orators found new and vital “authority”; persons with uncertain social connections and status found themselves thrust by their precocious grasp of new techniques vital to the archival, textual age into close proximity with socially better connected (but textually less trained or gifted) persons; people found themselves seduced from the world of primogeniture, *militia*, feudal marriage, lineage, and sword-and-horsemanship into a new world offering new kinds of dominance, mastery and power, a world in which – as Abelard put it – tournaments were conducted with written words, texts, and *rationes* rather than with horses, swords, and heraldry (Ward 1990 131).

Thus women, and particularly noblewomen, previously without access to Latin literacy except through monastic systems, participated in literate practice, as in the case of Eleanor of Aquitaine,
the Abbess Heloise, and other contemporaries.

One theoretical “lens” for examining the twelfth century as the temporal locus of this analysis is assisted by D.H. Green, whose writings are pivotal for understanding imperial and royal social relationships and their relation to other powers. Eleanor of Aquitaine’s letters represent a rhetorical artifact for international, diplomatic, and deliberative persuasion in the twelfth century. The letters’ relationship to the oral-literate nexus in the developing West stands at the center of the tradition of diplomatic practice. Green has noted that by the time of Eleanor’s letters to Celestine, lay literacy in France had become an expectation for any person of station, and even James Westfall Thompson (who concluded Eleanor was illiterate) acknowledges the long tradition of literacy in Aquitaine predating this expectation (284). The primary documents that are most relevant to dictaminal practice in the twelfth century can be found in the writings of John of Salisbury and Peter of Blois. I provide one qualifier: the prevailing dictaminal theories, as Camargo and Murphy have pointed out, were divided into the Bolognese and Northern French schools. But in all probability, at this time, there was a weird harmony attempted in the Norman realms, at least considering the evidence of the existing rhetorics which may be representative of rhetorical theory in this time. Camargo has analyzed this in relation to the *Libellus de arte dictandi*, often attributed to Peter of Blois, Eleanor’s secretary. I will briefly summarize the secondary sources necessary to establish the theoretical context.

A review of the existing literature must necessarily ground any analysis with John O. Ward’s statement that revision is demanded of generalities in existing histories of rhetoric that state that the need for political rhetoric ended with the Roman world. Ward has spent enormous scholarly energies arguing that a deliberative, Ciceronian rhetoric continued to be vital and useful in the Middle Ages, and has fully proven that such generalities about its disuse “should
now be revised” (Ward 1995 21). Ward has pointed out that the long medieval tradition of “Ciceronian rhetoric reached maturity in the twelfth century A.D.,” the century of such rhetorical luminaries as Heloise and Eleanor of Aquitaine. The “intellectual and political climate not only stimulated the renewed study of Cicero’s rhetorical juvenalia but also gave birth to systematized instruction in . . . letter-writing” (24). Ward attributes the renewed interest in classical Roman rhetorical theory to the “many-sidedness” of the twelfth century, such as a new perspective on the nature of the self and the overarching concern with the increasing ambiguity of the nature of “truth” (19-25).

Ward has further illuminated the changes for secular nobility in the twelfth century, prefiguring his discussion by citing changes within, specifically, the mentalities of the French cultural elite in the twelfth century, particularly in regard to the secular self (Ward 2006 citing Bond, 58). Ward builds on his position, stating

> It is clear that a major function of the medieval general rhetorical curriculum was the support of intercommunal and international political relations at the highest levels The grouping of texts within manuscripts indicates strongly that later medieval and especially Italian study of the Ad Herennium was seen as a prerequisite or co-requisite for specialist training in *dictamen* and epistolography (Ward 1995 293)

Thus, Ward highlights that the education of the nobility in the twelfth century was to enable activity in international political relations, but in addition, underscores that women were not excluded at this time in general rhetorical education. In subsequent writings, Ward goes on to explain the nature of women’s written and rhetorical practice, and particularly noble women, and their admission to rhetorical education in this period.
Women and Rhetoric in the Twelfth Century

Ward has further amplified his analysis of the very real and specialized participation of the nobility of Medieval Europe to extend to women, similarly, in his essay "Women and Latin Rhetoric from Hrotvist to Hildegard." Ward uses a very narrow definition, first, to qualify his findings, by saying that what he means by women "in" rhetoric is meant to mean "medieval rhetors, or women who taught the rhetorical art, or else women who practiced it from a learned base" (122). While one might take issue with Ward's narrow definition of rhetorical activity practiced by women, it is clear that Eleanor of Aquitaine can be shown to fall into the latter category, and is not accounted for in Ward's essay, presumably in the company of many other women. He does account for Eleanor's twelfth century peer, Heloise, and points out her relevance to "epistolary theory in general" (125). The suggestion of Ward opens doors to both epistolary theory and classical rhetorical theory as relevant to an analysis of Eleanor's letters.

But Ward takes us further. In his essay, “The Young Heloise and Latin Rhetoric,” he picks up his reasoning where he left off in previous works, and extends his proofs to discussions of women in the twelfth century, extrapolating by analogy from the rhetorical education of Heloise in the early part of the century. “Women came to share in [the] developments” governing the period of rapid social change in the twelfth century (58). Beginning in the late eleventh century, there was a “startling rise in the visibility of women who demanded an educational and literary culture in which they could participate” (58). While the geographical “focus” of these changes was in France, the language or medium of exchange was Latin. Ward points out that Heloise, a contemporary of the young Eleanor, had access at the same time, and in the same place – Paris, which was an “intense intellectual urban environment,” the Paris of Bernard and Bernard of Clairvaux – the latter a personal acquaintance of Eleanor (58). Heloise, a similarly-situated
noblewoman to Eleanor, was admitted to literate and rhetorical education through a system of private instruction, which illustrates the likely means of education Eleanor received. Education was aided by the immense outgrowth in the number of female monastic communities between the years 1100 and 1175, and Eleanor, as a patroness of a number of them, and eventually, a long-term resident, likewise had access to their attendant educational opportunities before her authorship of the letters (60).

It can be concluded that women were involved in the literate revolution of the twelfth century, especially women at the highest levels of society. It bears inquiry what the nature of rhetorical training was for those social strata – and thereby for women in Eleanor’s social strata. Ward has examined this, following his extensive study of the massive activity whose scope was Ciceronian commentary from the period, and examined “the content of the teaching tradition of rhetoric and the needs of the contemporary consumer,” one of whom was very likely Eleanor of Aquitaine. It is of note that this is all the more likely given Eleanor’s extensive, personal, lifelong contact with a circle of intellectuals who studied and practiced rhetoric. Eleanor was either proximally or personally close to figures beginning with Peter Abelard, Bernard of Clairvaux, John of Salisbury, Peter of Blois, and numerous others, all of whom had passing relationships or were intricately bound to the life of the court of her first and second husbands. Ward has concluded that the scholion and commentary traditions in evidence from the twelfth century show that the regularity and repetition between the existing glosses and commentaries suggests they were being produced for “a real audience with real communication needs” (Ward 1995 270). Additionally, it serves to thoroughly disprove the belief that “classical rhetorical theory had little relevance to the conditions of life and culture of the Middle Ages” (271).

Ward proceeds to cite a laundry list of scholars who have made this pernicious generality
(including Vickers, cited previously). Ward puts a nail in the coffin of the reasoning undergirding the previous scholarship about the Middle Ages, stating that just as it is necessary “to banish the notion that ancient rhetorical theory and practice was monolithic and unvarying in its contexts and emphases,” it becomes just as “necessary to discard the view that medieval rhetorical theory and practice fragmented these emphases and lacked these contexts” (272). This is because the rhetorical thinkers of the twelfth century, many of whom were known to Eleanor and her court, believed that rhetoric was a “controlling, shaping factor in social arrangements” including the belief that it had value “wherever people had to be persuaded … [and] Medieval society . . . was full of such opportunities” (276). Evidence of this can be found in John of Salisbury’s *Metalogikon*, when he writes:

> Who are the most prosperous and wealthy among our fellow citizens? Who are the most powerful and successful in all their enterprises? Is it not the eloquent?

(1.7)

Why, then, the neglect of Eleanor as a gendered participant in the history of rhetoric? In terms of Eleanor’s literate activities during her lifetime, her legacy has been problematized in a historical context by inquiries representing the authorial identity of her scribes. It is further complicated by a pernicious generalization that women in the Middle Ages, including the twelfth century, were not admitted to literacy or given a rhetorical education. Because most official charters and other documents were by custom composed in Latin, often the literate activities of the nobility were the result of collective action by members of their court, and their rhetorical acts were communicated through the offices of assistants. This “problem” of Eleanor as author is one which should be of little concern; literary production in the Middle Ages was often, by necessity, a *techne* which is made problematic only by our very recent conceptions of rhetorical
practice and authorial property, which Glenn also pointed out when she wrote, “Given the high level of illiteracy, rulers often dictated their letters to scribes who arranged for the letters to be read aloud in the persona of the composer” (89). To produce a lasting document complete with seals and other tokens of authority, often a group of individuals with multiple duties and literacies were utilized. No less, medieval noblewomen utilized devices such as sealing and witnessing to encode their rhetorical intent, authorship, or ultimate review of approval. The literate activity of Eleanor bears inquiry – as relevant to the history of the rhetorical activities of women generally in the High Middle Ages.

This dissertation demonstrates that certain generalizations about the literacy or rhetorical knowledge of women, and particularly noble women, in the twelfth century needs to be revised. The significance of Eleanor’s letters in relation to the essentially deliberative tradition of diplomacy, and therefore deliberative rhetoric, in the Middle Ages places her squarely in the *ars dictaminis* tradition. This would rebut Bizzell and Herzberg’s general assertion that, “in a largely illiterate society, official letters were often the only record of laws or commercial transactions and hence had legal standing,” but would bear out their assertion that “The person who could compose letters had access to considerable political power” (444). Glenn has described a *techne* of composition typical of the Middle Ages, that while it may include multiple parties acting in concert to compose a “writing,” such a practice could easily result in confusion with our modern notions of authority as property, and Romantic ideas of composition as a private, asocial act. It is possible that this was the *techne* undertaken by Eleanor of Aquitaine and her subordinates, and has led to the confusion that has resulted in her exclusion from rhetorical history; but it is just as likely based on the scholarly findings of Ward, that her letters were significantly more likely an invention of her own.
Further evidence is found in Jeffrey Kittay’s analysis of how the idea of “writing” was radically changed in the Middle Ages, describing how official charters and other documents did not fully betray the rhetorical intent of the author, but remained simply material artifacts “remaining only evidentiary” in this case of rhetorical agency and intent (211). Scribal culture has also been discussed extensively by Denise A. Troll. Scribes, and their ilk, were typically copyists more in the tradition of heavy manufacturers, with extensive materials and complex practices whose chief aim was accuracy. As Troll has pointed out, Alcuin himself established constraints on scribes, and had Eleanor in fact employed any, it would indicate they often had no measure of creative input in their written textual production, and were often themselves illiterate. Troll cites this as a condition of orality in medieval culture, following Ong (102). Thus, if a scribe or Latin secretary had taken Eleanor’s dictation, it was another significant *techne* representing the complex literacies of the Middle Ages - if, in fact, the twelfth century was typical of the Middle Ages *at all*. But more pertinently, the dismissal of Eleanor of Aquitaine as simply “illiterate” betrays our two-dimensional contemporary definition of literacy. This argument, when using the term literacy, follows Shirley Wilson Logan’s seemingly simple proposition that broadly applies to the Middle Ages, when she wrote, “Literacy is the broader term, the ground upon which rhetorical education develops. Some manifestation of literacy, then, is implicated in one’s rhetorical abilities” (4).

Similarly, Judith Green has thoroughly documented female defiance of traditional gender roles in the Anglo-Norman aristocracy, and literate and rhetorical activity cannot be logically excluded. Women sometimes declared and conducted wars in the twelfth century and the centuries before, and new rules of succession meant that “women appeared more conspicuously as wives and heiresses” (Martindale cited in Green 59). Part of this was the new ability for
aristocratic women to transmit land among “political elites” (60). Being an heiress to land raised Eleanor’s status, like similar women of her century, above mere nobility of birth, as she had inherited the extremely valuable duchy of Aquitaine, perhaps second only to Anjou in France in terms of its economic productivity. That Eleanor was central to the history of, and rhetorical history of, the twelfth century is likewise related to the rhetorical power of her culturally-transmitted feminine role that typified the time, as “Women were counters to be used in political bargains, in concluding alliances, in ending hostilities” (60). Despite the frequent characterization of Eleanor being oppressed in her marriage, she retained the right to transmit Aquitaine to her heir, and as such retained great power in the affairs of the Angevin dynasty before and after the death of Henry II, if not in matters of international diplomatic relations. As we shall see in the chapters to follow, Eleanor was not merely an exception in this regard. Rather, she was one of a large number of noblewomen leaving documentary evidence that they had an established and cultural, if not political, role to engage in deliberative persuasion in traditional deliberative *topoi* such as peace and war.

But how has the historiography of rhetoric and composition treated women in the twelfth century? In Robert Connors’ analysis of women and the *ars dictaminis* in his book, *Rhetoric-Composition*, he correctly observes that “the tradition of letter writing always included women” (31). Connors argument precipitously descends into inaccuracy when he characterizes women’s dictaminal rhetoric – particularly in the long twelfth century - as “small scale, personalized” and “private” and “familial,” “quiet,” “interiorized” and “written to be read silently”(32). As I have (briefly) already demonstrated, noble women’s participation in the long twelfth century was civic, orally delivered, and written to be read aloud, often by agents whose specific task it was to do so. Who were these agents?
Diplomatic Activity as Deliberative Rhetoric

By the year 1405, Christine de Pisan, writing her rhetorical counsel in the *The Book of the Treasure of the City of Ladies*, pointed out that by the Late Middle Ages, there was a broad cultural awareness that noble women were frequent participants in diplomatic (and therefore rhetorical) activities in the preceding centuries. She wrote, “the good princess will always be the means of peace as far as she can be, just as good Queen Blanche, mother of St. Louis, formerly was, who in this manner always exerted herself to make peace between the king and the barons” (547). She concludes that women are ideally suited to such activities, and “in particular ought to attend to this business” because of natural defects of their male counterparts, giving voice, perhaps, to when female nobility were used in matters of peace. Further in this work, the diplomatic practices of Blanche will be an integral part of the proof of the role of women in deliberative and diplomatic processes before and after Eleanor’s lifetime (one part being that the Blanche at issue was Eleanor’s daughter). Pisan does not mention Eleanor of Aquitaine, likely because she was just as intimately involved in war and internecine combat as she was diplomatic relations, which was not atypical of women in the Middle Ages, either. De Pisan, as the foregoing chapters demonstrate, was not gilding the lily merely as part of her argument in defense of cultural attacks on women prevailing in her day and age. This had been the traditional rhetorical role of women in the Middle Ages, and particularly noblewomen. To the extent her argument might be seen as exaggeration at all, as I have already noted, the limitation is confined to the fact that women were just as often engaged in deliberative persuasion for their peers to engage in war. But at the heart of their deliberative rhetorical activity were dictaminal artifacts and practices, which were, of course, informed by classical rhetorical principles. 

Giles Constable argued a connection between diplomacy and rhetoric some time ago,
when he concluded a general survey of court clerk’s activity, “The diplomat or diplomatist knew how to write and present documents. The history of letters, and of those who wrote them, thus merges into the history of … diplomacy and forms an important chapter in the development of government … in the Middle Ages” (46). While this was intended as a general observation, this argument will demonstrate that this was the case, particularly in the case of Eleanor of Aquitaine. Eleanor engaged in deliberative rhetorical practice, which, as Sophie Menache explained, represented “The written message … as the most concrete media of the cultural elite. … Whether in the form of a book, a pamphlet, or a letter, the written text gradually became an integral part of everyday existence among the cultural elite … for giving thoughts a concrete and more ordered expression” (13). By Eleanor’s time, “the widespread use of correspondence … among the ruling class [had] acquired the weight of information exchange, due to the nature of the medieval government system” (16). The argument in this and the foregoing pages will demonstrate that this was the case, particularly for Eleanor of Aquitaine, and illustrate that dictaminial documents were a species of deliberative persuasion that were essentially Ciceronian in character, following Ward. Further, it will demonstrate the deliberative function of women in medieval diplomatic communication, who used the written word within an established system to effect (or arrest) social change.

To account for previous scholarship connecting international communication with the ars dictaminis, Les Perelman has demonstrated the connection between the rise of the Papal Chancery and the administration of the chancery, and later papal reign, of Pope Gelasius II, which coincided with the outset of the first crusade (102). Murphy, in Rhetoric in the Middle Ages, begins his discussion by stating that “The very multiplicity of ranks and orders in an emerging feudal society had the effect of increasing the number of relationships – both social
and legal – which came to be reflected in writing in one way or the other” (199). His treatise concludes the section on the *dictaminal* tradition by stating that the *Ars Dictaminis* deserves further study because it might illustrate “the complex medieval between concepts of language and the social uses of language” (268). This work does just that. Camargo, additionally, has cited the performative and social nature of letter-writing, but largely identified its uses as administrative (86). In the context of the growth of medieval literacy, Clanchy discusses the bad practice of viewing the period between the mid-eleventh century and the early fourteenth century as a linear bridge between illiteracy and literacy. He explains, that there is no such thing as an “inevitable line of progress from illiteracy to literacy and, by implication, from barbarism to civilization” (Clanchy 20). However, the development of literacy and civilization is embodied in the civilizing effect of the rise of literacy in the twelfth century, particularly as embodied in the beginnings of diplomatic *dictaminal* documents. The approach in this argument to the *dictaminis* tradition is an expansion on, and follows, the state of current scholarship reflecting studies in medieval literacy and orality, rhetorical studies of the socio-political causes and effects of the *dictaminal* tradition, current scholarship on the revolution in the written word associated with the twelfth century, and women’s relationship to literate rhetoric in the Middle Ages generally.

To further amplify the work of Camargo and Perelman, Kristie Fleckenstein has recently connected the *Ars Dictaminis* in the late Middle Ages with the practice of courteousness and display, but more importantly reinforced the connection between civic and participatory engagement in a stratified society that this rhetorical medieval genre represents (111). Fleckenstein connected letter-writing to being “seen, heard, and heeded as ethically appealing in political, social, and legal arenas” and connected it with “civic engagement” (112). It can be demonstrated that, based on very real socio-political and factual proofs, letters written even at the
beginning of the formulation and proliferation of *dictaminal* rhetorics were fueled by the social and political continuum that existed between the emergence of the imperial reconfiguration of Western Europe in the 8th century and the flowering of literacy in the twelfth century. For many years, the Middle Ages were considered a low ebb of civic and public rhetoric, but it can be demonstrated that the socio-cultural elite of the twelfth century fueled an increasing demand for a means of delivery, a genre, and a rhetoric for transmitting written political and diplomatic demands due to prevailing international and political pressures. Moreover, women, and particularly aristocratic women, in this case Eleanor of Aquitaine, were pivotal in their participation in, and expansion of, a public, civic, and literate rhetorical tradition. This is particularly true of the twelfth century.

Similarly, John O. Ward has demonstrated how the evidence of commentaries in the eleventh and twelfth centuries created textual and rhetorical culture modeled on the Ciceronian tradition, manifesting in the sophisticated commentaries in those works. This commentary tradition shaped rhetorical culture in the twelfth century, which shaped the education and rhetorical activities of women in that period. Ward states that "the twelfth century placed a new emphasis upon complete flexibility of discourse in the major communication language of the day" (Ward 2006 37). The "intellectual and political climate not only stimulated the renewed study of Cicero's rhetorical juvenilia but also gave birth to systematised instruction . . . [in] letter-writing, and document composition" (24). Thus, the most mature expression of Latin rhetoric in the Middle Ages spanned the period "between Lawrence of Amalfi and the Fourth Lateran Council (A.D. 1215)" – a period in which the life of Eleanor of Aquitaine falls squarely (25).

To further illuminate the centrality of *dictaminal* composition to the political nature of the period, Fleckenstein has summarized how literacy-based demands upon the ruling elite of
Europe led to the standardization of the letter-writing genre (113). However, the standardization of the genre can be demonstrated to be a framework of rules in which argument and persuasion could flourish in the literate revolution of twelfth century, particularly in the context of political operation and international diplomacy. Camargo has pointed out that medieval letter writing existed at the nexus of orality and literacy in the Middle Ages, and Fleckenstein has further established that the tradition is, at its root, civic, public and performative (25). These innovations were an outgrowth of rapid social and international changes for which the long period of (relative) internal peace of Europe in the twelfth century. All of these factors illustrate a need on a variety of levels for the dictaminal genre to operate for a variety of compelling reasons and for a variety of uses. What has not been made explicit in previous literature on this subject is the letter genre as one that was deliberative in the context of international relations.

Eleanor’s rhetorical activity was, on multiple occasions throughout her life, diplomatic activity, directly relating to the balance of power within her dynastic familial network, and in relation to other sovereigns outside of that network. In the context of international relations, which naturally involved dictaminal writings and readings. “The distinction between public and private was extremely difficult to draw in the Middle Ages” (Queller 11). This is particularly sticky when a third-party legato (from the Latin root legatere, to read) is also charged with a speaking part in negotiations, often used interchangeably with the term nuncio (from the Latin, nuntio/nutiere, to announce.) It is clear that the role of ambassadorial relations involved the intersection of the oral and literate forms of communications from the interchangeability of the Latin terms ascribed to an ambassadorial role that are at the heart of oral-literacy in the twelfth century and the Ars Dictaminis. As Queller explains, “The basic function of a nuncius was to communicate a message” (13). In earlier, preliterate eras, the nuncio could customarily appear
with a letter conveying a patent introduction, one that bestowed the ethos of the communicator on the ambassador, to induce trust that he would accurately repeat an oral message. But as international relations grew in magnitude and complexity, writing became completely necessary to convey the full effect of the rhetor. Similar to the intent of Eleanor’s letter, as we shall see, “one of the important uses of nuncii was to summon careless or disloyal allies to the performance of their obligations” (18). Two major players in this story of rhetorical and diplomatic interactions, Richard Couer de Lion and Philip Augustus, sent nuncio to one another before the outbreak of their personal hostilities, before Richard went on crusade – a key point in our story. The nuncius functioned, in the words of Queller, as a “living letter” throughout the twelfth century (23). If Eleanor’s letter was entrusted to a nuncius, however, the historical record remains silent; but the silence of the historical record might indicate, given the veiled threats contained in the dictaminal artifact, that it was delivered and heard. In any case, the idea of ambassadorial relations being indistinguishable from rhetorical activity is also demonstrated by the fact that “orator” eventually was considered a synonymous term with “ambassador” before 1300. Further, it is significant that, as I will show, “diplomat” as a term derived from the work of the diplomatist in this period (in these cases, Peter of Blois as Eleanor’s secretary).

Contemporary study of diplomatic theory and practice has finally come to reconcile Western medieval diplomatic practice with the inherent problems associated with defining diplomacy in an era before embassies. This definitional problem is that in modern terms, “diplomacy” implies the definition of diplomats. By modern definition, there weren’t any diplomats: there were all levels of diplomatic couriers charged with everything from delivery of a document to the oral delivery of a written document, respectively, cursors and nuncii. Similarly, there were no embassy structures before 1400 utilized by international powers. To
problematize this further, there simply were no nations during this period, and certainly not	nations with fixed borders, national charters, and so on. But the historical fact remains that
diplomatic transactions did occur, and have been typified most recently by Karsten Ploger, who
defines medieval diplomatic activity as typologically characterized by the presence of activities
with 1) Mediation, 2) Representation, and 3) Communication (16). In sum, diplomatic activity
was rhetorical activity mediated by technological and representational processes between people
in power.

The categorizable typology of diplomatic missi eventually became standardized in the
thirteenth century, but were probably present in the late twelfth century as well, and reflect the
link between the rhetorical tradition of the \textit{ars dictaminis} and diplomatic practice. Although
Chaplais has identified a distinct proliferation in the rhetorical purposes of diplomatic letters
century XIII, Richardson and others have noted that diplomatic practice in the twelfth century
and before was probably far more sophisticated than previously believed. In general, all letters
between powers were generally described as \textit{littere missile}, but fell into distinct subcategories.
\textit{Littere congratulatory} functioned as a performative rhetoric to congratulate, and thereby reassure
allies or neutral powers there existed no new enmity between parties on accession to a throne;
ocasionally, they served the rhetorical purpose of being an initiation of more positive diplomatic
relations. Others functioned apologetically, so called \textit{littere de excusacione}, to convey apologies
or, rhetorically speaking, to prevent one party from believing that another intended to promote
more hostile relations. \textit{Nuncii} frequently carried \textit{littere reccomendatorie}, which largely conveyed
the ethos of the sender upon the deliverer or for a distinct purpose, \textit{in augmentum status}, for an
individual’s advancement with allied powers. Still others, given more treatment by Chaplais,
performed more broad rhetorical functions, with many sub-categories “the letters of credence
(littere de credencia), defiance (littere diffidacionis), and of request (littere requisitorie)” (93). It is into these latter two categories, which could often function in combination, that Eleanor’s letters fall, but it should be pointed out that there were no insular genres or rules for insular types of discourse that had developed in her time.

Having visited the implications for the rhetoric of the textual artifact at hand, complicated it with its implications for the history of the Ars Dictaminis tradition in rhetoric, addressed the practice by contextualizing it against the historical and socio-political background, one thing remains, and that is to explore the implications of the letters in their context. In an age when Western Europe and its elite dreamed of unity through empire, it is worth considering what Harold Innis, in Empire and Communication, identified as a compulsion through written mediums to tailor communication to address control of both spatial and temporal demands (34). This has implications for the transition in orality-literacy in the central Middle Ages, the role of women in rhetoric at that time, and the Ars Dictaminis tradition in general. Sophie Menache has recently argued forcefully that it was the “medieval ruling classes” who “had the strongest imperative to develop a communication system,” following Clanchy’s reasoning that internal administrative demands in a largely illiterate populace spurred a desire to “manipulate large masses of people” (11). Thus, the fact that Eleanor’s letters embody a significant and typical example of international diplomatic dictaminal rhetoric can be shown as Menache likens similar privileged Latin discourse in the Central Middle Ages to an imperial language which acted “not always concomitant with the needs of much of the local population” (11). Menache, like Innis, identifies time as a vital feature to medieval communication, involving significant lapses in both time of delivery and in the distortion of information over time and distance (12). This is directly related to the use of the privileged discourse of Latin being a medium that might insure the
precision of the arguments in diplomatic communication, and keep those not initiated into the privileged discourse out of sensitive affairs (12).

Methods and Methodology

The three primary methods or methodologies that inform this dissertation will be archival historical research, translation, and textual analysis. Method, in the context of this project, is a “technique for gathering evidence,” which in this study is archival (Harding 2). Methodology is the “theory and analysis of how research does and should proceed,” which in this dissertation will be through textual analysis and translation (3). My historical assumption for interpreting the letters of Eleanor of Aquitaine will be first to set a theoretical context, then contextualize instances of her rhetorical activity in light of the social, political, military, and economic circumstances of her time. Without examining the exigencies and personalities surrounding her statements, little or no textual interpretation of her rhetoric is possible. Accordingly, my underlying methods for textual analysis are centrally historical and rhetorical. Following Kirsch and Rohan’s archival theories, I will to analyze the text as a site of research, using the space, time and location of the place “where historical subjects live,” both temporally and geographically (2). Part of this context is to show that Eleanor was by no means unique or alone in these diplomatic and gendered roles, and to discuss other written artifacts to demonstrate that women were a kind of diplomatically-charged “textual community” in the twelfth century. Chapter Two discusses at great length the theory of this inquiry, how that theory is in itself methodological though requiring significant modification, and sets out this theory of inquiry as methodological analytic, giving a “roadmap” of the argument to follow. I add here that the methodological assumptions governing translation that advise my methods are Steiner’s, as he wrote in After Babel, that translation is not a science, but a hermeneutic act that constitutes “an
exact art” (91).

**Conclusion**

This and the following chapters of this work demonstrate that Eleanor of Aquitaine was not an exceptional participant in deliberative civic rhetorical processes and systems, but was one of a presumably large number of noblewomen in these processes as a complex functioning activity system. This is especially pointed in the twelfth century, when the study of classical rhetorical sources was at its high-water mark in the Middle Ages. Women shared in these developments, and the textual record is replete with examples. Diplomatic systems were essentially rhetorical and mediated by the written word in these processes, and proposed solutions to collective problems that were secular, ecclesiastical, and reflected a strange hybridity of public and private matters. One such deliberative rhetorical activity system was diplomacy, which shot through multiple institutions at many levels. But the precise nature of the practice will be examined theoretically in Chapter Four. One of many women practicing deliberative persuasion in the textual record was Eleanor of Aquitaine, who was just one such actor in these networks. Her written artifacts will provide proofs and examples of the foregoing conclusions.

This chapter has attempted to provide a structured review of scholarship on medieval rhetoric and its connection to diplomacy, and in turn the role of women in the rhetoric of international foreign relations generally. This groundwork laid, I proceed in chapter two to the relationship of classical rhetorical theory in the twelfth century, textual community theory, diplomatic theory, and how functional activity theory can function as a lens to examine historical rhetoric; and how multiple theories are accommodated by an activity theory analysis. This is the framework I is used in chapter three to examine the complicated contexts surrounding Eleanor’s rhetorical activity, which is analyzed socio-historically. Finally, in chapter four, I closely analyze
the existing both the rhetorical theory of deliberation in the Middle Ages, as well as the artifacts, principally letters, written by Eleanor in her lifetime. In so doing, I illustrate how she, and other similarly situated women were deliberative rhetorical actors, and used the dictaminal artifacts in complex systems. What follows in chapter five is analysis and conclusions, with a particular focus on defining, or redefining, deliberative rhetoric given the foregoing findings. Eleanor’s rhetorical activities comprise a meaningful gesture toward the future of peace and the deliberative political systems of which we are the inheritors.
CHAPTER II. SOCIO-HISTORIC ACTIVITY THEORY AS A METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR INQUIRY IN RHETORICAL HISTORY

Sometime during the reign of Richard I, after 1193, the monastic community of Canterbury had a problem. They were attempting to rebuild the chapel of Lambeth, but Archbishop Hubert Walter stood firmly in their way. Walter was one of the diplomatic agents between Eleanor and the Holy Roman Emperor, and was instrumental in raising Richard I’s ransom at Eleanor’s request. The connection between diplomatistic activity, rhetoric, and diplomacy is evidenced in his person; before becoming archbishop, Hubert had been Henry II’s chief diplomatist, intimately involved with the preservation of charter documents. This is a tale fit for the next chapter, however, which argues that deliberative rhetoric in the twelfth century, in which Eleanor was a participant, can be better understood when contextualized in relation to complex sets of activity systems. This chapter, however, investigates the theory relevant to an inquiry into these systems.

I return now, however, to the much-vexed nuns of Canterbury. The nuns of Canterbury sought help from Eleanor of Aquitaine, and asked her to persuade the king, Richard I, to influence the archbishop. This is what they wrote to Eleanor:

We beg your serenity, together and individually with tears and sighs, that in the sight of God and the glorious martyr Thomas, you strive to preserve the grace of our lord king towards us whole and unimpaired; that by letter, if it please you, you beseech for us and for the salvation of his soul that he provide for the peace and security of our church and not let it be disturbed by undue vexations; that similarly you beseech by letter your son lord John of Mortain that he interpose his support for us with our lord king, so that we may be even more devoted to you and your salvation with God and the saints of our church. (Supplicamus itaque
The letter demonstrates that Eleanor was regarded as a persuasive individual, who had a reputation for utilizing the written word to resolve disputes on deliberative matters. But more significantly, it is an illustration of how mediated communication and representatives were used in processes to deliberate, and how these deliberations were conducted within complex rhetorical contexts in the twelfth century. Additionally, it demonstrates that women were often participants to the continuing operation of these processes. This chapter will discuss the theories and methodologies for inquiry into these processes. It will conclude by proposing an analytic for methodological inquiry that will lay the groundwork to take us through the complex tapestry of actors, communities, institutions, artifacts, and practices related to deliberative rhetoric in the twelfth century. Using this theoretical apparatus as an analytic, the historiographic knots that have vexed historians of rhetoric for many years might finally be untangled. In so doing, it can be shown how at least one traditional rhetorical tradition common to women in the twelfth century was deliberative persuasion mediated by writing. It further shows that such practices were common at the highest levels of society. Eleanor of Aquitaine's letters are prima facie
evidence that she was one actor in these socio-historic and literacy-based networks.

This chapter illustrates that criticisms of traditional rhetorical history can be addressed by approaching the history of rhetoric using a modified Cultural Historic Activity Systems analytic. More specifically, the historical lacunae regarding deliberative rhetoric within its attendant processes in the Middle Ages might be examined more fully, and the place of women in those processes can be illustrated using this lens. First, this chapter briefly survey the major critiques leveled against traditional rhetorical histories. It then addresses how theories of diplomacy, authorship and textual community could be used together to form a part of this lens. Finally, it explains how cultural historic activity theory, modified to privilege the idea of rhetoric, can accommodate these theories and can be used to tease out historiographical issues in rhetoric to create a more layered and inclusive narrative of inquiry. Cultural historic activity theory will be discussed as forming the principle dynamic that provides an analytic approach to rhetorical history.

A Statement of the Historiographical Question

Eleanor of Aquitaine's role as a rhetorical civic actor in the twelfth century, as chapter one discussed, has been the subject of troubling generalities about women, and women in the Middle Ages specifically. Another issue is the apparent lacunae regarding deliberative rhetoric in Eleanor’s era generally. From 1906 to perhaps the middle of the twentieth century, her role as a rhetor has been reduced to a generalization regarding her literacy, and most of her rhetorical artifacts have been wholly attributed to Peter of Blois. The mistake, it should be said, lies not in the attribution of her rhetorical artifacts to him, but our misunderstanding of the epistemological assumptions regarding “authorship” in her age. No less, it has become increasingly apparent through contemporary scholarship that Eleanor’s letters were her original inventions, with other
historians uncovering more than 50 charters and letters attributable to her.

One example of the issues that arise from scholarly approaches that do not include an examination of the activity systems at work in their historical contexts is illustrated by Robert Connors’ analysis of women and the *Ars Dictaminis* in his book, *Rhetoric-Composition*. Connors correctly observes that “the tradition of letter writing always included women” (31). But historiographically, Connors argument runs aground when he analyzes the activity and communication typified by letter writing, at what he believes is a critical juncture in the history of literate activity. As Roxanne Mountford has pointed out, Connors cites this to support his thesis that the *ars dictaminis* was the beginning of a division of between written and spoken rhetoric. Mountford observes “Connors' argument turns on the assumption that rhetoric ("civic oratory") is a man's art, and composition is a woman's art. He sets up the dichotomy early in the chapter by looking at the cases of two medieval rhetorical arts: *ars dictaminis* (the art of letter writing) and *ars praedicandi* (the art of preaching)” (487). Connors makes this assertion in part because of his historiographical assumption that the history of rhetoric can be known by examining rhetoric only as a set of learned treatises, thereby narrowing the definition of rhetoric. By way of example, his argument hinges on the fact that model letter collections contain letters to or from women. Connors is correct that women were participants in the *ars dictaminis* tradition, but his inference from model letter collections does not follow: these model letters were generally not from *actual* senders. Connors argument precipitously descends into inaccuracy when he characterizes women’s dictaminal rhetoric – particularly in the long twelfth century - as “small scale, personalized” and “private” and “familial,” “quiet,” “interiorized” and “written to be read silently”(32). As I will further demonstrate in chapter three, noble women’s participation in the long twelfth century was civic, orally delivered, and written to be read aloud,
often by agents whose specific task it was to do so. Connors cites model letter collections as evidence of women’s inclusion in written rhetoric, but the inference is less than logical; model letters were not written by real people for real purposes, except arguably in the case of Peter of Blois’. If Connors’ study had examined the actual letters of women in the twelfth century, as artifacts within activity systems in their historical context, it would be apparent that what he describes as the beginnings of composition history were as civic and agonistic as what Connors characterizes as “masculine” oratory.

This and subsequent chapters will attempt to demonstrate that historiographical debates within rhetoric can be addressed more effectively if historians of rhetoric cease to view rhetoric as a set of learned figures or treatises. Instead, it will posit the history of rhetoric as a set of complex, functional activity systems of which traditional rhetorics were a part, using Eleanor of Aquitaine's rhetorical activities, and their apparent situation in the deliberative tradition of persuasion, as examples in chapter four. A functional activity systems model for historical rhetoric can not only provide a much broader analytic lens to analyze rhetorical activity, but can accommodate other theories relating to rhetorical theory, textual communities, and diplomatic practices.

Historiography and Methodology: the Nature of the Scholarly Debate

Much has been written critiquing the historiography of rhetoric in recent years, largely focused on lacunae within the discipline regarding marginalized groups and actors. One omission in the history of rhetoric in the Middle Ages is a lack of information on rhetorical practices of women in that period. This is further complicated by the nature of scholarly assumptions about deliberative rhetoric in the Middle Ages, quite apart from addressing diplomatic practice as a form of deliberative rhetoric in that period. These lacunae have certain historiographic
assumptions at their root. Walzer and Beard, in surveying the recent scholarship on
historiography summarized that, “Historiography is the critical study of the assumptions,
principles, and purposes that have informed a historical account” (13). This chapter argues that
logically, historiographical assumptions in turn affect methodological approaches. If our field
were to use more holistic examinations of rhetorical practices situated in the activity systems of
which they were a part, a richer and more complex image of the past might appear. The nature of
the historiographical assumptions about the Middle Ages, rhetoric in that period, women’s
participation in it, and the nature of deliberative rhetoric were discussed in the previous chapter.
Those assumptions pertinent to the present discussion are that, first, the Middle Ages represent
one monolithic historical period of darkness that is measured from late antiquity to the fifteenth
century. Traditional rhetorical history, as in the case of Vickers and others, characterize it as a
departure from a “golden age” of classical rhetoric. Underlying those assumptions is a general
belief that there was one “true” or superior rhetoric to be lost, or in turn, regained. Traditional
histories argue that the West was in rhetorical decline, similar to conventional history’s
characterization of its socio-political decline, and so deliberative rhetoric and its attendant
appeals were in decline. Traditionally, this “benighted” period was only alleviated after the
Renaissance “rescued” intellectual history, all rather abruptly.

As a result of this socio-political change, as it is historiographically characterized, in an
age of autocratic tyrants, no deliberative rhetoric was possible. The fact that there were
assemblies of nobility too numerous to count in the Carolingian period alone is fairly ignored
(see, generally, McKitterick). Similarly, the characterization of a lack of collective decision
making on policy matters ranging from war, peace, pressing matters of taxation, property, and
religion at the highest levels of society, these practices them as a species of rhetorical activity.
It is similarly argued that women had no place in such civic affairs, since they were not admitted to education in Latin, and therefore rhetoric. Nonetheless, the historical record is replete with the activities of noblewomen that fall squarely in the deliberative genre of rhetoric. Their activities came by, and through, diplomatic procedures that are complicated by the current theory and definitions related to its practice. As I shall demonstrate, women, through the letter writing tradition, were intimately engaged in this practice, and these practices were nothing less than a form of deliberative rhetoric, though deeply buried in the activity systems of which they were a part.

To briefly revisit the scholarly arguments on rhetorical historiography, the re-examination of traditional narratives of the history of rhetoric was arguably initiated by James Berlin. In observing century-long gaps in rhetorical history, particularly as evidenced by a once-prevailing view that in the nineteenth century, rhetorically speaking, nothing happened, Berlin asserted that the “grand narrative” of rhetorical history is not merely a history of intellectuals. Rather, Berlin asserted that the history of rhetoric is “a product of the economic, social, and political . . . conditions of a specific historical moment” (Berlin 1994, 115). By necessity, when examining an anomalous period of tremendous intellectual innovation like the twelfth century, there were prevailing conditions for the reinvigorated interest in rhetoric, both classical and medieval. Walzer and Beard aptly summarized Berlin, when they stated “Rhetoric . . . changes to reflect the ontological and epistemological presuppositions of a given period” (18). They reiterated this expanded concern relating to historiographic inquiry when they explained that a central inquiry into the history of an idea is to inquire “what civic and cultural function rhetoric was assigned in the culture at large” (19). What the next chapter of this work will address is the educational, social, historical, and cultural conditions surrounding rhetoric in the twelfth century, and more
specifically, surrounding the letter of Eleanor of Aquitaine to Celestine III.

Thomas P. Miller, at about the same time as Berlin, also critiqued the concept of the rhetorical tradition along similar lines. He wrote, “To write Demosthenes, Augustine, Ramus, Campbell . . . into the same history, we have to ignore, or at least simplify, the complex differences between their political, intellectual, and educational contexts” (27). The aim of this chapter, accordingly, is to articulate a theoretical apparatus to address diplomacy, deliberative rhetoric, and women in both traditions in the Middle Ages. To address the rhetorical traditions by contextualizing them in their own temporal loci requires both a theory and a methodology before this argument can proceed. Before a solution to the larger historiographical concerns at work in this inquiry, terms must be defined with a theory. A broader theoretical inquiry is needed because, as Biesecker has argued, Eleanor’s involvement in civic, deliberative rhetoric was not merely one of “a series of cameo appearance by extraordinary women” (144). Indeed, traditional historical narratives have excluded women’s roles in civic affairs, because of an erroneous historiographical assumption that the only venue for deliberative rhetoric was in democratic assemblies, or perhaps quasi-republican venues like the Roman Senate. But deliberative assemblies were very much a reality in the Middle Ages, as evidenced by many existing battle orations, synodic theological discourse, and assemblies of nobles in places as diverse as Gaul under Charlemagne, Scotland in the thirteenth century, and in Germany under the Ottonian kings. It’s nearly as accurate to say the Middle Ages had no deliberative rhetorical practice as it is, historically speaking, to call the nian political practice “democratic” when a huge percentage of the population of Athens could not vote.

Many scholars, accordingly, have argued that the scope of rhetoric’s definition should be read broadly in order to be more inclusive. For example C. Jan Swearingen has argued that the
kinds of writing women have done should be broadened to include such artifacts as the tradition of *poetria nova* of female mystics in the Middle Ages (36). Still others have cited the female tradition of *sermo* as a broad subheading or rhetorical genre in which women’s writings and speech might be grouped (Sutherland 58). Cheryl Glenn has argued that instead of redefining rhetoric, women should be written creatively into rhetorical history with ideological critique (Glenn 1997, 4). As Walzer and Beard have pointed out, to Glenn “history does something and is always partisan” (20). To Glenn, history does something such as silence the voices of women on its own, somehow, by the existence of the narrative. However, in the light of Berlin’s assertions, it becomes apparent that history can be viewed as a narrative employed by actors in a network who subscribe to that narrative for some purpose and adopt its attendant ideological underpinnings - sometimes. Others in the complex narrative system simply accept historical narratives as facts without questioning them, and employ an uncritical approach to reproduce them for material gain, to use one example. Arguably, the first theoretical principle at work here, within the context of historiographical issues in rhetoric, is this: history has no agency outside of the systems and individuals that produce it. A form of agency can only be interpreted from historical narratives to the extent such narratives are co-opted and reiterated by subsequent systems. For a whole host of reason, these systems produce and reproduce narrative arrayed in a nested or networked system of purposes, mediations, and re-inscriptions. The rhetoric of the twelfth century was an iteration of prior ideas applied to new problems arising from related systems. But accepting the assumption that rhetoric is an activity system using technological and conceptual mediation to produce communicative acts either to produce or arrest change, then there need be no group excluded from its history.

Similarly, many scholars in rhetoric have lamented the exclusion of non-Western
rhetorics, because of certain historiographical assumptions. Such exclusions have caused many scholars to call for a plurality of narratives, all equal, and often contradictory. One example is John Poulakos’ call for historians of rhetoric to “produce alternative versions of our tradition, to admit the limitations and biases of our peculiar viewpoints, and to leave behind us various and divergent histories of rhetoric” (186). By examining an inherently rhetorical activity system such as medieval diplomatic practice, part of the history of rhetoric must be the study of the history of the system itself. By applying an activity systems approach to diplomatic practice in the Middle Ages, it can be shown that by approaching the history of rhetoric as a set of socio-historically situated rhetorical systems, no discrete group need be (or can be) excluded. Applying an activity systems model to a variety of contexts in historically situated rhetorical activity can illuminate the many rhetorics and actors and traditions in systems. No actor in these processes can be regarded as separate from the rhetorics operating in historically situated contexts and systems, because there can be no part of an activity system that operates outside of its historical antecedents.

Having provided some general, and probably non-exhaustive, review of the literature critiquing conventional historiography in rhetorical history, I turn to look at some theories relevant to rhetorical practice, diplomatic practice, and the Middle Ages more specifically. I first examine their strengths and weaknesses in light of the present inquiry, and conclude by proposing one encompassing approach to theorizing, and also methodologically approaching, this inquiry, which has Eleanor at its center.

Diplomacy Before 1300: A Deliberative Rhetorical Tradition

This chapter has previously posited that within the diplomatic tradition in the Middle Ages, as a socio-historically situated rhetorical activity system, one can find the deliberative
rhetorical tradition alive and well and find women within it. The first theoretical lens one might apply to recover this tradition derives from theories related to diplomacy. This has never been discussed previously because of the very sticky historical conundrum regarding the nature of diplomacy before 1300. Before that time, the role of ambassador was a muddy one, at best, and ambassadors are alternately called *nuncii*, *legates*, or simply *rhetors*. The lack of embassies or formalized embassy structures, from which the word “ambassador” derives, was an innovation from much later, beginning in Venice. The diplomatic structures of the twelfth century are thereby as conceptually different from contemporary conceptions of diplomacy, as were their governmental structures, and little is known about the very real practice of inter-monarchical diplomacy before 1300, because of still more definitional and historiographic assumptions.

This lack of historical data on diplomatic practice before 1300 is compounded by a lack of theorization about precisely what diplomatic practice is. There is no discrete field in academia that studies diplomacy in theory, history or practice, and even the literature in the field of International Relations is filled with scholarly lamentations at the neglect of the study in their discipline. In spite of this, the *dictaminal* record of diplomatic practice alone is arguably replete with examples of women engaged in deliberative and diplomatic activity in the Middle Ages, as are secondary historical sources. The central concept behind this dissertation is that Eleanor of Aquitaine's existing corpus of rhetorical artifacts that challenge the widely criticized historiographical assumptions; but what they do not show is why such textual anomalies remain unaccounted for in conventional, traditional histories of rhetoric, if not history generally. Contemporary scholars have begun to realize, departing from Beatrice Lees’ attribution of Eleanor’s rhetorical artifacts to Peter of Blois, that they were in all likelihood her own work, and thus it is worthwhile to analyze her rhetoric using certain theoretical contexts. The theoretical
approach this dissertation advances is necessary to fully illuminate Eleanor’s letter as evidence of the history of diplomacy as a species of deliberative rhetoric in the Middle Ages. This work will act as palimpsest to a complex of social and therefore rhetorical activities unaccounted for in existing scholarship.

The state of scholarship regarding diplomatic practices after late antiquity and before the year 1300 is fairly sparse. Many of the most highly regarded works on the history and theory of diplomacy quite simply omit the period or treat it as a history of disorganized activity. By way of example, G.K. Mookerjee, in his book *Diplomacy: Theory and History*, states that the history of diplomacy precedes recorded antiquity, but skips diplomatic practice as even existent from late antiquity to the early modern period. However, the history of diplomacy in the Middle Ages after 1300 has been treated extensively by Pierre Chaplais, who provided some insights on diplomacy before 1300, though treating it in only one chapter. Therefore, it is useful to address how one might theorize diplomacy as rhetorical activity and how the history of rhetoric and literate production was intertwined with diplomacy. Part of the theoretical key that will unlock a new methodological approach responsive to historiographic concerns attendant to the history of rhetoric can be found in the history of diplomacy before 1300, because it was a socio-historically situated rhetorical system.

Thus, the first theory that might illustrate how diplomatic practice was centrally rhetorical is that of Costas Constantinou, from the book *On the Way to Diplomacy*. The relative strengths and weaknesses of Constantinou’s book to the current inquiry will be summarized here. Constantinou summarizes, in part, the overarching thesis of his book thus “diplomacy is a regulated process of communication between at least two subjects, conducted by their representative agents over a particular object” (25). This, however, is only part of the story.
Constantinou explains that a writing might be an agent, or a reader of a writing might also be an agent. Diplomacy and writing, Constantinou explains, have always been inextricably bound, both historically and etymologically. The word diplomacy derives from a Greek term related to a document folded in two, from the word *diploun*, which is a verb meaning to double, and additionally from the Greek noun *diploma*, which refers to an official document on double leaves (77).

Even etymologically, a diplomat, whether embodied in a human double who stands in for the sovereign or a sovereign mediating their communication with another by means of writing. Using an etymological and historical lens, Constantinou traces both the word and the function of diplomatic relations through the Middle Ages. During the Roman Empire, by way of example, the word eventually came to be associated with letters conferring official rights. The word “diploma,” he explains, “began to connote an official paper conferring certain rights to the bearer,” which he also observes is directly referred to in the writings of many statesmen and rhetoricians such as Cicero and Seneca (77). However, by late antiquity, and well into the Middle Ages, the idea of an envoy was used by invoking the word *legatus*. Arguably, by the time of the twelfth century, the two were finally closely allied: a diplomatist was one skilled in creating official, often diplomatic documents, which were in turn delivered by royal or Papal authorities by the further mediation of a *nuncius* or a *legate*. Both words had a relationship to medieval conceptions of rhetoric, and could be used interchangeably with the word *rhetor*. By that time, as Murphy and Camargo have demonstrated irrefutably, the written genre was governed by classical rhetorical principles via the *ars dictaminis*. Thus, whether involving mediation of a writing or further mediation by a “living letter” in the person of a *nuncius*, representation and mediation are key to diplomatic practice. Diplomacy, then, was a practice that was essentially rhetorical.
because of its relationship with speaking and writing, and formally governed by rhetorical principles in the twelfth century. This is the first theoretical key to the sticky historiographic issue, both with the history of rhetoric and with Eleanor as a gendered participant in complex rhetorical systems.

Diplomatic systems, as essentially rhetorical systems, serve as one illustration of how activity theory might resolve historiographic issues in rhetoric. These historiographical concerns are relevant to our present inquiry surrounding Eleanor of Aquitaine as a rhetor in a complex diplomatic system. Traditional history has called into question the “authorship” of the letters by Eleanor in a vacuum, without an understanding of the socio-historically situated rhetorical systems relating to equally complex literacies in the twelfth century. Because Eleanor’s letters were contained in a letter collection of Peter of Blois, scholarly claims have run the gamut of possibilities, from some claiming her letters were mere inventions, to other claiming they were merely inspired writings based on the queen’s personal feelings. Contemporary students of Eleanor and Peter of Blois, notably Jean Flori, Lena Wahlgren, and John D. Cotts, and to be fair, even scholars like Amy Kelly (who has been fairly pilloried by historians for her biographical liberties,) have attributed Eleanor’s rhetorical intent or primary authorship to the letters. Jean Flori, the most critical biographer of Eleanor, has concluded that there is no reason not to accept her letters as the expression of her innermost thoughts (164). Wahlgren, who has completed an exhaustive comparative study of Blois’ letter collections, has also advanced the argument that the letters written “on behalf” of Eleanor were included to show Blois’ involvement in “the tumult” of her court, written at her request, after Peter “turned to the queen for her help” (ad dominam reginam me contuli) (13-14). Peter had already had a near-fatal brush with inter-monarchical political affairs before seeking protection at Eleanor’s court; to suggest he would comfortably
step out of his magpie-role and write insolent letters to the Pope without Eleanor’s direction seems rather counter-intuitive (if not absurd). Finally, John D. Cotts has analyzed the genres at work in the letters of Peter of Blois; Peter seemed to be motivated to provide a degree of *varietas* to his collection, including many sub-genres, and Eleanor’s letters seem to be consistent with the others he wrote to display his abilities in the secretarial genre (68). What is clear is that Peter was working in a representative capacity when he participated in writing some of Eleanor’s rhetorical artifacts.

Constantinou’s theory also provides a deeper understanding of diplomatic processes in his discussion of the development of the concept of representation in the Middle Ages. Varying degrees of representation, with tightly confined roles, duties and powers, were an outgrowth of the papal nunciial corps, much as the *ars dictaminis* was an outgrowth of the papal chancery’s practices (see, e.g., Perelman). The varying degrees of power could include *vicarii* who literally possessed the voice and power of the pope; the *legati a latere*, who only had partial representative authority; and the *ambactus*, whose role was wholly menial (Constantinou 105). The relationship to writing, speaking, and delivering messages with varying degrees of agency, is clear; but what is even clearer is that the concept of *plena potestas*, key to deliberative practices in the Middle Ages, is an outgrowth of this system of representation. The concept of *plena postestas* eventually imbued representatives to act with the full power of the sovereign to negotiate for peace in deliberative assemblies. Before the full development of this concept, however, noblewomen had a culturally constructed role in prospective, exhortative, and collective decision making at the highest social strata: in sum, a deliberative function, one often mediated textually. Chapter three will demonstrate this at length.

The conceptual framework I suggest, in an extremely compressed form, is that while
there have been forays into “high theory” by Constantinou applicable to diplomacy, Constantinou has used philosophy to theorize diplomacy. What is absent is his work is the historical and theoretical connection of rhetoric to explain diplomatic practice. Including rhetorical analysis as a tool for understanding the diplomatic activity systems before 1300 creates a more complete theoretical picture of diplomatic practice in the Middle Ages, as well as women’s engagement in that practice. If one creates a theoretical framework which includes rhetorical theory and systems theory to examine the political and diplomatic context of inter-monarchical relations, a fuller picture of political rhetoric emerges. A more workable model emerges when deliberative rhetorical activity is defined collective communicative decision making, which is in turn nested in a variety of social, political and cultural activity systems organized among textual communities. In doing so, diplomacy as deliberative rhetorical practice can be defined as an activity system mediated by writing or speech to address collective problems with the goal of either making social change or arresting it. Further, if diplomacy is defined as mediated action that is representative, and organized among textually constituted communities, then the otherwise hazy subject areas of diplomacy, deliberative rhetoric, and women’s respective participation in each during the Middle Ages is more apparent. The *ars dictaminis* were the mediating vehicle of these activity systems, further mediated by papal authority and the will of the nobility. These artifacts and practices were nested in systems related to lordship, fealty, and other social and political systems. Further, women actively participated in these systems, and the historiographical assumptions that have occluded deliberative rhetoric in the history of the rhetoric of the Middle Ages can be readily refigured, to present a more accurate picture of the way rhetoric pervaded a broad range of social practices in the Middle Ages.

Peter of Blois’ goal in Eleanor’s service was diplomatic communication, mediated by
himself as writer, Eleanor as rhetor, and the genre of the letter. The utility of Constantinou’s
theory as a piece of this puzzle begins to emerge, but is complemented by an understanding of
the theory of authorship in the Middle Ages.

The Medieval Theory of Authorship and Eleanor of Aquitaine

Diplomacy, as a rhetorical system, is the activity in which the rhetoric of Eleanor’s letter
is situated, but another useful theory that is implicated for a rhetorical analysis is that of
medieval authorship. First, this is because before 1300, a more rigid set of social obligations and
corresponding duties existed between the cultural elite and their diplomatists. Extensive
scholarship has debated what role Peter of Blois had in the “writing” of Eleanor’s epistles to
Celestine. As Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford have pointed out that contemporary notions of
proprietary authorship are “actually a cultural construct, and a recent one at that” (77). In the
Middle Ages, as they, integrating considerable scholarship, point out “there was no distinction
made between the person who wrote a text and the person who copied it” (78). This is only
compounded by the fact that Peter, acting as Eleanor’s diplomatist – that is, a specialized agent
charged with producing written documents relating to deliberative diplomatic functions – had a
socially proscribed role to write on her behalf. Part of the nature of diplomatic agents in the
transmission of written inter-monarchical demands was to repeat concisely and accurately the
demands of the monarch for whom they were composing. The nature of composition in the
twelfth century complicates diplomatic practice because diplomatic practice, as in the case of
Eleanor’s letter, was overwhelmingly personal, but complicated by a host of intermediaries. If
Peter of Blois was this intermediary, as all circumstantial facts indicate, then the question is not
whether Eleanor was the “author” of the communiqués to Celestine, but to what extent Peter of
Blois was an authorial participant. This is illustrative of the complex technēs at work that
complicate “authorship” in the socio-historically situated rhetorical systems that have stood in the way of understanding women as rhetorical actors in the same period. Constantinou’s theory is a key to understanding part, but not all, of the aspects of these systems, which is further complicated by medieval theories of authorship and Brian Stock’s theory of the emergence of textual communities in the twelfth century.

It is worthwhile to examine the social role of the rhetorical intermediary in the twelfth century through the medieval theory of authorship. Peter of Blois’ social role, if indeed he had any, would be that of a diplomatist in the context of inter-monarchical diplomatic relations. What is known about the role of the diplomatist - the part-scribe/part-rhetorician employed for the purpose of the production of official documents relating to governmental matters - is that traditionally their role was confined to performing a “magpie” function for the monarch that employed them. “Magpie” is used in medieval conceptions of diplomacy as a metaphorical term for a diplomat, one who carries the voice of the monarch and repeats what is said verbatim. This role of nuncius, which was interchangeable with the term rhetor in the context of these relations, could apply equally to those mediating document production or orally and physically delivering the “voice” of the monarch.

One such example is the previously mentioned Hubert Walter, who not only organized written document storage and production for the Angevin monarchy early in his career, but later seamlessly acted in a personal capacity as envoy under Richard I and King John. The tightly-confined “magpie” role of the diplomatic agent formed the way it did because prior to the year 1500, the “act of representation was not and could not be confined to individual states, because they did not yet exist” (Hamilton and Langhorne 23). The nuncius acted as a kind of “living letter” that stood in for the voice of the monarch directing the communication to another;
however, as Chaplais points out, the diplomatist (from which the word diplomat is derived) had a unified and corollary function as Latin secretary, rhetorician, and “magpie”\footnote{The diplomat, and the writing of monarchs themselves, mediated the voice of the monarch in similar ways (see also Hamilton and Langhorne 24). A personal \emph{nuncius,} that is, one who physically appeared at the court of one monarch on behalf of another, had a limit of authority conferred by other formal diplomatic documents, namely letters of credence. It is therefore logical that the control of the contents of such communications were subject to the generative rhetorical will, review, and revisory power of the communicating monarch.}

Thus, Eleanor had generative power, the power to revise, and the power to edit inter-monarchical communiqués. This power, then, by modern conceptions of authorship, would render Peter of Blois’ claim at authorship extremely tentative or wholly false, yet perfectly consistent with twelfth century notions of the role of the author. Contemporary historians struggling with who “authored” the letter are essentially overlooking the contextual information about the very nature of literate practice in this period. The limited role of fiduciary \emph{nuncii} and other agents, including the hand that pushes the pen, were logically limited by the specific purposes of inter-monarchical communication in the day (25). This is logically why the epistles from Eleanor to Celestine do not seem to “match” with Peter of Blois’ other writings, as many scholars have pointed out. Indeed, in including these letters, it may have been his intent, as he himself wrote, to show himself “in the tumult of the court”, a functionary for his function, rather than an “author” in the contemporary sense.

Before analysis of the nature of Eleanor’s rhetorical artifacts, it is useful to note that the mediated activity which her letter represents is evidence of her participation in deliberative rhetoric. However, given the complications mentioned regarding Peter of Blois, it is necessary to
examine the typical composition practice among cultural elites, similarly situated in the twelfth century. This examination will not only illustrate how writing was a mediating technology for a variety of rhetorical activity systems, but also show the likely approaches to writing Eleanor practiced. One similarly situated person - indeed, a personal associate of Eleanor’s - was Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. Bernard, a friend and spiritual mentor to Eleanor at various points in her life, described twelfth century compositional practice as if it were commonplace. In one sermon he describes his composition practice not as advice, but to bolster his credibility. As Brian Stock described Bernard’s composition process, “his words, as was his habit, were written down (scripta) as they were spoken (dicta), that is, recorded by pen (excepta stylo)” (409). In another letter, he describes “three phases, composition (dictare), transcription (transcribe), and publication (edidi)” (409). In still another letter, “he mentioned oral presentation in small groups (conferre), writing out (scribere), revisions for correction (recogitare, corrigere)” (409). Thus, Bernard gives us some insight into the typical composition process in the mid-twelfth-century for a member of the cultural elite; but what is key here is that composition had a vocal component in the twelfth century, which was subsequently committed to writing. Stock explains that “These rough indicators of his methods of composition are confirmed by his contemporaries . . . and may be summed up as follows: a purely verbal delivery; transcription, usually by other hands; revision and editing by himself” (410). Thus, as Stock points out, his writing process “never completely lost touch with the spoken milieu” (411). That this is typical of women’s literate practice as well could be evidenced by Julian of Norwich, or Margery Kemp, who, as Cheryl Glenn points out in Rhetoric Retold, very likely composed with the mediation of other hands.

The forgoing theoretical constructs for examining complex rhetorical systems shed some light on why noblewomen, as deliberative rhetorical actors in a socio-historically situated
rhetorical system, are not included in conventional histories of rhetoric. A woman might be the “voice” of the text, and possess the auctoritas of the persuasive artifact. But it is equally possible she might elect not to take “ownership” of a text by signing it, after having orally delivered it. However, the problem cannot be considered without looking at the theoretical implications of Stock’s theory of textual communities in the twelfth century, because Eleanor, Celestine, and their mediators are only part of the story. Eleanor was by no means exceptional in her participation in deliberative rhetorical systems related to inter-monarchical relations, and Stock’s theory of textual communities is therefore implicated.

Noblewomen as a Textual Community

Brian Stock, in The Implications of Literacy, provides us with a further contextual understanding for how textual, and arguably rhetorical, communities were formed during the outgrowth of literacy in the twelfth century. Stock’s theory of the twelfth century formation of textual communities has become almost universally accepted by twelfth century historians, and has been summarized by C.F. Briggs as follows:

The textual community, then, is a group of people, each of whose members identify with the others not according to family, status, or locale, or at least not principally, but according to a common viewpoint as defined by a body of written texts. Their ‘literacy’, then, was not predicated on being able to read, but in their willingness to assign authority to texts and their ability to interpret the messages contained therein (405).

Although it is beyond the scope of this work, and indeed, may be a fit topic for another book-length study, it can be show that the formation of textual communities in the twelfth century had a corresponding social formation of generative rhetorical communities. That is to say, in the twelfth century, rhetorical communities with their own practices also developed who shared common sets of rhetorical practices at multiple levels of society. As will be shown in more
detail in chapter three, one of these communities was noblewomen practicing deliberative persuasion by means of the letter. This is why Stock’s theory is one piece of the theoretical puzzle that provides insight into part, but not all, of the lenses useful to a recovery of Eleanor’s rhetorical practices as part of an overlooked tradition in medieval rhetoric.

Stock ably summarized his heavily-documented theory, when he wrote that it became “less and less likely that [people in the twelfth century] should remain out of touch with the social forces which the written word increasingly embodied” (Stock, “Medieval”, 15-16). Stock explains that textual practice created communities, and the establishment of those communities, including noble women engaged in traditionally deliberative civic decision making, by the end of the twelfth century had become an accepted fact. Through texts, “individuals who previously had little else in common were united around common goals” (18). Eleanor and other noblewomen were one such community, and part of their role in existing networks of communication was related to deliberative persuasion, usually with a common goal of maintaining peace, likely because of pre-existing gender role expectations. Eleanor, as I will elaborate further in chapter three and four, deliberated on political matters with papal, noble, and royal actors on matters such as dynastic succession, excommunication, fealty, peace, and war. But she was not exceptional. The list of similarly situated women engaged in the same or similar exhortative functions between the years 1100-1250 includes Ermengard of Narbonne; Empress Matilda; Ingeborg of Denmark; Marie of France; Matilda of Bolougne; Blanche of Castile; Alix-Adela, Queen of France; Eleanor of Provence; and, of course, Eleanor of Aquitaine herself. What the presence of so many surviving documents written by, or to, noblewomen, asking them to fulfill an exhortative function, at this time suggests is that they are representative of a much larger number. Stock’s theory essentially argues that the expansion of literacy created communities of
readers and writers in the twelfth century, which is useful to understand the fact that deliberative rhetorical practice had to be contextualized within the complex social systems of the time. Women had a culturally constructed role in deliberative persuasion mediated by texts, a fact overtly argued by De Pisan in *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, and this role can be readily illustrated by showing the connections between the noblewomen in deliberative rhetorical roles, connections which were often not only familial, but social.

However, Stock’s theory does not sufficiently illustrate the rhetorical circumstances of Eleanor’s writing, because his theory tends to focus on textual consumption rather than production, and largely on ecclesiastical literate practices. More to the point, his illustrations of textual communities do not account for (though they might theoretically accommodate) the role of women in those practices, and tend to privilege reading over writing. The most useful contribution of Stock’s theory to this analysis answers *how* and *why* a deliberative rhetorical community could exist among noblewomen and written deliberative persuasion in the twelfth century. Stock explains, “Owing to the wide-spread rebirth of literacy . . . a new reference system for meaningful social action was gradually introduced into a formerly oral network of social relations” (24). What Stock’s theory does not do is explain how such communities have been thus far overlooked in relation to rhetoric.

Another theoretical lens for understanding this community of textual and deliberative rhetorical practice is, as in chapter one, the classical rhetorical theories extensively proven to be in common usage by scholars including Murphy and Camargo. Classical rhetorical practice pervaded most medieval social institutions, and Chaplais has connected it to the diplomatic tradition. However, none of these sources have connected the deliberative rhetorical tradition to diplomatic relations, nor have they connected women to these traditions. All of the previously
discussed theories have merit; but standing alone, they cannot fully explain the deliberative rhetoric. Standing alone, they cannot fully explain the deliberative rhetorical tradition that I will contextualize in Chapter Three. Eleanor’s rhetorical artifacts are clear proof of the existence of such a tradition, once contextualized in the socio-historically situated rhetorical systems of which they were a part. Additionally, the preceding theories have yet to be situated in a comprehensive analytic to circumvent the historiographic lacunae that rhetoric has been arguing about for decades. What follows, then, is an attempt to harmonize these theories into both a usable framework and an analytical analytic to examine Eleanor as a deliberative rhetor, and similarly situated women’s rhetorical activity contextually. It does so with a modified form of Paul Prior’s Cultural Historic Activity Systems, which can provide a methodological solution to critiques of traditional rhetorical historiography.

It is possible for all these theories – Minnis’ theory of authorship, Stock’s theory of textual communities, and the rhetorical theory of diplomacy - to fit together both theoretically and methodologically to more fully understand rhetorical practices in a given temporal locus. Their compatibility is theoretically encompassed in Prior’s theoretical and methodological approach found in Cultural Historic Activity Theory.

Cultural Historical Activity Analysis as Method in Rhetorical History

As previously noted, historiography implicates methodology. Prior’s model of Cultural Historical Activity Theory can serve as a model for contextual historical analysis methodologically, which in turn can address historiographic critiques at large in the field of rhetorical history. Although this dissertation does not seek to adapt his model completely, largely owing to the many demands of methodology incompatible with a lack of extensive data within distant historical periods, Prior’s theory can no less serve as an analytic theoretical construct for examining, contextualizing, and evaluating rhetorical practices, as embodied in socio-historically
situated rhetorical systems. Diplomatic practice was one such complex rhetorical system, embodied in actors, practices, institutions, tools (whether physical or semiotic), and communities. As will be discussed at some length in chapter three, Eleanor, one such actor, engaged in deliberative, exhortative rhetorical practices, to address deliberative questions in her letters mediated by writing, which is an artifact in a larger system. She was, however, only one actor who was representative of a community - namely noblewomen - who had a culturally-constructed role to engage in these practices. In turn, she was attempting to move an individual, namely Celestine III, to decide proactively to exert political pressure on another actor, a representative of a differing community: the Holy Roman Empire. Eleanor attempts to persuade the Pope to engage in another set of complex rhetorical actions, which would in turn be mediated by the nuncii and the chancery apparatus at his disposal. A modified analytic analysis based on Prior’s theory can not only describe but define socio-historically situated rhetorical systems and practices, and that can be inclusive of multiple actors traditionally excluded from rhetorical history.

Prior’s theory in Writing/Disciplinarity was to create a framework which proposed to study the development of scholarly writing. My argument, however, is that this theoretical framework can be used to describe deliberative rhetoric situated in complex, historically-situated, rhetorical, and systemic activities. Prior’s work proceeds on the assumption that this rhetorical activity is “situated, distributed, and mediated” activity, which neatly integrates Constantinou’s contributions into its structure (5). The assumption that writing is situated and mediated can be illustrated by the historical circumstances relevant to Eleanor of Aquitaine’s rhetorical artifacts, and the role of agency and mediation attendant to their composition. Prior’s theory, moreover, permits the historian to have a lens through which to study rhetorical activity
at a temporal remove with sufficient primary and secondary materials, and directly implicates methodology. Prior’s approach is also useful because the rhetorical activity of noblewomen, acting alone or in concert with rhetorical intent aimed at prospective change, was distributed over social networks in the twelfth century. Finally, because of the procedural and spatial difficulties inherent in inter-monarchical communication in that period, writing was the typical mediating tool for such communications. Prior’s theory, taken as methodological analytic approach, provides a way to examine often-marginalized groups, activities, and periods in rhetorical history, because no one need be excluded from any socio-historically situated rhetorical systems in which they had communicative participation. Using Prior’s theory as a methodological analytic allows the historian to systematically examine communicative systems and their components, traditionally excluded rhetorical acts, actors, genres and communities become more fully evident. Prior’s theory thereby rests on work that does not treat rhetorical activity as “a unified anonymous structure of linguistic, rhetorical, and epistemic conventions,” but instead reflects “a very human world” (25). I underscore these assumptions in Prior because some might critique his theory, based on its social scientific bent, as incompatible with the humanist tradition; I argue that it can be entirely harmonious with the humanistic tradition in rhetorical history because of these very assumptions and goals.

Prior’s approach, which is grounded in the concept of discourse communities, grew out of the theory of distributed cognition, which links “things happening within and between artifacts, people, and the world” (29). It is ideally suited to an inquiry in deliberative rhetorical processes, because, as Prior explains, “activity implicates co-action with other people, artifacts, and elements of the social-material environment” (29). Prior identifies five kinds of media within functional systems “persons, artifacts (semiotic and material), institutions, practices, and
communities” (30). My analytic adopts all five kinds of media as Prior defines them:

*Artifacts* refer to material objects fashioned by people (e.g. written texts, furniture, instruments, and built environments) or taken up by people (e.g. ocean currents for travel, the night sky as a navigational aid, animals as domesticated food stock, a stone as a weapon). Artifacts are also durable symbolic forms, like natural languages, mathematics, and specialized disciplinary discourses, which may be inscribed in material objects, but are also internalized by and distributed across persons. *Practices* refer to ways of acting-with and interacting in worlds . . . *Institutions* refer to stabilizations of activity around formal and informal social groupings *Communities* refer to potentials for alignment that emerge from any “common” experience (31)

The four media, therefore, that I will examine are *artifacts, practices, institutions,* and *communities*. The fifth and final media is that of *persons*, which Prior does not define for obvious reasons. Prior explains further that these media are not mutually exclusive and diagrams the concept to suggest a constant weaving and reweaving of these elements (31).

Another advantage to Prior’s Cultural Historical Activity Theory analysis is that within its framework, other, relevant theories can be integrated. The analytical category of “community” neatly affords the very real consideration that noblewomen were one such community, an assertion for which Brian Stock has given a warrant. The analytical category of practices accommodates Constantinou’s theoretical definition of diplomatic activity. This synthesis is accomplished almost seamlessly until one attempts integrate the theory of rhetoric itself. One shortcoming with using this analytic is that Prior’s theoretical apparatus does not readily include a tool to deal with concepts like rhetoric in systems. Is rhetoric a practice? Many would argue
that yes, it can be, but it is not limited to, a practice. Is it a set of semiotic tools? Arguably, considering its complicated schema of invention heuristics alone, it can be a theoretical set of tools. Is it an artifact? It can be an artifact, but it can also be a practice that implicates a host of other activities, people, communities, practices, and mediating tools. in Prior’s model, a concept like rhetoric is as difficult to categorize neatly as a concept like

![Cultural Historic Activity System, as Modified to Privilege the Idea of Rhetoric](image)

**Fig. 1 Cultural Historic Activity System, as Modified to Privilege the Idea of Rhetoric**

philosophy. Additionally, to take Stock’s argument to its logical conclusion, rhetorical practices were the very thing that communities began to form around: methods of textual consumption and production in turn implicated a host of communicative acts that were similarly organized. Accordingly, my analysis calls for a modified analytic that reflects rhetoric as a more central and privileged set of ideas, artifacts, communities, and practices.

Prior’s theory, implemented as an analytic research methodology, has promise on
several counts. Its attention to the role of persons, particularly those excluded from traditional histories of rhetoric, are potentially provided conceptual space and methodological attention. The theory’s attention to practices and artifacts, likewise, can permit the examination of rhetorical artifacts not necessarily confined to learned treatises. Likewise, communities and institutions as a subject of examination can reveal rhetorical traditions that are not confined to elite and patriarchal groups over-emphasized in such traditional locales of courts, assemblies, or other venues exhaustively examined as the locus of rhetorical practice, to the exclusion of the far more varied locales and communities with distinct and unexplored rhetorical traditions. Prior’s theory argues that, in the context of writing, we can better understand what writing does, and how it does it, by examining the systems of activity in which writing is historically embedded. But if we shift the central inquiry of Prior’s analysis away from writing, which is a far narrower activity (and one that could arguably be a subdivision of rhetoric more broadly defined), to directly focus on rhetoric as a temporally embedded concept - whether spoken, written, verbal, visual, theoretical, or material - a rich and textured understanding of rhetorical activity in a given historical period might emerge.

However, Prior’s model as a methodological analytic might contain a limitation that at once becomes very apparent. Where do complex meta-concepts, such as rhetoric, fit in this theory as a methodological analytic? Writing, which was the central inquiry of Prior’s inquiry, is clearly a practice and an artifact, necessarily involving persons at work in institutions and communities. But consider what rhetoric is from a variety of perspectives in relation to the media at play in Prior’s theory. Is rhetoric an artifact, that is, a durable symbolic form or a kind of specialized discourse? Certainly, the canonical “artifacts” and discourses that treat rhetoric can be called symbolic artifacts, and a specialized discourse, if we define rhetoric in its most
traditional sense: a set of learned texts. Conversely, rhetoric may not be reduced to an artifact at all: it can be a traditional or wholly innovative set of ideas, shared by a community, an institution, a culture, or one individual. Moreover, a rhetoric may be an inchoate set of ideas that are in no way durable, and change over time and across cultures. Indeed, the reason that rhetoric is historicized as an idea is precisely because of the development and change, both conceptually and practically, across and between historical periods, and even between rhetoricians in the same temporal space who formulate radically different articulations of its central tenets. Rhetorics can arguably be both theoretical and completely without practical application, embedded in ideologies, epistemologies, power relations, and assumptions underpinning other philosophical fields, from ontology, to theology, to semiotics and metaphysics. Likewise, reducing rhetoric to a “material object” taken up by people is very reductionist indeed.

In similarly obvious fashion, rhetorics are not persons; rhetoric may be practiced by persons, read by persons, and theorized by persons, but ideas that transform over time are not persons in any sense. Rhetoric, similarly, is not an institution; over several millennia of transformation as an idea, rhetoric has had relationship to institutions, or been authorized by them, but the study of rhetoric and the development of rhetoric as an inchoate concept has had a life separate from institutional actors, educational institutions, or social institutions. Rhetoric has arguably operated independently within, or without, or even in resistance to institutions, and has provided both stabilizations around institutions and de-stabilizations of such institutions. Likewise, rhetoric, as a set of concepts either with or without practical application, may not necessarily involve either stabilizations around, or even potentials for stabilizations around, communities. Because of the limitations of space, I invite the reader to take Prior’s model and apply other inchoate ideas that represent vast and complex intellectual phenomena across time:
for example, the nature of dialectical disputation in the Middle Ages, peripatetic philosophy in ancient Greece, or metaphysics in theological culture in the fifteenth century. Possibly owing to activity theory’s intellectual roots in Vygotskian dialectical materialism, it might be incompatible to non-material, intangible, and highly internalized concepts underpinning intellectual and verbal activity systems.

This incompatibility is illustrated by Prior, et. al.’s, webtext “Remediating the Canons”. The text attempts to examine the traditional canons through the extremely complex media at work in Prior’s theory in a contemporary context. Most of the contributions to the webtext devote minimal time and space to demonstrating a familiarity with the canons in their many formulations throughout the history of rhetoric, and generally suggest that rather than “revising and reinterpreting the classical canons, it is time to begin remapping the territory of rhetorical activity”. The central problem with “Remediating the Canons” is that few of the webtexts attempt anything other than a perfunctory approach to defining the canons or showing how they evolved over time. In so doing, the argument turns the canons into a kind of straw man which the authors then proceed to tear down as inadequate when compared to the authors’ proposed remediations. The webtext’s limited historicization of the canons stand in contrast to the canons’ very complex metamorphoses throughout rhetorical history, and their proposed “need” for remediation are a form of begging the question: we inadequately describe the canons and therefore they are inadequate. For example, in the “node” on the canon of memory, there is offered not more than two sentences about the nature of the canon of memory, describing it as “largely ignored” (although citing both Yates and Carruthers). This leads me to ask: by whom was the canon of memory ignored? Paolo Rossi, in his excellent book *Logic and the Art of Memory*, historicizes the way the *ars meorativa* became a sub-discipline of extensive study
throughout the renaissance and enlightenment.

But I critique the treatment of Prior, et.al’s, argument for remediating the canons not on the basis that it lacks historicization, because in all fairness, historicizing the canons was not their authorial intent. But I do offer this example as evidence of how Prior’s theory, unmodified, does not lend itself to the integration of meta-conceptual media at work in historical inquiry. The webtext reflects the incompatibility of CHAT with extremely complex, historically situated ideas in rhetoric by simply characterizing them as antiquated and requiring remediation. Arguing that rhetoric or rhetorical concepts require remediation, without a comprehensive grasp of how they operated over time, does not seem to sufficiently warrant remediation, and is a bit like arguing that concepts in theology require remediation because the Bible is not ideally suited to effective multimodal interpretation on Twitter; and in turn, a more viable theory of Twitter-based Biblical exegesis is required. I posit that the argument calling for remediating the canons is not sufficiently warranted without a more comprehensive understanding of their historical role. I emphasize, however, that I point to the webtext’s inadequate historical treatment of the canons as a critique of the text itself, but as evidence that CHAT is not well-suited to the accommodation of meta-theoretical concepts as part of its analysis. A seeming inability to historicize rhetoric attendant to the current trend of “remediating” rhetorical concepts is not the point of this argument; rather, it is that cultural historic activity theory is a viable analytic methodology to provide a nuanced and rich historicizing analytic in the history of rhetoric, if it is modified to examine the idea of rhetoric as its own media of analysis.

The model in Figure 1, adapted from Prior’s model, whose analytical framework uses a five-sided figure, I have modified his model to include rhetoric as a concept central to this historical inquiry. Because of the serious significance of rhetoric as only one idea of many that governed
communicative activities in the Middle Ages, I have privileged rhetoric, being the central
concern of this dissertation, as its own dimension which in turn affected everything else, which
in Prior’s model cannot be subsumed in any one individual category. Like the other units of
analysis in his model, it is a unit of analysis that weaves and reweaves itself into the persons,
artifacts, practices, communities and institutions surrounding it. This new model is represented in
Figure 1. In addition to a rough approximation of the various systems, communities, figures, and
so forth at work in the diplomatic-rhetorical system, I have also shown correspondences with
certain previously discussed theories and their role in this theoretical apparatus. In addition to the
broad categories of systems and actors within those systems, rhetorical systems analysis cannot
begin without accommodating the kind of rhetoric that was active within a cultural and historical
system – in this case, as Murphy, Camargo, and Ward have extensively proven, the *ars
dictaminis* governed many theoretical modes of language production in civic, private, and public
matters in the twelfth century. In modifying Prior’s approach to include a central concept in this
work, that is essentially an inquiry into the history of an idea, I do not intend to underestimate the
utility of Prior’s model; rather, I intend to convey that it is most compatible to re-thinking the
history of rhetoric by studying examples within active systems, to have a broader, richer, and
more accurate history that reflects the complex, situated, and inclusive nature of rhetoric in the
Middle Ages, its participants, and its practices.

Take the example of the convent of Canterbury. To refresh the reader’s recollection, the nuns
of Canterbury mediated their rhetorical appeals with writing, which in turn was likely delivered
by another representative. They asked Eleanor to represent them yet further, as a mediating party
to influence the king. The king, in turn, would mediate regarding a deliberative decision
between the nuns and the Archbishop. Figure 1 shows, as an example of communities, the nuns
of Canterbury as a gendered ecclesiastical community, prevailing on a community of noble persons. A community is a potential for alignment that emerges from any “common” experience; their monastic community and Eleanor’s share in common an actor and a member of both communities in the person of Hubert Walter. They are attempting to persuade one actor to influence another actor by virtue of a set of common values and experiences. They use an artifact, namely the letter and the developing genre of the ars dictaminis to persuade Eleanor of Aquitaine. The term artifacts refers either to material objects fashioned by people or durable symbolic forms, in this case a specialized discourse. The categories need not be insular, as the art of letter-writing could also be regarded as a practice, a term that refers to ways of acting-with and interacting the world. The monastic community directs their appeal not only between one community and another, but between institutions, that is to stabilizations of activity around formal and informal social groupings. The institution of the monarchy, generally, has authority and persuasive power over members of the church, based on long-standing stabilizations of reciprocity and practices attributed to each. Eleanor of Aquitaine is asked in turn use her rhetorical prowess to persuade (supplicare) the king to persuade the archbishop. The artifact even requests that this persuasion in turn be mediated by means of a written instrument (litterarum: “litteris vestrus”) as an artifact. The convent of canterbury are thus one textual community mediating their appeals to another through a series of established institutions, particularly the complex relationship between the institutions of church and state, embodied in a set of monarchs and ecclesiastical authorities.

This minimalistic example illustrates the usefulness of this theory when examining rhetorical traditions as evidenced by artifacts alone. As a methodology, it encompasses an analytic with heuristical application that can address Thomas Miller’s critique, by taking our attention away
from “abstract continuities” and contextualizing the rhetorical tradition in the actors, times, artifacts, and other media in their own temporal and historical milieu (27). Likewise, it provides a methodology that accommodates Enos’ call for a closer examination of the material and the archaeological by addressing the artifacts at play in rhetorical activity systems, when he wrote that our field should “expand our history of rhetoric by including sources that are not only visible but tangible.” (66). Because this methodological and theoretical framework permits the examination of “the economic, social, and political” networks of a given historical moment, it similarly can analyze historical periods by examining the context of rhetorical activities in their respective historical context. The critiques of Swearingen, Glenn, and others who question conventional rhetorical historiography are similarly served, because the rhetorical activities of marginalized or excluded groups and cultures can be actively analyzed with the contextualizing framework of Cultural Historic Activity Theory, to embrace lost traditions of communication and persuasion not found in conventional histories of rhetoric. Finally, and just as importantly, this theory accounts for other theories, particularly relevant to the twelfth century, such as those in Stock and Constantinou. The chapter that follows begins such an analysis, focusing on textual communities of noblewomen in the twelfth century, the manner in which they mediated their rhetorical appeals, as well as an analysis of actors, artifacts, and other media in the complex tapestry of rhetorical-diplomatic activity in the Middle Ages.

Cultural Historical Activity Theory as a conceptual framework can help establish that the historiography of rhetoric, which has been criticized as limiting in scope or excluding many historical participants, could be re-envisioned to provide for rigorous analysis at any given point in history with sufficient historical data. Because it is a theory that directly implicates methodology, it shifts the focus from what historians of rhetoric look at to where they actually
look. It effectively broadens a historian of rhetoric’s scope of inquiry, thus accommodating a far broader range of definition for what historical rhetoric is. Rather than a history of learned treatises, this analytical approach grounds theory in practice, and can illustrate how rhetoric worked in prior societies, and in turn, how social practices modified rhetorical practices in the systems that rhetoric was intimately related to, in both theory and practice. In chapter three shows how applying this analytic works when applied to the issue of women’s rhetorical traditions in the long twelfth century. How this analytic can do so is illustrated in chapter three and four, as I move on to examine how Eleanor’s rhetoric operated within complex systems.
CHAPTER III. THE RHETORICAL CONTEXT: PERSONS, COMMUNITIES, INSITITUTIONS AND PRACTICES IN DELIBERATIVE SPACE

In the years 1193 and 1194, Western Europe hovered on the brink of war. Anglo-Normandy’s fate hung in a precarious balance. On one front, King Philip Augustus of France ravaged the continental possession of Anglo-Normandy, while John of Mortain attempted to stir revolt in England. King Richard I was held for a ransom and was the prisoner of Emperor Henry VI, who was literally considering selling him to the highest bidder. The entire economy of England was being taxed at a rate of 25% to raise Richard I’s ransom. The Third Crusade had ended without measurable gains, leaving Palestine in ruins. The pope stood at the center of this conflict, having sanctioned the disastrous crusade, was facing a dilemma of competing practical and ethical concerns relating to what should be done with Henry VI and Philip Augustus, who were in clear and blatant defiance of the law of Christendom. Civic decision making, the future of dynastic succession, and the economic fate of the Anglo-Norman kingdom lay in the hands of one person: Eleanor of Aquitaine.

In her seventh decade of life, Eleanor acted as regent in Richard’s absence, overseeing nearly all civic matters during the time of his captivity, as well as negotiations and rhetorical intercessions for his release, which also placed her at the nexus of the conflict between Henry, Philip, Richard, and John. Her options were limited: Anglo-Normandy could not possibly raise an army powerful enough to defeat both France and the Empire. This left her with two primary weapons in her arsenal, one economic, the other persuasive and diplomatic. It was typical of the age in which she lived that the weapon she turned to first was writing and rhetoric. The crisis of the West would be won or lost only with the knowledge of the available means of persuasion.

This was the socio-political context in which Eleanor of Aquitaine vied for the release of Richard I, and the individuals who deliberated to determine the fate of her son and his kingdom
consisted of the players noted above. This complex system of diplomatic relations between monarchs is an example of socio-political entanglements that gave rise to deliberative processes in the Middle Ages, and the rhetoric attending those processes. They constitute an activity system, and letters were the principle artifacts in that system. Those letters are some of the principle evidence we posses to illustrate deliberative persuasion in the twelfth century. Letters and the rhetorical appeals they contained were mediated by rhetorical concepts inherited from antiquity. I will revisit these complex systems and events as institutional practice in relation to twelfth century diplomacy, which was a deliberative rhetorical system in the concluding chapter. First, however, this chapter analyzes the various media at play in these rhetorical activity systems, by examining the most relevant actors, communities, institutions, practices, and artifacts central to Eleanor’s rhetorical activity. The most important element relevant to this inquiry is the discussion of rhetoric in theory and practice – in relation to deliberative processes in the High Middle Ages, which is discussed in chapter four.

Persons and Actors in Context

Celestine and Eleanor

To understand the complex systems of deliberation and rhetorical power surrounding the letters of Eleanor of Aquitaine, I first contextualize the historical relationship between the key players surrounding her exhortative role in the crisis of Richard’s captivity in the 1190s. The “key players” constitute a media of persons as defined in the analytic derived from Prior’s Cultural Historical Activity Theory. To refresh the reader’s recollection, the key to understanding this element – persons - is to understand that between Celestine and Eleanor there was already a significant personal and political relationship evidenced at least thirty years prior to Celestine becoming pope. Most of Eleanor’s critical biographers have overlooked a letter directed from her
to one Cardinal Jacinto (Hyacinth) after her marriage to Henry II. The nature of this relationship will be discussed, after an examination of precisely who Cardinal Hyacinth was, since he would eventually become Celestine III. He was pivotal to the controversy of Richard I’s captivity. After an examination of some critical facts of his biography, the long-standing relationship between himself and Eleanor of Aquitaine can be demonstrated. A significant point of this chapter’s argument might assist to resolve the dispute over the Eleanor’s letters, providing contextualizing historical evidence that renders disputes regarding her letters “authenticity” significantly less relevant due to the evidence of this long-standing relationship.

Celestine III, born 1106, did not assume papal office until 1191, two years before Eleanor’s letters and Richard’s captivity. Anne Duggan has written a comprehensive article discussing the life and works of Hyacinth Bobone, later known as Pope Celestine III. Celestine’s accepted the papal office very reluctantly, afraid to be at the helm of the church in the event of a “great schism”, as he was the successor to a pope who had been caught up in a similar controversy (2). It is this central preoccupation that relates to the rhetoric of Eleanor’s letter, discussed in Chapter Four. But for purposes of the current chapter’s inquiry, the most relevant fact about Celestine III was his lifelong devotion to diplomatic service for the Holy See, and his role as a diplomat and peacemaker, which continued until the time of his death. Like Eleanor, he lived well into his eighties. Before he became pope, he acted in a diplomatic capacity as envoy of previous popes on multiple occasions, affecting the will of the church on matters of peace and war by means of persuasion. He was educated in the Paris schools, and early in his career, he defended Abelard in a trial for heresy. Unsurprisingly, given the relationship between rhetoric and the diplomatic office, Celestine had an extensive education in rhetoric (Montaubin 114). During Eleanor’s youth, he had extensive contacts with the Anglo-Norman possessions of
Eleanor’s husband, Henry II, and had contact with Eleanor at least thirty years before her letters directed to him as pope were drafted. He was employed through the papal curia, and his connection to documentary production and later, to diplomatic activity at the highest levels further illustrates that there was a substantive connection between diplomatics, diplomacy and rhetoric. As Duggan explains, “What was his major activity throughout that long service to the Curia? In a nutshell – he was a diplomat” (5). He was one of the emissaries sent to “smooth over” Papal relations with Fredrick Barbarossa in 1158, after a poor choice of wording nearly resulted in the death of another legate in 1157; he conducted negotiations to establish the Treaty of Venice in 1177. He maintained special relationships with many of the major figures of Europe, Eleanor of Aquitaine being one of these individuals.

Eleanor’s first documented contact with Celestine can be found in an exchange of letters written ca. 1163, which Anne Duggan has translated from Luc d’ A'chery’s *Spicilegium Sive Collectio Veterum Aliquot Scriptorum qui in Galliae Bibliothecis Delituerant*. I have altered Duggan’s original translation in order to more accurately reflect Eleanor’s promise to devote her intellectual and persuasive energies to Hyacinth’s advantage. Duggan has stated that Eleanor’s letter was prompted by Hyacinth’s support of her cousin, per her request, for election into the higher ranks of the church (7). Duggan’s translation suggests that in the last two clauses Eleanor pledges her “heart” (*L. corcillum, animulus*) and her possessions (“all that I have”) (*L. possessiones, or more likely fortuna*). But Eleanor’s choice of words more accurately pledges her mental and intellectual devotion.

I rejoice that I have, and have had, such a friend in so important a person […] For your letter declares, and my consciousness understands from your letter, that it is your settled intention to devote yourself wholly to my honour and my eminence.
For my part, I devotedly and faithfully expound that what I am, what I am able to do, the whole contents of my mind, and all of my faculties are at your disposal (adapted from Duggan 7).

(Gaudeo in tanta persona, tantum me habere habuisse amicum [...] Testantur enim litterae vestrae, et litteris vestries mea testator conscientia, vos ex proposito ad honorem meum et meam plurimum intendere magnificentiam. Ego quod sum, quod possum, totam mentem meam, omnes facultates meas vobis devote, fideliterque expono) (Achery 528-529).

I depart from Duggan’s translation because, as I will demonstrate, Eleanor had persuasive and logical faculties widely in demand by others in power in her time, and this writing reflects an offer of reciprocality in exchange for Hyacinth’s rhetorical intervention. It seems a bit of a stretch to translate Eleanor’s offer of her faculties (facultas) and the contents of her mind (totam mentam meam) as her undying love, devotion and material possessions. Eleanor’s position as a powerful agent of persuasion can be similarly illustrated by a letter from the same period to Pope Alexander III, regarding the same appointment of her relative to Holy Orders, where Eleanor entreats the pope’s aid by pointing out

Wherefore, whenever there is talk about factions in my presence, I am not afraid to do battle against the attempts of the enemy power but assail and subdue them with my arguments, confidently defending your side” (unde quoties, me praesente, fit sermo de partibus, ego pro parte vestra confidenter defendens, inimicae ausus potestatis impugnare, immo meis rationibus expugnare non vereor.) (“Eleanor of Aquitaine to Alexander III”, Epistolae).

Based on this corollary letter to Hyacinth’s superior, I argue that the allegiance Eleanor promises
is intellectual, argumentative, and at root rhetorical. Here, Eleanor is guaranteeing her rhetorical assistance to the pope against arguments in favor of an anti-pope, in exchange for his assistance. This is only a foreshadowing of her letters in the 1190s, some thirty years later; but more importantly, the statement is substantive evidence of her active role in deliberative processes and argumentation at the highest levels. It also demonstrates that noblewomen were valued not merely as marriageable and commodified actors in the twelfth century; rather they had valued social and rhetorical roles. What is also apparent from these statements is that Eleanor possessed rhetorical and intellectual power that was valued by others at the highest levels of medieval society, and could use it as a bargaining chip.

The 1163 letter to Cardinal Hyacinth established a pre-existing set of loyalties and personal relations between the two which appear to have existed some thirty years before her later letters to him. The letter also suggests that her later letters reflect her personal feelings. Moreover, the 1163 letter shows that she would have good reason to instruct Peter of Blois to write to Celestine as a mediating diplomatist. The letter likely dates from after 1163, when Henry II and Eleanor met Alexander III, who was accompanied by Hyacinth, at the fortress of Chateauroux. This letter demonstrates that at that time, Eleanor met with and persuaded the two men to elevate her relation to a position of power in the Catholic hierarchy, thus attesting to her early rhetorical power. It is also of note that this incident, and the subsequent correspondence, are largely overlooked in even the most critical biographies of Eleanor. The letter also reflects that there existed a surprising degree of parity and reciprocity in the political relationship of Eleanor and Celestine well before the 1190s, to say nothing of their personal acquaintance. Her letter to Alexander III is additional res gestae evidence of the likelihood that Eleanor mediated rhetorical power through the written word for decades before the imprisonment of Richard I.
Further analysis regarding the rhetorical practices of similarly-situated noble women later in this chapter will provide additional circumstantial evidence relating to these conclusions. I reproduce the original text of Eleanor’s letters in Appendix 1, with their translations by Ferrante.

One final question should be addressed to provide systemic context as to why Eleanor chose to direct her appeals to Celestine in the 1190s. Such a question can only be answered by briefly reviewing the political situation which implicated Eleanor, Celestine, Henry VI, and Richard alike. The political position of the popes in the twelfth century has been usefully summarized by John W. Baldwin, who wrote

> If the medieval popes were political failures at home, they nonetheless succeeded in making their influence felt throughout Latin Christendom . . . In the course of the Investiture Conflict, Pope Gregory formally deposed the Emperor Henry IV . . . By the end of the century the Papacy initiated the crusading movement . . . Pope Innocent III excommunicated King John of England . . . Similar coercion was applied to King Philip Augustus of France (6).

Although hardly the case in the late 1190s, eventually, in “the middle of the thirteenth century . . . Pope Innocent IV declared without qualification that the pope possessed universal temporal authority” (7). With papal power in the ascendancy in Eleanor’s time, and her appeal for temporal intervention was neither misplaced nor underestimated; unfortunately Henry VI proved to be too powerful a player for Celestine to contend with, given his military might and his presence in the Italian peninsula.

*Richard I and Henry VI*

Two other critical participants attendant to Eleanor’s letters to Celestine III must include
her son, Richard I, and the Holy Roman Emperor Henry VI, his captor. In September of 1192, at the completion of the Third Crusade, Richard left the Western stronghold of Acre for England. Jean Flori, Richard’s most critical biographer, has this to say about the conduct of Richard and the crusaders generally, to which I will embroider no more details regarding this horrific and tragic chapter of western history:

   His crusade had hardly been a military success … Richard’s warlike and sometime bloodthirsty exploits, which achieved so little, won much wider acclaim than the diplomatic and peaceful exploits of the Emperor Frederick [accomplished later, in the year 1229]. This strange paradox speaks volumes about contemporary attitudes and also about the popularity of holy war, a notion then becoming widely accepted and which has sadly persisted (Flori Richard 155).

Richard set sail for a crossing, likely protracted and dangerous, that was made more perilous because of natural dangers and political conflicts at the conclusion of the crusade. When he embarked, Richard was advised of rumors that the King of France, Philip Augustus, had incited the barons of Aquitaine in revolt, preventing him from landing on the coast of his own possessions. A further complication was the alliance of Henry VI with the King of France, making certain overland routes impossibly dangerous for Richard. After a variety of abortive attempts to land in Western Europe, Richard wound up on the coast of Istria, in what is today Croatia, to become Henry’s prisoner.

   The political situation between Henry VI and Celestine III, and the papacy generally, is also a useful context for understanding what Eleanor would later see as papal inaction in her letters. Upon becoming emperor, Henry married Constance of Hauteville, overthrew the kingdom of Sicily, and effectively placed the Papal States in Italy between a rock and a hard
place (Shepard 58). Shepard explains that the papacy, “finding itself encircled by imperial territories,” found itself without room for maneuver to play Henry against Norman powers (58). To underscore the power of twelfth century women at work in this argument, the conflict between Henry and the pope over the conquest of Sicily would eventually be effectively defused by Constance of Hauteville. Constance would act as regent after Henry’s death, name his heirs, and return Sicily to papal control. Constance is also rumored to have poisoned Henry who died at age 31 (59).

**Philip II**

The other players involved in the attendant conflict, as individual actors in a complex network of diplomatic relations mediated by writing, must necessarily include Philip II, King of France. Philip joined Richard I in 1191 on the Third Crusade. After only three months’ engagement, Philip abandoned the crusade, returning to France. Upon arrival, he began plotting with John of Mortain, Richard’s brother, to take English land in Western France. On his return, Philip visited Celestine III asking permission to wage war on Richard III. Jean Flori has documented Celestine’s terse response in this letter

> We emphatically decline to release you from your oath [to not attack the King of England in his absence]. Like every Christian Prince, you should observe a peace agreement even without an oath. Indeed, we approve of that oath . . . and we reinforce it with our apostolic authority (Richard 158).

Thus, Celestine was already in the middle of the conflict between Richard and Philip, and its tentacles extended to embroil Henry VI. In spite of Celestine’s admonition, Philip and John began to attack Richard’s holdings during his captivity. What the exchange between Philip and Celestine illustrates is that the pope at this time was a diplomatic channel for legally waging war
and peace in the time of the crusades.

Eventually, Philip’s outrageous behavior led Celestine to place France under interdict; although the interdict did not arise from events in the early 1190s, Philip eventually only compounded his list of offenses. From the wealth of scholarship about the institutional roles of the monarchy and the papacy in the twelfth century, one important role of the Vatican as an institution is its central relationship to peace making in this period, which was rhetorically-driven through diplomatic agents and intermediaries. As illustrated in the exchange between Philip II and Celestine, the pope and the Church could create terrible consequences for monarchs, using excommunication and interdict on entire kingdoms. If a pope placed a kingdom under interdict, monarchs could lose the support of their feudal vassals, and perhaps their lives. The Vatican was not the exclusive diplomatic channel, however, between monarchs and vassals; women were employed as diplomatic intermediaries and agents of deliberative persuasion, as in De Pisan’s example of Queen Blanche of Castile (Eleanor’s granddaughter), and in the instant case of Eleanor of Aquitaine.

These were the major individuals at work in the complex diplomatic systems, of which Eleanor was at the center. These players, one of whom was Eleanor, are related to relevant communities engaged in rhetorical action; and a community central to this inquiry is that of noblewomen in deliberative, textual space.

Communities and Institutions: Noblewomen as Persuasive Agents and Actors

The next elements to be considered in the complex systems of deliberative persuasion in the Middle Ages are the media of institutions and communities. As previously explained, “Institutions refer to stabilizations of activity around formal and informal social groupings . . . Communities refer to potentials for alignment that emerge from any “common experience”
(Prior 31). The institutions that centrally concern us here are the nobility, constituting a formal social grouping, and the potential they represented by common alignment in the routine practice of deliberative persuasion, which can be illustrated in the writings of noblewomen. Medieval diplomacy, as both the locative space and as an activity associated with rhetoric, is an element of the activity system in question here, and can be illuminated by identifying the most relevant communities at work.

The nobility generally, and noble women in particular, are central as both an institution and a community relevant to this inquiry, and their rhetorical practices are at the center of this inquiry. Following the theories of Brian Stock, it can be illustrated that noblewomen were nothing less than a textual community frequently called on to engage in civic persuasion to change or arrest change in the outcomes of future events. There were many communities related to textual practice in the twelfth century, but the best way to illustrate the relevance of noble women as a community is to consider women situated similarly to Eleanor throughout the historical period in question. Individual actors in complex networks whose central purpose was civic and persuasive in nature share membership in multiple communities. Looking at the practices of similarly situated women in both time and geographical space is useful, since the purpose of this inquiry is to show the nature of the rhetorical power of women generally in the Middle Ages, and Eleanor of Aquitaine in particular. Many of the noble women at the heart of this inquiry about their community were related to Eleanor either socially or by familial relation, making an inquiry into their rhetorical communities more relevant. When one glosses the existing textual record of dictaminal sources, in the form of both letters to and from noble women in this period, Christine De Pisan’s assertion that women had a rhetorical role in persuasion relating to civic matters becomes more evident. The fact that they exercised power in
these persuasive capacities as part of a long tradition is also apparent.

I cannot cite every example, but after examining many hundreds of letters to and from noble women between the years 1000 and 1250, from France and Anglo-Normandy alone, I have chosen a few examples of women in civic persuasive capacities. The evidence below shows that noblewomen were a textual community who were frequently called on to engage in deliberative persuasion through writing. The letters reveal exhortative roles that tend to fall into two categories. The first category consists of artifacts that evidence noble women as agents, who are asked to fulfill a hortatory and civic role for another. The second consists of artifacts that evidence women’s engagement as rhetorical actors and show their persuasive appeals in action.

Women as Agents of Civic Persuasion

Because a chronological account of all the evidence is impossible in the spatial limitations of this chapter, the evidence is best presented in representative groups, the first of which are dictaminal artifacts which show that women were persuasive agents for others. I therefore begin with marked examples of women as deliberative decision makers on behalf of others. In 1163, Louis VII of France granted Ermengarde of Narbonne the power to resolve disputes at law, without regard to her gender. He wrote:

As your love indicated to us through the worthy messengers, the abbot of St. Paul and Peter Raymond, there is hesitation in your area to permit judicial power to women in matters of imperial law (deciduntur negotia legis Imperatorum . . . feminis permittatur judicandi potestas). But the custom of our kingdom is far more benign, allowing women . . . to succeed and administer their inheritance. Remember therefore that you are from our kingdom and we want you to keep the usage of our kingdom; and although you are a neighbor of the empire, do not
acquiesce to its custom or laws in this (consuetudini et legibus non acquiesces).

Sit therefore in judgment of cases (cognitionem causarum), diligently examining matters with the zeal of him who created you a woman when he might have [made you] a man, and in his benignity gave the rule of the province of Narbonne into the hand of a woman. By our authority, no person is permitted to turn away from your jurisdiction because you are a woman (auctoritate nulli personae liceat a tua jurisdictione declinare). (“Louis VII to Ermengarde 1164”)

This excerpt shows that women were afforded special power in France and Anglo-Normandy, and were entrusted to use their deliberative faculties to resolve civil disputes by presiding over them, at least in the absence or incapacity of a male nobleman. Another example can be found in Eleanor of Provence, who, many years later, was directed by her husband to assemble all the nobles and church officials in the realm into an assembly, and preside over them. She wrote back, “We have received your letters at Christmas just past, that on next St. Hilary we should convene the Archbishops, Bishops, Abbots, Priors, Counts, and Barons of the Kingdom of England: to make known to them your situation and the coming of the King of Castile into Gascony against you” (“Eleanor of Provence to Henry III 1294”). These two examples, which are not isolated, show the rhetorical action of women as both actors and decision makers in a period extending over two hundred years.

Female adjudicative and deliberative power and agency was not a unique circumstance, or confined to Anglo-Frankish culture. According to certain annals, the Empress Matilda was the head of deliberative bodies in the absence of the Emperor (Rundholt 33). Matilda also acted as a diplomatic agent between Henry II and Thomas Becket for the pope. In 1165, Matilda wrote to Thomas Becket, describing the circumstances for her letter, “My lord Pope sent to me, enjoining
me, on the remission of my sins, to interfere to renew peace and concord between you and the king” (Crawford 29). Matilda also reminds Becket that “You, as you well know, have asked the same thing from me” (29). What is evident here is that both the Pope and Thomas Becket relied on Matilda’s rhetorical agency for their ends, namely to act toward future peace in an ongoing conflict. All of these examples illustrate by their similarities the rhetorical roles of medieval women and their dependence on reciprocal relationships: women acted in reciprocity as persuasive agents for others, which is evidence that they were valuable rhetorical participants in civic persuasion.

Women actively operated in similar capacities, with similar purposes, and in the same period in matters related to peacemaking and other traditionally deliberative aims. De Pisan was restating this culturally constructed role in the late Middle Ages. As already noted, a marked example is Ermengarde of Narbonne. Frederic Cheyette has unearthed sixty three documents bearing her name, and estimates that we only have 0.1 percent of the total (“Women” 150). There is no scholarly work at all on the ample evidence of Ermengarde’s rhetorical practices. Joan Ferrante has pointed out that “The women who are asked to mediate are not passive messengers of the petitioner's position-they sometimes sound like presiding judges” (884). Ferrante’s work on the letters of noblewomen deserves further discussion, because her important archival project provides many examples of noblewomen as a rhetorical community.

Ferrante’s database contains exhaustive examples of similarly-situated noble women and is entitled *Epistolae: Letters of Medieval Women*. Ferrante created the archive and described its contents, consisting of letters to and from women in the Middle Ages, and it provides unique insights into the social roles of women through their letters. Many women throughout the period were in contact with rhetorical luminaries such as Alcuin, Hrabanus Maurus, Augustine, Peter of
Blois, and John of Salisbury, as well as famed orators such as Bernard of Clairvaux. Eleanor of Aquitaine, as one example, knew the latter three well. Ferrante characterizes the letters generally, explaining that “public letters, to or from women in official positions, call women to action in the battle for the faith against heresy or simony and in support of the papacy, ask them to call a synod, to mediate, to settle disputes even among churchmen, and of course to persuade their husbands to do the right thing” (881). Ferrante, however, qualifies this description, by explaining that “Women were frequently asked to influence and persuade their husbands, but it was not only with husbands that they served as mediators” (882). The letters show persuasion and exhortation between noblewomen and popes was a two-way street. Ferrante explains, “We expect letters from churchmen correcting women's actions, rather than the other way around, but there are also letters of women preaching to popes. Queen Adela of France, third wife of Louis VII, wrote for her husband to Pope Alexander III in support of Thomas Becket” (886). Thus, it is not unheard of for their rhetoric to use a surprisingly agonistic tone, revealing that women’s twelfth century rhetorical practices were hardly “quiet,” “private” or “interiorized”.

Matilda of Bolougne, then Queen of England, was on at least one occasion asked to fulfill an exhortative role as agent in deliberative ecclesiastical and political matters. In 1147, King Stephen, her husband, was subjecting a local bishop to demands for an oath of fealty; when he refused, Stephen began to persecute him. Pope Eugenius III wrote to Matilda asking her to persuade Stephen to reach a compromise. Eugenius wrote

> With your husband, our beloved son Stephen, the distinguished king of the English, strive to bring about, with instructions, urging, and counsel (*ut monitis, hortatu, et consilio*), that he receive him with benignity and love, and hold him commended out of reverence for St. Peter and us (‘Eugenius III to Matilda of
Boulogne”

The three verbs the pope uses to request Matilda’s rhetorical actions in this message are respectively *monitis, hortatu,* and *consilio.* As Chapter Four discusses at some length, *consilio* was an integral concept within deliberative persuasion in the Middle Ages, sometimes being used interchangeably with deliberation. The pope is persuading Matilda to act in a hortative capacity, and as agent, provide *consilium* on prospective matters with two or more possible outcomes. The rhetorical intervention he requests of Matilda illustrates three distinct rhetorical roles aligning with the offices of rhetoric derived from Roman antiquity, incumbent upon noble women in the twelfth century: to instruct, to persuade, and to counsel other sovereigns in civic deliberations. Matilda is not alone in the period, as a member of a discrete social group frequently asked to engage in persuasive activity, and requests often used conjugations of these same verbs. That the pope would ask Matilda to fulfill such a function illustrates that there was a pre-existing set of cultural beliefs that women were capable of such functions, if not that they were expected to discharge them. Thus, in even the earliest part of the twelfth century, it was a clearly established role for women at the highest levels of power to fulfill an exhortative function related to deliberative matters.

    The rhetorical “offices” of noblewomen are not evidenced by one epistle or figure alone. Blanche of Castile – the selfsame Blanche remembered as exemplar of persuasive noble womanhood by De Pisan, and notably Eleanor of Aquitaine's granddaughter – received a letter from Honorius III in the year 1224, where he attempted to persuade Blanche, in turn, to persuade her husband to give aid to Constantinople. He writes, “Therefore we ask, we admonish, and exhort your magnificence assiduously that you solicitously persuade and inspire (*sollicite animes et inducas*) said king your husband to that” (“Honorius III to Blanche of Castile”). The precise
phrasing here derives, again, from the Latin verbs meaning exhort (*hortamur*) and instruct (*monemus*) with the intent to persuade (*inducas*), illustrating that throughout the twelfth century, noblewomen occupied a persuasive and instructive role in civic decision making related to both peace and war. The pope makes clear that the aim of this request is ultimately persuasion (*inducas*). This is yet another example of the constellation of verbs (*monitus, hortatu, and consilio*) that one sees recurrently in reference to the roles of noble women in relation to persuasive action. The request is *prima facie* evidence that noblewomen in the twelfth century, at least in Western Europe, were a rhetorical community who engaged in exhortative and instructive rhetoric on deliberative matters, both on their own behalf and at the request of others. There are yet more examples to be found in the life of “Good Queen Blanche”.

Gregory IX asked Blanche for her counsel (*consilium*) to move the King to militarily support Baldwin II in the east. Moreover, on at least two occasions, the King of England sent ambassadors through Blanche in order to make peace with the King of France. Thus, Blanche was but one of a number of similarly situated noblewomen who acted in an exhortative fashion in deliberative matters. This is further borne out by the fact that, as early as the year 1153, the pope sent both Eleanor of Aquitaine and the Empress Matilda, identical requests to use their persuasive abilities. The object of persuasion was to be Henry II, who was not yet a king, in an attempt to prospectively resolve a dispute between Henry and a bishop. Anastasius II requested of both Eleanor of Aquitaine and Matilda:

> Since there is a participant of mercy, who shows [her]self a helper in good works, we command, admonish, and exhort your nobility by these writings in the Lord that you strive to suggest (*efficaciter suggerere studeas*) to your renowned husband, the duke, diligently and efficaciously that he permit that abbot to return
to his monastery in peace and carry out his office in the regular way and do no harm to him about anything or permit harm to be done by his men ("Anastasius II to Eleanor of Aquitaine").

Often the phrasing of these requests seemed to convey a papal exhortative role to the agency of the recipients. But these written requests to women to act rhetorically in a deliberative contexts do not account for requests that were verbal, which were possibly vast in number; similarly, these are merely the ones that are extant in the archival record. Moreover, this chapter cannot treat some of the most extensive examples, such as Eleanor of Aquitaine's letters to Celestine III, where she reminds the pope that she has intervened on the papacy’s behalf repeatedly in a rhetorical, diplomatic capacity, and demanded treatment in kind in the 1190s. These artifacts will be treated in Chapter Four. Thus, the pope, who sat at the apex of medieval power, and was believed to mediate between secular politics and God, often requested rhetorical action from noble women. But as we shall see, women also directed their rhetoric to him to demand he take action.

*Women as Civic Actors in the Twelfth Century*

Thus far, this chapter has established only that noble women were frequently sought after in an agency capacity on behalf of others in medieval deliberative processes. I now move to discuss women’s roles as independent rhetorical actors in civic systems in the Middle Ages. However, the distinction between women acting as rhetorical agents and acting on their own behalf is not always that clear because of the nature of reciprocal duties in medieval politics. There existed between women, and those requesting their rhetorical assistance, something akin to a duty of fealty, or a duty to reciprocate, which alludes to the strange blend of public, private, civil and ecclesiastical matters connected to the “civic”. Issues such as marriage, divorce,
inheritance, war, and allegiance which we think of as private or ecclesiastical had political dimensions.

One notable example of women exercising hortative persuasion with enormous social consequence involved Ingeborg of Denmark, the queen of France. Ingeborg wrote to the pope in an attempt to resolve disputes between herself and her husband, King Philip II of France. Throughout these letters, she exhorts the pope to intervene on her behalf, which he eventually did by placing the entire kingdom of France under interdict. But this kind of request for political intervention was a two way street. Years later, in 1200, pope Innocent III called in the favor and demanded reciprocal rhetorical action from Ingeborg. The pope sought to employ Ingeborg’s persuasive powers toward her husband, writing:

> We admonish your royal serenity, therefore, and exhort in the Lord that you strive to press him, who, according to the Psalmist, is “our refuge and strength, our helper in tribulations” [Ps.45 2], that you may administer with pious eloquence, *(piis orationibus instare procures)* that the king will retain you in conjugal grace and treat you with marital affection. (“Innocent III to Ingeborg of Denmark”, translation adapted)

Here, we see the word *orationibus* (eloquence) used to describe rhetorical role of noblewomen in political disputes. But unlike the examples under agency, there seems to be an implicit demand that she act persuasively because the pope previously took rhetorical action on her behalf. But what is most significant about the pope’s use of *orationibus* is that “eloquence”, to the medieval mind, was not necessarily related to “set piece” speeches, and in fact need not be anchored to a locale or process as in classical definitions of deliberative rhetoric. In the Middle Ages, deliberative eloquence could concern private matters that have a public impact, and be delivered
in a private context. In fact, here, as in many letters, *orationibus* is used interchangeably with “prayer”. The aim of the persuasive act the pope requests had public repercussions, and were aimed at the eventual goal of peace. Epistles are not the only evidence we possess relating to the role of women in deliberative matters in the twelfth century. Letters often reveal how verbal persuasion was used by noblewomen as a constitutive community of rhetorical agents. Letters reveal a complex system of collective decision making, of which women were an integral part. They also reveal that women had persuasive agency which was not limited to peace, but also war.

A common example of how women in the twelfth century were afforded an exhortative role in prospective civic decisions was in the context of warfare. In 1173, Henry II was ravaging Narbonne and other French provinces. Eremengarde of Narbonne, in turn, exhorted Louis VII to declare war on Henry II, and her appeals fall squarely into the deliberative rhetorical genre. She wrote,

> I do not grieve alone, but all our compatriots are consumed by ineffable sadness that we see our region, on which the vigor of French kings has conferred the tokens of freedom, coming under the rule of another, to which they are little inclined, by your failure, lest I say guilt. Let it not offend your highness, dearest lord, that I presume to speak so boldly with you. The more I am a special woman of your crown, the more I suffer when I see it sink from its height. For it is not Toulouse alone but all our region from the Garonne to the Rhone, as our adversaries boast, that I feel them hastening to seize, so that, with the members reduced to servitude, the head may more easily be overthrown. (“Ermengarde to Louis VII 1164”)
Ermengarde is here providing *consilium* on prospective matters, namely whether there should be peace or war with the forces of Henry II. She concludes by appealing to fortitude, consistent with the common deliberative appeals of her day. The remainder of Ermengarde’s letter touches on the common deliberative *topoi* of justice and fortitude that were extremely common in twelfth century deliberative artifacts. Ermengarde concludes her exhortation, which she describes as *supplicare* (to pray) – another verb relating to rhetorical activity we see throughout women’s letters in this period – and argues that for every dollar Louis might spend in a war with the English king, he might recoup one hundred. This represents a rare appeal to expediency – in this case, personal gain – which is fairly uncommon in the Middle Ages, at least by female rhetors.

The examples between 1100 and 1350 related to warfare are not isolated, nor do they seem to be rare. Constance, Countess of Toulouse, was also embroiled in Henry II’s continental predations, and in the year 1164 also exhorted Louis VII to intervene militarily on her behalf (Cheyette *Ermengarde* 262). In the first epistle, she writes to inform and exhort, using the appropriate Latin phrases to express her intent. In a latter epistle, she attempted to persuade him to release hostages under her protection:

> For this cause I humbly implore (*implorare*), if I dare, your clemency as one in whom my whole hope is placed, that you deign to free them out of pity (*pietate*) for my prayers and those of your nephews. I call God to witness, if I knew anything useful (*utilitatem*) to you in their captivity, I would never have spoken of their release for anyone's prayers (“Constance of Toulouse to Louis VII”)

This illustrates another verb typically associated with noblewomen’s rhetorical activities, the verb *implorare*, which we shall see in other discourse, along with those previously cited. But more significantly, it provides another example of women mediating deliberative discourse with
writing in future decisions related to war. Like Ermengarde, Constance attempts to move the king by appealing to pity, which is a subdivision of the *topoi* of justice in the *Ad Herrenium*. She further points out that converse considerations of *utilitatem* (expediency) should not be considered, as the continued captivity of her heirs serves no practical purpose. The epistle is deliberative precisely because it gives *consilium* regarding two courses of future conduct.

The epistolary evidence is not the only evidence we possess relating to the deliberative rhetorical role of women in the twelfth century, particularly noblewomen, as a constitutive community of rhetorical agents. If one makes the historical concession that assemblies were relatively exceptional events before 1300, often held to ratify public matters on decisions already made in private, the complex system of collective decision making, of which women were an integral part becomes apparent. The real deliberative decisions were made often at the highest level in inter-monarchical relations, and women were numbered among those monarchs. In the examples above, we see patterns emerge that illustrate the diplomatic and sermonic character of noblewomen’s rhetorical roles. These documents supplement the conclusions of Judith A. Green, who has noted the power of women as “bargaining chips” in marital alliances or living deeds to convey feudal rights to land. Clearly, women not only had agency, but were known and valued as possessing this agency, that might be employed by others for their sheer rhetorical and diplomatic ends.

In sum, the media of Eleanor’s community suggests that Eleanor was not exceptional or a mere cameo appearance in rhetorical history in this period. As the King of France himself explained above, in many parts of Western Europe at this time, particularly in the blurry geographical and cultural regions of France and Anglo-Normandy, women were not relegated to chattel property, but treated as intellectual and rhetorical actors in both deliberative and forensic
roles. Many histories, written contemporarily to the women’s lives and actions they discuss, mention their role in such matters. While traditional scholarship may dismiss these, Ferrante’s collection of letters by noblewomen provides illustrations of the diplomatic and rhetorical role of noblewomen from at least 1090 to as late as 1152, when Henry III sent similar entreaties to Marguerite of Provence, to persuade her husband to make peace. This span of time represents a significant cultural edifice in which women had a well documented role in rhetorical, and particularly deliberative matters of diplomatic character, lasting arguably until the time of Christine de Pisan. Pisan was not fictionalizing this communal role for noblewomen in rhetoric, as confirmed by Ferrante’s database – which is, in fact, only a partial database. That Eleanor is situated among them is attested to by her letter in 1161 to Celestine, Pope Alexander, and later, to Celestine-as-pope.

Artifacts and Practices: Textual *Auctoritas* and Diplomacy in the Twelfth Century

The final media in this contextualizing analytic are those of artifacts and practices relating to them. To reiterate, artifacts can be objects or durable symbolic forms. In this case, they are writings governed by classical and *dictaminal* theory as well as the attendant modes of production and consumption surrounding them. Practices refers to ways of acting-with and interacting in any given environment, and for our purposes, the practices central to this inquiry are deliberative rhetorical practices and authorial practices. Eleanor’s position in a rhetorical community, and the role of rhetoric (as a set of *ideas* and *rules*), and attendant mediating practices in the twelfth century are discussed fully in Chapter Four. But for purposes of an initial illustration of how this complex activity system worked outside of the crisis of Richard’s captivity in the 1190s, examples should be cited that position Eleanor as an exemplary actor in her rhetorical community, and illustrate the practices within that community relating to the
artifacts mediating her rhetoric. Artifacts in the context of this analysis were, obviously, letters.

*Artifacts*

John Van Engen has described the significance of these artifacts to twelfth century women, because they were “arguably the central medium for twelfth-century literature and society” (204). He explains that they were “in fact both history and literature, the means for getting work done, historical, cultural and personal” (204). But these letters did not always attempt to persuade; often, they were records or reports of verbal persuasion provided to those who requested women to in turn persuade others. Eleanor of Aquitaine has at least one such letter, which can be found in the Foedera Rolls, and is a pointed example of a noblewoman in deliberative persuasion – remarkably, written when she was well into her eighties.

After the death of Richard I, John of Mortain had become king of England. Due to his ineptitude and mismanagement, John was in a continual struggle in both England and France to bring unruly barons back into positions of fealty. Eleanor, somewhere around the year 1200, was sought out by John to resolve one such dispute in a wholly rhetorical and diplomatic role. She wrote,

> You will know, dearest son, that we ordered your relative and ours, Viscount Americ Thoarc to come to Fontevrault to visit us in our illness and he came [. . .]
> And again we showed him that he should feel great shame and sin that he suffered your other barons to disinherit you unjustly: He listened and at the same time understood your words; and because we spoke right and reason to him, he freely and willingly conceded that he and his lands and castles were from now on at your command

*(Noveritis, karissime fili, quod mandavimus Consanguineum vestrum & nostrum*
Here, Eleanor reports on her rhetorical activity on behalf of John. She employed “our words” (verba nostra) to remonstrate (monstravimus) with reason (rationem) regarding what is just, right or reasonable (jus) to resolve the dispute. She reports that she has done so to make the Viscount hear and understand (audiebat and intelligibat) until his mind readily allowed concession to John’s position (animo libente concessit). Her letter illustrates not merely the rhetorical role, but records the rhetorical activity, of Eleanor late in her life. The above also provides a link to Eleanor’s presence in the deliberative community of noblewomen in her time.

Quite unlike her letters to Celestine III, no one has questioned the authenticity or authorship of this communiqué, which brings up the next point regarding practices related to written rhetoric by women in the twelfth century, namely that of authorship. The word “authenticity,” both theoretically and etymologically, implicates authorial practice, which is the first of the practices I will analyze. Eleanor’s letter above illustrates many things about rhetorical and diplomatic practices at work before 1300, but the central connection this analysis explores is authorial practice among noblewomen.

Jennifer Summit has connected women and authorial practice in the context of writing in the twelfth century, basing her discussion of authorial practice on A.J. Minnis’ theory of

(Eleanor of Aquitaine to King John, Epistolae)
medieval authorship. The theory significantly illuminates the historiographic quandary of the attribution of Eleanor’s letters to Peter of Blois. In the course of this investigation, the attribution is one of the only questions that remains a mystery. However, the very idea of authorship, or textual authority (*auctoritas*), in Eleanor’s time is the final key to the (now largely tangential) question of the “genuineness” of the letters, which can be resolved by fully grasping the theory of authorship in the twelfth century. Summit explains that “Authorship held a variety of meanings in the Middle Ages,” but for purposes of this discussion, sometime in the twelfth century, *auctoritas*, a term traditionally translated as “authority,” ceased to be associated with persons of authority and began to denote authoritative texts (Ziolkowski 246). For a text to have authority, it had to be attributed to Biblical or ancient sources. If such “authorities” were unavailable for attribution, then the next closest thing was often picked; say, an attribution of a writing to a renowned writer of the day.

An example of how these peculiar authorial practices played out can be found in the history of a book written by one of Eleanor’s close friends, Walter Map. Map was a diplomatic agent (in both senses of the term discussed herein) for Henry II and Eleanor. He wrote a book largely comprised of contemporary legends and fables which was intended to amuse a courtly audience in the late twelfth century. Many of Map’s contemporaries doubted that Map could have written it, and in subsequent centuries, Map’s work was attributed to the first-century Roman historian, Valerius Maximus (Minnis 12). The book, *De Nugis Curialium*, contains, for example, the first-ever account of English vampire legends, and many other fairy legends that have no possibility of having been written in antiquity. Even the contemporary reception of the book as not being Map’s own work caused Map to reflect on his authorship, and state that “‘My only fault is that I am alive. I have no intention, however, of correcting this fault by my death’”
Map himself speculated that after his death, his authorship would be attributed to someone else; he was correct. But as Minnis points out, Map did nothing to correct the mistake. Rather than a proprietary theft or an insult to Map, he appeared to be mildly amused by the attribution, which suggests that the misattribution of authorship was hardly a bad thing. Rather, it was a token of esteem and value for the writing itself, a mark that the writing possessed cultural value or auctoritas. Minnis explains,

The thinking we are investigating seems to be circular: the work of an auctor is a book worth reading; a book worth reading had to be the work of an auctor. No modern writer could decently be called an auctor (12)

Thus, Peter of Blois’ claim of authorship of Eleanor’s letters is hardly an act of malice or plagiarism. Consider this brief discussion of Peter of Blois’ relationship to the Angevin court by R.W. Southern:

At this time [after 1182] the writer’s position in the ecclesiastical hierarchy as an archdeacon was not very high, but his standing among men at the center of Angevin affairs, including the king himself, was brilliant. . . . he had written two works of edification for the king, and he was engaged on the composition of a serious panegyric on Henry II’s reign. Moreover, he was well known at the papal court. He had been present at the Lateran Council of 1179, and had written in the pope’s name (106)

The attribution of Eleanor’s rhetorical artifacts to him speaks more to their value, generally, as specimens of argumentation, objects of cultural relevance, or exemplars of rhetorical prowess. Summit has made clear that in the Middle Ages, auctoritas could not be called a system of attribution or intellectual property, but rather it was a system which governed “human acts . . .
that govern [textual] reproduction and circulation at every stage of their history” (93). Summit points out that generally, a woman couldn’t be an *auctor*, and to possess *auctoritas*, a writing had to be “attributed” to a man, and preferably a dead person or, barring that, a churchman of literary repute (namely Peter of Blois in the instant case). To understand authorship as a practice within an activity system at this time, Summit has aptly stated “While scholastic definitions of the *auctor* generally excluded women both ideologically and institutionally, medieval authorship, understood as a range of acts and cultural practices, extended more widely across social and gender boundaries than has previously been appreciated” (93). Eleanor’s letters are good examples of this system.

Authorship as a practice and a system throughout the medieval period was a concern with the quality of a written work that could be manipulated to “support particular claims about works’ social status,” and throughout the Middle Ages, works by female authors (in the modern sense) were routinely attributed to male authors, as was the case historically with Christine De Pisan and Marie de France (91). The attribution of Eleanor’s letters to Peter was, at a minimum, something that occasionally occurred, but did not necessarily mean Peter was the “author” of the letters in a contemporary sense. Historians have somehow inferred that the attribution of the Letters to Blois somehow means that Eleanor was not a willful agent in their composition, for this and numerous other previously iterated reasons. But her agency is a tangential question; rather, her participation in literate, complex rhetorical activity systems, and the relevance of *auctoritas* to such systems, is the central factor to consider in this inquiry relating to textual practices and artifacts.

Jennifer Summit has written extensively on authorial practices, artifacts, and women in the Late Middle Ages. Many of her conclusions (though not all) can be extended to practices in
the High Middle Ages, of which the twelfth century was representative. Summit has explored the implications of Minnis’ theory of authorship and its specific implications to women in the Middle Ages. The concept of authorship, as outlined by Minnis, still help to complicate (or occlude) historical understanding of Eleanor as a deliberative rhetorical actor. The status of the auctor was typically associated with Biblical or ancient authority, and signified “an ancient or approved theologian or classical writer who commanded deference and obedience” and as a result, “no living writer could hope to attain equivalent status or authority” (92). This affected the actual practice of writing as a social phenomenon, because “the contrast between [the two] . . . is visible in the relation each bears to the actual, material practices of writing” (92). Thus, for living writers such as Eleanor and her proxy Peter of Blois, “the act of writing was bound up in the wider social and historical networks of patronage, scribal reproduction and circulation . . . By the same token, no medieval writer could unilaterally declare him- or herself to be an auctor without the support of the multiple agents and acts of textual transmission through which writing gained cultural authority” (92-93).

Therefore, Eleanor’s part in the textual production of her letters could hardly be complete without invoking the authority of Peter of Blois; and conversely, Peter invokes Eleanor to lend auctoritas to his part in the process of textual transmission, reproduction and distribution; for her letters to have auctoritas, both parties were systemically indispensible. Summit further explains and confirms this conclusion, when she states that the definition of the auctor excluded women, but no less, we understand medieval authorship as a range of acts and cultural practices that extended across socially limiting boundaries to a greater extent than previous scholarship has articulated (93). The relation of Peter to Eleanor in his undefined capacity as her “writer” supports Summit’s argument that such scribal figures reveals that “literary authority was
produced less by individuals than by collaborative relationships”, and often the role of the scribe served by “not decreasing but augmenting” the authorial status of Eleanor of Aquitaine (98). Further, I argue that even for what might be termed “non-literary” textual production, noble women had their own sub-set of rules for implementing deliberative rhetorical practices, which often required the conjunction, in name or action, of respected scribes to Latinize their writings. These compositional practices had to occur in magpie fashion, as was appropriate within the subset of rules governing procedural diplomatic production associated with a chancery institution, and a diplomatist had to accurately reflect the intent of his patroness. And as Chapter Four demonstrates, those practices utilized topos derived directly from classical deliberative rhetorical precepts, and shared many of the characteristics of the deliberative genre as it was understood in classical antiquity.

Diplomatic Practices

Finally, another critical set of practices are diplomatic ones; when I use this term, I implicate both diplomacy and the art of diplomatics as previously discussed. It is useful to examine sets of diplomatic communications as a practice through the lens of Constantinou’s definition of diplomacy. Below is a chart illustrating, in order of the date sent, each of the communiqués between the actors at work in the diplomatic activity system attending Richard’s captivity (of which we have surviving historical records). The first column of the table has the name of the sender. The next column reflects the audience, or recipient, and the third column lists the date of transmission, if known. For each letter, there is a separate column illustrating the nature of the form of mediation for each – usually, either personal or in writing, and whether a representative, either legate or nuncio is known to have delivered the communiqué. Fourth, there is a column reflecting agency, or who each communiqué was written on behalf of. Finally, there
is a column to show the *rhetorical intent* of the sender, a critical factor which Constantinou’s theory calls “communication.” From this table, we can generalize at least some easily identifiable features of diplomatic practice and deliberative processes before 1300.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sender/ Speaker</th>
<th>Recipient/ Audience</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Mediation</th>
<th>Representative</th>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Rhetorical Intent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eleanor of Aquitaine</td>
<td>Celestine III</td>
<td>Jan. 1190</td>
<td>vocal</td>
<td>In person</td>
<td>Geoffrey</td>
<td>Appointment to church hierarchy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard I</td>
<td>Sala’hadin</td>
<td>April 1190</td>
<td>writing</td>
<td>Humphrey of Turon</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Cessation of War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philip Augustus</td>
<td>Celestine III</td>
<td>1191</td>
<td>vocal</td>
<td>In person</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>Commencement of War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celestine III</td>
<td>Philip Augustus</td>
<td>1191</td>
<td>writing</td>
<td>legate</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Maintenance of Peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleanor</td>
<td>Richard I</td>
<td>1192</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>John of Alencon</td>
<td>Richard I</td>
<td>Cessation of Hostilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleanor; Walter; Great Council</td>
<td>Richard I and Henry VI</td>
<td>Feb. 1193</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>“Two Cistercians”</td>
<td>Richard I</td>
<td>Intelligence acquisition, negotiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry VI</td>
<td>Philip Augustus</td>
<td>Dec. 1 1192</td>
<td>writing</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Capture/Ransom of Richard I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleanor of Aquitaine</td>
<td>Henry VI, Celestine</td>
<td>1193</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>Walter of Coutances</td>
<td>Richard I</td>
<td>Release Of Hostages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard I</td>
<td>Eleanor of Aquitaine</td>
<td>1193</td>
<td>writing</td>
<td>Walter of Coutances</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Requesting Ransom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleanor of Aquitaine</td>
<td>Celestine III</td>
<td>1193</td>
<td>writing</td>
<td>Peter of Blois</td>
<td>Richard I</td>
<td>Requesting Excommunication of Henry VI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleanor of Aquitaine</td>
<td>John of Mortain</td>
<td>1193</td>
<td>writing</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>Richard I</td>
<td>Terminating Rebellion in England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleanor of Aquitaine</td>
<td>Richard I</td>
<td>1194</td>
<td>verbal</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>Richard I</td>
<td>Concessions to Henry VI</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Fig. 3.1 Known Diplomatic Communiques Surrounding the Crisis of 1193.*

The events listed in Fig. 3.1 are a conservative accounting of what most historians are confident happened, littered as the historical record is with many fabulous tales and subsequent distortions. These events are principally drawn from Flori’s *Eleanor of Aquitaine (EA)* and the separate history on the life of *Richard the Lionheart (RL)*. An overview of the historical
record is needed before turning to the deliberative practice the letters represent. Richard began the Third Crusade, in the company of Philip Augustus of France in December 1191. Richard was joined by Eleanor as far as southern Italy, where she turned back to resume acting as regent, first meeting with Celestine III to request that he elevate her relation, Geoffrey, to higher office in the church (EA 154). By April 1192 Richard was in Cyprus, and then arrived in Muslim held territories, where he exchanged letters, carried by envoys, in an attempt to reach a truce with Sala’hadin, who had recently retaken Jerusalem (RL 142). Philip Augustus, meanwhile, abandoned the crusade and petitioned Pope Celestine III for the right to make war on Richard in his absence. Celestine, by letter, refused such a concession, sternly rebuking the king of France. Philip, assisted by Richard’s brother, John of Mortain, was undeterred, and began burning, looting, and waging generalized warfare on Richard’s continental possessions (EA 158). Richard received word of this from Eleanor through John of Alencon, according to contemporary chroniclers, but these communiqués do not survive (EA 161).

Having concluded his hostilities in Muslim lands, Richard attempted to return to England; but because Western Europe was by and large hostile to him due to a system of tentative alliance between France and the Holy Roman Empire, Richard landed in what is now Croatia in an attempt to reach allies sympathetic to Anglo-Norman interests (RL 158). Henry tried to travel across hostile territories incognito, but was an utter failure at this, attempting to pose as a merchant but neglecting to remove his opulent jewelry and being noticed refusing to eat anything but roasted chicken (a habit he was well known for).

Richard was recognized fairly quickly. In the midst of these attempts, he fell into the hands of Duke Leopold of Austria, who took him prisoner and delivered him to Henry VI. Leopold sent letters to Henry and Philip, who in turn sent letters to one another, each vying for
custody of the king of England (RL 163). In reaction to this, Celestine III excommunicated Leopold, but by then Richard was in custody of Henry VI. Hubert Walter, presumably at the direction of Eleanor, then held a massive assembly of nobles and churchmen described as a “great council”, who in turn dispatched two emissaries to Richard and Henry VI identified only as “two Cistercians” as agents to gather intelligence on Richard’s straits and open a dialogue with Henry (Gillingham 236). Eleanor, meanwhile, sent an envoy to both Henry and Celestine in the person of Walter of Coutances, while Richard wrote to Eleanor from the site of his confinement in order to raise a huge ransom to secure his release (RL 164-166).

Negotiations continued for custody of Richard between Henry VI and the King of France. After this, Eleanor directed the composition of the letters that are the central inquiry of this work. By 1194, Eleanor had personally arranged for Richard’s release, persuading him to make certain concessions to the Emperor in order to resolve the conflict between them (RL 171). Eleanor, meanwhile, put down the revolt of her son John against Richard, again by means of writing, although same does not survive (EA 164). I describe these as a conservative recounting of major events, because they are drawn from Flori’s analysis of the most reliable contemporary sources to the figures involved and the existing primary documents. Table 3.1 follows relating to the rhetoric that attended these events.

Consider the context of the practices illustrated in Figure 3.1. First, for the most significant diplomatic, informative, or persuasive acts, Eleanor was represented either by an envoy or in writing. Of the major diplomatic or persuasive activities between the major players, the existence of a writings predominate as the mediating artifacts. Most of the writings were in turn mediated by agents, usually church officials, or diplomatists. Further, this table shows that nearly all of Eleanor’s major acts of persuasion were undertaken in a representative capacity on
someone else’s behalf. Finally, nearly all of Eleanor’s rhetorical motives regard prospective
decision-making affecting large groups of people under her control, and the subjects are almost
all traditionally related to the deliberative rhetorical genre. Taken as a whole, the table tells us
that deliberative matters at the highest level were principally mediated by writing; that those
artifacts were central to diplomatic practice and regarded traditionally deliberative matters; that
women participated in these matters in writing in the twelfth century, and that Eleanor of
Aquitaine was one of these women.

If one concedes that there was a deliberative rhetorical tradition in the twelfth century,
and that the letters were the vehicles for deliberative persuasion, it becomes difficult not to
acknowledge that Eleanor was a notable figure in the history of writing and rhetoric. This
depiction of the deliberative context, with senders, recipients, dates, and forms of mediation,
representation, and rhetorical aims, visually illustrates the complex systems in which deliberative
rhetoric was embedded. An analysis of these media, too, illustrate the relevant practices near the
center of this inquiry. Having illustrated the persons, artifacts, communities, and practices at
play in the rhetorical context Eleanor operated in, this discussion turns to the precise rhetorical
tradition from antiquity that Eleanor practiced, constituting the last critical elements in this
activity system, namely ideas. The central role of the idea of rhetoric to Eleanor’s deliberative
activity in the twelfth century is central to an understanding of deliberative rhetoric in the Middle
Ages generally, women’s roles in the rhetorical tradition, and the relationship of rhetoric to
diplomatic practice before 1300.
CHAPTER IV. CONSILIUM: A RHETORICAL PRACTICE IN THE MIDDLE AGES TO TREAT DELIBERATIVE UNCERTAINTY

The foregoing chapter set out an analysis of the context in which Eleanor’s letters were written. This chapter places her letters in the context of medieval writings on deliberative processes and practices attendant to Eleanor’s time. These writings might best be described as theory of consilium as an identical or corollary rhetorical process to deliberation as it was inherited from antiquity. The theory of deliberation will first be explored, tracing its development from antiquity to the twelfth and mid-thirteenth century. This discussion will show that contrary to traditional historical assumptions, deliberative rhetoric, in both theory and practice, was alive and well in the Middle Ages under the guise of the ancillary or synonymous term consilium. Deliberation and its rhetorical practices were situated in the concept of consilium (counsel), which was theorized by many thinkers who wrote on rhetoric in the Middle Ages. Consilium and deliberation have demonstrable connections in both medieval and classical rhetoric, and are often used interchangeably. Although its conception derives from classical antiquity, in the Middle Ages its practice was adapted to medieval systems of governance. Consilium was a rhetorical activity, a legal duty, and a social obligation in Eleanor’s time, with direct connections to civil matters and deliberative contexts. Its connection and relation to deliberative rhetoric will be discussed at length in this chapter illustrated with examples. At this point, consilium can be provisionally defined as possessing several characteristics, many of which are identical with ancient theories of deliberative rhetoric.

Consilium as a rhetorical practice can first be described as systemic, meaning that it operates in a sequence of activities relating to persuasion and dissuasion that pervaded political and religious institutions. Consilium was characterized also by its largely non-adversarial nature and was intended to deal with human deliberative uncertainty about future courses of action. It
was theorized as having a largely ethical framework for its operation, which was often related to the topics and mental “places” (*loci*) of practical decision-making, which derive from Roman rhetoric and its medieval inheritors. *Consilium* was generally theorized to be a communicative procedure requiring no less than two living participants and was often theorized as transcending class, rank, and gender lines. As a species of medieval deliberative communication, *consilium* was also characterized as not necessarily tethered to assemblies or elective processes, and could be public or private. Further, it could be mediated by writing, and in at least one theoretical example, it is possible to seek and receive *consilium* from a text. *Consilium* is thus closely related to deliberative traditions of rhetorical practice and their attendant institutions; it also serves as an illustration of how women participated in civic life through literate practice in the Middle Ages, particularly Eleanor of Aquitaine.

I will proceed to demonstrate that many medieval theorists have discussed *consilium* as a process possessing its own attendant rhetorical practices. These theorists discussed the nature of deliberative processes, decision-making, and the rhetorical appeals appropriate to those processes. It can be shown that many of these appeals directly evolved from Roman antiquity and the common *topoi* of the deliberative genre. In this chapter, a tentative definition of deliberative rhetoric as it was understood in the High Middle Ages will be set forth, and a discussion of the appeals generally associated with deliberative rhetoric as *consilium* will be discussed. Finally, Eleanor of Aquitaine’s letters themselves will be analyzed to demonstrate their positioned within the deliberative genre, as defined.

Deliberative rhetoric has been generally described as having its highest expression and utility in ancient Greece, and thus, Aristotle’s definition of deliberative discourse is the origin of contemporary conceptions of the genre. However, in the millennia intervening between Aristotle
and the present, there was distinct thinking and theory about the nature of the deliberative genre. Most contemporary scholarship, as James Jasinski has noted in his encyclopedic entry on deliberative discourse, has focused on the theory of deliberative processes themselves, often having the effect of limiting the idea of deliberation to democratic or republican assemblies. Yet contemporary scholarship has a tendency to equate democratic or republican processes as the only legitimate venue for deliberative rhetorical activity, and doing so limits the definition and uses of deliberative rhetoric to only those contexts. This type of analysis tends to entangle the rhetorical genre of political speech with political systems that did not exist in the Middle Ages. If, however, as Chapter Two contends, deliberative processes are situated in the systemic political processes of a given time, one must play close attention to the political thinking of Eleanor’s day to understand how her rhetoric falls within the rhetorical tradition generally, and the deliberative genre as it was understood and practiced in her time.

   It can be shown that a large number of political and rhetorical thinkers theorized deliberation, and its associated rhetorical practices, as both a social activity and a related intellectual activity in the Middle Ages. Among the thinkers who address the nature of deliberation and deliberative speaking and decision making, all near-contemporaries with Eleanor, are Thierry of Chartres, Bernard of Clairvaux, John of Salisbury, Geoffrey of Vinsauf, Albertanus of Brescia, Vincent of Beauvais, and Brunetto Latini, all of whom derive much of their thinking from Ciceronian intellectual heritage. Finally and just as significantly, Thomas of Chobham’s Manual For Confessors evidences women’s rhetorical roles in the late twelfth century, and stands as evidence for their position in the rhetorical tradition of consilium; it also partially describes the confessor’s role as one in consilium. Redefined in the terms medieval thinkers used to discuss deliberation, it becomes clear that Eleanor of Aquitaine’s rhetoric
operated squarely within the deliberative genre as it was reframed as *consilium*.

Although conventional histories of rhetoric have characterized deliberative rhetoric as simply in decline in the Middle Ages, there has been significant scholarly advancement in the history of that tradition in recent years that suggests otherwise. James J. Murphy initially connected the deliberative rhetorical tradition to the art of preaching (294). Since Murphy’s groundbreaking study, John R.E. Bliese has written a brief survey of deliberative processes in the Middle Ages which would warrant further inquiry into deliberation. Bliese collected hundreds of examples of battle orations, as well as examples of other councils and assemblies where there was “oratory” with numerous hallmarks of traditional deliberative rhetoric. Bliese notes, “Feudal government was simply not ‘absolutist’, and inherent within the feudal system was a very important role for persuasive speeches on issues of policy” (274). Bliese has given numerous examples of historical contexts for such counsels, and one, the rebellion of 1173-4 in England, arose in part due to the rhetorical activities of Eleanor of Aquitaine (279). Another advance in the topic of medieval civic speaking was Cary J. Nederman’s 1992 article that effectively dispelled the notion that medieval rhetoric undervalued the union of eloquence and civic involvement, showing that the idea was not a product of the renaissance. Nederman showed that “In the Ciceronian ideal of oration . . . medieval authors found a model for their conception of community and a framework for the determination of the responsibilities of rulers and citizens” (75). By surveying a range of twelfth and thirteenth century thought, Nederman has proven that “the figure of the orator, conceived as the especially wise and eloquent man, constituted a necessary ingredient in the foundation and perpetuation of human social relations” in this period (77). Nederman tells us what the role of the ideal civic orator was in relation to socio-political medieval thought, but does not investigate the nature and practice of civic rhetoric itself. Finally,
the culture of royal *consilium* under the Angevin monarchy in the twelfth century has most recently been discussed by Jose Manuel Cerda. Cerda has concluded that “In the second half of the twelfth century, councils and courts acquired an unprecedented political and institutional importance, primarily by ceasing to be occasional meetings of nobles to become the ordinary channel and the most efficient means of resolving matters of general concern and generating royal policies of territorial application” (11). The office of the civic orator and the deliberative tradition can be found in the idea of *consilium*, and it is in the tradition of *consilium* that we find medieval women in as active participants in rhetoric.

Although women’s rhetorical transactions that were purely oral in the *consilial* genre are occasionally documented in chronicles, the best evidence for the way that they practiced *consilium* can be found in their letters. Eleanor’s actions in certain chronicles illustrate her civic and persuasive action, for example, they document that she incited the rebellion of 1174, and negotiated personally for the release of Richard I, acting persuasively toward both her son the King and the Emperor (see generally, Flori). But generally, chronicles are, at best, a record of a given persuasive transaction described in a largely perfunctory way without regard for the details of what was actually written or spoken by women. However, women’s participation in letter writing during the Middle Ages was often within the deliberative rhetorical tradition by virtue of the subjects, appeals, and arguments they utilized, and the abundance of extant letters provide ample material for close analysis. In addition, a significant number of writers investigated deliberation as both a rhetorical activity and a related intellectual activity in the Middle Ages.

**Deliberation and Deliberative Rhetoric to Late Antiquity**

In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle defines deliberative rhetoric as when a “political orator offers counsel” who “does not deal with all things, but only with such as may or may not take place . . .
matters, namely, that ultimately depend on ourselves and which we have it in our power to set going” (1359a31 – 1359a39). Aristotle argued that deliberative rhetoric concerned itself with the inquiry of whether a course of action might be useful or harmful. Aristotle’s “five topics” of deliberative discourse include ways and means, peace and war, national defense, import and export, and legislation. Consider, however, that *symbouletik* (deliberative) theory as constructed by Aristotle described activities within a political system that has rarely existed, and almost never been successfully reproduced. No less, his “five topics” were certainly common topics in the republican assemblies of the Roman Empire, whose processes were largely aristocratic. Moreover, in republican forms of government then, as today, persuasion was conducted as much *in sermo* (conversation, generally in private) as on the public floor of the Senate. Take, for example, the politicking that took place before Cicero’s exile. When the Senate attempted to retroactively impose a law to exile Cicero, he attempted to assemble a bloc of political support to oppose it (without success). These maneuvers certainly did not involve speeches on the floor of the Senate, but *in sermo*, much as political “deals” are cut today.

Aristotle’s definition of this crucial kind of rhetoric to deliberative processes, as behind the scenes of the Roman Senate, or peace brokering in the Middle Ages by application to the Vatican, does not “fit” the broad range of persuasive, linguistic activities nested within other political activity systems. Deliberative processes are dependent on the systems they are embedded in, and in the Middle Ages monarchies had to deliberate with one another in order to resolve conflicts or engage in concerted action. This begs the question: just how many people constitute an assembly? If the answer is more than one, and persuasion and its attendant *topoi* are possible in private (in *sermo or privatis*) as well as public, deliberative rhetoric was very much alive in the medieval civic arena, and manifested itself in the person of noblewomen.
In the Middle Ages, political rhetoric and its attendant processes derived little or no influence from Aristotle except through Roman rhetoric. Rather, the influences from antiquity on political speaking, came from the De Inventione and the Rhetorica ad Herennium. Cicero defines deliberative rhetoric at the outset of De Inventione as “that which, having its place in discussion and in political debate, comprises a deliberate statement of one's opinion” (L). He seems to attribute this definition to Aristotle, but explains that the division derives additionally from Hermagoras. The type of inquiry suitable to “deliberations. . . is, what is honourable and at the same time expedient” (2.50.4) Deliberative speech is distinct from judicial, because it generally does not concern the actions of persons (2.50.37). Distinguishing his position from Aristotle, who thinks that the proper object of deliberation is expediency, Cicero instead restates the proper consideration “is e pediency and honesty combined” (2.51.156). Thus Cicero has already set the stage to illustrate a debate in rhetoric over the role of ethics in politics, a debate in which the political, rhetorical, and ethical thinkers of the twelfth century took part, as we shall see. Cicero discusses separately those things proper for deliberative engagement as either the useful or the honorable in Book II. What is honorable he places under the umbrella term “virtue,” which he explains,” is a habit of the mind, consistent with nature, and moderation, and reason” (2.7.159). Virtue has four divisions, which include –“prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance” (2.7.159).

Just as in ancient Athens or Rome, elite assemblies were the norm in the Middle Ages; from the time of Charlemagne forward, such assemblies of nobles, chieftans, elite clerics, and so forth met continually to make decisions. It is often difficult for modern readers to fully integrate that the medieval conception of politics did not distinguish between the public and private or the secular and sacred. Nor did they make the distinction between discussions conducted in sermo,
as say, between two monarchs, as private or public. Thus, medieval politics often concerned topics such as excommunication or dynastic succession as much as peace, war, trade, or other Aristotelian topics. Where medieval theorists also radically diverged from antiquity were in the proper loci of argument for symbouleutik argument, and by extension decision-making. In the twelfth century, two thinkers who represented the written evidence of this distinction were Bernard of Clairvaux and John of Salisbury, both firmly associated with the rhetorical tradition, and both associates of Eleanor of Aquitaine. The nature of this divergence is fairly simple: medieval rhetorical thinkers believed the proper loci of deliberative argument to be in the honourable, and not the useful or advantageous, probably owing to their essentially Christian axiology.

The Rhetorica ad Herennium defines the nature of deliberative rhetoric as addressing matters “in consultatione”, translated sometimes as “concerning policy”, and can relate to persuasion or dissuasion (1.2.2). However, I will show that consultatione in twelfth century political-ethical thinking was used for both matters secular and sacred, particularly in the Polycraticus of John of Salisbury. John, however, uses the word consilium for advisory matters in assembly, which is closely linked to both consultatione and deliberatione. Concilium derives from the root ‘to call’. The Ad Herennium further defines deliberative speech as concerning two or more courses of future action, which can include whether to deliberate on a matter in the first place (3.2.2). It is of note that the author of the Ad Herennium, in this section, uses deliberation and consultation almost interchangeably. Like Cicero, the Ad Herennium defines the proper topics of deliberative speech – in contrast to Aristotle – as advantage (utilitas) and honourable (honestas).

A marked change in the conception of deliberative thinking can be found in Quintilian,
although it should be noted his statements regarding deliberative rhetoric likely had little
influence on the Middle Ages except in the form of quotations in *florilegium*, which were notably
cited by Albertanus of Brescia. It is worthwhile to discuss some marked distinctions in
Quintilian’s discussion of the deliberative genre because he provides a bridge between late
antiquity and the medieval period in several respects. Quintilian’s discussion begins with the
topics common to deliberative speeches, and handily summarizes that there is a debate in
rhetoric over whether the proper considerations of the genre are the honorable or the expedient
(3.8.1). But departing from previous thinking, Quintilian identifies the type of audience as the
determining factor in this debate. For the first time in the literature relating to deliberative
rhetoric available to us, however, Quintilian begins to use deliberative speaking synonymously
with “advisory” speaking, using the Latin words and their associated inflections *consilium* (3.8.6;
3.8.15; 3.8.30). *Consilium* would become ancillary to, and often synonymous with, deliberative
speaking in the Middle Ages, as will be shown. The other overt and marked departure from
previous classical theories of deliberation in Quintilian is the role or association with public
assemblies and the deliberative genre. Quintilian explains,

> The majority of Greek writers have held that this kind of oratory is entirely
> concerned with addressing public assemblies and have restricted it to politics . . .
> This type of oratory seems to me to offer a more varied field for eloquence, since
> both those who ask for advice and the answers given to them may easily present
> the greatest diversity (3.8.13-16).

Quintilian makes it clear that this diversity can relate to whom counsel is given, which can
include a single other participant, or an enormous assembly. He explains that “our audience may
be of two kinds” and can include “either single individuals or a number” (3.8.35-36). Whether
Quintilian influenced the theory of deliberation in the Middle Ages directly cannot be shown, but certainly what can be shown is that the theory of deliberation in the Middle Ages integrated the concept of *consilium* and the possibility of deliberative speaking outside of the context of assemblies to include private speech.

**Deliberation and Deliberative Rhetoric to the Long Twelfth Century**

Ancient definitions and theories of deliberation were amplified and complicated by the philosophical, ethical, and commentary traditions of the Middle Ages. But before examining medieval definitions of deliberation, it would be useful to synthesize and restate a working definition of deliberative speaking as medieval thinkers inherited it. After late antiquity, deliberation and deliberative rhetoric necessarily involved either public or private discussion, which must necessarily involve more than one person. Second, at the center of such discussion must be civic matters or civic questions, though it must necessarily embrace what any given historical period considered within the purview of the civic. Third, deliberation was intimately bound up with futurity and concerned no less than two future courses of action. Fourth, it typically concerns either the honorable, useful or necessary as its common topics, although the tendency in the Middle Ages focused on the honorable, rarely the expedient. Fifth, deliberative rhetoric was regarded as either a public or a private practice, and in the Middle Ages, could take place in counsel (*consilium*) with another person or a text, which marks another departure from traditional Aristotelian notions of deliberative rhetoric inherited from Roman antiquity. But the most intriguing departure was the idea that deliberation could be textual, and ultimately, wholly internal – an engagement of a single mind with a text - which is overtly demonstrated in Thierry of Chartre’s commentary on *De Inventione*. An inquiry into this addition to the tradition is beyond the scope of this work, however. Sixth, deliberative rhetoric in its guise as *consilium* is
also systemic, meaning that it is a sequence of activities relating to persuasion and dissuasion that pervades political and religious institutions. Thus, it was characterized also by its largely non-adversarial nature and was intended to deal with human deliberative uncertainty about future courses of action. Seventh, deliberative rhetoric was theorized as having a largely ethical framework for its operation, which was often related to the topics and mental “places” (loki) of practical decision-making derived from Roman rhetoric and the “pagan virtues”. Finally, it was generally theorized as a socio-political duty and a persuasive activity that could transcend class, rank, and gender lines.

One of the earliest articulations of the duty of consilium can be found in a letter from Fulbert of Chartres dating from 1033, who helped institute the study of rhetoric (along with other subjects) at Chartres cathedral in the tenth century, attracting many of the great scholars of Europe. Fulbert directed to William V, Duke of Aquitaine, in response to an inquiry of the mutual duties of lord and vassal (13). The language used regarding the duties of a vassal in this letter are generally agreed to derive from De Inventione and the Rhetorica Ad Herrenium, although some have identified Fulbert’s language as deriving from the Etymologiae of Isidore; in either case, his description underscores the fundamentally rhetorical component of political relations in the Middle Ages which in Fulbert’s content was related to persuasion (suasoria) (Behrends, 1963, 96). In the letter, Fulbert enumerates the considerations that a vassal should give to his lord, in terms of the particulars of the oath of fealty, explaining

I have briefly set down for you the following for you based on what I have read.

He who swears fidelity to his lord ought always have these six things in his memory; what is harmless, safe, honorable, useful, easy, practicable. . . . in the
same six things mentioned above he should faithfully counsel and aid his lord

(Fulbert of Chartres 1976, 91-93)

The use of the word *consilium* in oaths of vassalage began to become common in the ninth century, and spread to near-omnipresence in oath-giving by the time of the twelfth (Reynolds, 1996, 101, 157). Thomas Bisson describes Fulbert’s formulation of counsel as becoming an “idiomatic commonplace” by the time of the twelfth century (1966, 1204). Bisson has noted the importance of *consilium* in the context of medieval vassalage and connected it to “theology, psychology, and law” and explained that it “had come to be understood almost instinctively as the way to wisdom for fallible men” (Bisson 1966, 1203). Bisson identified *consilium* as a “complicated term” which connoted a “moral imperative, legal obligation,” and eventually evolved into a “right” (Bisson 1966, 1203). But until now, limited connections between *consilium* and rhetoric, particularly as a part of the deliberative tradition with its roots in antiquity, have been discussed. At best, Bisson has argued that courtly council was obscured by ritual and spectacle in medieval governance, and applied the term “rhetoric” in what is arguably a pejorative sense (Bisson 1982, 181). More recent scholarship on the nature of medieval feudal politics has, however, underscored the reciprocally dependent relationship of lords and vassals for collective decision making, a relationship which in itself implies the centrality of communication and persuasion in medieval governance; the norms of feudal government are increasingly being viewed by scholars as weighing normative expectations that value not merely hierarchy and obedience on one hand, but mutuality of obligation and collective judgment on the other (Reynolds 35). This article argues not that *consilium* was a social institution with intellectual ramifications, because that has been long established, but that it was a rhetorical practice undergirded by rhetorical theory which is illustrated below in various times and places.
Throughout the Western Middle Ages.

*Thierry of Chartres on Deliberation*

To introduce twelfth century thinking about deliberation both chronologically and theoretically, I have examined the commentary tradition as a direct way of understanding how medieval rhetorical scholars read and interpreted rhetorical treatises from antiquity. Many twelfth century rhetorical commentaries remark on deliberative rhetoric, and some of their interpretations significantly depart from their ancient predecessors. In the Middle Ages, one sees monarchies with a need to deliberate with one another and their own vassals in order to resolve conflicts or engage in concerted action. Christine Mason Sutherland has advocated an examination of women’s rhetoric in the sphere of what we contemporarily think of as the private (15). Applying the medieval definition of deliberative rhetoric to the evidence of letters, provides a means to understanding how persuasive action operated in medieval political processes.

Perhaps the most influential commentator on Ciceronian rhetoric in the twelfth century was Thierry of Chartres. By the twelfth century, the commentary tradition had woven additional complexities into the theory of deliberation. Thierry expands on and emphasizes the role of private consultation to political discussion when he interprets ancient rhetoric. For example, Thierry expands on the passage of *De Inventione* which reads “the deliberative is that which, having its place in discussion and in political debate…” (1.5.7) by interpreting it to mean,

Some have texts central to such deliberations, but [deliberation] can also exist if one takes counsel from another . . . [Cicero] calls it the civil, because all deliberation is out of either the private or public, but in which the civic is evident.

*Quidam libri habent positum in consultatione, sed hoc posset esse etiam si unus ab alio consilium acciperet . . . Civilem vero dixit, quoniam omnis deliberatio aut
de publicis est aut de privatis, ex quibus civitas constat) (1.5.7; Fredborg 73).

Thierry further amplifies this interpretation in his commentary on the Ad Herennium that when the author says “Deliberation is in consultation,” he means that “when I am in consultation, that is, when I am giving counsel, we are deliberating” (1.2.2; Fredborg 224). In both cases, when Thierry describes the place of deliberative speech, he notes that private political consilium (counsel) can be the place of the deliberative regardless of the locale or system. Alanus, in his commentary on the Ad Herennium, similarly underscores that the unity of rhetoric is distinct from a locale or even the genres themselves, when he writes “it is one and the same whether we speak of forensic rhetoric, which is concluded in the forum, or assembly [rhetoric, concionatrix] which is concluded in an assembly [in contione] before the people, or counsel [rhetoric, consiliatrix] which is concluded in the senate by counselors” (424).

As theorized in the Middle Ages, deliberation could be public or private, and regarded political or civic matters. Another important concept that Thierry articulates is the use of the concept of counsel and deliberation almost interchangeably, and other twelfth century thinkers do the same. Moreover, both Thierry and Quintilian theorize that deliberation is not tied either to assemblies as an audience of many, or assemblies as purely democratic or republican assemblies. When Thierry explains what the author of the Ad Herennium means by the phrase “aut consilium”, he explains, “that is, deliberation” (3.2.4; Fredborg 279). He also makes clear that in the twelfth century, the sphere of deliberation was non-combative because it existed in counsel (“non in pugnationibus vel agitur”) and concerned – perhaps because it is concerned with- that which is wholly useful for all in civic life (3.2.3; Fredborg 279). Thierry further elucidates the difference of deliberative rhetoric to the thinking of his time, because he explains that all deliberation concerns what is in the future, similar to ancient definitions of deliberation (1.8.11).
What is most distinct about Thierry’s concept on deliberation in his time is that it could derive from textual authority or from the verbal counsel of others; though this may seem like a radical departure from traditional conceptions of deliberative rhetoric as formalized oratory, it is perfectly consistent with notions of auctoritas in his time. Likewise, his conception argues forcefully that the idea of hortatory rhetoric changed as technology associated with the written word changed, and the means of delivery of deliberative counsel changed to include the letter.

Thierry is not without justification in his association, if not substitution, of the noun consilium for deliberation, and is certainly not alone. Consilium is most commonly defined in Latin le ions as “deliberation”, “counsel”, but can also mean a “deliberative body or counsel”; less commonly, it can mean a “plan”, “deliberate action”, “diplomacy”, or a capacity for judgment (415-416). In the Middle Ages, consilium was not merely an activity or a process, but a legal duty incumbent on noble people of both genders associated with their oaths of fealty. Cary J. Nederman has aptly described the nature of consilium in terms of medieval political culture as “the requirement that a political superior . . . seek auxilium et consilium (“aid and counsel”) . . . when undertaking any enterprise that requires their cooperation” (Nederman 2009 105). But just as there was a requirement to seek consilium as a social and legal duty, there was a corresponding rhetorical duty and role to give it – in other words, it is not merely a noun, but a verb. As a duty and a social responsibility, it transcended both class and gender, as we shall see. Letters both to, and from, Eleanor use consilium to describe her duty and relationship to the kingdom. Latin authors in antiquity also used consilium interchangeably with, or act as corollary to, deliberatione. Unnamed commentaries published as late as 1521 interpreted Cicero’s De Inventione as stating that “counsel has been thought of as reasons for doing or not doing something” (consilium est aliquid faciendi aut non faciendi excogitata ratio) (Halm, ed., 594,
17). Victorinus described *consilium* as a kind of system deriving from and relating to reasonable thought when there is doubtful uncertainty with opposing arguments (*Sed quia, cum de re alique dubitamus, incerta quaedam ratio in ancipti cogitatione versatur, erit excogitata ratio, et ideo excogitato, quia fuerat iam ante cogitata ratio, quod consilium est.*) (1.25.9-12). The act of counsel was, moreover, clearly a socially constructed role for noble women in this time; Eleanor of Aquitaine describes *consilium* as her role in relation to her kingdom while the king is imprisoned, and Richard the Lionhearted thanks her for the *consilium* provided to his kingdom during his imprisonment. The idea of *consilium* as a legal, moral, and social role that pervades many works of significant influence from the years 1130 to 1250 C.E., and the relationship of women to *consilium* is often an object of inquiry in those works. The primary thinkers I will discuss in this regard are, in chronological order, Bernard of Claivaux, John of Salisbury, Geoffrey of Vinsauf, Albertanus of Brescia, Vincent of Beauvais, and Brunetto Latini. All of them wrote on the subject of *consilium* in relation to noble conduct and politics, and many used the term *consilium* synonymously for deliberation. All wrote on the topic within fifty years of the 1190s. At least two, Albertanus and Vincent particularly, wrote in relation to noble women, and their educational and social roles in the deliberative process, particularly.

*Bernard of Clairvaux’s and Deliberative Uncertainty*

Bernard of Clairvaux was known as one of the greatest rhetors of the twelfth century, and his orations were so effective that he was asked to preach the Second Crusade. He was even partially blamed thereafter for the disastrous results. William of St. Thierry, writing on Bernard’s life, records that Bernard studied rhetoric at Chatillion, and was considered a prodigy of the language arts (Sommerfeldt 36). His advice was frequently sought by people at every level of twelfth century society. One of those who sought and received his counsel was Eleanor of
Aquitaine, and chronicles attest to the personal relationship she had with Bernard throughout the first half of her life. Many scholars have noted that Bernard wrote little on rhetoric himself, although at least one of his letters counsels a young clergyman on the arts of persuasion. Bernard’s *De Consideratione*, however, is intimately related to rhetoric, and particularly deliberative rhetoric, as attested to by John of Salisbury, who wrote in the *Politicratus* that the treatise was commonly known as, alternately, *Of Consideration and Deliberation*.

Bernard connects consideration to deliberative decision-making and other inherently rhetorical processes, as the prefiguring act of judgment in deliberative or forensic decision making. Bernard describes consideration as a faculty prefiguring action on future decisions, in sum, the rational faculty related to deliberative processes and decisions in the classical definition of the deliberative rhetorical genre. “There must be consideration lest haply affairs which foreseen and premeditated might turn out well, may, if precipitated, be fraught with peril. I have no doubt, if you will recall the incidents, you will find that in law cases, important business of various kinds, or in weighty deliberations, you have yourself frequently had this sorrowful experience” (1.6.26). To Bernard, consideration is an active process at arriving at truth by fixed and persistent interaction with others, as he identifies the locus of consideration to be the deliberative (and forensic) sphere. But it is not wholly internal or based on self-examination; to Bernard consideration is connected to both internal deliberation and a social component based on counsel: “accordingly, diligently examine for yourself, and with the assistance of the men who love you, whatever is to be done” (4.4.109). In the exempla which follows this passage, Bernard becomes one of the earliest exponents of the relationship of counsel to deliberative uncertainty, as well as articulating an explicit connection to the four cardinal virtues
in that process. These loci align his advice with the rhetorical tradition and the respective rhetorical genres associated with them. As one analysis has concluded,

The clue may be offered by the key-term of the treatise, *consideratio*. Before entering the fourfold subject of his work, Bernard gives a short definition of what he thinks consideration to be: 'Consideration can be defined as a strained thinking to investigate the truth or the strain of the spirit which investigates the truth'. For this reason, contemplation differs from consideration in being certitude about things, whereas the latter consists rather in questioning (*inquisitio*) . . . For the first key to wisdom may indeed be defined as an assiduous or frequent interrogation ... By doubting we will thus come to questioning and by questioning we will perceive the truth'(Verbaal 35).

Clearly Bernard is not advocating questioning oneself, but rather an active, questioning role in the advisory assemblies of the papal curial; in sum, a social and rhetorical activity in the face of deliberative uncertainty.

Verbaal has also identified a distinctly Ciceronian influence in Bernard’s *De Consideratione*, in terms of its structure. But in fact, its moral philosophy derives directly from the apparently conflicting nature of the useful, as opposed to the honorable, which forms the central and essentially rhetorical and ethical subject of Bernard’s book. Verbaal has made this general connection, when he writes “Cicero's rhetorical composition, his eloquent style and the practical bias of his philosophical approach (in a medieval sense one would call it a moral philosophy) must have attracted Bernard” (Verbaal 42). Verbaal goes on to speculate that ”it may have been Cicero who taught him that one of the four virgins, with whom the monks have to enter into matrimony, is 'philosophical eloquence’” (42). Bernard’s writing derives as much from
the influence Cicero’s rhetorical works as from Cicero’s discussion of the virtues in *De Officiis*, reflecting Bernard’s near-academic familiarity with ancient rhetoric, and derived partially from Cicero’s discussion of deliberative *topoi* in *De Inventione*.

*John of Saslisbury and Deliberative Systems*

After Thierry of Chartres and Bernard of Clairvaux, sequentially speaking, John of Salisbury was the next twelfth century thinker to underscore the importance of *consilium* in a civic context. There is a direct biographical connection between John, Thierry of Chartres (his teacher) and Bernard of Clairvaux, who was John’s close personal and professional associate. John of Salisbury cites the authority of both of them in his existing corpus. John, a rhetorical theorist and logician, wrote the *Metalogicon* in 1159, the title of which literally means “about the arts of verbal reasoning” (Copeland and Sluiter 484). In addition, he was a political theorist who wrote the *Policraticus*, which is considered one of the foundational documents in the development of deliberative democracy and a theoretical precursor to the Magna Carta.

Though the *Policraticus* itself could not justly be described as a rhetoric, there are connections to *consilium* and the deliberative tradition that illustrate the systemic nature of *consilium* in medieval governance. Additionally, “John … refers to the subject [of the trivial arts of grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic] in his *Policraticus* 7.9 and 12” (Copeland and Sluiter 485). When setting out the ideal political system, John makes an extended anatomical analogy between the commonwealth as a body and its various parts as organs or extensions of that body. John describes the very heart of the commonwealth as comprising those who give *consilium*, and he likens counselors to the senators of the ancient world (5.9). Thus, John directly connects *consilium* to the ancient deliberative tradition and it is theorized as a central institution in medieval political decision-making. John’s principle assertion in book 5, chapter 9 is as to the
age and character of those who give counsel, which demonstrates a continuing intellectual concern with *consilium* and ethical conduct in the twelfth century. The ideal *consilii*, according to John, have to be those who take “no delight in sinning, who hate sin, and rejoice in virtue” (5.9). John opposes government according to the *consilium* of “the untaught whims of the multitude” or exclusively the “proud counsel of magnates” (7.20). One of the central duties John describes one central quality in an ideal monarch is “to act on the counsel of wise men” (5.6). Additionally, John argues that these *consilii* should strictly be old men, falling on one side of the ongoing debate regarding women’s roles as *consilii*. But additionally, the *Policraticus* shows an overt connection in twelfth century thought between courtliness, virtue, and *consilium* as a means of political decision-making and makes overt connections to the deliberative tradition. But regarding *consilium* as a rhetorical practice. John gives no specific advice outside of the ethical precepts he delivers generally to those in governance. Accordingly, one has to look elsewhere – specifically in the *dictaminal* tradition – for this advice, and into medieval letters as they were actually written.

**Deliberation and Futurity: the Summa de Arte Dictandi**

By the late twelfth century, dictaminal theory was beginning to accommodate deliberative rhetoric, and the need for a medium of delivery in deliberative matters, into literate practice. The *Summa de Arte Dictandi*, often attributed to Geoffrey of Vinsauf, addresses the temporal relationship of the narration to futurity and deliberative decision-making. The work is generally believed to have been written near the precise historical moment that Eleanor’s letters were written to Celestine, that is, between 1188 and 1190. Vinsauf explains the temporal nature of the narration in the traditional structure of the letter:

The narration of the *dictator* expresses facts or falsehood about the present, past,
and future. In fact, it is not so much past events that command the course of the letter-writing, but [the writer] should weave his narration around future or present matters … at times deliberating about current matters (*de presentibus deliberet*), at times reverting to past events, at times turning to his concerns about the future (3.1; *trans.* Shepard).

Eleanor of Aquitaine narrates events past, present and future to influence the deliberative decision of Celestine III, and her narrations frequently seem to act on this advice. Laurie Shepard has noted that “Geoffrey’s notions of temporality” are a key feature of this dictaminal rhetoric written just prior to Eleanor’s epistles. Shepard explains that in this theoretical formulation, “The letter-writer expresses facts to influence the outcome of events” (17). This was at least part of *dictaminal* theory related to the deliberative, persuasive genre. Peter of Blois brought *dictaminal* theory to England at roughly the same historical moment that he helped Eleanor write the letters to Celestine, as James J. Murphy explains. Peter, a transplanted Frenchman, is alleged to have written his rhetoric around 1187, six years before the crisis of 1193 (229). Peter’s rhetoric demonstrates, arguably, his acquaintance with both the Bolognese and French strains of the rhetoric of letter writing, and his involvement with Eleanor’s compositions demonstrate that in the process of bringing those arts to her court he also brought the deliberative tradition with him in her service. Whether he was intimately aware the ideas in Vinsauf’s *Summa* is a matter of speculation, but both rhetoricians clearly understood the deliberative function of the genre of the letter.

*Albertanus of Brescia and Consilium*

The next of the major theorists of *consilium* in the Middle Ages, and one of the most influential in subsequent centuries, is Albertanus of Brescia. Albertanus was in mid-thirteenth
century social theorist. He was also a rhetorician in the strictest sense, writing a widely-circulated rhetoric entitled *De doctrina dicendi et tacendi*. Albertanus, principally in the works *De Amore* and the *Liber Consolationis et Consilii*, also addresses the arts of speaking and listening; the corpus of his work as a whole has been described as representative of “the free-standing nature of medieval social and political theory” (Powell 56). A central focus of his thought concerns the critical nature of giving and receiving counsel to the good of society as a whole. His rhetorical counsel is spread throughout the corpus of his work, and he touches on *consilium* in no less than three of his works. He directly connects *consilium* to deliberation, both allegorically and theoretically. Other students of Albertanus have noted that the idea of deliberation pervades the corpus of his work. Enrico Artifoni has described the work’s direct relation to deliberative speech and deliberative systems:

> The treatise is original, in the didactic literature of the Italian Duocento, for the organic unity with which takes as the subject of a specific treatment procedures and extensive training of opinion when there is deliberative uncertainty. with the broadest sense of the art of *consilium*, virtue, the people and procedures involved. . .[it should be] taken as an example understandable to all for its dramatic importance for society of the time, of a *rus dubia* to be developed against adequate deliberative procedure (197).

Albertanus synthesizes and theorizes a system for *consilium* in society, presumably in response to a cultural and rhetorical practice that already existed, but largely had been under-theorized or rarely assembled under one heading. Arguably both John of Salisbury and Bernard of Chartres (discussed below) had visited the theme, but the *Liber Consolationis* was perhaps the first treatise to deal with the subject exclusively. Albertanus does so allegorically in the *Liber*
Consolationis, though he revisits the theme in both De Amore and his rhetoric, Liber de doctrina et dicendi tacendi.

The nature of consilium in Albertanus, as Enrico Artifoni explains, is systematized in a series of maxims “in no particular order” regarding to whom and from whom advice should be considered, given, and taken, but most importantly, that the “system is stabilized with the virtue of Prudence” which derives from Ciceronian schema relating to virtue (Artifoni 197). Albertanus connects consilium to verbal and written forms of deliberation overtly and by exempla in the Liber Consolationis et Consilii. In Albertanus treatise, consilium is systematized to prevent snap decisions on matters related to human uncertainty about future action. Albertanus’ definition of consilium comes in Chapter XI, after he sets up the premise of an extended allegorical dialogue between “Lady Prudence” and the major characters of the dialogue. Prudence not only represents the personification of the chief virtue that instructs the system of consilium he sets forth, but as a figure she illustrates the role of women in the culture of consilium in his thinking. Consilium is defined as

a person’s intent or practice, which is exhibited or presented to a person or to persons, good or bad by persuading, in the appropriate manner, about other doings or omissions.

(Consilium est hominis intentio vel propositum, quod homini vel hominibus exhibetur vel tribuitur, bonum vel malum persuadendo, motu proprio, super aliquo faciendo vel omittendo) (XI)

Thus, Albertanus makes distinct connections between the deliberative genre and his definition of consilium as a rhetorical act. We see that consilium is a communicative act to persuade or dissuade, regarding acts or corresponding omissions. Deliberation as consilium is similarly theorized as being offered or exhibited to not less than one other person, or possibly to several.
Albertanus continues, “Counsel is also given, because it is taken with many” (XI), which illustrates that consilium, like deliberation, is a cooperative and dialectical activity.

Albertanus also connects the place of consilium to the common topic of deliberation, namely war, in his extended allegory. This is a topic where consilium is related to deliberation, and war is one of the common topics deliberative rhetoric is historically concerned with. Albertanus also connects consilium to prospective decision-making and human uncertainty. He explains,

However, concerning the deed of waging a war of vengeance we see the most doubt, whereby, whatever is better, we are not able to judge, whence we require a space of deliberating with the cause; indeed not suddenly or swiftly must it be judged (De facto autem vindictæ atque guerræ faciendæ dubium maximum videmus, quare, quid melius sit, adhuc judicare non possimus, unde spatium deliberandi causa postulamus; non enim subito vel celeriter est judicandum) (2)

Albertanus, like Bernard and Vincent of Beauvais, thus theorizes consilium as systemic, preceding the act of judgment, and related to human uncertainty about matters of polity in the future. Consilium is also related to caution and delay before decision making. Finally, consilium is governed by ultimately ethical concerns, as he explains by exempla that it is most necessary “when knowing that the work at hand was about to be committed in malediction” (XI). To Albertanus, taking and giving consilium as a rhetorical process is therefore an ethical obligation to prevent wrongdoing. Albertanus returns again and again to the utility, and ethical nature of offering consilium, and connecting it to deliberation, he explains “Therefore you ought not give or receive counsel suddenly or with haste, but with deliberation and a delay for seeking agreement” (cum deliberatione ac mora competenti) (XIV). To Albertanus, consilium is a
process that requires a system for advised decision-making in a social context. He continues, “in such things deliberation . . . while seeking agreement is not condemned, nay it is especially valued” (*Quare in talibus deliberatio et competens ... immo valde diligenda*) (XIV). In chapter XV, Albertanus sets out the threshold question on whether to give *consilium* or remain silent: counsel is not to be sought or given unless “you are not able to make better the condition of another man” (XV).

The way *consilium* is theorized as both a social system in the Middle Ages by both Albertanus and Bernard of Clairvaux is through ethics. But just as germane to this inquiry is Albertanus’ treatment of women in *consilial* roles in his time. The structure of Albertanus’ narrative has the main character, Milebeus, seeking *consilia* from a wide variety of participants in the dialogue. At the heart of the characters’ inquiry about future action is how to act in the face of violence against his daughter. The allegorical figure who resolves the argument and the conflict is his wife, Prudentia. Prudentia eventually brokers a peace between the warring factions after directing the deliberation of the characters to an ethical compass synonymous with her name, prudence or moderation. But Prudence is not merely an allegorical vehicle to describe the relationship of virtue to deliberation; she is also the allegorical figure of women’s place in the process. On the whole, her role is a commentary on women’s medieval role in the social and rhetorical practice of *consilium* in the Middle Ages. Given noble women’s roles in political and ethical *consilium* in the preceding centuries, the figure of Prudentia is also a comment on the significant cultural institution of women’s roles in this rhetorical capacity.

As James M. Powell has explained in his slim volume on Albertanus’ existing corpus of writing, “Since Prudence assumes the leading role in advising Melibeus, it is apparent that Albertanus attached unusual importance to female advice” (77). I would go further and argue that
the female figure of Prudence was not a figure advocating for the role of women as advisors; rather, Albertanus was reaffirming a pre-existing set of cultural and rhetorical roles for women in situations of crisis and deliberative uncertainty.

Thus, one can see that *consilium* was already an important social concept in Albertanus’ time (though shortly after Eleanor’s). That *consilium* was intimately related to a Ciceronian system of virtue and ethics, and that women had a social role in that system – while perhaps a conceptual locus of debate in his time – might also be inferred. As can be shown, Eleanor’s letter uses appeals relating to ethics and Ciceronian virtues systematized in classical rhetoric, and her letters stand as evidence that she acted in a socially-constructed *consilial* role. This role had a relation to international deliberative processes and classical persuasion and argument. But Albertanus was not the first or last thinker from the long twelfth century to theorize or argue about the nature and importance of consilium, nor was he the last person to use *consilium* interchangeably with the term deliberation.

**Consilium and Vincent of Beauvais**

A roughly contemporary thinker with Albertanus is Vincent of Beauvais, an educational and political theorist, who wrote *De Morali Principis Institutione* around 1259. The treatise is a theoretical one, which advises on the qualities, morals, and behavior necessary for the ideal monarch. Vincent discusses the role of *consilium* in terms of the duty and the role of giving and receiving advice in the course of governance. The ability to give and receive advice constitutes the third of the nine primary attributes of the ideal monarch. Vincent explains that the ideal prince must be wise “in giving and receiving counsels, since he has to do and to dispense with great things, and the work is to use great counsels in great matters” (11.51-53). Vincent dots his discussion throughout the book itself with citations from numerous rhetorics, including
Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria* and the *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, although it should be noted that he was likely working from *florilegia*. In Chapter XI particularly, Vincent relies on parts of Quintilian to support his assertions about the role of *consilium* in the conduct of medieval monarchy, drawing directly from Quintilian’s discussion of the deliberative genre in Book III of the *Institutio*. Vincent himself overtly connects *consilium* to deliberation, writing that “the final place of deliberation (*deliberacio residet*) is therefore in the counsels (*consiliis*) about to be taken in the presence of the prelate or the prince” (11.89-91). Vincent states that monarchical wisdom exists in accepting counsel from others, because “having heard [from] the thoughts of others what is best for all” is the truest kind of discernment (11.110). He concludes his discussion by saying that “the final place of deliberation resides” with the monarch who offers and takes counsel, and persons of inferior rank should not be disregarded in such deliberations (11.119).

But similar to Albertanus, Vincent also is an advocate for the education of noble women, and part of his educational *schema* for women embraced rhetoric. Vincent argues that noble women should necessarily be literate and trained in the seven liberal arts, one of which is rhetoric. His rationale for the education of women is that they should model the “Blessed Virgin Mary” in terms of erudition (Tobin 78). This is owing to the fact that Albertanus interpreted Biblical sources to mean that Mary possessed “a perfect knowledge of the seven liberal arts” (78). Rosemary Barton Tobin has pointed out that in *De Eruditione Filiorum Nobilium*. Reading, of course, is only part of Vincent’s curriculum, and it is by no means the most important. . . . Girl’s education must be composed of ‘*oracio et operacio*’ in addition to her reading which is primarily if not totally scriptural (89).

While the likely translation for the key terms “*oracio et operacio*” means a focus on prayer and dedication, *oracio* as prayer is also a term synonymous with eloquence; thus, part of Vincent’s
educational model has at least some focus on instruction in speaking as well as reading. If nothing else, Vincent recognized that noble women required training in both aspects of the language arts, with some attention given to both speech and literate practice. It is unclear whether Vincent advocates the same educational program or the same ideal qualities of monarchs in both men and women, but it is arguable that, indeed, he viewed taking and giving counsel a duty that crossed gender lines. If one can assume that the general educational scheme adopted by Vincent included noble women, then it is of note that at least one part of it included attention to writing as part of a general curriculum. Section XVII of De Eruditione concerns “Of Writing Exercises Against Opposition.” Using many sententiae from antiquity, including Cassiodorus, Augustine and Seneca the Younger as exempla, Vincent concludes that it “is generally agreed that it is virtuous either to write their own or another's words” (18.18). Vincent describes how students can excerpt, transcribe, or correct the work of others (if the passage represents something morally wrong) (18.20-21). Chapter XIX discusses extensively the proper place of student writings, and distinguishes between writings for public presentation and the private use of the student, as another example.

Brunetto Latini and consilium

Another thinker, a near-contemporary of Eleanor, who might provide an insight into consilium is Brunetto Latini. Latini wrote the Rettorica as an Italian vernacular guide and positional commentary on Cicero’s rhetorical corpus. The significance of Latini’s rhetoric being written for a vernacular audience cannot be understated. Latini uses not only everyday language to explain rhetoric, but also illustrates his arguments with everyday examples, choices that illuminate the real rhetorical practices of his day. In one section, he titles his explanation of the divisions of the oration “On Councilmen.” He begins his explanation of the order of proof
and orations by explaining

In similar fashion it often occurs among councils of lords or of the commons that when they are assembled to consider some event, that is, some case, which is proposed before them, one side will see it one way, and the other side will see it the other way . . . And therefore the one, after having stated and recommended his view, immediately sets out the reason for which his counsel is good and right. . . . And after he has set out the cause and the reason, he works to demonstrate how any contrary counsel would be bad or not right (76.8-10).

He describes such proceedings as a competition of counsels, where parties deliberate as to whether the first speaker has “counseled well” and the second “demonstrates why his counsel is better” (775). Here, Latini gives us insight into how, by the time of the late thirteenth century, deliberative decision making rested in the commonplace of noble counsels. This is not Latini’s central point; he goes on to analogize the writing of letters to the argumentation of counselors in deliberative disputes. He seems to regard such disputes as commonplace, relating the procedures to the order of the contents of letters. But Latini goes further than this, moving to overtly explain how the order of the letter, as described in the *ars dictaminis*, can be adapted to *consilial* ends:

It is true that the teaching of this book has for the most part dealt with those situations where persons find themselves in dispute . . . In this light, one could criticize [this] book … for not providing instruction in these matters … However, if one were to truly consider the structure of a letter… it would be clear that whoever writes or sends it desires the recipient does something for him (776)

Latini, writing some sixty years after Eleanor’s death, thus overtly comments on *consilium* as deliberative practice in noble society and explains that letters can perform a similarly persuasive
role. Latini is perhaps the best evidence for the cultural role of *consilium* in civic decision making in this period, because his intent is to explain to his audience the role of *consilium* at two separate strata of his own society, contrasting the counsel of nobles and the day-to-day argumentative demands of the letter. Latini was a trained diplomat and was responsible for brokering peace between Siena and Florence, or at least acting in a notarial capacity in that process (Holloway 48). Latini saw and participated in deliberative processes firsthand, often arguing successfully for changes in civil polity in the Florence of his day. Holloway also notes that participation in quasi-parliamentary decision-making bodies was by no means isolated to the Italian peninsula, and the Normans were comfortable with this system of government, “with the use of councils advising kings” (208). Latini’s examples are proof that *consilium* was theorized as possible both verbally and in writing at multiple levels of society. Latini himself argued for deliberative policy change in the counsels of Florence, often with success, and was an experienced politician and diplomat. Latini also visits the concept of counsel in his *Book of Treasure* and, similar to many thinkers before him, connects it to deliberative uncertainty and decision-making. Latini’s thought is directly influenced by Albertanus, as he incorporates sections of advice from Albertanus rhetoric into his own treatment of rhetoric. But Latini revisited rhetoric in a subsequent work that further demonstrates how he theorizes the nature of *consilium* as a political, social, ethical, and above all rhetorical role.

Latini, after he wrote the *Rettorica*, wrote a French vernacular rhetoric in section 3 of his *Li Livres dou Tresor*. After devoting ninety odd chapters to rhetoric, largely derived from Cicero, he moves to discuss the practices of governance (lordship) to rhetorical practices. Some commentators have seen this as a seemingly artificial break in Latini’s discourse (see Murphy 113-114) because Latini seems to simply abandon rhetoric in favor of the theory and practice of
governance. But what pervades every aspect of the communicative duties of the ideal lord in Latini’s discourse in both the theory and practice of ruling is the act of taking and receiving counsel at nearly every stage of the process. Thus, Latini implicitly connects *consilium* as a rhetorical practice to resolve deliberative uncertainty to his more general advice on speaking. Although Latini’s work has been described as a reformulation of his *Rettorica*, in fact Latini’s treatment of rhetoric is a significant departure from his earlier work, because it seems to be tailored to an audience of noble readers, as book three contains an extensive treatment of the duties of lordship, governance, and their relationship to rhetoric. Latini echoes the twelfth century definitions of *consilium* and underscores its importance in his second treatment of rhetoric, as he defines counsel as one of the properties of human faculties to draw on in inventing arguments, thus:

*Counsel is a judgment long mulled over as to whether one should do something or not. But there is a difference between counsel and thought, for thought is to consider one thing then another, but counsel is the judgment when one takes one of two sides* (3.52.11)

Latini, like other thinkers of his day, connects *consilium* to argumentative persuasion in the face of deliberative uncertainty. But Latini also connects *consilium* to even more central systemic concerns of human government, which he connects to the nature of the universe itself.

Latini argues for the central role of counsel in government by making a model argument in *Li Livres dou Tresor*. Latini does this by analogizing the importance of counsel as it is mirrored in the natural world. In Book 3, Chapter 59, Latini develops a model argument about the orderly nature of the universe, and in it posits that “nothing is so well governed by counsel as the whole world” (3.59.3). He continues by describing the order of the cosmos, days and nights,
which are signs that “the world is only governed through very great counsel” (3.59.4). He continues by concluding that therefore, “all things are governed through counsel than without counsel, and nothing is so well governed by counsel than is the whole world, therefore I say the whole world is governed by counsel” (3.59.5).

Early on in the *Tresor*, Latini connects counsel and deliberation. Latini explains that to avoid evil actions, “one should not choose all things one desires, but only those on which one has received counsel beforehand” (2.18.13). He continues

Furthermore, one must not deliberate on all things, but on those things on which wise and informed men deliberate … But with respect to difficult things we cannot do, because we are uncertain of the results, we must have counsel (2.18.13-15).

Latini thus connects counsel and its relationship to deliberation as necessarily involving moral choices that involve human uncertainty. To Latini, counsel or deliberation with others precedes and is required before meaningful deliberation can occur with oneself, and the consequences are ethical and moral. Latini continues with the proper loci of deliberation at some length. A final illustration of the extent to which Latini considers counsel vital to virtually all aspects of behavior, speech and civil governance can best be illustrated by his instruction on how a reader is to use *Li Livres dou Tresor* itself “By the instructions in this book each person who looks at it carefully can govern the city in time of peace and war, with the help of God and good counsel” (3.101.1, emphasis added).

Most relevant to our current inquiry, Latini also invokes the idea of *consilium* by giving systemic advice for every stage of lordship in his book, and the idea of giving and taking counsel pervades every stage of the process. Early in the work, when discussing intellectual and moral
virtues, Latini states that the ability to “counsel true reason concerning the bad things in man” derives from the virtue of prudence, echoing lbertainus’ allegory (2.31.2). Latini describes counsel as one of the “pillars of Lordship”, theorizing that the subjects of a lord must genuinely pledge their aid and counsel in an ideal society (3.74.4). Similarly, Latini advises that the ideal lord should take the counsel of friends when deciding whether to even accept or reject noble title and its attendant duties. Latini goes on to admonish that one of the first actions of the ideal ruler must be to assemble a council and take their *consilium*, extending his analogy to civil government:

> He must seek advice once, twice, three times or more, and from many different people if necessary, at the small council or the great one, and add to the council other good men . . . for it is written that from great counsel comes great salvation (3.87.2)

This is by no mean Latini’s last word on the central relationship of *consilium* to ideal government. In Chapter 95, Latini also posits that the ideal ruler should also give counsel to “his wise men” on certain occasions, “especially on feast days at night and in wintertime” (3.95.1). The nature of the counsel that an ideal ruler will give is treated after the type of counsel he should seek. Latini admonishes the ruler to “entreat and admonish them to be the just balance which counterbalances right and wrong, according to God, reason and justice” (3.95.2). It is here one can see the role of noble *consilium* described explicitly for the first time in medieval rhetoric, albeit briefly. In Eleanor of Aquitaine's rhetoric to Celestine III, she offers precisely this type of persuasion, and on similar themes. Latini connects the rhetorical office of noble *consilium* to justice and reason, which can also be seen in Eleanor’s epistle to King John as her rhetorical strategy to persuade Viscount Thoare (see Chapter 3, 26-27).
Women’s Persuasive Roles in the Late Twelfth Century: Thomas of Chobham

Up until this point in my argument, the persuasive roles of women in their office of *consilium* as a rhetorical tradition has largely been circumstantial. While Vincent of Beauvais and Albertanus of Brescia make accommodation for the women in rhetorical roles, their rhetorics merely stand as possible evidence that these ideas may have been in intellectual currency in Eleanor’s time. What specific rhetorical practices are outlined generally for women, and where, in the vast amount of conduct literature, philosophy, and rhetoric in the long twelfth century? Perhaps the most definitive evidence can be found in the rhetorical advice Thomas of Chobham was giving to confessors during Eleanor’s time. Chobham similarly sees the role of the confessor, in part, as *consilial*. In the first book of the *Summa*, entitled *De Peccatis et Irregularitatibus*, he explains that the role of the confessor is to counsel, and explains “Of the gift of counsel, however, it must be said that the counsel is given to human beings to guard against the dangers of this world, and the face of dangers against the dangers of the flesh and the devil, and the gift of this belongs to beware all of the aforesaid the dangers” (7a.11.1). Chobham thereby connects the role of *consilium* to human moral uncertainty and future decision making. Chobham goes on to discuss the nature and role of counsel and persuasion between the confessor, women, and men.

Sharon Farmer has translated and underscored the importance of this passage in the *Manual for Confessors*, in the section entitled *Of Penitents (De Penitentiiis)*:

In imposing penance, it should always be enjoined upon women to be preachers to their husbands, because no priest is able to soften the heart of a man the way his wife can. For this reason, the sin of a man is often imputed to his wife if, through her negligence, he is not corrected. Even in the bedroom, in the midst of their
embraces, a wife should speak alluringly to her husband, and if he is hard and unmerciful, and an oppressor of the poor, she should invite him to be merciful; if he is a plunderer, she should denounce plundering; if he is avaricious, she should arouse generosity in him, and she should secretly give alms from their common property... Therefore, this ought to be the first and foremost concern of the priest, that he instruct the wife in this way (7.2.15)

Chobham’s instructions to confessors are evidence of women in consilial rhetorical roles, even at the lower strata of medieval society. While, as chapter 3 has illustrated, there can be little doubt that women had persuasive roles that pervaded medieval society at the highest levels, Chobham’s advice on the persuasive role of the clergy toward women, and rhetorical and ethical directives to them, shows that religious institutions and systems only reinforced those consilial roles. It shows that women very possibly were given rhetorical advice and instruction to then persuade their spouses, and that by the year 1215, they were already assumed to have a great deal of persuasive power. It also illustrates that women’s rhetorical instruction clearly pervaded medieval institutions, and likely the highest levels. The passage also suggests that Eleanor very possibly had training in persuasion from ecclesiastical associates, and one of them, at least in 1193, was Peter of Blois, one of the rhetorical luminaries of the twelfth century; another was certainly Celestine III in the 1170s, and Bernard of Clairvaux sometime before the second crusade.

The Tradition of Consilium as a Deliberative Rhetorical Role

These fine distinctions in the place and definition of deliberative rhetoric illustrate the differences between Roman and Medieval sources, it can be legitimately used to argue that medieval thinking on deliberation represents a departure from both Greek and Roman thinking. Using the definition and theory of deliberative rhetoric at play in her own era, it can be shown
that Eleanor’s appeals to Celestine III fall squarely in the deliberative genre. Eleanor appeals to Celestine about civic matters, namely inter-monarchical relations, and the disposition of the future of both her son, the King, and the Holy Roman Emperor in an ongoing dispute with at least two possible future outcomes – this much is obvious. The question at hand for Eleanor was whether the Pope should use his secular or sacred power in the dispute to intervene diplomatically with the disposition of *nuncii*, or to excommunicate Henry IV outright. Thus, the choices she suggests are at least two in number. Eleanor directs the pope to textual authority in making this decision, largely verses of the Bible, providing him the option of taking *consilium* either from her own letters or a text in his deliberations. Finally, the common topics (*topoi*) she utilizes fall squarely in appeals to the four primary virtues – fortitude, temperance, mercy, and justice – which derive from Ciceronian and pseudo-Ciceronian sources, namely *De Inventione*, the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, and *De Officiis*, all of which had vast influence on the rhetorical and ethical thinking of her day. I move now to discuss the primacy of certain *topoi* and their role in the Middle Ages and in Eleanor’s letters. The nature of *topoi* associated with deliberative persuasion in the Middle Ages further illustrate the intimate relationship of *consilium* to deliberative *topoi* in antiquity, and show how Eleanor’s letters fit in that genre.

**Deliberative Topoi in the Central Middle Ages**

John Tinkler has aptly summarized the classical *topoi* related to political oratory in Roman antiquity, namely “*honestas* (honor), *utilitas* (utility) and *necessitas* (necessity)” (190). Tinkler has noted that the four primary virtues are discussed in the context of rhetorical theory “sometimes in his description of the deliberative and sometimes in his description of the demonstrative genus” (190). Tinkler has noted that deliberative and demonstrative (epideictic) topoi show significant overlap, because often persons or actions are praised or blamed in the
cause of deliberative persuasion. In Eleanor’s letters, there is extensive censure directed to her son’s captor to deliberative purpose, and more generally, persuasion themed around the primary virtues, principally courage and justice. Although Eleanor mentions utility once, her primary topoi relate to action in accordance with the virtues, and relate censure and blame to the need for action. Cicero’s *De Officiis*, as one highly influential, broadly studied, and widely distributed work in the Middle Ages contains a typical discussion of the primary virtues, and Tinkler has noted the *De Officiis* displays the “same progression of topoi” typical to deliberative questions, because it “discusses honestas in Book I, utilitas in Book II, and their union in Book III” (192). *De Officiis* is not merely an ethical work, but a work on the process of ethical decision-making for those confronted with deliberative uncertainty, which is a continuing theme regarding deliberative rhetoric throughout the Middle Ages. Proof that this was Cicero’s intent in writing *De Officiis* is front and center in Book 1.9 of the work, where Cicero associates virtuous action’s conflict with the expedient that leads to “the irresolution that is born of deliberation” (1.9).

As outlined above, in the Middle Ages deliberative rhetoric could derive from the public or the private; it could be in consultation with a person or a text; yet in every circumstance it must deal with more than one course of action to be determined in the future, at the heart of which was a civic question. But separate from the limited number of topoi Aristotle enumerated as those in the deliberative, civic matters could extend to relate to institutions that simply did not exist in ancient Athens, such as the Catholic church and the process of excommunication. But what continued to be relevant to rhetorical appeals were the common topics to which medieval persuasion directed its appeals. The principle texts that deal with deliberation, consultation, and consideration – which could be described as a constellation of related terms concerning the deliberative – will be discussed shortly. These topoi, as dominant ones in medieval rhetorical
artifacts that might be described as deliberative, deserve careful attention, for if one wishes to
discover where deliberative rhetoric was taking place within certain activity systems, one has to
know first where to look. Deliberative persuasion almost overwhelmingly was related to the four
cardinal virtues, which derive from *De Invenzione*, the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, and *De Officiis*. The four “cardinal virtues,” which had been given rhetorical primacy over appeals relating to the
expedient since at least the Carolingian period, pervade deliberative discourse in the Middle
Ages, and cross both gender and social lines. Thus, by Eleanor’s day, such rhetorical luminaries
as John of Salisbury and Bernard of Clairvaux had weighed in on the idea of deliberation, and
spent extensive effort explaining the nature of the primary virtues as both appeals and topics of
decision-making. By the twelfth century, the constellation of terms related to deliberative
processes had coalesced into a two-part process, constituting a process of consultation and then
consideration with the four primary virtues at their heart, at least in theory. As previously
discussed, Thierry of Chartres has shown that his interpretation of the deliberative process
includes first consultation (either with a text or another person,) which is then followed by
deliberative decision making. This conception of deliberation as a sequence of steps is also
implicit in other thinkers in Eleanor’s day. By examining those sources, it becomes apparent that
this process would eventually lead to meditation on the primary virtues, which any rhetor should
therefore choose as the common topic of argument to persuade a decision maker. Eleanor of
Aquitaine does just this in her letters. I now turn to contextualize the deliberative *topoi* related to
*honestas* and their position in ancient and medieval rhetoric.

The *topoi* of the cardinal virtues in deliberative speaking derived from Roman rhetoric, as
manifested in medieval speech. In *De Invenzione*, Cicero provides the earliest discussion of the
nature of these virtues in relation to rhetoric, and in his maturity eventually revisited the conflict
between virtue and expediency in deliberative processes in De Officiis. The topics of the honorable, Cicero explains, are related to the ends and goals of the genre, which young Cicero defined as “both honor and advantage” (2.51.156). He goes on to define the virtues as common topics for deliberative invention, the honorable being that “which draws us to it by its intrinsic merit” (2.52.157). The parts of the honorable are fourfold, with their own subdivisions, and they are “wisdom, justice, courage, temperance” (II.53.159). Cicero does not go on with extensive examples of topics of invention related to the honorable, but the Rhetorica ad Herennium does. The ad Herennium explains how the topics of the honorable might be employed in deliberative argument by example, for example, in relation to justice:

We shall be using the topics of Justice if we say that we ought to pity innocent persons and suppliants; if we show that it is proper to repay the well-deserving with gratitude; if we explain that we ought to punish the guilty; if we urge that faith ought zealously to be kept … (3.3.4-5)

Similarly, in relation to courage, the ad Herennium argues that when this virtue is invoked,

We shall make it clear that men ought to follow and strive after noble and lofty actions . . . Again, from an honourable act no peril or toil, however great, should divert us (3.3.5)

I excerpt these discussions of the topoi of justice and courage because these are the primary topics that Eleanor utilizes to move Celestine in her letters. The Ad Herennium further explains that “Virtues of this kind are to be enlarged upon if we are recommending them, but depreciated if we are urging that they be disregarded” (3.3.6). As we shall see, Eleanor uses appeals to justice and courage, while depreciating mercy and temperance, which she tends to cast as inaction and cowardice. Medieval deliberative appeals related to the four primary virtues were highly valued,
as opposed to appeals for utility and necessity, because of the extensive ethical concerns of
custom literature and the wide dissemination of Cicero’s *De Officiis*, and the medieval
preoccupation with virtue persisted from patristic times, through the Carolingian period, and well
into the twelfth century.

C. Stephen Jaegar has pointed out “conduct literature” was a preeminent discipline of
study for both secular and ecclesiastical education in the Middle Ages. I argue that this is largely
due to the fact that the business of government involved *consilial* actors in private, or semi-
private situations attempting to determine the best course of future action. In terms of the union
of medieval rhetorical thinking and ethics, the fullest and most obvious treatment in conjunction
with rhetorics written prior to 1200 was Alcuin’s *Disputatio de Rhetorica et Uirtutibus*. Scholars
still puzzle over the conjunction of Alcuin’s conjunction of the discussion of the four virtues with
his extended treatment of largely forensic rhetorical theory. Mark D. Johnston aptly summarized
why this was so, when he wrote “One’s entire behavior should manifest moderation, since the
virtue of temperance must prevail ‘not simply in behavior, but also in speech’” (150). Johnston
makes the connection that the relationship between speech and ethics was in the canon of
delivery throughout the Middle Ages. But whether this was accomplished verbally or in writing,
as the genre developed in the twelfth century, it is clear that mannerisms, speech and behavior
could only be manifested by appealing to the common topics befitting ethical concerns.
Overwhelmingly, noble women’s letters that provide *consilium* or argue for action from another
highly-placed person use appeals to these virtues. Eleanor’s letters are no exception, and each
letter uses common topics derived from classical rhetoric. Each of the three letters contain
arguments formulated around two of the four cardinal virtues, namely, justice and courage and
invoke many of the sub-topics enumerated within those divisions.
The earliest Medieval rhetoric that began to emphasize the four cardinal virtues as concerned civil questions, in opposition to *topoi* related to utility, was Alcuin’s *Disputatio de Rhetorica et de Virtutibus Sapientissimi Regis Karli et Albini Magistri*. Much debate has surrounded the final portion of Alcuin’s rhetoric, in which he appears to transition abruptly into a discussion of the virtues. Matthew Kempshall has recently summarized the problem by explaining that the rhetoric has caused speculation because of its “form (its apparently bipartite structure) and content (as a digest of the rules of rhetoric combined with an exposition of the four cardinal virtues)” (7). Kempshall asserts that Alcuin discussion of the primary virtues derives from Augustine, and even Quintilian, but cites no specific textual evidence of this; what is beyond question is that *De Officiis* and *De Inventione* were available to Alcuin and it at least appears that it was from them he formulated his understanding of the cardinal virtues. His *Rhetoric*, which is posited as a manual relative to civil science in “dealing with public questions” ("*civilibus versari quaestionibus*")", reflects the fundamental belief that nothing can be useful without also being moral (66-67). Alcuin makes this clear in introducing the cardinal virtues which “should be sought and loved and followed, not because of some advantage which accrues as a result, but rather because of the inherent excellence of the things themselves” (145).

Here, Alcuin sets up his own early and novel position on the tension between *utilitas* and *honestas* in the context of Christian government by not mentioning *utilitas* at all. This reflects a tension that is almost exclusively the concern of *De Officiis*, but is likewise echoed in *De Inventione*. However, Alcuin’s restatement of the four virtues derives almost verbatim from the *Ad Herennium*. He states that virtue is one thing with four aspects, and then lists them: “Prudence, Justice, Courage, Temperance” (147). By way of example, Alcuin describes Justice as follows “*Iustitia est habitus animi uni cuique rei propriam tribunes dignitatem*” (148). The *ad*
*Herennium* defines it as “*Iustitia est aequitas ius uni cuique rei tribunes pro dignitate cuiusque*” (III II 4). Alcuin’s other definitions of the virtues are also nearly indistinguishable from the *Ad Herennium*. But what is most significant about Alcuin’s interpretation of the four virtues as civic virtues is that he does not mention *utilitas* as any part of the governing concepts regarding civic decision making. This is distinctly un-Ciceronian quality of his rhetoric.

One can see consideration of those virtues in the work of Bernard of Clairvaux, as one twelfth century example, who discusses the common topics of virtue in connection with deliberative processes and decision-making. An illustration of Bernard’s thinking on the virtues in relation to medieval polity and deliberation underscores the significance of these appeals. Bernard’s emphasis is particularly significant because of his close relationship with Eleanor and her appeals to Celestine that seem designed to relate directly to Bernard’s advice on the *loci* of deliberation for the pope. In composing his work, Bernard, in fact, was offering *consilium* on how to properly deliberate. It should be noted that Bernard was early, but by no means alone: John of Salisbury devotes several chapters to the primary virtues, Vincent of Beauvais does the same, as do Albertanus of Brescia and Brunetto Latini.

Bernard of Clairvaux continued the traditional concern for polity guided by virtue by aligning the proper mental *loci* for deliberative judgment with the primary virtues in ancient deliberative *topoi*. The proper loci for consideration mirror the four topics in the *Ad Herennium* related to the Good in Cicero’s *De Inventione* and the *Ad Herennium*. They appear in Chapter 8 of *De Consideratione*, and are described as “The Four Primary Virtues”. They are Justice, Prudence, Temperance and Fortitude. The virtues he describes at length, however, are not merely rhetorical appeals but locations of “mental habit” before making future decisions, explaining “The mind must first reflect upon itself in order that it may frame a rule of Justice” (1.8.29). The
virtues and their ideal position as central to papal decision making are precisely the *topoi* that Eleanor draws on to persuade Celestine III. At a minimum, *De Consideratione* shows that thinkers in the twelfth century were giving a great deal of attention to decision-making (*sunesis*) and the rhetorical appeals attendant to it. The preoccupation with the traditional virtues as appropriate *loci* for consideration also betrays their anxiety about the relationship of the secular and the sacred in political thinking. It is this cultural conflict that Eleanor’s letters are evidence for, and the role of the sacred in civil polity. This conflict in deliberative processes, as previously noted, dates back to Aristotle and continues through Cicero. In the twelfth century, the differences between secular and sacred power were becoming more marked and causing increasing levels of conflict, and the intellectual elite were lobbying for the primacy of the four primary virtues in governmental affairs – which necessarily included papal affairs. Thus, it is clear that Eleanor’s decision to appeal to those virtues in her rhetoric directed to the Pope reflected an awareness of the appeals of her day. This seems like a simple assertion: but from the perspective of rhetorical strategy, Eleanor appealed to the virtues to persuade a sitting pope to intervene in secular matters with apostolic authority, in itself quite a gambit. If the pope in this intellectual climate was beset by one intellectual camp insisting he steer clear of secular conflicts, and beset on the other by an intellectual camp to “wield the two swords of Peter”, it put him in a tricky position. Eleanor was using ethical appeals related to the primary virtues to move the pope to exercise authority in secular matters.

The appeals attendant to deliberative rhetoric in Eleanor’s time have been documented as crossing gender lines as well as social lines, which illustrate their presence in a variety of contexts. One pointed example that has been treated were battle orations. The appeals in those orations are frequently identical to the appeals in the rhetoric of noble women in the letter-
writing tradition. John R.E. Bliese has particularly focused upon battle orations as a species of deliberative rhetoric and extensively promoted the analysis of these artifacts as falling squarely in the deliberative tradition. Bliese has argued that in spite of the assertion that political oratory was in abeyance, in fact, feudal lords summoned their men and asked for their ‘counsel’”, and engaged in martial oratory squarely in the deliberative tradition (1994 273). From accumulating hundreds of battle orations and noting their major topics and appeals, Bliese found the most common to relate to “bravery” or “valor” (1989 204). Valor corresponds to the primary virtue of *fortitudinis*, deriving from the principle deliberative *topoi* in the Ciceronian tradition, although Bliese does not overtly connect it to those rhetorics. Some scholars of the orations connect the outcomes of battle to the general topic of “honor” (*honestas*), which is the genus corresponding to the other divisions of virtue (temperance, justice, fortitude, mercy) (1989 205). Similarly, the second most common appeal is justice in such battle orations, similarly deriving from classical deliberative *topoi* related to deliberative rhetoric (1989 205). Many of the appeals rely on the argument that the duties of warriors derive from their relationship to their nations, their families, and their ancestors, all of which are common topics under the heading of *honestas* and justice described in the *Ad Herennium* (1989 206). All of these topics are common topics associated with the deliberative genre, and derive from the topics of *honestas* in the *Rhetorica Ad Herennium* and *De Inventione*. I will illustrate below that these deliberative *topoi* common to medieval battle orations were also common to women in deliberative rhetorical practice via the letter writing tradition in the central Middle Ages, and also demonstrate how the letters have the hallmarks of medieval deliberative rhetoric.

**Eleanor’s Letters in the Medieval Deliberative Context**

The letters of Eleanor directed to Pope Celestine III number three in total. They can be
found in the Foedera Rolls, as well as in the model letter collection of Peter of Blois. They originate from about the years 1193, during the captivity of Richard I in Germany. They are readily available online in the database *Epistolae*; when citing them, I have numbered them 1, 2, or 3 and provided links to them in the Works Cited. Letter 1 appears contextually to have been written first, but the precise sequence of the letters is not apparent. Letter 1, in the original Latin, weighs in at around 1300 words; Letter 2 is the shortest, at approximately 1200 words; and the third letter, longest and most fiery, is approximately 1500 words. Each of them clearly follows the organizational structure set out in the typical *dictaminal* scheme, having five parts, beginning with a salutation, narration, exordium, petition, and conclusion. An enormous amount of the letters cite Biblical *exempla* which probably owes to Peter of Blois, in large part; for this reason, I will not spend time analyzing the exempla but the exhortative and substantive arguments within the letter, for the narrow purpose of illustrating Eleanor’s *consilial* persuasive strategies and situating the rhetoric in the deliberative tradition, as it was understood in Eleanor’s day. Each of the letters is directed to Celestine from Eleanor and concerns the pope’s inaction during the conflict between Henry and King Richard. I use them as examples of how Eleanor’s rhetoric fell in the medieval tradition of *consilium* as a deliberative rhetorical practice.

One quality that pervaded deliberative rhetoric, and by extension *consilium*, was that whether delivered publically or privately, it must necessarily involve more than one person and must directly relate to the *civic*. As previous chapters have illustrated, letters between monarchs were typically designed to be read aloud by *rhetors* or *nuncio*. Eleanor, while directing a letter to the Pope, no less describes her case as a public one.

Peoples ripped apart, the lacerated multitude, desolated provinces, and the whole western church, consumed by laments, in contrite and humbled spirit beg you
whom God set over peoples and kingdoms in every fullness of power (3). She describes the captivity of Richard not as a crime against one person, but against the “multitudes” and “provinces” and an issue for the arbiter of peace between “peoples” and “kingdoms”, and the “whole western church”. In petitioning the Pope to act, she argues that the outcome of his intervention would “give peace back to his people, tranquility to the religious, and joy to all” (3). Eleanor characterizes Celestine’s inaction as a collective injustice against her kingdom, and characterizes the mass of people in a condition of misery by his inaction, then uses it as an argument for action, pleading “In such a mass of misery, the only and common solace is awaited from the authority of your power” (2). She thus contextualizes the crime that moves her to write to him as civic and institutional action, concerning more than one person and multiple institutions. These appeals and contextualizing statements also show that, rather than addressing personal injustices, the Pope’s inaction affects the relationship between governments, people and the church, in sum embracing all of what would be considered “civic” in the twelfth century.

Another characteristic of rhetorical consilium is that it operates systemically: that is, the act of counsel operates in a sequence of activities relating to persuasion and dissuasion that pervaded political and religious institutions. That Eleanor’s rhetoric to Celestine III constituted consilium in a socio-political system is attested to by her appeals characterizing the situation with which she was confronted. She continually characterizes the travails of her son as a social injury to both the church and the population of Europe, an injury which prompts her to write. She describes the captivity of her son as an injury to Christendom by describing the condition of people and nations and their relationship to the church. Eleanor argues that the collective members of her community will lose their faith through the inaction of the see:

It will be imputed to their pusillanimity that the church is trampled, the faith
endangered, liberty oppressed, that deceit, suffering and iniquity are nourished with impunity (1)

Eleanor’s appeals are directed at the moral and rhetorical obligation of the church in relation to its members. She casts herself as one voice in a multitude afflicted by the wrongs of the Emperor, and as but one actor in a system of moral and diplomatic nature that the Pope is ultimately in control of. In other words, Eleanor offers her consilium in the face of deliberative uncertainty, as one actor in a system; an injustice has occurred, the Pope should act, the people are injured, and her consilium is an act of persuasion to affect an outcome in the system and sequence of events.

Another example of how Eleanor’s consilium is systemic is illustrated as she demands specific diplomatic action:

It saddens the church publicly and excites the murmurs of the people not a little at the expense of their opinion of you that, in the face of … the supplications of so many provinces, you have not sent one messenger to those princes. Often for insignificant causes your cardinals have been dispatched in legations with great power even to barbarous regions; yet in such an arduous, lamentable, common cause, you have not yet sent one subdeacon or acolyte (3)

Thus, Eleanor, as one persuasive actor in a diplomatic system, is in turn demanding diplomatic and systemic action from the Pope. She characterizes the demand as coming from people and provinces, to move the church to act persuasively in turn in a system of diplomatic relations, where the church acts as a traditional intermediary, writing “And since I find no judge on earth, I, miserable, appeal to no earthly judge but to your terrible tribunal” (2). Ultimately, she casts the role of the Pope in a system by admonishing him about his consilial role, as she quotes from the
book of John: “A good shepherd instructs other shepherds” she argues, but the legates of the Pope she likens to “mute dogs [that] can not or do not wish to bark” (3).

Another characteristic of medieval deliberative rhetoric is that it must deal with no less than two future courses of action and deliberative uncertainty. Eleanor contextualizes her situation as leaving her in an untenable situation with two options: she can now in the face of the crisis either die or seek the aid of Celestine. It is this situation of her own deliberative uncertainty that she transfers to frame Celestine’s inaction. She writes

If I go, deserting my son’s kingdom, that is laid waste on all sides with grave hostility, it will be deprived of all counsel and comfort in my absence. If I remain, I shall not see the face I most desire, of my son. There will be no one to zealously procure the freedom of my son and, what I fear even more, with the impossible quantity of money, that very delicate youth, impatient at such affliction, will be pressed by his torments and driven to death by his tortures (3)

Thus, Eleanor contextualizes her choices as being between either to face death and the desolation of her kingdom – dependent on her consilium – or to seek aid from Celestine. She creates the exigency of a potential disaster to argue that Celestine has two choices as well– to act rhetorically to prevent that disaster or to do nothing and face the consequences. She places the outcome of the conflict in Celestine’s hands by arguing that “the prince of apostles still reigns and rules in the apostolic see and judiciary rigor is established there” (2). She then inquires as to why the Pope did not take the course of action of the two possible, that is, to either intervene or do nothing, by stating “Why, therefore, do you delay so long, so negligently, indeed so cruelly to free my son, or do you not dare” (2)? In fact, the number of times Eleanor contrasts action and inaction in her letters is enormous. But to two examples, she states “My son is tormented in
chains and you do not descend nor send to him” (2). She later states, characterizing the pope’s inaction as consent “he seems to consent who, when he can and ought, does not reprove” (2). What is most notable here is that Eleanor offers a critique, and therefore a directive, to the rhetorical action of the Pope. This feature makes her letters perhaps the best example of women’s medieval consilial rhetoric as a systemic and persuasive practice that pervaded many medieval institutions.

Finally, the topoi Eleanor uses are consistent with the deliberative subject and appeals of her day. Eleanor’s primary appeal is largely related to justice. She repeatedly uses the term “iudicio” in demanding action from the pope, which reflects the exact language of the Ad Herennium. Her petito e horts the pope to “let judgment come forth, let your eyes see equity; on your decision and the mercy of your see hang the vows of the people and unless your hand seizes judgment early, the whole tragedy of this evil will redound on you” (2).

Eleanor’s third letter of 1193 to Celestine utilizes topoi relating to justice almost exclusively. She begins with an appeal to pity, echoing the Rhetorica Ad Herennium’s delineation of appeals to pity as a sub-topic related to the virtue of Justice. It explains that “We shall be using the topics of Justice if we say that we ought to pity innocent person (innocentium) and miserable supplicants (supplicium misereri)”. Eleanor’s letter plays on the word “miserere”, and her salutation invokes her position as a “miserable supplicant”. She places the Pope before her in the Salutation, writing “Reverendo Patri, et domino Coelestino Dei gratia summo pontifici” but then proceeds to describe herself, “wretched and to be pitied Queen of the English” (misera, et utinam miserabilis Anglorum regina), and “the suffering mother” (miserae matri) (1). She restates her appeals directed at eliciting pity by describing her suffering. She continues, “Mother of mercy, look on a mother of such misery”(1), and continues to refer to her miserable condition as she
recounts a statement of the problem in the narratio.

Eleanor further opens her initial appeal by referring to herself as innocent “innocentium”, and miserable, an adjective which continues repeatedly throughout the narratio, echoing the key words in the description of the topical appeals in the Ad Herrenniun. The author of the Ad Herennium explains that the topics of justice for deliberative appeals should explain that we “ought to pity innocent person (innocentium)”. Eleanor’s opening salvo in the first letter uses these words:

Mother of mercy, look on a mother of such misery, or if your son, an endless font of mercy, exacts the sins of the mother from the son, (Matrem tantae miseriae respice misericordiae mater, aut si filius tuus fons misericordiae inexhaustus) let him exact them only from the one who sinned, let him punish the impious (puniat impiam), not laugh at the punishments of the innocent (et de poenis innocentis non rideati) (2)

Eleanor then recounts in her extensive narratio that she has already lost two sons, and that now a third is imprisoned. This section is nothing short of the description of a rhetorical situation and its attendant systems of activity, which are intimately related to her role as deliberative counselor and steward of the kingdom in her son’s absence. More specifically, in the narration which sets up the problem she faces, she characterizes her situation using the key medieval concept of consilium as the political role of women in monarchical affairs:

If I go, deserting my son’s kingdom, that is laid waste on all sides with grave hostility, it will be deprived of all my counsel (erit in absentia mea omni consilio ... destitutum) and comfort in my absence (1)

As previously mentioned, consilio is a verb used in tandem with medieval discussions of deliberation, or interchangeably with deliberation, or as a related or subordinate activity to
deliberative processes. By discussing her duty to give consilium to the kingdom, demanding her continued presence, she underscores her persuasive role, a role that renders her movements and actions limited. Later, she uses this role by way of antithesis, the dominant trope throughout the letter, as related to a papal duty to act in a corresponding rhetorical capacity. She continues the narration by describing her key role in obtaining the ransom, and the possibility of Richard’s death if she does not, underscoring the key trope at work in her first epistle. Eleanor’s description of her role is not merely her own, because Richard himself, writing during his captivity in 1193, thanks Eleanor for providing “your counsel and assistance” (vestrum consilium et auxilium) to the Kingdom in his absence (1).

Another topoi deriving from the Ad Herennium at work in Eleanor’s rhetoric relates to “punishing the guilty” (1). Throughout the letters, the Emperor is repeatedly accused of avarice, sacrilege, impiety, inhumanity, and cruelty. In referring to Henry, she describes him in Epistle I as follows: “O impious, cruel, terrible tyrant, who did not fear to lay your sacrilegious hands on the anointed of the Lord; neither the royal unction, nor reverence for holy life, nor the fear of God kept you from such inhuman action” (3). Eleanor further amplifies her appeal to the punishment of the guilty by recounting a laundry list of Henry’s crimes.

We have learned from a reliable public account that after the death of the bishop of Liège, whom he is said to have killed with a long hand by deadly sword, the emperor constrained by wretched imprisonment the bishop of Ostia and four of his fellow provincial bishops, as well as the archbishops of Salerno and Trani and, what apostolic authority ought in no way to hide, occupied by tyrannical usurpation Sicily, which from the times of Constantine has been the patrimony of St. Peter, despite legations, supplications, and threats from the apostolic see. With
all this his furor is not abated but his hand is still stretched forth. He has done serious things, but you can most certainly expect more serious soon (3)

In sum, Eleanor argues from the topoi of punishment from the *Ad Herennium* by amplifying upon the fact that excommunication may be the only option, because previous rhetorical maneuvers have not worked. It is here that Eleanor argues that this action comes from necessity, or the pope can “expect more serious” consequences if nothing is done.

Some seven hundred words into the epistle, Eleanor makes her *petitio*, that is, she asks for relief or action. She asks directly that the pope “unsheath the sword of Peter which he set for this purpose over peoples and kingdoms”(3). Eleanor argues that, based on ancient Roman custom deriving from Constantine, “the apostolic see passes sentence on imperial power” (3) having discussed her own rhetorical and political role in the narration (*consilium*), she attempts to move the Pope to rhetorical action of his own. She asks, “that . . . you strive to procure with swift legations, with salutary admonitions, with thundering threats, with general interdictions, with terrible judgments” Richard’s release from captivity (2). The action she demands of the Pope is at root rhetorical because of the verbs she uses: *legationibus* is the diplomatic dispatch that carries the “voice” of the holy see; she requests that their rhetorical office be “*monitus*” (from *monere*) related to the rhetorical office of instruction. She points out that the nature of the Pope’s inaction is essentially rhetorical, because he has been unwilling either to say (*dicebus*) or write a single word of protest (*unum verbum dicere, aut scribere noluistis*). Thus, her *petitio* links her persuasive intent to move the pope to rhetorical action, and thereby is a rhetorical artifact within a complex system. She continues, “Legates have now been promised to us three times but have not been sent” and reminds the pope of their long relationship, and interaction of thirty years prior, when she writes “Is this the promise that you made to us at Châteauroux with
such love and protestation of faith?” (2). In so doing, she argues further from the Ad Herennium, whose common topics related to justice are that “alliances and friendships should scrupulously be honored” (3.4.5). Thus, Eleanor’s exordium falls squarely into the deliberative genre because the pope – the object of her persuasion – is faced with not less than two future courses of action. He can either do nothing, excommunicate the Emperor, or send a legation to negotiate with or threaten the Emperor. Deliberation requires not less than one person, which is certainly the case here. Her appeals derive from the topoi associated with deliberative rhetoric inherited by the Middle Ages from antiquity.

Below is a table with each of those thinkers and the qualities they describe. Each thinker is represented sequentially in the row across, and the major features of consilium as a rhetorical practice are represented in the column to the left.

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Fig. 4.1 Major Thinkers and their Theories on the Nature of Consilium

As this analysis has shown, Eleanor’s letters fall squarely in the deliberative genre because they possess all of the features and many of the appeals associated with deliberative persuasion as it was understood in her day. The nature of her rhetorical practice was theoretically similar to how major thinkers of her day described consilium, which was closely allied to the feature of deliberative rhetoric. According to key theorists in the long twelfth century, consilium, a
pervasive legal, social, and rhetorical practice in the Middle Ages aligned with the rhetoric exemplified by her letters. Eleanor’s letters were a systemically placed set of appeals which related to ethical concerns which addressed situations in the future related to deliberative uncertainty. Her argumentative appeals illustrate how deliberation in the Middle Ages operated in the context of writing. Chapter 5 addresses the implications of this study and suggest further scholarly issues not addressed by this dissertation.
CHAPTER V: ELEANOR OF AQUITAINE AND THE HISTORY OF RHETORIC: A SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

The first chapter of this dissertation set out a map of the existing scholarly work on the *ars dictaminis* and rhetoric in relation to noble women and diplomatic practice. In the subsequent chapters, the theory and methodology of historical rhetoric was discussed through the lens of Prior’s writing systems theory. Chapter three and four analyzed the situational context of Eleanor’s rhetoric in her three letters to Celestine III, as well as the rhetorics that were in currency surrounding the composition of those letters. This chapter discusses the implications of this study, the limitations inherent in this study, and avenues for further scholarship. The chapter is organized according to the bodies of scholarship that have informed the study, specifically specific areas of knowledge that are implicated in this study are for the history of rhetoric; implications for the theory and methodology of historical rhetoric scholarship; women’s history, particularly with reference to literate and rhetorical practice; implications for the history of diplomacy before 1300; and implications for the biographical information regarding Eleanor of Aquitaine in its present form. In each section, the implications and limitations of this study and possible avenues for future research are discussed.

The History of Rhetoric: Conclusions and Future Scholarship

One primary implication of this study is the identification of *consilium* as a corollary to deliberative rhetorical practice in antiquity, as well as a socio-political persuasive practice in the Middle Ages. While it is easy to overlook *consilium* as a practice because of its omnipresence in oaths of fealty and other documents and the supposition that this language was merely ornamental, it is apparent that many took the duty to give and receive counsel as a serious rhetorical duty, and that the nature of *consilium* derives at least theoretically from deliberative
practice in antiquity. Thierry of Chartres’ initial identification of *consilio* with deliberative rhetoric is the earliest example of how medieval thinkers found connections between the practice of political speech of antiquity and the role of counsel in the twelfth century. But Thierry’s commentaries, standing alone, are not sufficient proof of a widespread cultural and political idea. The fact that the concept and the overt connection recurs in so many other rhetorics surrounding the period, however, strongly suggests that this connection, and possibly the practice of courtly counsel, was far more intimately related to rhetoric than has been previously suggested. The term *consilium* is not only discussed in rhetorics throughout the Middle Ages, but many landmark works in the history of ideas in the period. Considering this evidence, in conjunction with the omnipresence of the term in epistolary evidence and oaths of fealty in the period demonstrates that *consilio* was a rhetorical practice from the Middle Ages that few scholars have examined.

*Consilium* also appears as a noun, suggesting that it was not only a form of speech but also an institution which evolved into both a privilege and a responsibility of noble status, and eventually became a legal right. It is possible that the rise of parliamentary bodies with formal rules and procedures arose in part because of a lack of adherence to the practice of giving and receiving counsel as the practices associated with monarchical governance changed over time, and proof of this is one possible avenue for future study. Secondarily, this study reveals that this practice crossed the lines of gender and rank in what is generally perceived as a patriarchal and stratified society. Thus, *consilium* was a women’s rhetorical practice, and there is ample epistolary evidence to support this assertion, and perhaps even more anecdotal evidence of the same in chronicles and other textual artifacts in the Middle Ages generally. The practice of *consilium* seems to have so pervaded noble culture, and therefore the political institutions of the Middle Ages, that a suggestion remains that the development of deliberative oratory in the
creation of formalized assemblies after the signing of the Magna Carta may have owed much to *consilium* as a rhetorical practice and a civic institution in previous centuries.

Third, evidence of *consilium* survives in, and was mediated by, epistolary artifacts, and Eleanor of Aquitaine had an evident social role and a rhetorical “office” in practicing *consilium*. The word is used to describe her role in her kingdom not merely by herself, but by others at her socio-political station. What is also evident is that women at the highest levels of medieval society were subject to requests to use their considerable rhetorical prowess in the service of others, including kings and popes. It is likely that *consilium* as a rhetorical practice was largely verbal, but this study has shown that it certainly was a practice mediated by writing. By the time of the late twelfth century, at least in Anglo-Normandy, there was likely an existing apparatus of technology, literate collaboration and instruction to this end that admitted women. It remains an open question how formal the rhetorical education of noble women was, but the existence of similar epistolary artifacts among similarly-situated noble women suggests that there was a culturally-constructed persuasive role for noble women in *consilium*. It is possible to conclude that there may have been a corresponding educational expectation and institution that existed in their culture. Existing accounts occasionally refer to women in the Middle Ages as possessing eloquence, and alas, the only remaining evidence we possess is documentary. Historians will never hear the voices of women as they were used in the conduct of civic affairs; but consider that Eleanor of Aquitaine was imprisoned for a period of her life for what many chroniclers allege was her capacity to move Henry II’s heirs against him with her words. Eleanor stands as a very obvious example that women were powerful, and that the power they exercised lay in their capacity to persuade.

Fourth, the role of women as rhetorical and diplomatic agents and their relationship to
ecclesiastical culture provides some insight into the complex systems of persuasion, agency, and diplomatic relations at work in the long twelfth century. *Consilium* was one strain of the origins of diplomatic practice in relation to the rhetorical tradition with respect to inter-monarchical relations. Historically, before 1300, there is a seeming inseparability of rhetorical training and early diplomatic theory and practice, finding its most overt expression in Albertanus of Brescia, and its ultimate personification in Brunetto Latini. When one views this connection in with the routine conjunction of discussions of the role of *consilium* as a genre of political speech, the evidence would suggest that more work needs to be done to tease out the precise intellectual traditions related to diplomacy which preceded the establishment of embassy structures. But it is clear that women had a diplomatic role closely related to their exhortative capacities, which were sought after by those charged with regulating peace between kingdoms in the Middle Ages. The alignment between women participating in future decision making related to the civic and the frequent use of topics of invention associated with deliberative rhetoric in their letters strongly suggest not only the existence of the deliberative tradition in the Middle Ages, but women as participants in it.

A final implication for the findings of this study for the history of rhetoric is that it may effectively dispel the idea that deliberative rhetorical practice in the Middle Ages had no relationship to civic life. It is apparent only from the excerpted letters of Ermengaard of Narbonne, Eleanor of Aquitaine, and Blanche of Castille alone that this is a somewhat untenable assertion, to say nothing of the vast and largely unexplored rhetoric of their male counterparts in the twelfth century.

But in light of these implications, there are also inherent limitations in the scope of this study. To begin with, this study has provided limited insight into how either noble men or non-
secular authorities – particularly in the case of courtier bishops - gave consilium. Just as significantly, there is little information on the educational tradition in persuasion that was a component of medieval noble education, and little or no data on the technical training of noble people of either gender in rhetorical practices related to consilium. It is entirely possible that the answer is contained in medieval conduct literature, which this study does not explore. The limitations of this study, confined as it is to roughly 100 years on either side of the 1190s, cannot adequately connect the practice of giving and receiving consilium in formalized assemblies as they developed in subsequent centuries, but it remains entirely possible to do so with adequate time and the availability of archival materials. Similarly, the origins of the survival of the deliberative tradition in the practice of consilium can likely be further historicized in Carolingian educational, social, and rhetorical practices, a task which remains outside the temporal scope of this argument. There is a wealth of data concerning Carolingian systems of written and oral communication in the historical record, and a largely uncharted and unexplored body of data relating to the Ottonian inheritors of those traditions.

To further illustrate how this persuasive practice of giving and receiving counsel can be historicized to Carolingian times, consider the following. Regular assemblies in the Frankish kingdom under Charlemagne were held annually, and sometimes more often, between Charlemagne and his nobles, as well as the highly literate ecclesiastical authorities in his realm. These were largely verbal assemblies, about which there are scattered references “through the narrative sources to meetings of Franks, of the army, and of lay and ecclesiastical magnates” (McKitterick 2008 222). Thus, it is known that Charlemagne conducted these assemblies to form consensus in the decision making processes, but only a few facts are known about the conduct and procedures of this process, as we possess only narrative accounts and charter
evidence. But among the accepted facts is that annual assemblies were not merely held to reinforce fealty and manufacture consent, nor were they just platforms for the pronouncement of Charlemagne’s agenda. By way of example, in 787, Charlemagne convened an assembly of his sacerdotes and optimates merely to inform them of his recent travels in Italy (McKitterick 2008 223). From such discrete facts we know that Carolingian assemblies were not merely discursive or autocratic occasions for pronouncement, but interactive and meaningful exchanges in which policy was built over time by meaningful exchange. It follows that rhetorical practices would be indispensable to such a critical function of government. Among subjects that were routinely discussed were war-making policy, as against the rebellious Saxons in 776 (216). Another use of these assemblies was the exchange of military intelligence, in the years 778 and 795 (223). All manner of intelligence from each noble was disgorged at these assemblies. One indication of how assemblies might have been conducted was through ecclesiastical accounts, which contend discussions were conducted, “individuals questioned,” written texts scrutinized, and decisive acts made in a collective presence (224). Assemblies were occasions for political cohesion, displays of political power, but most importantly, as scholars have determined deductively, for negotiations of power in and amongst all parties (227). This example, using merely secondary sources, shows that further study of the primary accounts of Carolingian assemblies and the decretal evidence associated with them could provide an extremely fertile avenue for studying the origins and nature of consilium in some of its earliest manifestations.

Another issue that is open for exploration in medieval rhetorical history includes the rather vast subject of inter-monarchical and intra-monarchical rhetoric. Extensive epistolary evidence exists between kings, and similarly, between kings and vassals. It is an open question as to the precise conduct of, and practices associated with, royal courts themselves. How formalized
were the persuasive practices of fealty-holders in making prospective decisions and giving *consilium*? Because of the somewhat sketchy image in the existing chronicles, an accurate picture has yet to be formed. Brunetto Latini’s rhetoric strongly suggests that speaking among nobles may have traditionally followed the model of the five-part oration, and proceeded according to rules of order, in his words a competition of counsels. But what does exist is a fairly vast body of data in the form of epistles accumulated by scholars who printed archival letters to and from noble participants in compendia after the advent of printing. There exists more data as evidence of persuasive practices in writing than one rhetorician, or several rhetoricians, could fully examine in one lifetime from the twelfth and thirteenth century alone.

Finally, there remains the open question about the extent and nature of the rhetorical education of noble women in the twelfth century. In terms of both the rhetorical practices and the educational activity of noble women, I strongly suspect that if a wealth of written records were to emerge surrounding the monastery of Fontevrault, and Fontevrism generally, enormous progress could be made with regard to the rhetorical traditions of noble women; from the year 1100 to the time of the French Revolution, Fontevrault would become a monastic refuge for noble women of all ages, one of the earliest of whom was Eleanor of Aquitaine.

**Theory and Methodology in Rhetorical Research: Toward a Methodology of Inclusion**

One significant finding of this study has been to investigate and apply Prior’s Cultural Historic Activity Systems theory as a methodological analytic for unpacking the history of rhetoric and rhetorical practices within their cultural and activity-centered contexts. However, this study represents both a departure from that theory, and a departure from traditional modes of historical analysis because it privileges rhetoric and rhetorics in the more conventional sense, to illustrate the relationship of the rhetorical tradition to frequently marginalized participants. On
the other hand, it can be illustrated that this mode of inquiry is also not new, and there are significant precedents for this inquiry in previous and current scholarly methods.

The present work began with an inquiry into the media of persons, namely Eleanor of Aquitaine and Celestine III. This inquiry, while biographically revealing based on the existing epistolary evidence, still did not sufficiently detail the nature of the rhetorical tradition in which she operated, or render her, historically speaking, anything other than an isolated anomaly – another so called “cameo appearance” in the history of women in written persuasion. I proceeded to my next significant finding, and that was the existing corpus of letters to and from noble women similarly situated in time, geographic space, and social rank, to discover that a tradition existed in women’s rhetorical practice that had been largely undocumented as a part of civic persuasion. An investigation of the specific nature of these practices in relation to the rhetorical tradition remained. Many questions remained, however, namely the attribution of some of Eleanor’s most significant writings to another person, and second, the relationship of rhetoric to civic life in the Middle Ages, particularly as concerned women; traditional histories do not account for either. Only after I examined medieval authorial practice, and the systems of (mis)attribution and the reasons behind them was I able to proceed to contextualize these practices within medieval rhetorics as primary sources. As a result, I began to examine how the commentary tradition illuminated medieval thinking about the “lost” genre of deliberative rhetoric, and only then, when dealing with the primary texts in their original language, did it become clear that the theory and practice of consilium was itself a slightly modified persuasive practice that pervaded, at a minimum, the theory and practice of medieval governance with respect to speaking and writing.

This is all well and good, but to prescribe for other scholars a uniformity of inquiry
progressing from persons to communities to practices to the rhetorics attendant to a given time seems limited as some form of inflexible proscription. Consider this narrative by James Kinneavy when he began to unearth the concept of *kairos*. Kinneavy indicated that he had been reading theology for his own edification when he kept noticing a term – *kairos* – referred to in the text. He then began to examine the etymology and origin of the term in connection with Greek and Hellenistic rhetoric. As Kinneavy himself explained, “I ran across it in [Paul] Tillich, the theologian . . . Then I read Levi and others who had historical articles on it going back to the pre-Aristotelian and pre-Platonic philosophies in Greece. . . . I reread the Phaedrus, and I was just amazed how important this word was” (Thompson 76). In a sense, Kinneavy’s methodology moved from the conceptual to the contextual, in reverse fashion from the present methodological inquiry.

Consider a slightly different narrative. James J. Murphy began his professional career by studying Chaucer, and looking very closely at whether Chaucer evidenced any influence of rhetorical training in his textual corpus. Murphy in turn systematically examined and catalogued all of the medieval rhetorics he could find beginning with a search for primary sources, and twenty years later produced *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* (Murphy 2012). Thus, in a sense, he began with practices and artifacts and moved onto the artifacts, as his search led him to comb library catalogues for primary sources, and finally patterns began to emerge reflecting three distinct categories reflecting the theory of rhetoric, in an almost inverse relationship to Kinneavy’s methods in recovering *kairos*. Murphy characterized these decades of research as a search “for any manuscript entries - not necessarily titles - even remotely connected to rhetoric” (2011). In the process of so doing, he began to learn exhaustive amounts of information about the persons who wrote those rhetorics, and the practices those rhetorics were designed to assist
people with.

Take another more recent statement of the theories implicating methodologies of important feminist scholars, who have articulate their methods in terms of the “critical imagination.” Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa F. Kirsch, from their book *Feminist Rhetorical Practices*, have stated:

... the goal is to look beyond typically anointed assumptions in the field in anticipation of seeing something not previously noticed or considered. We look at *people* at whom we have not looked before ... in *places* at which we have not looked at seriously or methodologically before ... at *practices* and *conditions* at which we have not looked closely enough ... and at *genres* that we have not considered closely enough ... and we think again about what women’s *patterns of action* seem to suggest about *rhetoric* (72 emphases added)

I have emphasized certain terms to illustrate the media of inquiry in the Royster and Kirsch’s methodological summary that closely mirrors the media at play in an activity theory analysis. Thus, it is apparent that Cultural Historic Activity Theory analyses, when contrasted with traditional and feminist methodological approaches, is not a significant departure from analytics of inquiry already in use. How then does the methodological approach in this dissertation differ? One possibility is that in feminist historical studies, notably Glenn’s *Rhetoric Retold*, there is a tendency to extend a privilege to the media of persons, and historiographically redefine the concept of “practices” in terms of the definition of rhetoric.

The focus of feminist rhetorical historiography seems overwhelmingly to be on gendered participants in a given culture and the rhetorical strategies they employ. The historical treatment feminist scholars routinely employ tends to begin with the media of *persons* (as did this study at
its outset) and move outward from there. One useful precedent of activity system analysis as a methodology is to make ideas, and particularly the idea of rhetoric, central to historical inquiry and then contextualize it in relation to persons in the period they lived in. One virtue of this approach is that it treats gendered individuals in the social, material, and historical context they operated in, rather than superimposing contemporary values on them. Thus, this study departs from feminist methods because it privileges rhetorical theory in context, and in turn relates these theories to persons and practices situated in their historical contexts. This is not to say this study does not owe a nearly inestimable debt to the contribution of Cheryl Glenn and countless others. Women inherited rhetorical traditions they were generally regarded as being excluded from – that is, participation in civic life and deliberative persuasion. But it has been difficult for previous generations of scholars to examine those traditions because traditional histories assumed there was no deliberative rhetoric in the Middle Ages in theory and practice, due to assumptions regarding the political context of the period that were far too sweeping.

All of the above accounts are examples of the methodology associated with studies in rhetorical history, and are selected by virtue of being drawn from studies which remain of lasting importance to the inter-discipline of rhetoric. I offer them to illustrate how patterns in methods of inquiry emerge which closely mirror the use of Cultural-Historic Activity Theory as a methodological framework. The excerpt demonstrates that methodological approaches very similar to the one in this study were already in practical operation before Prior articulated his theory. Thus, arguably it is both a strength and a weakness of the methodology used in this argument that, as a practical matter, similar analytics were already in operation in prior studies. This study’s contribution to methodological inquiry in the field of historical rhetoric lies only in the fact that it is at variance with some methods that do not privilege a close reading of rhetorics
conventionally defined. This approach, in the study at hand, has hopefully illustrated the utility of moving from theory to methodology when attempting to untangle previously undocumented rhetorical traditions.

Thus, the limitations inherent in this study in terms of methodology for rhetorical history must include what is perhaps a restatement, namely that I do not hold this up as a prescriptive “lockstep” of procedures and methods for investigating rhetorical traditions. All methodologies must be preceded by insights and natural curiosity, as well as the ability, ultimately, of the researcher to fully synthesize information and learn to ask the right questions. Another inherent limitation is the simple capacity for the historical archives to provide a sufficient amount of material a given investigation, which may speak to the organization, size, and availability of the archive itself. Many of the questions that researchers still have about the Middle Ages are largely owing to the wholly textual evidence that remains, as well as the motives and epistemic assumptions of those who left the evidence behind; generally, when dealing with the remote past, we see the full range of practices, persons, communities, and artifacts only as through a glass, darkly. To fully contextualize these practices not only demands a contextual examination, but unfortunately is sometimes made impossible by the state of the existing textual evidence. With the proliferation of disciplines and resources converging on the subject of rhetoric as a topic of historical inquiry, combined with the readily available and increasing number of textual artifacts being digitized and made available to everyone on the world wide web, one can only hope that the amount of information and those processing it will advance the study of the history of rhetoric light years ahead of its state in the early twentieth century. While Cultural Historic Activity Theory is not a perfect method of inquiry into this subject, it effectively broadens the scope of historical inquiry and provides an orderly analytic for it.
In the study at hand, I have privileged one media as a category which is not accounted for in Prior’s theory as it was originally modeled; this could either be an implication of this study in terms of its contribution to advance methodology, or a limitation. Because rhetoric was the central concept at the heart of this inquiry, I made it a separate component of my analytic, but it certainly could be argued that is simply due to the way I framed the question and privileged certain data over other data. I hope that the effect of this kind of amplification of one aspect of a cultural activity system has provided, at a minimum, useful evidence for questions in rhetorical history that many feel have not been adequately explained. A significant limitation of using this analytic is to know where, and when, to stop looking for connections between persons, institutions and other media at work in a given temporal space. Prior’s analytic is so encompassing that it is possible to trace and follow connections to the point where inquiry is no longer generative of new knowledge. One principle limitation for use by other scholars in the history of rhetoric is similarly what to identify as the operative and central question and which media to begin with to determine whether further inquiry is justified.

One avenue for future research in this area would be to gather, using qualitative research methods, more methodological accounts of the procedures used by other representative historians of rhetoric to determine if commonalities emerge. To the best of my knowledge, this data has never been systematically collected, and accounts from historians such as Richard Leo Enos, Cheryl Glenn, and many others with diverse historiographic assumptions could provide a rich and layered set of narratives which other scholars could employ to create knowledge in the future. Such an endeavor could provide young scholars with both practical and theoretical insight into historical rhetoric that might greatly advance the knowledge we possess and the way we make it.
Women’s History: A Legacy of Literacies

This study, building on the work of Joan Ferrante and a host of other scholars who already have proven and articulated the social and political roles of medieval women, has added to that conversation by identifying the rhetorical practices and offices of these women in the context of their time, and in relation to the ancient rhetorical traditions. This study also has implications for the history of women in Anglo-Normandy, generally, in the period between 1100 and 1250. What was already apparent from looking at primary and secondary sources is that the persuasive social role of women was already developed and a subject of intellectual inquiry throughout the period. What the intellectual preoccupation suggests is that, as a practical matter, women already had an apparent role which was communicative and persuasive at its heart, and governed by both a practical and an ethical conceptual framework. This study also illustrates the role of ecclesiastical authorities and their relationships to women in persuasive practice. But additionally, it illustrates that Christine de Pizan was more than just an apologist or advocate for the role of women in civic decision making; Pizan was arguing from a widely-recognized social and political phenomenon, which recognized women’s consilial speech as a vital part of complex systems of medieval governance. Thus, this study also gives insight into the social and intellectual milieu which De Pizan inherited, and offers one avenue to expand a scholarly understanding of her rhetoric and political theory, by showing the practical realities and rhetorical traditions women already practiced in the centuries preceding her writings.

The limitations of this study in this account for women’s history and literacy are numerous. First, there is a vast corpus of letters to and from women readily available dating as far back as the Patristic period, and increasing in number throughout the Carolingian and Ottonian period. This study has simply not addressed these whole epochs of human history, nor
the many hundreds of artifacts from those periods. Conversely, evidence of women’s *consilial* rhetoric in subsequent centuries has not been mapped, and in all likelihood, the archival record must be significantly larger simply because it has not been subject to the predations of time. A colossal amount of work remains to be done to give the history of women back to us, work which could provide countless opportunities to show how noble women’s speech and writing changed and adapted over time. Elizabeth I’s famous orations to the troops at Tilbury stands as a clear piece of evidence that women’s deliberative speech persisted into the Early Modern period, but what is unclear is what happened in the intervening centuries. It is highly unlikely that the answer to such a question is “nothing.”

One avenue for future investigation and research in this regard is further scholarship that separates and compares ecclesiastical pronouncements about the role of women in governance and civic persuasion in order to compare them with non-monastic or ecclesiastical sources. Vincent of Beauvais and John of Salisbury could be said to be the former, and clearly came from a culture of monastic and celibate values, while the positions of non-ecclesiastical thinkers Albertanus of Brescia and Brunetto Latini appear markedly different. The reason for the markedly different positions is that many of the ecclesiastical thinkers about ideal government in the twelfth century were reacting negatively to courtly culture as it actually was, and part of their hard-line pronouncements about the role of women in government could have been a reaction to women’s actual persuasive participation in courtly life. A more extensive study and comparison is certainly needed.

**Implications for the History of Writing and Literate Practice**

Cheryl Glenn, Jennifer Sutton, and others have offered a salient point regarding the nature of “literacy” in the Middle Ages, namely that literacy was not an isolated art but an
activity requiring multiple participants. This study has offered a careful analysis of the nature of agency, representation, and authorship in one narrow context. What the findings of this study suggest is that the nature of invention, arrangement, and memory in civic persuasion could hardly be a solitary act, and the attribution of Eleanor’s letters to Blois (and vice-versa) may be missing a significant social and historical context. If one considers that Eleanor’s persuasive practices, in her own time and in relationship to her innumerable scribes, rhetoricians, and diplomatists, need not be an either/or proposition. More likely, Eleanor is either both and author with Peter of Blois and others, or neither an author in a modern sense at all; the long debate about the “authenticity” of her writings may be missing the central inquiry entirely. In general, Eleanor’s literate production by custom, practical requirement, and everyday practice could not be done in isolation; moreover, her letters are so shot through with personal memories and contextualizing information which Peter of Blois could not have known that it is apparent that the letters could be said to be neither Eleanor of Aquitaine’s or Peter of Blois, or to be both.

Thus, one implication for this work is its illustration of the complexity of writing practice, as well as the nature of “authority” in that process. It is apparent that, at least in the Middle Ages, written composition was an act of heavy lifting in a foreign language which, to be effective, required extensive Biblical, rhetorical, grammatical, and logical training. To argue that Eleanor of Aquitaine was therefore untrained in rhetoric is to ignore the inherent nature of the relationship of herself to Peter, and likely, countless others who circulated ideas from the ancient traditions and genres of rhetoric to assist her in governance and in the practice of inter-monarchical persuasion. It is apparent that she exercised persuasive power both before and after her encounter with Peter, and had a lifelong association at two courts with the intellectual luminaries of her day, many of whom were rhetoricians of the first water.
Additional scholarship on the material and practical realities of writing related to agency, representation, authority, and persuasive practices is further needed to unravel the complex systems attendant to written persuasion at every level of medieval government, and the existing archival record will likely be merely the very tip of a very large iceberg of evidence. One possible avenue to examine the literate practices of noble women exists in the Great Charter of Fontevrault. In the charter, there exist hundreds of written artifacts which provide evidence of persuasion in writing by noble women, in a community created for them. The charter record is spread over hundreds of years, and constitutes hundreds of thousands of words. Many of these records might seem of a wholly pedestrian character, recording transfers of property and rights to and from the Fontevrist community; but in all likelihood, patterns of activity and persuasion mediated by writing can emerge to illustrate broad categories of written and material practice which would illustrate the values, motivations, and practices attendant to noble women’s written and rhetorical practice. Few scholars have even scratched the surface of this charter evidence, but many scholars studying the Carolingian charter record from prior centuries have established enormously important evidence of systems of writing and its uses (see McKitterick). A similar undertaking could examine women’s persuasive practices in a constitutive community at the Abbey of Fontevrault.

International Relations and its Practices Before 1300

Given the state of knowledge about diplomacy in theory and practice before 1300, this study, if it has done anything, has shown the utility of examining historical systems using the lens of Constaniou’s theory of diplomacy, although subordinate to an activity systems analysis. Constantinou has offered a warrant to study diplomatic exchanges. Secondly, this study has illustrated that at least one representative figure in the rhetorical tradition was discussing and
prescribing diplomatic practice as one with, or related to, rhetoric. Moreover, the historical record is replete with examples of the rhetorical training and practice of chancery officials, at least in Anglo-Normandy, and this rhetorical training was generally a precursor to being selected by royal authorities to practice diplomacy. *Rhetor* was synonymous with *diplomat* before 1300, which was the first substantive clue that the rhetorical tradition was at least one source of the formation of diplomatic institutions before the Viennese established formal embassy structures across Europe. Moreover, it would appear from the historical record that women acted as diplomatic agents between and among monarchs, either in person or in turn through representative agents. There remains a significant amount of research into the diplomatic records and the rhetorics attendant to them in before the twelfth to find connections between medieval rhetoric and the development of diplomacy in Europe. The limitations of this study and the evidence available merely hint that further research on this subject could yield abundant scholarly information, and greatly enrich how we understand the theory and practice of diplomacy prior to 1300.

**The Biographical Implications: Eleanor of Aquitaine**

The final implications of this study reflect the significance of what we know, or do not know, about Eleanor of Aquitaine. There are at least a dozen biographies of Eleanor, ranging in nature from the highly conservative, such as Jean Flori’s recent critical biography, to the largely speculative to the highly imaginative. Numerous scholarly debates have sprung up around her, particularly with regard to her relationship to literate practice and literate culture in her time. Very few have closely examined the written artifacts she left behind in relationship to the literate culture of her time, or their relationship to the rhetorical tradition. All too often, as has been discussed in great detail here, the discussion of Eleanor’s literacy turn on the idea of Eleanor’s
literacy using contemporary definitions of literacy, rather than conceptions based on literate practices of Eleanor’s time. Secondarily, they often focus on the authenticity of the letters from Eleanor attributed to Peter of Blois.

One implication of this study is that these debates have been asking the wrong questions, and do not examine literate and authorial practice and theory in her time. The attendant cultural evidence and circumstantial facts concerning Eleanor’s community, writing practices in her time, rhetorical theory and education as it existed in her day, as well as the socio-political system she actively engaged in, all would suggest that what we “know” about her has been limited to a rather specific body of evidence, analyzed through a conceptual framework that was not hers. By way of example, her literacy in Latin is really only one rather narrow question which ignores her role as a rhetor, and therefore an actor in the rhetorical tradition. If her letters to Celestine are excluded from all of the other artifacts which bear her name, we are still left with all of the accounts in historical chronicles of her role as a persuasive actor at the highest levels of Anglo-Norman political culture. Additionally, we are left with numerous letters and charters whose authenticity is not in question, which reflect that she acted as an agent of political and social change. But taken contextually as a whole, all of the evidence I have cited in this work points to a set of facts strongly suggesting that her life was one which intersected with the rhetorical tradition of civic engagement, and in all likelihood was influenced through ideas circulating in her day that had their origins in classical rhetoric. Her biography, outlined in its most conservative way, also strongly suggests that Eleanor of Aquitaine had more than a passing relationship with the art of writing and rhetoric, even using the most conservative definitions of what constitutes “rhetoric” and “literacy.”

Conclusion
This dissertation has been an attempt to inform a collective understanding not only of rhetoric in the Middle Ages, women’s rhetorics, and the deliberative rhetorical tradition, but to illustrate a mode of methodological inquiry into how these concepts relate to one another. It has been an attempt to articulate not only the role of noble culture, noble women, and political speech in the long twelfth century, but an illustration of how such a study, both methodologically and theoretically, can broaden and enrich our knowledge about significantly neglected periods of rhetorical history.

There is a common joke among historians that the thing about history is that it’s just one damned thing after another. But just as significantly, history is a conjunction of many things happening at once. In our increasingly complex world, I hope this study of remote time and place means something for our own time. I believe it is theoretically useful to examine the past to tease out traditions where concepts such as rhetoric, literacy, and the very technology of writing intersect. It is especially useful to show how these literate practices changed, and in turn changed the idea of the civic. Today, our culture and political system is faced with technology that far outpaces the ability of its participants to absorb information, and it demands of the average citizens vastly more technical and rhetorical ability than it ever has. Similar changes were taking place in the twelfth century, but with rhetorical and technical demands that we sometimes take for granted from our perspective in the twenty-first century. If we learn nothing else from the past, we can learn the way our predecessors intellectually dealt with language in relation to their historical and political contexts. The rhetorical context, that is, the evolution of the deliberative genre in the Middle Ages, is an illustration of a system of communication that embraced more participants than previously imagined. The inevitable consequence of this systemic interaction of language and governance was – and still is - further systemic change of political systems of
every level. If we understand examples from the past that illustrate the evolution of systems and
participants in them, we can analogize to the present, and adapt the way in which we teach and
practice written communication more responsively. In turn, perhaps we might someday learn to
govern ourselves with more civility and a greater capacity to accommodate all the perspectives
of those who come after us.
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