

# Widows, Queens and Sword-bearers in Medieval Liturgical Prayers

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## *Outline*

Introduction  
General Intercessions  
    For the weak  
    For widows and orphans  
    For nobility, protectors of widows and orphans  
Blessing of swords for new knights  
    The Germanic tradition  
    The English tradition  
    Use of these rituals  
Blessing the swords of king and queen sovereigns  
    King sovereigns  
    Queen sovereigns  
    Queen Elizabeth II  
Queen consorts and the sword-bearing widow Judith  
Conclusions

## **Introduction**

In medieval society, the strong – those who carried swords – were expected to protect the weak and the church and to bring peace in society. Sword-bearing knights, king and queen sovereigns, and other nobility, therefore, were to use their swords for the sake of widows, orphans and the poor. Furthermore the sword-bearing widow, Judith, was held up as model for queen consorts. These roles and expectations were expressed and embodied in a variety of medieval liturgical prayers, some used once in a lifetime, others said every Sunday.

Here I tell the story of sword-bearing men and women and their relationship to widows and orphans, using prayers from several medieval liturgies.

## General Intercessions

The general intercessions of the Sunday liturgy will be considered first. These prayers were regular parts of Sunday worship in the middle ages (and were used on some other occasions as well). They were generally prayed in the vernacular rather than in Latin. General intercessions were wide-ranging in scope: church and society at large were prayed for as were all ranks of clergy from pope to local pastors. Members and leaders of religious orders were named, as well as royalty, nobility, cities and city officials. Thus they constituted a kind of mirror of church and society. In the context of the Sunday parish mass, a large part of the prayers was directed to naming members of the local parish community, including those who were weak and needed care and protection. The general intercessions were intended to be relevant to each time and place, hence they were composed locally and varied in content, wording and order; each surviving text is distinct. At the same time, they are similar in that they followed the same general pattern.

Medieval general intercessions from across Europe are identified in my *Medieval General Intercessions: Bibliography of Texts and Sources*. Ways in which individual local church communities adapted the contents of these intercessions is considered in my *Women and Medieval General Intercessions: Introduction*.

Excerpts will be quoted from a number of general intercessions. The source of each excerpt is identified and linked to the *Bibliography* through the use of a unique designator; full bibliographic information is therefore given only in the *Bibliography*. These designators have four elements: (1) a code for the country of origin or equivalent, thus EN = England, FR = France, GR = Germany, RO = Religious Orders. (2) Within each of these groups the general intercessions are numbered consecutively, in approximate chronological order. (3) The name of a place or person with whom each text is associated as given next. (4) Finally, the approximate date of composition is provided.

Spelling and accents are those of published editions; words of particular interest are underlined.

### ***For the weak***

In some sets of general intercessions, the weak who were prayed for included mainly those who were poor, or sick, or distressed and troubled. A few examples of such intentions are given here.

#### *The poor:*

Bittet umbe ... alle arme leut

GR-13. Baumgartnerberg 14<sup>th</sup> c.

*The sick*

Ye shall also pray for all them that be sick or diseased of this parish that God send to them health the rather for our prayers

EN-37. Caxton 1483

Pro infirmis. Et per tous maulaudeys et malaudas

FR-27. Limoges St Pierre du Queyroix 1450

Nous prions pour tous les malades de ceste parroice

FR-25. Saint-Jean-en-Greves 1405

*Those in distress*

Après nous prions dieu pour tous desconfortez et desconseillez, et touz autres qui sont en tristesse et tribulatio

FR-22. St Andrè des Arcs 15<sup>th</sup> c

pour tous desconseillés et desconfortez

pour tous desvoyés de vérité et de raison

FR-26. Paris 1449

***For widows and orphans***

Widows and orphans are not only among the weak members of medieval society, they are also given considerable prominence in the biblical tradition. A few pertinent biblical quotations and references are given here.

For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing.

Deuteronomy 10:17-18

Every third year you shall bring out the full tithe of your produce for that year; and store it within your towns; the Levites, because they have no allotment or inheritance with you, as well as the resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows in your towns, may come and eat their fill so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work that you undertake.

Deuteronomy 14:28-29

When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be left for the alien, the orphan, and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all your undertakings. When you beat your olive trees, do not strip what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not glean what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan,

and the widow.

Deuteronomy 24:19-21

When you have finished paying all the tithe of your produce in the third year (which is the year of the tithe), giving it to the Levites, the aliens, the orphans, and the widows, so that they may eat their fill within your towns, then you shall say before the Lord your God: I have removed the sacred portion from the house, and I have given it to the Levites, the resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows, in accordance with your entire commandment that you commanded me....

Deuteronomy 26:12-13

Father of orphans and protector of widows  
is God in his holy habitation.

Psalms 68:5

The Lord watches over the strangers;  
he upholds the orphan and the widow,  
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

Psalms 146:9

The gospels include the story of the widow's mite (Mark 12:41-44 = Luke 21:1-4) and that of the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17). 1 Timothy 5:3-16 speaks of the order of widows as well, including to the following description:

[The widow] must be well attested for her good works, as one who has brought up children, shown hospitality, washed the saints' feet, helped the afflicted, and devoted herself to doing good in every way.

1 Timothy 5:10

Widows and orphans are absent from general intercessions coming from England, Spain and Poland; the reason for this is not known.

They are named in one tenth century text from France and in three French intercessions from 15<sup>th</sup> century Paris, however, as shown below. Note that both male and female orphans are named in two of these texts. Also shown here is one German text in which widows and orphans are mentioned among a series of intentions which include pregnant women, the troubled, workers, etc.

Egentium quoque, viduarum, pauperum, et delibium angustias et miserias respice...

FR-2. Lotharingia 10<sup>th</sup> c

Après nous prions dieu pour toutes femmes vefvez, pour tous orphelins et orphelines; que dieu les vueille conseiller et conforter, et leur envoyer ce qui leur est neccessaire aux corps, et aux ames.

FR-22, Paris B, 15<sup>th</sup> c

Pour vesves et orphelins; que diex les vueille visiter et gouverner

FR-25. Paris A 1405

Et pour tous orphelins et orphelines et femmes vesves; que dieu par sa pitie leur soit pere et la bonoite glorieuse vierge marie leur vueille estre mere

FR-26. Paris, before 1449

Auch helft mir den hirren bitten vmbe dy gancze gemeyn,  
arm vnd reich

vnd vmbe witwen vnd vmbe wezen

vnd vmbe alle swanger vrawen,

vmbe alle betrubte hercze,

vmbe alle getrewee erbeter vnd erbeterynne,

vmbe alle getrewee dinsboten,

has yen der hirre gebe gesundikeit eres beybes,

das ze noch desin legyn mogen vordynen das ewige lebin.

GR-17. Nikolaus C, 1423

### ***For nobility, protectors of widows and orphans***

Of particular interest here is a group of eleven sets of general intercessions from medieval Germany that associate widows and orphans (witwen und weisen) with noblemen; the latter are often described as those who carry swords (swert).

pittet umbe alle die dar getermet sin daz si daz swert tragen, daz si witwen unde waiesen also schirmen, als in gesetzt ist.

GR-8. Bavaria 1150

Ier sult pittten... vnd vmbe alle die den das swert da czvo gesegent ist, das fride sulen machen, wittwen vnd waiesen schulen besciernen vnd arnev gotes huesser, Das si das also getuon muozen, das si mit dem ewigen swert an dem ivngiste tage iht erslagen werden.

GR-12. Charterhouse 12<sup>th</sup> c

Byttet got vmbe ... alle dy do beschirmer seynt der cristenheit vnd armer weysen vnd wytwen, vnd vmb alle tot zunder vnd zuenderynne.

GR-15 Nikolaus A 1414

Nu byt wir ... vor alle ritter vnd knecht, ver alle getrewee man, dy do beschirmen wytwen vnd weyzen.

GR-16. Nikolaus B 1414

Auch bit ... den herrin vor alle rittir, vor alle furstin, vor alle herrin, dy do beschirmen witwen unde wayesen, kirchen unde klostirn unde den heyligen gelaubin, das yn got der herre gebe unde verlee das swyge lon in deme hymelryche.

GR-18. Bohemia 1378

Darnach helf mir vnseren herren pitten ... vmb den dye da gesezt sein czu dem swert das sy peschirmen witiben vnd waisen, vnd das sy iren scherm alzo tragen gegen armen vnd reichen damit sy mit sampt vns verdien nach dem leben daz ebig leben.

GR-19. Lambach 14<sup>th</sup> c

Pit ... vmb all dy geseget sein zw dem swerdt zw peschirmen witib vnd waissen vnd all geistlich leut das sy das also verpringen das auch uber sy gee der swig schirm vnd der swig frid.

GR-21. Aldersbach 15<sup>th</sup> c

Vmd vmb all die zu dem schwerdt geordnet sein, das sy machen frid vnd sun vnd beschirmen vnd beachitzen den heiligen cristenlichen glauden, dy gerechtikait vnd witib vnd wayesen, vnd das weltlich schwert das ist der gwalt also prauchen, das das sey got ein lob, vns ein hail vnd ein trost.

GR-22. Benedicktbeuer 15<sup>th</sup> c

Darnach vmb ... vmb all ritter vnd chnecht dy da gesezt sind zw dem swert das yn go verleych chrafft vnd macht das sy beschirmen witimb vnd wayssen

GR-23. St Florian 1477

vnd vmb all die. den dz schwert in die hant geseget ist. dz sy beschirmen sulln arm leut witib. vnd waisn. Das got ir beschirmer sey vor alln im veinttn sichtig vnd unsichtig.

GR-25. Pausau 1496

Fur alle ander herren ritten vnd knecht so do regierent den weltlichen standt: das inen got der herr verlyhe craft vnd macht zuo regieren also das land vnd luot witwen vnd weisen beschirmet werden. vnd das gemein goetlich recht furgang had. Vnd in disem vnd andern landen guoter frid blyben moege. Dormit das sy vnd wir verdienen vnd erlangen moegen den weigen frid vnd ewigs leben.

GR-27. Surgant A 1503

It is interesting that this type of intercesion is found only in texts from Germany and that among German texts it is the most common type of intercessions both for nobility and for widows and orphans. This may possibly be related to the fact that nobility in Germany had greater importance in the political system than was the case in other countries. (See the separate document: *Women, men and political governance in medieval general intercessions*.) In addition, as will be seen below, the liturgy of blessing swords of new knights may have had particular significance in Germany.

The key verb used in these texts is *beschirmen*, “protect”; that is the principal role and obligation of the nobility. The bearing and use of swords is a means by which this goal may be achieved. Sword-bearing is a religious act, a responsibility for which nobles are blessed and ordained; their use has consequences for eternal life. Through these intercessions members of local church communities – nobility, widows and everyone else as well – pray first that nobility will use their swords, and second that they use them to protect widows, orphans, the church, and to preserve peace in society. Such protection would seem to be the only legitimate use of swords.

One wonders what affect the saying of such prayers every Sunday had on the expectations of those who did not bear swords in medieval Germany, and on the behavior of those who did.

### **Blessing of Swords for New Knights**

Another liturgical occasion on which widows, orphans and sword-bearing nobles are brought together is the liturgy for blessing swords for new knights. Two traditions have come down to us, one from Germany, the other from England.

#### ***The Germanic tradition***

A liturgy for the blessing of swords of new knights is at least as old as the tenth century and is found in several liturgical books from central Europe. The ritual begins with a blessing of the sword, followed by its presentation to the new knight, who then puts it on. Further prayers follow; as would be expected, the ritual became more elaborate with time.

#### *Sources:*

Cyrille Vogel and Reinhard Elze, eds., *Le Pontifical Romano-Germanique du Dixieme Siecle*. Citta del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana 1963

Michel Andrieu, ed., *Le Pontifical Romain au Moyen-Age*, vol 3. *Le Pontifical de Guillaume Durand*. Citta del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana 1940

Walter von Arx, ed., *Das Kosterrituale von Biburg*.. Freiburg Schweiz: Universitätsverlag Freiburg 1970

This source notes that the same ritual occurs in three other 12<sup>th</sup> c liturgical books:  
Rituale von St Florian  
Klosterrituale von Wessobrunn  
Klosterrituale von Oberaltaich

Max Perlach, ed., *Die Statuten des Deutschen Ordens*. Halle a. S.: Max Niemeyer 1890

Though individual liturgical books present somewhat different versions of this ritual, the prayer for the blessing of the sword (*Benedictio ensis*) remains virtually the same (except for some small variations at the end of the text). Note the use of the somewhat unusual term for sword (*ensis*) in place of the more common *gladius*. That the sword is to be used for the protection of the church, widows, orphans and all who serve God, is quite clear.

Exaudi, quesumus, domine, preces nostras,  
et hunc ensem, quo his famulus tuus N. se circumcingi desiderat,  
maiestatis tue dextera benedicere dignare,  
quatinus defensio atque protectio possit esse  
aeclesiarum, viduarum, orphanorum  
omniumque Deo servientium contra seritiam paganorum,  
aliisque insidiantibus sit pavor, terror et formido. Per.(1)

Romano-Germanic Pontifical p 379. *Benedictio ensis noviter succincti*  
Pontifical du Guillaume Durand, p. 447. *De benedictione novi militis*  
Klosterrituute von Biburg, p. 262. *Benedictio ensis nouiter succincti*  
Statuten des Deutschen Ordens, p 129. *Benedicchio ensis ad faciendum militem*

This ritual, including the blessing of the new sword, is also part of the process of becoming a Teutonic Knight; see the reference listed above. Though this is not included in the Rule of the Templars, the preface to “The Primitive Rule” states that knights should “defend the poor, widows, orphans and churches”. The text claims that ordinary knights are not doing this, but that Templars should be true to this calling.

*The Rule of the Templars: The French Text of the Rule of the Order of the Knights Templar*, translated by J. M. Upton-Ward. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1992, p 1

It may be noted that the same prayer was included in the post-Reformation *Pontificale Romanum* of 1750 and hence was in the liturgical repertory of the Roman Catholic Church until a new pontifical was issued in 1978. (This does not include any coronation liturgy, however.)

*Pontificale Romanum*. Ratisbone, Neo Eboraci et Cincinnati: Typis Friderici Pustet 1888. I, 202: *De Benedictione Novi Militis*

The close relationship between this blessing prayer and the German general intercessions considered above is obvious. From the very beginning of a new knight’s career, therefore, he is charged with the protection of widows and orphans. There is no justification here for the use of swords either for defense or aggression.

### ***The English tradition***

The Germanic liturgy of blessing swords just considered is not found in any of the English liturgical books I have examined. The Sarum Manual (i.e., ritual) of medieval England, however, contains an entirely different prayer and ritual for the blessing of the new knights’s

sword. This has not been found in other English liturgical books that have been studied.

### *Sources*

“Manuale ad Usum Insignis Ecclesiae Sarum,” in *Manuale et Processionale Ad Usum Insignis Ecclesiae Eboracensis*, ed. W. G. Henderson. Surtees Society 63. Durham: Andrews 1875 [hereafter, Henderson]

*Manuale ad Vsum Percelebris Ecclesie Sarisburiensis*, ed. A. Jefferies Collins. Henry Bradshaw Society vol 91. London 1960 [hereafter Collins]

One of the biblical persons named as model is the sword-bearing widow Judith; the other is the sword-bearing youth David.

Benedictio ensis nuoi militis

Deus cunctorum in te sperantium protector adesto supplicationib nostris et concede huius famulo tuo qui sincero corde gladio se primo nititur precingere militari:  
ut in omnibus galea tue virgutis sit protectus.

Et sicut dauid et iudith contra gentis sue hostis fortitudinis potentiam victorium tribuisti; ita tuo auxilio munitus contra hostium suorum seuitiam victor ubique existat; et ad sancte ecclesie tutelam proficiat. Per

Henderson, p 28\*; Collins, pp 63-64.

The biblical stories in question are the beheading of Holofernes by Judith (Judith 13) and the beheading of Goliath by David (1 Samuel 17). Neither the widow Judith nor the boy shepherd David owned or ordinarily carried a sword; the weapons they used were those of the oppressors, Holofernes and Goliath, respectively. This is an interesting (though not unique) case of a biblical woman raised up as a model for a man.

The blessing prayer is followed by another text that has to do with receiving the blessed sword and taking up the responsibilities that follow from this ritual. The blessing prayer says nothing about the protection of widows and orphans. Instead, it speaks of fighting against oppression and liberating God’s people. With God’s help, even the underdog can succeed.

The elaborate ritual for the making of a Knight of the Bath in England does not include a blessing of the sword prior to the king’s girding the new knight with the sword. The candidate does however spend an all night vigil in prayer, followed at dawn by confession, matins and mass (though these seem to be optional). Toward the beginning of the ritual the candidate’s escorts deliver an address which begins as follows: “Ryght dere broder, great worshype be this order unto yow. Allmythy God gyve yow the presysynge of knyghthod. Lo, this is the ordre. Be ye stronge in the feith of Holy Cherche, and wydows and maydones oppressed releve as right commaundith.”

*Three Fifteenth-Century Chronicles*, with Historical Memoranda by John Stowe..., ed. James Gairdner. Camden Society 1880, pp 106-113, here 107 plus 113 note.

### ***Use of these rituals***

In addition to these liturgies for blessing swords and making new knights, those with appropriate authority in medieval society – such as kings – could also make new knights without any religious ritual. The relative use of the “liturgical” and the “secular” route to knighthood requires further investigation.

Because the Germanic ritual is found in several important pontificals as well as in local rituals and in the liturgies of the Teutonic Knights, and because of the frequent allusion to this ritual in German general intercessions, I would tentatively conclude that this liturgy was actually used with some frequency – though not necessarily exclusively.

In contrast, I wonder if the English liturgy described above was very important. There is ample evidence, at least from the Tudor period, that new knights were made without any religious ritual. Thus the Sarum Manual text, creative as it is, may not have been particularly significant in the lives of knights in England.

### **Blessing of Swords of King and Queen Sovereigns**

Liturgies for the consecration of sovereigns also include the blessing and bestowal of a new sword. Here I refer to sovereigns rather than just to (male) kings, as a few women were sovereigns as well. I refer mainly to Mary I and Elizabeth I of England – and to show the longevity of this tradition, to Elizabeth II as well; the first female sovereign in England, however, was Matilda III (crowned as sovereign in June 1141). (I do not consider the use of more than one sword in the coronation liturgy.)

### ***Sources***

Robert L. Jackson has published an extensive collection of royal coronation rituals from medieval France.

Richard A. Jackson  
*Ordines Coronationis Franciae*, 2 vol.  
Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995, 2000

Liturgical books from England that contain relevant texts include the following:

*Liber Pontificalis* of Edmund Lacy, Bishop of Exeter, ed. Ralph Barnes. Exeter: William Roberts 1847

*Liber Pontificalis* Chr. Bainbridge Archiepiscopi Eboracensis. Surtees Society vol 61.  
Durham: Andrews 1875

*Liber Regie Capelle*, ed. Walter Ullmann. Henry Bradshaw Society vol 92. London 1961

In addition, coronation rituals are included in the *Romano-Germanic Pontifical* and *Pontifical of William Durand*, listed above.

### ***King Sovereigns***

Examination of these sources shows that the following prayer is used in several such rites.

Accipe gladium per manus episcoporum licet indignas, vice tamen et auctoritate sanctorum apostolorum consecratas, tibi regaliter impositum nostreque benedictionis officio in defensionem sancte Dei ecclesie divinitus ordinatum, et esto memor de quo psalmista prophetavit dicens, Accingere gladio tuo super femur tuum potentissime, ut in hoc per eundem vim equitatis exerceas, modum iniquitatis potenter destruas et sanctam Dei ecclesiam eiusque fideles propugnes ac protegas, nec minus sub fide falsos, quam christiani nominis hostes execres ac destruas, viduas et pupillos clementer adiuves ac defendas, desolata restaures, restaurata conserves, ulciscaris iniusta, confirmes bene disposita, quatinus hec in agendo virtutem triumpho gloriosus iustitieque cultor egregius cum mundi salvatore, cuius typum geris in nomine, sine fine merearis regnare. Qui....

Jackson, vol I, pp 163-164. Ordo of Eleven Forms, Ordo XIV

Jackson, vol I, p 209. Royal Ordo Cologne Dombibliothek 141, Ordo XVI

Jackson, vol I, pp 259-260. Ordo of 1200, Ordo XIX

Jackson, vol II, pp 357-358. Ordo of 1250, Ordo XXI

Jackson, vol II, p 479. Ordo of Charles V, Ordo XXIII

“Consecratio Regis” in Fragmentum Libri Pontificalis Regeri de Martical

Episcopi Sarisburienses, A. D. MCCCXV -- MCCCXXIX. Appendix I to *Liber Pontificalis* Chr Bainbridge, p 218

A related text is found in the *Romano-Germanic Pontifical*:

Accipe gladium per manus episcoporum licet indignas, vice tamen et auctoritate sanctorum apostolorum consecratas, tibi regaliter inpositum nostraeque benedictionis officio in defensionem sanctae Dei aecclesiae divinitus ordinatum, et esto memor de quo psalmistra prophetavit per eundem vim equitatis exerceas, molem iniquitatis potenter destruas et sanctam Dei ecclesiam eiusque fideles propugnes ac proceres ac destruas, viduas et pupillos clementer adiuves ac defendas, desolata restaures, restaurata conservs, ulciscaris iniusta, confirmes bene disposita quatinus haec in agendo, virtutem triumpho gloriosus iustitiaeque cultor egregius, cum mundi salvatore, cuius typum, geris in

nomine, sine fine mercaris regnare. Qui cum patre.  
Romano-Germanic Pontifical, p 255

In comparison with the blessing prayer for a new knight's sword, note that ensis is here replaced by gladius, and orphanum by pupillos. In the first text the words "Accingere gladio tuo super femur tuum potentissime" is a quote from Psalm 45:3 (Gird your sword on your thigh, O might one NRSV) and hence were thought to come from the mouth of David.

It should be also be noted that three liturgies for the consecration of kings simply used the blessing prayer for new knights. The term ensis is replaced by gladius, however.

Benedictio super gladium regi dandum.

Exaudi, quesumus Domine, preces nostras, et hunc gladium quo famulus tuus N se accingi desiderat maiestatis tue dextera benedicere dignare, quatinus defensio atque protectio possit esse ecclesiarum, viduarum, orphanorum omniumque Deo serventium contra evitiam paganorum, aliisque insidiantibus sit pavor, terror et formido. Per.

Jackson, vol I, p 244. Ordo of Saint-Bertin, Ordo XVIII

Jackson, vol II, p 478. Ordo of Charles V, Ordo XXIII

Jackson, vol II, p 537. Ordo of Louis XI, Ordo XXIV

Finally, one late English source, the *Liber Regie Capelle* uses both texts: Exaudi... hunc ensem and Accipe gladium. This might have been the practice at the time of the coronations of Mary I and Elizabeth I, though probably not at the time of Mathida III.

The protection of widows and orphans is therefore one of the purposes for which kings are given swords, and part of the divine mandate of the sovereign.

### ***Queen Sovereigns***

The consecration of queens who were themselves sovereigns was identical with that of kings, considered above, with simply minimal changes in gendered language. They received swords in the course of their consecration, and these were blessed with the prayer(s) already noted; they were therefore charged to use them to protect widows and orphans, along with the church and society. Prayers used in the coronation of queen consorts (see below) and that referred to Judith and Esther were therefore not used for these queens.

The association of swords with queen sovereigns remained visible and regular in their daily lives, even after the celebration of the liturgy of coronation. The following excerpts from contemporary chroniclers, for example, show the "visibility" of the sword in the reign of Mary I and Philip of Aragon of England.

**A**

*The Chronicle of Queen Jane, and of Two Years of Queen Mary*, and especially of the Rebellion

of Sir Thomas Wyat. Written by a resident in the Tower of London. Edited, with illustrative documents and notes by John Gough Nichols. Camden Society 48. London 1850

[coronation of Queen Mary, October 1, 1553].

[after the liturgy]: And as she cam homeward ther was borne before her iii. swords shethed, and one naked. (p 31)

[marriage]

Note, ther was ii swordes caried before theym, and ii horses ledd after theym. (p 81)

[marriage]

Wedinsdaye, Sanct James daie, the xxv of July...

Thys (as I have saide) being ended and done, the erle of Darbey beefore the quenes magestie, and the erle of Pembroke before the kinges highnes, did bere ech of them a sword of honour. (p 141)

[2 August and following]

they came to Windesore the next Friday, at vi of the clocke at nyghte.

And cumming in at the west end of the town, they came, with two swordes borne before them, streight way towards the churche weste dore.... (pp 144-145)

[wedding/ wedding banquet]

And when they had included their hands, immediatly the sword was advanced before the king, by the earl of Pembroke.

This done, the trumpetes sounded; and thus both returned hand in hand, the sword being borned before them, to their traverses in the quier... (p 169)

## **B**

*The Diary of Henry Machyn*, from A.D. 1550 To A.D. 1563, edited by John Gough Nichols. London: Camden Society 1848

The xxiiij day of Aprell, the wyche was sant Jorge day, the Kyng's grace, behyng at Westmynster at ys plase, dyd where ys robes of the garter, and the yong yerle of Warwyke beyrng of the kynges sword afor hym through the halle unto the chapell; and ys grase dyd offer, and the resyduw . . . (p 17)

The sam day affor non landyd at the Towre wharf the Kynges lord of myssrulle, and ther mett with hym the Shreyffes lord of myssrulle with ys men, and every on havyng a rebynd of blue and shytt abowt ther nekes, and then ys trumpet, drows, mors danse, and tabrett, and he toke a swaerd and bare yt afore the kynges lord of myssrulle, for the lord was gorgyusly arrayed in purprelle welvet furyd with armyn, and ys robe braded with spangulls of selver full.... (p 28)

The xxx day of September the Qwuyen's grace cam from the Towre through London,

rydyng in a charett gorgusly be-sene unto Westmynster; [...]

Westmynster chyrche, and ther her grace hard masse, and was crounyd a-pon a the stage and after she was anonted Qwene, the first day of October. When all was don, her grace cam to Westmynster hall . . . ut was iiij of the cloke or she whent to dener or past; and ther the duke of Norffoke rod up and done the hall, my lord the yerle of Darbe he constabull, the yerle of Arundell the boteler, and my lord of Borgane cheyff lardered, master Dymmoke the qwyen's champhon; and ther was great melode; and the erle of Devonshyre bare the sword, and the yerle of Westmorland bare the cape of mantenans, and the erle of Shrowsbery bare the crowne, and the duke of Norfooke was earl marshall, and the yerle of Arundell lord stuard, and the erle of Surray was doer under the duke ys gransyr,.... (pp 45-46)

The v day of October the Qwuen's grace rod unto Westmynster chyche, and ther her grace hard masse of the Holy-gost, and ther wher ij bysshopes; on delevered her the shepter and odur thyng. Her grace rod in her parlement robes, and all the trumpeters blohyng a-for them all; and so, after her grace had hard masse, they whent to the Parlement howsse all to-geyther, and the yerle of Devonshyre bare the sworde, and the yerle of Westmorland bare the cape of mayntenans. (p 46)

The xvij day of October king Philip came down on horseback from Westminster unto Paul's with many lords, being received under a canopy, at the west end: and the lord Montagu bare the sword afore the king. There he heard mass, and Spaneards song mase; and after masse he went back to Westsmynster to dener. (p 72)

The xij day of November the Kyng and the Quen rod unto Westmynster chyrche to the masse of the Holy-gost, and after masse to the parlement-howsse; and all the bysshopes and the lordes in ther parlement robes, with trompeters blohyng, and all the harolds in ther cote armurs, and the juges in ther robes; the yerle of Penbroke bare the kyngs sword, and the yerle of Comberland bare the quen's sword, and the yerle of Shrowsbery bare the kyng's cape of maintenance, and the yerle of Arundell bare the quen's cape of maintenance; and a-for them rod together my lord chansheler and my lord tressorer in ther parlement robes. (p 74)

The same day cardinal Pole came from gravesend by water, with the earl of Shrewsbury, the lord Montagu, the bishops of Durham and Ely, the lord Paget, sir Edward Hastings, the lord Cobham, and diverse knyghts and gentyllment, in barges, and thay all did shoot the dryge be-twyne xij and on of the cloke, and a-gainst the steleard of Temes my lord chanseler mett them in his barge, and my lord of Shrousbury had his barge with the talbot, all ys men in bluw cotes, red-hosse, skarlett capes and white fethers; and so to the cort gatt, and ther the Kyng's grace met him and inbrasynd hum, and so lad ym thurgh the kyng's hall; and he had borne a-for hym a sylver crosse, and he was arrayed in a skarlet gowne and a sqware skarlett cape; and my lord North bare the sward a-for the Kyng; and so they whent up unto the Quen's chambur, and ther her grace saluted hm; and after he toke ys leyffe, and toke ys barge to ys plase at Lambeth, that was the byshope of

Cantorbery's Crenmer, and so to dener. (pp 75-76)

The xxj day of Marche the Kyng and the Quen went through the galere unto ther closett, and they thay heard mass; and they was ij swordes borne a-for them, on by lord Cobham, and the thodur by my lord admerall; and from ther closett bake to dener, boyth the Kyng and the Quen together, and ther my lord chanseler was ther and dyvers other lords. (p 129)

The sam after-non was chossen iij knyghts of the garter, my lord Fuwwater depute of Yrland, my lord Gray depute of Gynes, and ser Robart Rochaster controller of the quen's howsse the iij. And after cam the duwcke of Muskovea cam through the halle, and the gard stod in a-ray in ther ryche cottes with halbardes, and so up to the quen's chambur, and dyvers althermen and marchandes; and after cam downe a-gayne to the chapell to evyngsong, and contenant cam the Kyng and the knyghtes of the garter to evyngsong; and when that evyngsong was down cam the Kyng and the knyghtes up to the chambur of presens; and after cam the duke of Muskovea, and toke ys barge to London, and that tyme my lord Strange bare the sword to eveynsong. (pp 134-135)

## ***Queen Elizabeth II***

To illustrate the longevity of the tradition described above, I provide the portion of the coronation liturgy of Queen Elizabeth II that had to do with her sword. This is taken from the following source:

*The Coronation of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in the Abbey Church of St. Peter, Westminster, on Tuesday, the second day of June, 1953*

[www.britischebotschaff.de/jubilee/en/facts/coronation.htm](http://www.britischebotschaff.de/jubilee/en/facts/coronation.htm)

### VII. The Presenting of the Spurs and Sword, and the Oblation of the said Sword

The Spurs shall be brought from the Altar by the Dean of Westminster, and delivered to the Lord Great Chamberlain, who, kneeling down, shall present them to the Queen, who forthwith sends them back to the Altar.

Then the Lord who carries the Sword of State, delivering to the Lord Chamberlain the said Sword (which is thereupon deposited in Saint Edward's Chapel) shall receive from the Lord Chamberlain, in lieu thereof, another Sword in a scabbard which he shall deliver to the Archbishop and the Archbishop shall lay it on the Altar and say:

Hear our prayers, O Lord, we beseech thee,  
and so direct and support thy servant  
Queen Elizabeth,  
that she may not bear the Sword in vain,  
but may use it as the minister of God

for the terror and punishment of evildoers,  
and for the protection and encouragement of those that do well,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Then shall the Archbishop take the Sword from off the Altar, and (the Archbishop of York and the Bishops of London and Winchester assisting and going along with him) shall deliver it into the Queen's hands, and the Queen holding it, the Archbishop shall say:

Receive this kingly Sword,  
brought now from the Altar of God,  
and delivered to you by the hands of us  
the Bishops and servants of God, though unworthy.  
With this sword do justice,  
stop the growth of iniquity,  
protect the holy Church of God,  
help and defend widows and orphans,  
restore the things that are gone to decay,  
maintain the things that are restored,  
punish and reform what is amiss,  
and confirm what is in good order:  
that doing these things you may be glorious in all virtue,  
and so faithfully serve our Lord Jesus Christ in this life,  
that you may reign for ever with him  
in the life which is to come. Amen.

Then the Queen, rising up and going to the Altar, shall offer it there in the scabbard, and then return and sit down in King Edward's Chair: and the Peer, who first received the Sword, shall offer the price of it, namely, one hundred shillings, and having thus redeemed it, shall receive it from the Dean of Westminster, from off the Altar, and draw it out of the scabbard, and carry it naked before her Majesty during the rest of the solemnity.

Then the Archbishop of York and the Bishops who have assisted during the offering shall return to their places.

First, note the retention of the masculine "kingly" at the beginning of the second prayer, which is simply a version of the prayer *Accipe gladium* presented above for king sovereigns. This part of the ritual of consecration has therefore not changed much for at least a thousand years. The sword, however, today is not so much an actual weapon as a metaphor for power and authority and a reminder that the sovereign is called to by God to protect the weak. In an age of constitutional monarchy, the queen's authority is not even governmental but rather moral in character.

## Queen Consorts and the Sword-bearing Widow Judith

Queens who were consorts (wives) of king sovereigns did not receive swords in the course of their coronation. Prayers used in such liturgies did, however, raise up various biblical women and men as predecessors and models for such queens. Among these biblical personages, in some cases, was the widow Judith, who liberated her people by wielding a sword (Judith 13). Three such prayers are given here. Though all three were used in France, only the second was used in the English liturgies I have examined.

Domine sancte, Pater omnipotens, aeternae Deus, electorum fortitudo, et humilium celsitudo, qui in primordio per effusionem diluvii crimina mundi purgari voluisti, et per columbam ramum olivae portantem pacem terris redditam demonstrasti, iterum Aaron famulum tuum per unctionem olei sacerdotem unxisti: et postea per eius unguenti infusionem, ad regendum populum Israeliticum, sacerdotes, reges, et prophetas perfecisti, vultumque ecclesiae in oleo exhilarandum prophetica famuli tui voce David esse praedixisti, qui hoc etiam unquento famulae tuae Judith ad liberationem servorum tuorum, et confusionem inimicorum, vultum exhilarasti, et ancillae tuae Hester faciam hac spirituali misericordiae tuae unctione adeo lucifluam reddidisti, ut efferatum cor regis ad misericordiam, et salvationem in te credentium, ipsius precibus inclinaret. Te quaesumus, omnipotens Deus, ut per huius creaturae pinguedinum, columbae pace, simplicitate, ac pudicitia decoram efficias. Per...

Jackson, vol I, p 78, Ordo of Judith, Ordo V

Omnipotens eterne Deus, fons et origo totius bonitatis, qui feminei sexus fragilitatem nequaquam reprobando aversaris, sed dignanter comprobando potius eligis, et qui infirma mundi eligendo fortia queque confundere decrevisti, quique etiam glorie virtutisque tue triumphum in manu Judith femine olim Iudaice plebi de hoste serrissimo resignare voluisti, respice, quesumus, ad preces humilitatis nostrae, et super hanc famulam tuam N, quam supplici devotione in reginam eligimus, benedictionum tuarum dona multiplica, eamque dexterae tuae potentie semper et ubique circumda, ut umbone muniminis tui undique secus firmiter protecta, visibilis seu invisibilis hostis nequitias triumphaliter expugnare valeat, et una cum Sara atque Rebecca, Lia et Rachel, beatis reverendisque feminis, fructu uteri sui fecundari seu gratulari mereatur ad decorem totius regni statumque sancte Dei ecclesiae regendum necnon protegendum. Per....

Jackson, vol I, pp 164-165. Ordo of Eleven Forms, Ordo XIV

Jackson, vol I, p 214. Royal Ordo Cologne Dombibliothek 141. Ordo XVI

Jackson vol I, pp 264-265. Ordo of 1200, Ordo XIX

Jackson, vol II, pp 363-364. Ordo of 1250, Ordo XXI

Liber Pontificalis of Edmond Lacy, pp 150-151

Liber Pontificalis Chr Bainbridge, p 222

Liber Regie Capelle, pp 108-109

Deus bonorum cunctorum auctor et distributor, benedictionumque omnium largus infusor, tribue super hanc famulam tuam N benedictionis tuae copiam, quo, quam humana

sibi electio preesse gaudet, tua superne electionis ac benedictionis infusio accumularet. Concede ei, Domine, auctoritatem regiminis, consilii et magnitudinem sapientie, prudentie et intellectus habundantiam, religionis ac pietatis custodiam, quatinus mereatur benedici et augmentari in nomine ut Sara, visitari et fecundari ut Rebecca, contra omnium vitiorum muniri monstro ut Judith, in regni regimine elici ut Hester, ut, quam humana nititur fragilitas benedicere, celestis potius intimi roris repleat infusio, et quae a nobis eligitur vel benedictur in reginam, a te mereatur obtineri in premio eternitatis perpetue, et sicut ab hominibus sublimatur in nomine, ita a te sublimetur in fide et operatione. Illo etiam sapientie tue eam rore perfunde, quem beatus David in repromissione et filius eius Salomon percepit in locupletatione. Sis ei, Domine, contra cunctorum ictus inimicorum lorica, in adversis galea, in prosperis patientia, in protectione clipeus sempiternus sequatur pacem, diligat caritatem, absteat se ab omni iniquitate, loquatur iusticiam, custodiat veritatem; sic cultrix iusticie et pietatis, amatrix religionis, vigeatque presenti benedictione et hoc evo annis plurimis et in sempiterno sine fine eternis. Per....

Jackson, vol I, pp 196-197. Ratold Ordo, Ordo XV

These three “Judith prayers” for queen consorts are quite different from one another. The first prayer, Domine sancte, refers entirely to the anointing that is central to the queen’s coronation. One reference is to the dove that brought an olive leaf back to Noah (Genesis 8:11); olive oil is assumed in all biblical anointings. A second reference is to the anointing of Aaron and his sons as priests (Exodus 30:30). David was not only anointed as king (1 Samuel 5:3) but also, as psalmist, often spoke of oil and anointing (cf. Psalm 133:2)

Judith and Esther are here remembered as anointed women. Judith anointed herself with precious ointment before going to meet Holofernes (Judith 10:3, 16:7). Esther “was anointed with oil of myrrh, with perfumes and cosmetics” (Esther 2:12) before going to become queen.

The second prayer, Omnipotens eterne Deus, refers entirely to biblical women. It contrasts the stereotypical weakness of women with the triumph wrought by the arm of Judith when she liberated her people as an instrument of God. References to the matriarchs have to do with fertility and childbearing, an important role of queen consorts.

The third prayer, Deus bonorum, includes both women and men of the bible, but the unifying notes are wisdom, prudence, understanding and piety. This certainly implies a role for queen consorts other than being child-bearers; she is to contribute to analysis, discernment and decision-making.

Though queen consorts do not receive swords in the course of their coronation, and do not carry swords on other occasions, the use of Judith as a role model for queen consorts means that swords are always in the background of their lives as queens. The artist Luba Lukova has provided a helpful insight by imaging the person of Judith herself as a sword. See the accompanying illustration

The naming of the biblical matriarchs in these prayers of consecration refers to the hope and expectation that the queen consort will bear royal children, especially an heir to the throne. The naming of Judith, however, shows that such a queen is also expected to care for the people over whom she and her husband rule and to be both bold and cunning in doing whatever is necessary to make them “free.” Other biblical models contribute to a picture of the queen consort as a woman of strength, courage, boldness, cunning and bravery, as well as being an instrument of liberation and freedom.

## **Conclusions**

The story of women and sword-bearing nobility told by medieval liturgical prayers is complex and multivalent. All who carry swords are to use them to protect widows, orphans and the feminine image of “mother” church. But sword-bearers are not only or always men; female sovereigns also receive swords, and queen consorts, like the widow Judith, are called to be liberating swords in their own persons.

In a certain way, gender may be said to be defined here by one’s relationship to swords: those who carry or use them (or who are swords) are masculine, while those who do not are feminine. Protectors of the weak are masculine; those who need protection are feminine.

In any case, the medieval prayers and liturgies considered here place the carrying and use of swords in a religious context and limit their use to doing good, especially the protection of widows and orphans.



*Judith*, by Luba Lukova, © 1999

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