Queen Adeliza and the Lotharingian connection

by Kathleen Thompson

Compatriots of king’s foreign wives often benefited from the queen’s access to patronage and expatriate communities developed, but it is rare to be able to trace these networks in the central Middle Ages. An early example is the group that gathered around the second wife of King Henry I (1100–35), Adeliza of Louvain, who settled in Sussex after the king’s death. Clerics from Adeliza’s household became successful in the English church and the women who accompanied her married into the Anglo-Norman nobility. Adeliza was herself the ancestress of the earls of Arundel through her second marriage to William d’Aubigny, while her half-brother, Joscelin, was the founder of the Percy family.

Although Sussex has had links with several dowager queens of England, in no case has an association had more impact than that with Queen Adeliza of Louvain, who settled at Arundel in the 1130s. The queen’s dower lands formed the basis of one of the most important landed estates and her descendants remain in the county to this day. The presence of the dowager queen at Arundel is therefore an important factor in the history of Sussex, but Adeliza’s activities have broader implications too. While medieval historians have devoted considerable attention in recent years to the role of a queen, their ability to trace a queen’s entourage in any detail before the 13th century remains limited. Queen Emma, the Norman wife of both Aethelred II and King Cnut, may have been responsible for the large numbers of Normans in pre-Conquest England, but there is little to link them with her specifically. Similarly, the marriage between William the Conqueror and Matilda will have opened up for Matilda’s Flemish compatriots opportunities which can only be surmised. In contrast, Adeliza’s patronage network in the first half of the 12th century can be illuminated by a number of references and provides an important, as well as perhaps the earliest, insight on the social and political impact of a foreign queen on national as well as local history.

Early in 1121 Adeliza, daughter of Godfrey, Count of Louvain and Duke of Lower Lorraine, married Henry I (1100–35). She was Henry’s second wife whom he married some three years after the death of his first queen and only weeks after the drowning of his son and heir, the Atheling William, in the loss of the White Ship. As queen, Adeliza was a patron of the arts, but less actively involved in government than her predecessor, the Scottish princess Edith Matilda, and no children were born of the marriage. The king granted her property in Shropshire and West Sussex that had been in his hands since the banishment of the Montgommery family in 1102, and after Henry’s death at the end of 1135 Adeliza can be found in residence at her castle of Arundel. She did not, however, disappear into an uneventful retirement. In 1139 she welcomed the rival claimant to the throne, her step-daughter, the empress Matilda, to England and around the same time she made a second marriage to William d’Aubigny, the royal butler or pincerna. By her second husband she was the mother of a sizeable family and her male descendants formed a line of earls in West Sussex until the middle of the 13th century.

Adeliza’s 30-year residence in England as queen and dowager can be reconstructed from chronicle references and from a series of charters, dating from her dowagerhood, in which she manages her estates. She confirmed, for example, the grant to Lewes Priory made by Alan of Chithurst and there are records of numerous benefactions to the Cluniac house at Reading, including a peremptory mandate to the abbot instructing him not to alienate a gift she had made. King Stephen also had occasion to direct two instructions to the dowager queen regarding the impact of her actions on religious houses. From the 1140s there are a number of acts issued jointly by the queen and her second husband, as well as references to her in the acts of others.
When Adeliza had arrived in England in January 1121 she was surrounded by her own compatriots. Unlike the household of her step-daughter, the empress Matilda, that had been dismissed shortly after her arrival at her husband's court, many of Adeliza's followers remained with her and would percolate into Anglo-Norman society. Her chancellor, for example, was a fellow Lotharingian named Godfrey, who remained with her until 1123, when he was appointed by the king to the bishopric of Bath.8 The appointment of a Lotharingian to an English bishopric was by no means without precedent, since Lotharingia had been a focal point of ecclesiastical reform in the 9th and 10th centuries.9 He presumably took compatriots to Somerset with him, for his charter restoring Monkton Combe to the monks of Bath in 1135 is witnessed by the chamberlain, Rothardus.10 A chamberlain named Rotardus is known to have witnessed acts by the Adeliza and her second husband, so it would appear that, after Bishop Godfrey's death in 1135, the chamberlain returned to the widowed queen's household.11

Bishop Godfrey's successor as Adeliza's chancellor also made his way into the English episcopate. In 1125, only two years after Godfrey's appointment, Adeliza's second chancellor, Simon, whom the Waverley annals indicate that the queen had brought with her from Louvain, became Bishop of Worcester. He was to hold his office until his death in 1150 and appears to have remained a close friend of the queen, witnessing several of her grants, including one made at Arundel in the days of her widowhood.12 John of Worcester's account of Simon's appointment demonstrates mutual support among the Louvain community in England, for Bishop Godfrey accompanied his compatriot, Simon, to his ordination and consecration at Canterbury in May 1125.13 The Louvain community did not lose touch with its homeland, however, for Bishop Simon's absence from the general church council of 1127 is attributed to his visiting his kinsmen abroad and he is known to have been in Louvain in 1136.14 None the less, by the mid-1120s there are signs that Queen Adeliza was beginning to develop a patronage network among her husband's subjects. In 1124, for example, she was instrumental in placing the young boy who would become the Waltham Chronicler in the school of that house.15

In addition to the officers of her household Adeliza was accompanied by her ladies, some of whom would have chosen to stay and it is possible to describe the careers of two of them. Orderic Vitalis comments that Juliana, the wife of Jordan of Auffay in the Talou area of Normandy, was a ‘wise and beautiful girl who had come to England with Queen Adeliza from the region of Louvain.'16 When King
Henry gave her in marriage to Jordan, one of the young men attached to the royal court, he also gave him Norton Ferris in Kilmington, Somerset, now Wilts. Ordéric also provides the information that Juliana’s father was called Godeschalk and it is tempting to identify him with Godeschalk the constable who witnessed a grant by the queen to Reading Abbey, probably made early in 1140.

A second companion of Queen Adeliza had rather grander origins. Melisende of Rethel was Adeliza of Louvain’s cousin through their mothers’ connections to the comital house of Namur, and she had probably joined her cousin in England as a means to escape an ambiguous status at home. Her father, Gervase, was the son of Hugh Count of Rethel and brother of Baldwin of Le Bourcq, who ultimately became King Baldwin II of Jerusalem. Gervase had entered the church, but after his deposition as Archbishop of Rheims by Pope Paschal II in 1107, he married Isabel, daughter of Godfrey Count of Namur. The legitimacy of his only surviving child was perhaps questionable and her stepfather apparently took the opportunity to find her a foreign husband.

The chosen bridegroom was Robert Marmion, an Anglo-Norman lord, who was described as ‘a warlike man, hardly equalled in his time for his ferocity, cleverness and boldness’. His Norman lands around Fontenay-le-Marmion were modest, but he was building up interests in Lincolnshire and Staffordshire. He also held a small estate at Berwick in Sussex, given to his father by Henry I, that would provide Melisende with a home reasonably close to her royal cousin. The date of Melisende’s marriage to Robert Marmion is unknown, but Melisende must have remained close to her royal cousin, for after the death of Robert Marmion in 1144 Adeliza gave a portion of the manor of Stanton Harcourt in Oxfordshire as a maritagium or marriage portion when Melisende made a second marriage to Richard of Camville. Melisende appears to have shared with Adeliza an affection for the Abbey of Reading to which she persuaded her second husband to grant the chapel of South Leigh.

Early in the reign of her husband’s successor, King Stephen, Adeliza took the traditional role of a dowager queen, preserving the memory of the husband. In December 1136, for example, she was at Reading, where her husband lay buried in the abbey of his foundation, and it has recently been argued that there was a special association between Adeliza and this house. In the presence of several bishops and abbots, she granted property to the abbey in memory of her husband and the document recording her act is a particularly valuable indicator of what might be described as her court on that occasion. It was composed of her household and those closely associated with her. There were her clergy, the chaplain, Herman and the clerk, Master Serlo; her constable, Gozo, and the brothers, Maurice and Reginald of Windsor, the second of whom appears to have been her steward. Also present were the heads of religious houses with whom the queen may have had most contact when her husband was alive: Ingenulf, abbot of Abingdon, Walter, abbot of Eynsham, and Ralph, prior of Osney. Among the senior clergy was Simon, bishop of Worcester and Nicholas, the abbot of Battle, who had presumably accompanied the queen-dowager from Sussex.

Although Adeliza remained in England after the death of King Henry, it is clear that her links with her homeland continued. It has recently been suggested that, drawing on the religious traditions of her native Low Countries, she commissioned the Shaftesbury Psalter in the early years of her widowhood, and that it may have been produced for her at Arundel under the supervision of her chaplains. Adeliza was certainly served by chaplains with the non-Norman names of Herman and Franco in the second half of the 1130s and it was probably at this time that the best-known of Adeliza’s compatriots arrived. The queen’s brother, Joscelin of Louvain, ancestor of the Percies, first appears in English documents in 1136 when he attested the queen’s first act in favour of Reading. He was the son of Adeliza’s father, Godfrey of Louvain, but probably not, as has been suggested, of Godfrey’s second wife, the widowed Countess of Flanders, Clementia. In medieval society it was the common practice for a man’s eldest daughter to receive the name of his mother, yet Joscelin did not use the name of the very well-connected Clementia, who was the daughter of the count of Burgundy and sister of Pope Calixtus II, for his daughters, Eleanor and Alice. Joscelin’s arrival, shortly after the death of King Henry, at the court of his widowed half-sister, sheds therefore an interesting sidelight on the queen’s reference in the 1136 act to ‘all the offspring of the most noble king Henry’. These words suggest a tolerant attitude on the queen’s part to King Henry’s multitude of illegitimate children, but a
display of such tolerance might have enabled her to help her own bastard brother.

Joscelin’s career in the late 1130s and early 1140s is obscure, but he is likely to have remained in his sister’s household and served among the knights of his second brother-in-law, William d’Aubigny pincerna, the royal butler. The date of Adeliza’s second marriage is not known. William of Malmesbury does not mention William d’Aubigny in his account of the empress’s arrival in England in September 1139, but Robert of Torigni indicates that an invitation had been sent from William d’Aubigny to the empress, which would place the marriage before autumn 1139. The Norman lands of the Aubigny family lay in western Normandy, where there was active support for the empress in 1138, led by her half-brother, Reginald of Dunstanville, and Baldwin de Redvers, and it is possible that William d’Aubigny had made contact with the empress’s supporters in Normandy.

The Waltham chronicler tells us that Adeliza’s new husband had spent some time in the early days of their marriage defending her rights over the Collegiate Church of Waltham, a traditional perquisite of the queen, and it may be that there were tensions between the queen dowager and the new king, brought about by an attempt on Stephen’s part to recover the queen’s property for his wife, Matilda. Although it has recently been suggested that Adeliza was attempting to make peace between Stephen and his cousin in 1139, it may equally be the case that the queen dowager had welcomed her step-daughter to England after having been deprived of some or all of the queen’s traditional lands by King Stephen. The empress’s later attempt to restore Waltham to Adeliza suggests that there was some understanding between the two women about this particular piece of property. A certain caution on Adeliza’s part in the early years of Stephen’s reign is also indicated by her reluctance to make inroads on the bloc of Sussex lands granted to her by King Henry, for her religious patronage was confined to her outlying property in Oxfordshire and Hertfordshire until the time of her second marriage, when her resources would have been supplemented by the Norfolk estates of the Aubigny family. Queen Adeliza’s donation of property in Sussex to the abbey of Afflighem and its confirmation by her second husband, two acts which were witnessed by Joscelin and probably made shortly after the death of their father, Duke Godfrey in 1139, are the earliest alienations of her Sussex property.

Adeliza’s second marriage may have been the factor that led to a marked improvement in Joscelin’s fortunes. Very late in the 1130s William d’Aubigny was created earl of Lincoln by the king and the acquisition of the title reflects William’s growing power. His family lands in combination with whatever remained of the queen dowager’s property represented a substantial powerbase, and it may even be possible that the earldom was granted in compensation for Adeliza’s loss of the traditional revenues of the queen. By Christmas 1141 William’s earldom had been changed to that of Sussex, but the fact remained that his landed interests were widespread and he would have needed reliable lieutenants to manage them. Although Joscelin does not witness two of the three known charters that his brother-in-law gave as earl of Lincoln, it is clear that at some point in the 1140s he took on responsibility for the castle at Arundel. He may have succeeded Godeschalk as the constable, but preferred to use the title of castellan since that title was commonly used in Lotharingia and the Low Countries.

To support him in this role, Joscelin received from Queen Adeliza and William d’Aubigny the honour of Petworth and his new position is demonstrated by an act in which he approved the gift of a church to Lewes Priory. The honour of Petworth had formerly been held by Adeliza’s steward, Reginald of Windsor, and this grant indicates the key part that Joscelin had come to play in the running of his sister’s and brother-in-law’s lands. The honour was a substantial portion of the resources available to Adeliza and her husband in Sussex and was to account for 22½ knights’ fees in 1166 as against 88 fees of the honour of Arundel; in the 1180s it would pay a farm of over £130 as against over £380 for the Arundel honour. Earl William had become a very rich man through his marriage and his wealth enabled him to build a new establishment at Castle Rising in Norfolk, recently described as a ‘castle fit for a queen’. By the second half of the 1140s there was no need for caution in the allocation of religious patronage and at Candlemas 1148 William and Adeliza made an agreement with Bishop Hilary of Chichester concerning their rights over diocesan property in Chichester. With his foot on the ladder of lordship
Joscelin, like his cousin, Melisende, also remembered Reading abbey and used his new property to make his own benefactions to the abbey, confirming them in the early 1150s at the burial of Queen Adeliza. Although his sister was dead, Joscelin continued to prosper in partnership with his brother-in-law. He witnessed his brother-in-law’s confirmation to the Norman abbey of Troarn for the soul of Queen Adeliza and in 1153 Earl William may have used him as an emissary to Henry fitz Empress as Henry sought to make good his claim to the English crown. If Joscelin was his emissary then he was very successful in forging links, for after his accession Henry II not only allowed William d’Aubigny to maintain his hold on Adeliza’s lands and to retain the privileges of the earl in Sussex, he also arranged Joscelin’s marriage. His wife was Agnes, daughter and eventual co-heiress of William de Percy. Although it is not clear whether Agnes was her father’s heiress at the time of her marriage, she was to set the seal on Joscelin’s fortunes by bringing him the more important part of the Percy lands in Yorkshire in a settlement in the king’s court in 1175. Joscelin retained the good opinion of the king, witnessing royal charters and undertaking occasional tasks, and it is perhaps not without significance that his eldest son was named Henry and his eldest daughter Eleanor. He died around 1180, having established a lineage that was to make a significant contribution to English history.

Even after the death of Queen Adeliza the Louvain connection may still have been active in Sussex. In the late 1150s for example, Gelduin fitz Savaric of Midhurst took a bride, Estrangia, whose personal name is probably a nickname covering an unfamiliar continental personal name. Gelduin was one of the sons of Savaric fitz Cana, a Manceau noble, settled in Sussex in the reign of Henry I, and the links that his elder brother, Ralph fitz Savaric, had established with Adeliza’s second husband, William d’Aubigny, have already been noted. Gelduin himself may well have served Queen Adeliza and her second husband, but nothing is known of his activities until shortly before the death of his elder brother in the middle 1150s. Then Gelduin and his other brother, Savaric partitioned the family lands. The acquisition of those lands would have given Gelduin the means to marry, and it is possible that he chose his wife from the household of Joscelin of Louvain.

The origins of Gelduin’s wife are unknown, but her son, Savaric bishop of Bath, was able to exploit kinship with the emperor Henry VI to undertake diplomatic negotiations on behalf of King Richard I. A. L. Poole suggested, therefore, that Estrangia was a Burgundian relation of Gelduin’s neighbour at Petworth, Joscelin of Louvain. An alternative suggestion is that Estrangia was a second-generation member of Queen Adeliza’s entourage, who may have moved to the household of Joscelin of Louvain after the queen’s death. There is clear evidence that the Lotharingian connection was reinforced in the 1140s when Joscelin’s nephew, also Joscelin, was granted property by his uncle and another individual with a Lotharingian toponymic, Simon of Wavre (Brabant, arr. Nivelles), witnessed his acts. Estrangia’s eldest son, the brother of Bishop Savaric of Bath, bore the unusual name of Franco, which had never been used hitherto in Gelduin’s family. Yet this was not an uncommon name in Louvain. In 1128 Abbot Franco of Afflighem had visited the court of King Henry and Adeliza. Queen Adeliza’s 1136 grant to Reading abbey had been witnessed by a Franco of Brussels and her chaplain Franco, who had attested her gift of land at Stanton Harcourt (Oxon) to provide lights for Reading abbey, apparently took service with her brother after the queen’s death. Estrangia might therefore have been the daughter of a Franco who had entered either the queen’s household or that of her brother in the 1140s or 1150s.

Adeliza was accompanied to England by a considerable number of her compatriots, many of whom chose to remain with her, particularly the clergy, who were perhaps attracted by the opportunities that had already been exploited by their countrymen in England. These men and women were successful in Anglo-Norman society and they were joined by reinforcements, of whom Adeliza’s brother, Joscelin, is the most well-known. More than twenty years after her arrival in England Queen Adeliza was still attended by a chaplain who bore a Germanic name, and, although only one donation to a Lotharingian house is known, it is possible that Adeliza arranged for some of her earthly remains to return to her native land. She clearly therefore remained until her death the centre of a Lotharingian community in England, but she was also the source of a new noble house. The acquisition of her Sussex lands during Stephen’s reign enabled her second husband, William d’Aubigny, to enhance his family’s position, and to
consolidate it through an alliance with Henry II. Although failing to secure the royal line of Henry I, Adeliza did establish through her second marriage a long-lasting line of earls at Arundel.58

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NOTES


6 The Chartulary of the High Church of Chichester, ed. W. D. Peckham (Sussex Record Society 46 1942/3), no. 295; Calendar of Documents Preserved in France, ed. J. H. Round (London, 1899), no. 974; Regesta, 3, nos 697, 793, 918, 921.

7 Orderic, 6, 168. Dr Chibnall comments that Henry, archdeacon of Winchester, became bishop of Verden.

8 John of Worcester, Chronicle, III: Annals from 1067 to 1140 with the Gloucester Interpolations and the Continuation to 1141, ed. and trans. P. McGurk (Oxford, 1998), 154 says that Godfrey was the king’s chancellor, but the E version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle says that he was the queen’s chancellor and born in Louvain, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, ed. D. Whitelock (London, 1969), 189.


13 JW, 158.


17 Reading, no. 535, probably dating from shortly after the death of Bishop Roger of Salisbury in December 1139.

18 For Melisende’s background, Alberic of Trois Fontaines, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores 23, 817–22.


21 Reading, no. 536. Regesta, 3, no. 140 states this was given in maritagium. For the second marriage, Davis, ‘Coventry charter’, 536.

22 Reading, no. 533.


24 Reading, no. 370.

25 Herman was the queen’s chaplain in 1136, Reading, no. 370 and was still with her in the late 1140s, Chichester, no. 95. Master Serlo was the queen’s clerk in 1136, Reading, no. 370 and was given the churches of Berkeley Hermesse by Bishop Simon of Worcester, Reading, no. 270. Adeliza’s grant to Osney is witnessed by a Serlo medicus, Osney, no. 75.


27 Eynhsham, no. 725 and Osney, 2, no. 725. Ingenuulf of Abingdon witnessed Reading, no. 459 and was present at Reading for the burial of the queen, Reading, no. 551. For Henry I’s fondness for the Thames valley, D. Crouch


Reading, no. 370: pro salute...totius progeniei quam defunctorum.


For Waltham as the property of Henry’s first wife, Regesta, 2, no. 525. It was apparently still in the Queen dowager’s hands when she married William d’Aubigny, Waltham Chronicle, 78. For its relationship with Stephen’s queen, Regesta, 3, no. 917.


Cartulaire d’Afflighem, ed. E. de Marneffe (Louvain, 1894), nos 67, 68. Duke Godfrey died in January 1139, Monasticon Belgæ, t. 4, Province of Brabant (Liège, 1964), 28.

For the earldom, R. H. C. Davis, King Stephen 1135–1154, 3rd ed. (London, 1990), 134.


The fullest account of the honour of Arundel and the Aubigny lands in Norfolk and Kent is Farrer, 3, 1–16.


Chichester, nos 94 (Earl William’s act), 95 (Queen Adeliza’s act), 96 (King Stephen’s confirmation), 60 (Pope Alexander III’s confirmation of 1148). Bishop Hilary was consecrated 3 August 1147, so this act must refer to February 1147/8.

Reading, nos 550, 551, 552.


EYC XI, no. 89.

Boxgrove, no. 103.

OV, 6, 32; R. Latouche, Histoire du Comté du Maine (Paris, 1910), 127–31. See footnote 35 for Ralph’s links with William d’Aubigny. He was alive in October 1155, Chichester, no. 305.


Poole, ‘England and Burgundy in the last decade of the twelfth century’.

Boxgrove, no. 56; Lewes, 2, 79–80.

For Franco de Bohun, PR 32 Henry II, 184.


For William d’Aubigny patronised by her family, where her father had been buried and her brother became a monk, Wertheimer, ‘Adeliza’, 82. It is possible that Adeliza’s body was buried at Afflighem, a house where she married William d’Aubigny. He was buried near her first husband, but there was also a tradition that she was buried at Afflighem, a house patronised by her family, where her father had been buried and her brother became a monk, Wertheimer, ‘Adeliza’, 82. It is possible that Adeliza’s body was buried at Reading and some internal organs returned to Afflighem.

In his sketch in the Dictionary of National Biography, J. H. Round credits Adeliza with seven children by her second marriage, but gives no sources. He may have been relying on Agnes Strickland’s account in Lives of the Queens of England from the Norman Conquest, 1 (London, 1882), 197. Robert of Torigni is unsure, asserting in one place that there were three (William, Godfrey and Adeliza) and in another four (William and three others), 246, 271. Five
potential siblings are traceable: William and Godfrey (Chichester, no. 295), Adeliza, wife of John, Count of Eu (Torigni, 246) Reinier (British Library, Cotton Titus MS. C viii, Cartulary of Wymondham Priory, fo. 18), and Olivia, who was buried at Boxgrove (Boxgrove, no. 40). The latter may have been an illegitimate child of William d’Aubigny. There is no warrant for the editor of the Boxgrove cartulary to suggest that there was a daughter, Agatha, also buried at Boxgrove, since this lady is likely to have been Agatha, daughter of Ralph fitz Savaric for whom the family made grants to Wymondham priory (Brit. Lib. Cotton Titus MS. C viii, fo. 20v).