

Noble Women's Position in the Capetian Dynasty

By

Choi-Saeng yeoul

Suwon University

Suwon, Korea

Introduction

Until now the research of women in medieval history has been excluded from the concern of the historians. Its principal factor was that the main interest of the historians was restricted only in political, economic aspects. On the other hand, this theme was difficult to understand componently because of the extreme dispersion of the sources. At any rate, it is true that since the 10th century useful sources are increasing more and more.¹⁾

By the way, useful sources were almost written by males, especially by the clergy. Generally Churchmen's view of women could be condensed like next. "A man was created in the image of God and a woman in the imitation of God. Therefore, a woman was inferior to a man. Moreover, Adam's degradation was caused by Eve's sin. Therefore, a woman was obliged to obey a man."²⁾

We know well that the feudal Society was the masculine one. However, prior to predicate that the women's position was entirely low, we must inquire practically about the women's real position shown in this Society. In this paper, I will try to show mainly the women's position in the noble family and its marriage in the Capetian Dynasty, which is considered as a typical feudal period. Its chief reasons were that useful sources about this field were relatively many and that this

research will help to understand the ruling Structure of the nobility in the feudal period.

I. Women in the family

The family structure of the French nobility in the Middle Ages came to be transformed from the Cognatic lineage—the male line and the female line were composed complexely—into the paternal lineage since the end of the 10th century.³⁾ In other words, while the nobility before this time was composed of a loosely organized large family, the nobility after feudalization was composed of a considerably structured family. The latter, settled on an hereditary estate, came to depend on its male head to maintain its property and to pass it to its heirs in intact. This fact can be grasped by researching genealogies edited in those days. Above all, in the genealogy written by Lambert of Wattrelos only 19 members among 73 were women. In this genealogy, men were enumerated in advance of women, elder sons in advance of younger sons and especially names of single women were not even listed.⁴⁾ This fact corresponded to the general custom, by which women were often omitted in the genealogy of their proper family and they were called 'daughter of X', 'sister of X' rather than their own names. Also such masculine structure of the family was proven through the research of genealogies of the prominent families in the Capetian dynasty composed by the medievalists.

However, on the other hand, this fact did not mean that women's position within the family was poor at all. Especially women of the upper family who brought considerable landed property with her through marriage used to be admired. In the genealogy already uttered, a title 'nobilitas' was endowed to only two women who brought considerable wealth into her husband's family.⁵⁾

Also this point was proven through the research of the system of namegivings. In those days children were generally given the family name of the male line, but in individual names they were accorded the names of the female line frequently, especially if the female line was nobler. In the 'Giroie' Family, influential in Normandy, its male descendants were given the names of the male line, for example, Ernaud or Renaud, but after alliance with the family of Duke of Normandy its names tended to be substituted by Gaillaume or Robert, the names of Duke's family.⁶⁾ In this case, the family name became a kind of nickname to differentiate the male line on the cognatic structure. In addition, we often see particularly close ties of affection between the children of the new couple and their mother's brothers.

By the way, the sources which showed real position of women within the family more evidently were the documents of exchange, donation, transaction and the laws relative to the 'dotalitium'. The nobility in the Middle Ages needed the consent of the family members (Laudatio parentum) in cases of transactions and donations, while in the early feudal period the extent to be consented was large, but by and large it tended to be restricted. Between 1000 and 1200, the rate that a large family including cousins and nephews consented was downed like next. In Picardie from 36% to 21%, 23%, and 15%, in Maconnais from 49% to 70%, 50% and 20% (by 50 years).⁷⁾ Also in case of Coucy since the 12th century the rate that only a concerned person or a couple consented was beyond 80%.⁸⁾ This phenomenon was thought to mean that women escaped from the pressure of the family gradually. That is, the conjugal family and individualism came to appear even if meagrely.

'Dotalitium' was the property that a bridegroom donated to his bride at the time of marriage or after marriage and that he administrated during his life but after his death his wife owned it. such 'dotalitium' was donated as the gurantee of the dowry generally since the 12th century. By the way, the size and the property pattern of 'dotalitium' varied in every region. For example, ^{the} archives of cluny showed the pattern of donating parts of the acquired (not patrimony) and in Bourgogne even parts of patrimony use to be donated. At any rate, the size of 'dotalitium' varied from $\frac{1}{10}$ to $\frac{1}{3}$ or $\frac{1}{2}$ of her husband's property. Also in the patterns of property, appeared patterns which a husband administrated until his death (Maconnais) or which both of a husband and a wife owned together (Lyon). Also in Bauvaisis in the 13th century a widow held usufruct for the half of the wealth which her husband herited.⁹⁾ As a result, it was natural that because of 'dotalitium' the conflicts arose frequently between a widow and her husband's family.

Thus, although married women were defended partially, non-married women were not able to hold their own rights and honours under the bondage of their fathers or elder brothers, as Guibert of Nogent reflected clearly.¹⁰⁾ Also even the rights of married women were guaranteed in formal aspects, in practice those rights were restricted considerably in regions which the solidarity of the family remained firm.

II. Women in the marriage

By the way, the fact that noble families imposed constraints on the members of the group was also evidently shown in the field of marriage. Namely, the heads of households incessantly intervened in their children's marriage, disregarding the consent

of the partners and also they preferred endogamy which preserved family property.

However, on the one hand, the nobles' matrimonial strategy came into conflict with the model propounded by the church which regarded the free consent of the partners, publicity of marriage, monogamy, and exogamy (moreover extending 'forbidden degrees' from four to seven) as the essential factors of a valid marriage. In these respects, it is not unreasonable to expect that the church's marriage-model might bestow stability to the conjugal life and guarantee the least feminine dignity (especially for it suggested the equality of the sexes).

Nevertheless, this point must not be overestimated. Fundamentally the church's basic attitude to women was expressed clearly in next phrase. "I do not say that it is the function of women to pray, work, and fight : they are married to those who pray, work, and fight : and they serve them".¹¹⁾ In addition, we must remember that the church did not have immediate interest in the restoration of the feminine dignity. Its marriage-model was adopted chiefly against two powers, that is, the heretics and the nobles. The heretic movements (especially the catharii) prevailed since the 11th century attacked the church's authority and the lay society in terms that they adopted anti-matrimonial and antiprocreational attitudes.¹²⁾ In opposition to these attitudes the church established the strict marriage-model considering marriage a necessary institution and even viewing it as the sacrament.

At any rate, as churchmen including Ivo of chartres came to strengthen their efforts to enforce these principles (the main problem was about the exogamy), the confrontation between nobles and the church flared up since the Gregorian Reform. In this

conflict, it was true that as several medievalists, especially C.B.Boucharde demonstrated, nobles tried not to marry excessively close relatives—they almost never married anyone related more closely than a fourth or fifth cousin. 13)

However, on the other hand, the noble families frequently used to utilize the church's marriage-model in the detouring manner that they broke the accomplished marriage in the excuse of incest, if divorce was thought to be useful. The typical example was the divorce of Louis VII and Eleanor of Aquitaine in 1152.¹⁴⁾ In these days such cases were witnessed frequently, rather the exemplary conjugal life like that of between Matilde and Guillaume, Duke of Normandy was exceptionally found.¹⁵⁾ As a result, the church was obliged to reduce 'forbidden degrees' from seven to four in order to preserve the principle of monogamy at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215.

By the way, the matrimonial crisis mentioned above resulted from the political turbulence in these days. In the midst of the feudal anarchy, the families and factions conflicted each other incessantly, and occasionally a woman fell into the condition that her father or brother confronted with her husband. In this disorder, to reconcile the conflicting factions or to consolidate inter-familial relationship, the betrothal or marriage between the groups concerned was necessarily required (Seven ages daughters were possible to engage and fourteen ages to marry).

But if the situation was reversed, such engagement was used to be broken and remarriage was contracted frequently. As a result, the conjugal life could not be stable. Occasionally several monasteries in these days were also the place into which the victims of such crisis refuged. The monastery of Fontevraud

founded by Robert of Abrissel showed interesting aspects. At this monastery, women, refused for their sterility or abandoned for the better alliances and women who wanted to avoid their father or their husband, assembled and they lived along with men in community. One interesting point was that noble women administrated this monastery and men were obliged to obey these women. In this respect, Michelet quoted this case as a clue to prove that the liberation of women (with that of the community) was the chief character of the 12th century.¹⁶⁾ But this point must not be overestimated, because in this monastery women were utilized as an instrument of redemption of men - for example for obeiance, service, and restraint of sexual desire. ¹⁷⁾

Uttering additionally, in this period considerable numbers of women entered into the convent. Achives of Ronceray showed social origins of nunns. Among 73 the number of noble women exceeded that of other origins, and the total of widows and married women represented 30.13%, of which the former was two times more .¹⁸⁾

However, on the other hand, it was noteworthy that occasionally women tried to obtain their own love and femine dignity even in this turbuluent period. As mentioned above, a number of women temporally refuged into the convent to escape their family's pressure. Also in these days it was frequent that a man abducted a woman to marry and occasionally a woman used to comply with her lover to avoid her family's pressure. Such abduction with the consent of women might be regarded as the start of the conjugal union.¹⁹⁾ Moreover, as demonstrated well in The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis , a few number of noble women were strong enough to force their husbands to fight, or to encourage them to participate in

the crusade, and in case of emergency herself participated in the military actions.²⁰⁾

At any rate, by and large as the feudal feud was repressed by peace movement of the church and the princes, and as the nobles' warlike spirit was refined in what is called 'courtly love' since 12th century, the conjugal life came to be stable even if meagrely. Especially in the 13th century when the feudal hierarchy was completed, the minority of noble women, for example, Blanche of France, Blanche of Champagne governed their family as maternal regents of the kingdom, principality, and castellany.²¹⁾

III. Marriage in the feudal hierarchy

As mentioned above, in the midst of the feudal anarchy, to reconcile and to consolidate the conflicting factions, marriage, namely, the exchange of women between the group concerned was contracted. Also it was true that such marriage came to be crystallized as the feudal hierarchy came to be stable gradually. In this chapter, I will try to inquire into the relation between vassalage and the noble family's matrimonial strategy.

First of all, the next point might be suggested. As a rule, men contracted with daughters of a equal status (homogamy) or a higher status (man's hypergamy). This fact was shown evidently in genealogies edited during these days and in the research of prominent families by French medievalists. For example, those of counts of Anjou, Bourgundy, Blois-champagne, Never, Roucy. These families contracted their male members with daughters of royal families, in addition, they contracted their daughters with sons of equal or lesser families frequently.²²⁾

Also, this point was suggested well in the knight-errants' adventure. In these days, most of the knights who remained

'youth' according to the family's strategy used to wander about to seek an heiress or an nobler woman ²³⁾ and occasionally they abducted their victims. Uttering additionally, even elder sons who could herit their family property in intact used to participate in such adventure to obtain a opportunity to enlarge their power. 'Court romance' showed us this fact romantically.

'Courtly love' accomplished between brilliant knights(not married) and married women of a higher status revealed men's submission to women in their loving. But it didn't prove that a woman herself was placed at the summit of the court society at all. Rather it demonstrated that a woman was utilized as an instrument of the social ascension of her husband.

During these days, there were many women whom men wanted to conquest and a knight who gained the favour of a female of a higher status could move up the upper groups. Although the nobility was divided into several groups, they could ally with each other through such men's hypergamy. In other words, through men's hypergamies, the bloods of the royal family flowed into the family of dukes and counts, and in turn those of the latter into the castellan families or the lesser families. As a result, the ruling class seemed more united.

Such a net of relations suggest us a clue to help us understand the relation between stratificated vassalage and the tie of family. The need of the equal alliance-reinforced by the church that tried to enlarge the extent of exogamy-leded into the enlargement of nets of alliances. However, because the great families of France already contracted with each other complexly, they were obliged to marry the members of the lesser families. Also we must remember that since feudalization the nobility was crystallized on the residence of their own power.

As a result, they tended to marry around the fixed residence and if the marriage with the equal families was not possible they were willing to contract with the members of the lesser families in that province. Therefore, in the fixed region was accomplished marriage between a lord's family and a vassal's, and such an alliance operated as a nuclear link to consolidate the solidarity of the ruling class. Such a close relation between vassalage and the tie of family was shown well in the next phrase. In Catalonia and Languedoc in time of fealty, both a lord and a vassal revealed their familiarity by calling their mother's name²⁴⁾ (not father's name) and this fact showed us the reason why women of a higher status who flowed into new families were admired extremely.

Here we need to cite anthropologists' researchs on marriage. According to their opinion, it were men who exchanged women and in the feudal period, not the restricted exchange (reciprocal exchange of women between two men) but the general exchange (unilateral exchange among groups more than three) was contracted. In the latter it was general that the position of a giver of women was higher than that of a receiver and as a result the hierarchic relation was realized among different groups (By the way, this rule was not enforced strictly but it revealed tendency. That is, homogamy was contracted simultaneously).²⁵⁾

Uttering additionally, in the end of the 12th century and the 13th century that the feudal hierarchy came to be stable, the vassalic relation was more and more placed on the familial relation. As a result, feudal suzerains came to defend and manipulate sons, daughters, and widows of their vassals.

Conclusion

Noble women's position in the Capetian Pynasty was reinforced partially and gradually as times went on. Especially 'dotalitium' guranteed women's economic rights partially. By the way, they must overcome the pressure of the family in order to hold their own rights. In this aspect, it was true that they came to escape from such restraints gradually, as shown in the evolution of 'laudatio parentum'. while in the early feudal period, the ratio that relatives consented was relatively high, by and large the ratio that only a individual or a couple consented increased. However, this point must not be esteemed exaggerately. We must remember that the tie of relatives was strong contineously until 13th century, as shown in the blood-feud(faيدا) and the right of redemption enjoyed by relatives (retraft lignager).²⁶⁾

On the other hand, the pressure of the family was also imposed on their children's marriage. In this aspect, it was generally true that women could not escape from such restraints, although they often tried to obtain their own choice owing to church's favour partially. However, it was also true that the conjugal life came to be stable gradually as times went on. At any rate, it was noteworthy that through the marriage, that is, the exchange of women, the tie among the familes was reinforced.

Notes

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