

## Chapter Eight:

### **The Princesses who might have been Hostages: The Custody and Marriages of Margaret and Isabella of Scotland, 1209-1220s**

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In 1209, stemming from the Treaty of Norham, Scottish hostages were sent south into England. Margaret and Isabella, daughters of King William of Scotland, went along too.<sup>1</sup> Both daughters were intended to marry sons of King John, with the elder Margaret to wed the future Henry III before 1217. By 1215, no such marriages had taken place though the daughters were still in England, and they were subsequently mentioned in the Magna Carta. In 1220, Alexander demanded the promised marriages of his sisters, still in England. Finally in 1221 Margaret was married to Hubert de Burgh, the justiciar of England, and Isabella was married to Roger (III) Bigod in 1225. Both princesses, promised to possible kings, were married below their rank more than ten years after the promise of these positions as a condition of their holding by King John.

Contemporary and later medieval records as well as modern scholars seem uncertain in their terminology for the status of the princesses. While Roger of Wendover and, consequently,

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<sup>1</sup> My grateful thanks go to Matthew Bennett, Gwen Seabourne and Elena Woodacre for reading and commenting on earlier drafts, and to Jess Nelson for generously sharing unpublished work with me. All remaining errors, of course, remain my own.

Matthew Paris refer to them as hostages to King John<sup>2</sup>; the annals of Dunstable do not.<sup>3</sup> In his recent volume on medieval hostageship, Adam Kosto considers the sisters hostages.<sup>4</sup> These two princesses were certainly held by King John though their status has been previously much debated: were they hostages, or undefined honoured guests in the manner of fosterage as their purpose in the English court was ostensibly to make marriages to the sons of John?<sup>5</sup> Their circumstance, as pointed out by Gwen Seabourne, makes complicated the idea of firmly classifying such persons as hostages in the medieval world; Margaret and Isabella might be best termed, as Seabourne suggests, as ‘quasi-hostages,’<sup>6</sup> and indeed the recently-discovered text of

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<sup>2</sup> Wendover, II:60: ‘...et insuper ad majorem securitatem traderet ei duas filias suas in obsidatum, ut per hoc inter eos pax firmio haberetur’; Sir Frederic Madden, ed., Matthew Paris: *Historia Anglorum*, vol. II (London: Longmans, Green, Reader & Dyer, 1866), 119: ‘traderet eidem duas filias suas in obsidatum.’ *MPCM* II, 525: ‘et insuper ad majorem securitatem traderet ei duas filias in obsidatum, ut per hoc inter eos pax firmior haberetur’; unsurprisingly almost identical to Roger of Wendover’s version of events.

<sup>3</sup> *Annales Monastici* III: 58.

<sup>4</sup> Kosto, table 4.2.

<sup>5</sup> Stoertz, Fiona Harris, ‘Young Women in France and England, 1050 – 1300,’ *Journal of Women’s History* 12:4 (2001): 24-5. Stoertz particularly notes that women could be both ‘a hostage and a future wife,’ citing Margaret, daughter of Louis VII of France who was ‘sent to the household of the chief justice of Normandy to be raised as a wife for three-year-old Henry, son of Henry II of England, a part of peace agreements between the two countries’: 25.

<sup>6</sup> Seabourne, this volume.

the Treaty of Norham does not refer to Margaret and Isabella as hostages, which may momentarily damp some of the debate as to their status.<sup>7</sup> However their situation might be legally defined either in the medieval or the modern world, the Scottish princesses were contractual parts of a peace agreement, given in tandem with other hostages, and expressly held by the king for the purpose of their marriages. In many ways, the purpose and experience of Margaret and Isabella's holding by the king is functionally similar to many other high-level hostageships<sup>8</sup> and deserves treatment in its own right, not only for the purpose of exploring hostageships but also with the particular view of the female custody as explicit marriage fodder in the medieval world. Previous works have barely considered the sisters' important roles in the diplomatic manoeuvres and actions of Scotland and England. Indeed, their role as marriage fodder to the English kings for the purpose of shoring up the Anglo-Scottish alliance has long been neglected, despite recognition that their father's previous attempt at creating marriage contracts for them in attempts to ally with the king of France was a part of John's reasons for the terms of the Treaty

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<sup>7</sup> David Carpenter, *Magna Carta* (London: 2015), 472-5. It is worth noting that no hostages at all are mentioned in this text of this treaty, though hostages are known to have been handed over as a part of this agreement.

<sup>8</sup> See for example Gordon McKelvie, this volume; Gwen Seabourne, 'Eleanor of Brittany and her Treatment by King John and Henry III,' *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 51 (2007).

of Norham.<sup>9</sup> The recent volume on the reign of Alexander II,<sup>10</sup> for example, makes only occasional mention of the princesses in any context, neglecting not only the women's lives but also their political importance in the spotlight of a very contentious period of Anglo-Scottish relations. This volume focuses on the many 'traditional' ways of viewing a reign and a kingship: via the military manoeuvres, diplomacy, papal and ecclesiastic relationships, and so forth. All are indeed very valid ways to view a reign and a period, but in neglecting any aspect of the princesses' role in these negotiations, the overview is one of a masculinized world in which Margaret and Isabella were mere tokens instead of a significant part of diplomacy and negotiation between Scotland and England.

The curious facts of the princesses' detention by the English kings outlines a feature made a number of times in this volume, that of the fluidity and nuanced nature of hostageship, but in this case their role in custody had a specific purpose: marriage. Ultimately, neither princess ended up with their intended husbands, the sons of John. Modern scholarship tends to note in brief that the princesses were married to earls, but there is a crucial point that this statement fails to make: Margaret and Isabella did *not* marry earls, they married men who *became* earls. To Scotland, this could have easily been perceived as an insult. To England, this must have been seen as an expedient way to reward loyal men whilst putting Scotland in what England might have seen as

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<sup>9</sup> A.A.M. Duncan, 'John King of England and the Kings of Scotland,' in *King John: New Interpretations*, ed. S.M. Church (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1999), 260, 271; Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, 239.

<sup>10</sup> Richard D. Oram, *The Reign of Alexander II, 1214-49* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

its place as a vassal state; indeed, by the end of the Anglo-Scottish conflict of 1215-17 Scotland is seen as being ‘firmly put in their place’<sup>11</sup> by England and these marriages are a very much part of this worldview. Finally, these marriages note an experience very similar to women of the upper ranks of society and one that fits a much larger pattern: that of women being political marriage fodder, particularly women who were political or social hostages. In fact, there are possibly three known women who moved from a hostageship to John into marriage.<sup>12</sup> This may be a trend indicative of the ‘King John blip’<sup>13</sup> of his reign, or an indication that perhaps the state of being a high-status *woman* in confinement, and thus available for utilization for advantageous marriages, trumped the status of being a high-status *hostage* who might not expect to be given in marriage as a part of a surety agreement. This paper seeks then to not only illuminate the lives and situations of Margaret and Isabella through their eventual marriages, but to restore to them their important roles particularly through their confinement and marriage negotiations for them undertaken by those around them from 1209 into the 1220s. This chapter will further explore the position of Margaret and Isabella as honoured guests or hostages and their possible change from the former to the latter after the ostensible failure of the Treaty of Norham in 1217, and the larger questions of why we might or might not view Margaret and Isabella as hostages—or if that even makes a difference.

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<sup>11</sup> Keith J. Stringer, ‘The War of 1215-17 and Its Context,’ in Oram, *Alexander II*, 146.

<sup>12</sup> For the third see Katherine Weikert, ‘The (Truncated) Life of Alice de Solers Rufus nee Huntingfield: Medieval Hostage, Wife and Widow,’ in *Writing the Lives of People and Things, AD 500-1700*, ed. Robert Smith and Gemma Watson (Farnham: Ashgate, forthcoming 2016).

<sup>13</sup> Seabourne, this volume.

## Negotiations and Marriages

The naming of both daughters as a part of the treaty specifically included their marriage instructions: Margaret and Isabella were to marry the young Henry, heir to John, and Richard, in whatever combination best worked when accounting for any potential deaths between the four of them.<sup>14</sup> Although no mention of Alexander's marriage was made in the known text of the treaty, a later charter of 1212 confirmed that the future Alexander II would be married 'at John's entire discretion' within six years of 8 February 1212;<sup>15</sup> this is taken as a probable promise to John's daughter Joan, only two years old at the time.<sup>16</sup> Relatively quickly after the handing over of his daughters, three of the legitimate children of William the Lion were promised in marriage to legitimate children of John. This certainly was a political manoeuvre for John, and the terms of handing over his two daughters for marriage has been read as one of the 'humiliating feature[s]' of the Treaty.<sup>17</sup> But more may have been on William's mind than this; the marriage of his daughter to the presumed heir of England may have ultimately provided some leverage for the

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<sup>14</sup> Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, 474-5. Stone's reconstruction of the treaty suggested that the hostages were all named, though the fourteenth century copy of the major terms of the treaty which Carpenter has discovered does not include the details of the male hostages.

<sup>15</sup> E.L.G. Stones, ed. and trans., *Anglo-Scottish Relations 1174-1328: Some Selected Documents* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965, reprinted 1970), no. 12.

<sup>16</sup> Keith Stringer, 'Alexander II (1198–1249),' *ODNB*, accessed 20 August 2014, doi: 10.1093/ref:odnb/322.

<sup>17</sup> Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, 239.

Scottish crown, or at the very least a commensurate rank for the woman. The king's own marriage, arranged in part by Henry II, was to Ermengarde, daughter of Richard, vicomte of Beaumont, who was an illegitimate son of a daughter of Henry I. Jessica Nelson rightly notes this choice of a bride by Henry II was one with a lineage that was 'good, but not too good.'<sup>18</sup> Initial reaction in Scotland to this proposed marriage was negative with the match seen as disparaging to the king.<sup>19</sup> The marriage to Ermengarde was not without benefit to William, though, as Henry II returned to him Edinburgh Castle as a part of Ermengarde's dower<sup>20</sup> and Ermengarde ultimately proved diplomatically adept at later occasions. The circumstances surrounding his own marriage may have been on William's mind at the point of handing over his daughters, as well as considering the potential for future political relationships between the kings of England and Scotland: a Scottish princess as an English queen might have provided a key point of intercession in future negotiations between the two kings.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Jessica Nelson, 'Queens and Queenship in Scotland, circa 1067-1286' (PhD thesis, Kings College London, 2006), 131.

<sup>19</sup> W.W. Scott, 'William I [William the Lion] (c. 1142–1214),' *ODNB*, accessed 20 August 2014, doi: 10.1093/ref:odnb/29452; W.W. Scott, 'Ermengarde (d. 1233),' *ODNB*, accessed 25 August 2014, doi: 10.1093/ref:odnb/49356; Nelson, 'Queens,' 126-63 for Ermengarde's career and 131-2 for commentary on the marriage.

<sup>20</sup> Howden, II, 310.

<sup>21</sup> Contra, Carpenter and Nelson both consider this arrangement 'humiliating' to William (*Magna Carta*, 239; 'Queens,' 149), with William's loss of 'crucial diplomatic tools': Nelson, 'Scottish Princesses in Thirteenth Century England' (paper presented at the Thirteenth Century England

Meanwhile, from 1209 the two sisters were taken to England. E.L.G. Stones made a reconstruction of the turbulent years after 1209 for Margaret and Isabella,<sup>22</sup> and accounts in these years allow for somewhat of a portrayal of Margaret and Isabella's custody by the English. The first notice comes from the Pipe Roll of 11 John (1210x1211), wherein one Geoffrey fitz Piers of Essex or Hertford pays a hefty fine of ten goshawks in order to *not* take the princesses in wardship.<sup>23</sup> The ensuing years through to 1214 outline a series of movements for Margaret and Isabella,<sup>24</sup> including a period from 1212–14 when the princesses were most active, or at least best recorded: the pair were at Windsor, Nottingham, Winchester, Waltham, Winchester again,

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Conference, Cambridge, 7-9 September 2015). Whilst both are valid considerations of the 1209 arrangement, long-term planning for a daughter as an English queen might have equally provided a sense of political manoeuvring benefitting the king of Scotland.

<sup>22</sup> Stones, *Relations*, xlv-xlviii.

<sup>23</sup> Bain, I, no. 463. As Nelson points out, the keeping of royal hostages or guests was an expensive business, and so fitz Piers' reticence to accept them can be understood at least in economic terms: 'Scottish Princesses.'

<sup>24</sup> Including for the princesses and Robert fitz Roger, the constable of Chester, for one night's accommodation in Ripon to the tune of £6 15s 3½d in 1211x1212: Bain, I, no. 482. Before 26 July 1212 the princesses were in Bristol but were moved to Nottingham shortly thereafter: Bain, I, no. 530. In November 1212 the princesses were in Gloucester, where the king gave money to the sheriff of Gloucester, Engelard de Cigoine, for clothing for the princesses and their governesses (*magistrarum*): Bain, I, no. 544.



Rochester (where they may have received messages from their father<sup>25</sup>), Temple near Dover, Corfe Castle, London, and Windsor again.<sup>26</sup> As Bain notes, it seems that Margaret and Isabella were then with the royal court, following its rapid movements.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, the company they keep explicitly included the queen herself, Isabella of Angoulême,<sup>28</sup> and John's famed niece, Eleanor of Brittany.<sup>29</sup>

The supplies provisioned for Margaret and Isabella were also commensurate to daughters of a king travelling with a royal court. John provided for the sisters' luxurious clothing, including capes and robes lined with rabbit fur, miniver, lambskin and deerskin, hoods also lined with fur, capes of cambric, and light summer shoes; dresses were made in dark green for the sisters along with hoods and capes in russet.<sup>30</sup> Their entourage were not forgotten, receiving robes (light green for the maids), hoods, capes, and rain hoods.<sup>31</sup> On one possibly memorable occasion, the king provided for Margaret and Isabella two seams of fish, fifty pounds of almonds, and one hundred

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<sup>25</sup> Bain, I, Introduction, xxx.

<sup>26</sup> Bain, I, nos. 559, 562, 563, 564, 565, 568, 570, 572, 579, 581, 602, 612.

<sup>27</sup> Bain, I, Introduction, xxx.

<sup>28</sup> Bain, I, nos. 565, 568, 579.

<sup>29</sup> Bain, I, nos. 579, 581.

<sup>30</sup> Bain, I, nos. 562, 579, 581, 597, 602, 609.

<sup>31</sup> Bain, I, nos. 544, 563, 581, 609.

pounds of figs for their use whilst at Windsor in 1212 or 1213.<sup>32</sup> Margaret and Isabella were well-dressed, well-fed, well-provisioned and generally in good company.

In fact, it is the company of Eleanor of Brittany that may give us the greatest suggestion as to Margaret and Isabella's status within the royal household at that time. Eleanor, as *suo jure* duchess of Brittany as well as a daughter of John's older brother, represented to John both in her person and (previously) in her deceased brother a potential threat to the throne of England. Eleanor's captivity was a probably a strategy to keep Brittany quiet and Eleanor from agitating either for the duchy or the throne, alongside an expectation to potentially make a marriage match that was most favourable to the English throne.<sup>33</sup> Eleanor's captivity is one of the better-documented and well-known female hostageships in the period; indeed it has been established that outside of the obvious fact that she was not actually free, her hostageship in many ways

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<sup>32</sup> Bain, I, no. 559.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Jones, 'Arthur, duke of Brittany (1187–1203),' *ODNB*, accessed 22 Aug 2014, doi: 10.1093/ref:odnb/704. Here too it is worth noting that Eleanor's position, whilst generally accepted in antiquarian and modern sources as a hostageship, was also itself fluid and rather ill-defined: Seabourne has established that Eleanor likely had some sort of a wardship-type relationship with the kings of England previous to Mirabeau, has cast reasonable doubt on the prevailing notion that Eleanor's hostageship sprang from a capture at Mirabeau, and also, and most interestingly, noted a change in Eleanor's relationship to her keepers after the early 1220s with a more 'serious effort to keep Eleanor confined' by the young Henry III (or, as is more likely, the men around him). Seabourne, 'Eleanor,' *passim*.

resembled typical life as a noble woman in the early thirteenth century.<sup>34</sup> Eleanor's hostageship, in fact, has been referred to rather politely as a 'comfortable confinement.'<sup>35</sup>

The amount of travel that Margaret and Isabella did with the English court in the early years of their custody also flags up their political use. Although most of the money of the treaty's terms had been paid by 1211, all of the hostages, including the princesses, remained in England.<sup>36</sup> In February 1212 the agreement in regards to Alexander's marriage was drawn up, mediated by Queen Ermengarde;<sup>37</sup> on 4 March 1212, Alexander was knighted by John at Clerkenwell.<sup>38</sup> This date may correspond to a flurry activity undertaken by Margaret and Isabella in March of the same year including travel from Nottingham to Winchester and the use of the John's horses and groomsmen in the process (to the tune of £19 13s 6½d).<sup>39</sup> The knighting of the heir to the Scottish throne was undoubtedly a large and grand affair, to say nothing of the political

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<sup>34</sup> Seabourne, 'Eleanor;' Annette P. Parks, 'Rescuing the Maidens from the Tower: Recovering the Stories of Female Political Hostages,' in *Feud, Violence and Practice: Essays in Honor of Stephen D. White*, eds. Belle S. Tuten and Tracey L. Billado (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010).

<sup>35</sup> Michael Jones, 'Eleanor, suo jure duchess of Brittany (1182x4–1241),' *ODNB*, accessed 22 Aug 2014, doi: 10.1093/ref:odnb/46702.

<sup>36</sup> Scott, 'William I.'

<sup>37</sup> Stones, 'Relations,' no. 4; Scott, 'William I.'

<sup>38</sup> Stones, 'Relations,' p. 26, n. 1; Scott, 'William I.'

<sup>39</sup> The same record notes gifts of gyrfalcons from William to John, all a part of a related series of activities. Bain, I, no. 564.

connotations of the king of England knighting the heir of Scotland, further emphasizing the state of political relations between the two. If Margaret and Isabella had been present, they were certainly a part of this showy presentation and royal ceremony. Ostensibly they could have been there as representatives of the Scottish royal family. But more so, they would have been there as a display of John's power over William. Three of William's legitimate children were in John's hand, not simply as knights or 'quasi-hostages' but also, recall, future children-in-law. The occasion of March 1212 to underline this fact was undoubtedly one not to pass up. In fact it has been noted that in the years from 1209 through 1212 the concessions made via Norham and the agreement that Alexander would marry at John's wish were 'completely at odds with any idea of Scottish independence,'<sup>40</sup> and in the years surrounding 1214 John was acting as 'overlord of Scotland in all but name.'<sup>41</sup> The ostentatious display of the Scottish princesses, in his own court and under his care whether as ward or hostage, would compound this image of John's control over Scotland. The apparent display of other Scottish hostages at the feast of St John the Baptist in 1213 shows another example of John's willingness to exhibit the hostage-spoils of his dominance over Scotland.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, 240.

<sup>41</sup> Stringer, 'Alexander II.'

<sup>42</sup> Bain, I, no. 574. This same series of notices reports on the death of the daughter of Alan of Galweya (Galloway), another hostage to John, who had been in the custody of Robert fitz Roger. It is also worth noting in brief that William took as hostage the daughter of John, earl of Orkney and Caithness, upon John's ascendancy to the sole earlship following his brother's death in 1214. It is not known what happened to this daughter either at the time of her hostage-taking nor at

William's death in 1214 did little to change this, though Alexander, upon assuming the throne in Scotland, would soon press his political advantage in the ensuing tumultuous years. In the 1215 Magna Carta, Clause 59 specifically referenced Margaret and Isabella alongside the other Scottish hostages. In regards to these 'sisters and hostages of Alexander,'<sup>43</sup> Alexander was to be treated as the other barons of England, whose hostages were to be returned according to Clause 49. In a large part this was significant to Alexander's claim to the border counties, continuing William's policy; Clause 59 also offers justice in accordance to Alexander's 'liberties and rights.'<sup>44</sup> A.A.M. Duncan concludes that Clause 59's purpose was in giving Alexander rights as an English baron, moving away from the fates of the unmarried princesses despite of the reference to them.<sup>45</sup> David Carpenter reads this clause in the 1215 Magna Carta as an attempt to negate the punishing terms of Norham, reasserting control over a Scottish kingship while

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William's subsequent death a few months later. John of Fordun, printed in Alan Orr Anderson, ed. and trans., *Early Sources of Scottish History, A.D. 500 to 1286*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1922), 399 (note); W.W. Scott, 'Macheth family (*per. c.* 1124–1215),' *ODNB*, accessed 25 Aug 2014, doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/49354; Scott, 'William I.'

<sup>43</sup> 'sororibus suis et obsidibus;' a precise status for Margaret and Isabella is avoided.

<sup>44</sup> 'et libertatibus suis, et jure suo'; Stringer, 'Alexander II.'

<sup>45</sup> Duncan, 'John,' 266-7. Throughout this piece, Duncan also adamantly maintains that the Scottish princesses were strictly *not* hostages, and even suggests that the payments from the 1209 treaty may have been dowries.

maintaining his only relationship with John was as an English baron.<sup>46</sup> Within Magna Carta itself this is only one of three references to hostages, including Clause 49 (important to the construction of Clause 59), demanding the return of hostages taken from the England barons, and Clause 58, referencing the return of Welsh hostages including the son of Llywelyn. In fact Clause 58 and 59 work in tandem, both referencing not only high-level hostages from troubled Scotland and Wales during John's reign but symbolically tying together the status of Alexander's sisters and Llywelyn's son as high-ranking noble men and women in the possession of the king.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, Clauses 56-59 all deal with either Wales or Scotland, lands in which John had had significant issues during his reign, and link together the Welsh and Scottish hostages alongside the English ones referenced in Clause 49. Only Clause 59 deals with Scotland, though, but with references to charters John held from William, presumably the Treaty of Norham.<sup>48</sup> But like Llywelyn's son, the situation of Margaret and Isabella was well-known enough and their status high enough to be linguistically separated from the situation of the cadre of Welsh and Scottish hostages also referenced in the clauses. The status of Alexander's potential marriage as controlled by John is not referenced here outside of an oblique reference we might read into the reference in Clause 59 of charters from William. Perhaps Alexander had every intention of

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<sup>46</sup> Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, 240-1.

<sup>47</sup> The return of the Welsh hostages was no doubt heavy on the Welsh prince's mind following the execution of some of them in 1212. A. D. Carr, 'Llywelyn ab Iorwerth (c.1173–1240),' *ODNB*, accessed 25 Aug 2014, doi: 10.1093/ref:odnb/16874.

<sup>48</sup> 'per cartas quas habemus de Willelmo patre ipsius, quondam rege Scottorum'

seeing his own marriage through. But at this time it was pressed that Margaret and Isabella were to be returned to Alexander, and consequently their marriage arrangements controlled by him.

This was not to be borne out, but Alexander pressed the advantage of 1215. After John's repudiation of the 1215 Magna Carta, Alexander took much of the north of England in late 1215 and formed alliances with the barons of the region, whose leaders were (not coincidentally) married to his illegitimate half-sisters.<sup>49</sup> At this time agreements were conducted between Alexander and these barons in regards to Margaret and Isabella's marriages, though these details do not survive.<sup>50</sup> Alexander was not only pressing his military and territorial advantages from 1215-17 but also diplomatic and political ones, most likely banking on the availability of his sisters to make strategic marriages to increase his own clout at the cost of John's. Here again the fate of the sisters' marriages were being held, controlled and used to the advantage of a king. However, Alexander's advantage was not fully borne out, and in December 1217, he resubmitted to Henry III. Alexander was ready then to play politics with the English throne as opposed to fight it,<sup>51</sup> and his own and his sisters' marriages were a large part of this new approach. Probably not coincidentally, Clause 59 of the 1215 Magna Carta was omitted from all later versions.

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<sup>49</sup> Stringer, 'Alexander II.'

<sup>50</sup> Stringer references inventories of Scottish archives in 1282 and 1291 listing the negotiations between Alexander and the northern barons resulting in agreements about Margaret and Isabella's marriages: 'Alexander II;' Duncan, 'John,' 270-1 for the inventories.

<sup>51</sup> Stringer, 'Alexander II.'

Traces of Margaret and Isabella disappear in the documentary record for a period after the 1215 Magna Carta. In August 1219 Alexander was again negotiating marriage contracts, this time with Theobald IV, Count of Champagne and future King of Navarre, for Margaret.<sup>52</sup> This is likely in

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<sup>52</sup> D.W. Hunter Marshall, 'A Proposed Marriage-Alliance between Scotland and Champagne,' *Scottish Notes and Queries*, vol. VII, 3<sup>rd</sup> series (November 1929), 207-9. Marshall interprets this letter as in regards to Alexander's illegitimate sister Margaret, though the terms of the negotiated agreement would suggest that it was not only for a legitimate daughter but also one in whom the king of England had a vested interest: terms included 6000 silver marks not only for the marriage but the same amount also paid to the king of England via the Knights Templars or Hospitallers '*facere securitatem*.' The fact that both the legitimate sister Margaret and the illegitimate sister Margaret were both unmarried in 1219 would have added to this confusion (the illegitimate sister having been widowed by Eustace de Vescy in 1216 (Ralph V. Turner, 'Vescy, Eustace de (1169/70–1216),' *ODNB*, accessed 26 May 2015, doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/28253). However the immense amount of money paid and the need to keep peace with the English king on this agreement would strongly suggest the marriage of the legitimate Margaret, as would the details of lifecycle: the legitimate Margaret was at that time an 24-32 years old (Scott, 'Margaret') in a good stage of lifecycle to provide an heir to Champagne, rather than the illegitimate Margaret, a widow of 38 (Scott, 'William I'). Further questions remain unanswered and possibly unanswerable about whether or not Theobald would have been seen as the heir to the throne of Navarre in 1219; if so, this would add another dimension of placing a Scottish princess on a



light of the fact that England was now in violation of the terms of the Treaty of Norham which stipulated that the marriage between Margaret and Henry would take place in 1216 or 1217, when the young Henry was nine or ten, and the marriage between Isabella and Richard one or two years after that.<sup>53</sup> This attempt with Theobald did not materialize, but is an early indication of Alexander's attempts to place the Scottish monarchy on par with European ones seen in the 1220s.<sup>54</sup> In 1220 there is unsurprisingly another round of marriage negotiations with England, listing that Alexander was to marry Joan or her younger sister Isabella post-haste whilst Margaret and Isabella were to be married honourably or returned to Scotland.<sup>55</sup> At this point, all of the previous marriage agreements had gone awry: Alexander was not married within the prescribed six years of the 1212 charter, whilst the 'unfortunate ladies'<sup>56</sup> were still unmarried in England.

Perhaps the terms of the 1220 agreement should have been more specific as to what constituted an 'honourable' marriage for Margaret and Isabella. The marriage between Alexander and Joan did indeed take place at York in 1221.<sup>57</sup> Hubert de Burgh, justiciar of England, married Margaret in the same year, probably in October although the agreements had probably been settled at

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Continental throne and adding to the expanding outlook of Alexander at that time; Elena Woodacre, pers. comm.

<sup>53</sup> Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, 4474-5.

<sup>54</sup> Richard Oram, 'An Overview of the Reign of Alexander II,' in Oram, *Alexander II*, 14.

<sup>55</sup> *Foed.* I, i, 160-1; trans. Bain, I, no. 761.

<sup>56</sup> Stones, *Relations*, xlvii.

<sup>57</sup> Stringer, 'Alexander II.'

Alexander's own wedding.<sup>58</sup> De Burgh's influence was undoubtedly at play here as he wed the princess intended for Henry III. Henry III even gave Margaret away at the wedding.<sup>59</sup> Isabella's marriage duly followed suit: in 1225 she was wed to Roger (III) Bigod, the future earl of Norfolk.<sup>60</sup> However there are brief glimpses of her in 1221–22: in September 1221, Isabella was back in the company of Eleanor of Brittany in Southampton, with both women provided robes, cloaks, caps and hoods including linings of squirrel and deerskin.<sup>61</sup> In November 1222, Henry III purchased horses for Isabella in order to go 'to her own country.'<sup>62</sup> It could be debated whether this constituted sending Isabella back; in the same month the king was ordering bed linens and more clothing to be made for Isabella in London.<sup>63</sup> From 1222 through to 1225 Isabella is absent

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<sup>58</sup> David Carpenter, *The Minority of Henry III* (Berkeley, CA, and London: University of California Press, 1990), 245, 268.

<sup>59</sup> Bower IX, no. 34. De Burgh, predictably, was later accused to helping himself to Margaret during Henry III's minority.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Bain, I, nos. 788, 815

<sup>62</sup> Bain, I, no. 835.

<sup>63</sup> Bain, I, nos. 836, 841. Nelson considers these a sort of 'going away present,' 'Scottish Princesses.' Marc Morris, without considering the provisions Henry III was still providing for Isabella in London, also considers this Isabella's return to Scotland: *The Bigod Earls of Norfolk in the Thirteenth Century* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005), 5; the Chronicle of Melrose also records Isabella's return in 1223: Anderson, *Early Sources*, 454. Isabella's location from late 1222 through to her marriage is clearly up for debate. She might have gone to her brother at that time,

from the English documents until the record of her marriage to Roger (III) Bigod. Isabella received one-third of Roger's land in dower in May 1225<sup>64</sup> and the pair were married at Alnwick in June.<sup>65</sup>

### Examining the Marriages

Many factors would have been at play in arranging both marriages, most perhaps circling around Hubert de Burgh. De Burgh's star was on the rise in Henry III's minority government and it is not impossible that his own influence nabbed him the older of the two Scottish princesses. He had already done well in his previous marriages: in 1208 to Beatrice de Warrene, heiress to her father's barony at Wormegay and the mother of de Burgh's only son, and in 1217 a marriage of mere days to Isabella, countess of Gloucester, the divorced wife of King John.<sup>66</sup> The marriage to Margaret tied him in a kinship relationship to both thrones of Scotland and England, carrying 'tremendous prestige' for this 'younger son of a gentry family, who had made good in royal

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but the expense paid for bed linens and clothing paid in London for Isabella's use must question the permanency of her visit to Scotland.

<sup>64</sup> Bain, I, no. 906.

<sup>65</sup> *Calendar of the Fine Rolls of the Reign of Henry III 1224-1225*, no. 204. Henry III Fine Rolls Project, (<http://www.finerollshenry3.org.uk>), accessed 27 August 2014.

<sup>66</sup> F.J. West, 'Burgh, Hubert de, earl of Kent (c. 1170 – 1243),' *ODNB*, accessed 20 August 2014, doi: 10.1093/ref:odnb/3991.

service.<sup>67</sup> But the consolidation of his power that this marriage might have represented still did not confer upon him a title,<sup>68</sup> and did not always help him in playing for advantages: Roger of Wendover, for example, noted the disdain with which the Countess of Salisbury greeted a suit for her hand in marriage by de Burgh's nephew after the rumour of William Longespee's death at sea in 1225. According to Wendover, this suit was initiated by a request from de Burgh to Henry III, and ended with the Countess angrily denying de Burgh's nephew, saying that her nobility prevented such a match.<sup>69</sup> However, de Burgh's many manoeuvres, of which a marriage to Margaret was surely one, was to come to fruition: in 1227, the first year of Henry III's majority, de Burgh was created the earl of Kent with the descendency of the earldom to be placed with any children of de Burgh and Margaret, who jointly held his much of his land.<sup>70</sup>

The reasons for Isabella's marriage to Roger Bigod, who was the heir to the earldom of Norfolk, remain more muddled but again the influence of de Burgh was probably at hand. If de Burgh had manoeuvred for this marriage, he had managed to arrange for himself a brother-in-law who, in his majority, would be rich and powerful.<sup>71</sup> De Burgh already acted as custodian to the lands of

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<sup>67</sup> Carpenter, *Minority*, 246.

<sup>68</sup> Carpenter notes that the marriage made de Burgh 'earl-worthy': *Minority*, 246.

<sup>69</sup> Roger of Wendover, *Flores Historiarum*, ed. and trans. J.A. Giles, London: 1849, 2 vols., vol. 2, p.465-6; Jennifer C. Ward, 'Ela, *suo jure* countess of Salisbury (*b.* in or after 1190, *d.* 1261),' *ODNB* (2009), accessed 25 Aug 2014, doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/47205.

<sup>70</sup> Carpenter, *Minority*, 395.

<sup>71</sup> Morris, *Bigod*, 5.

the earl of Norfolk from 1223.<sup>72</sup> When the third earl died in 1225 while Roger was still in his minority, Roger's complicated wardship passed first to William Longespee, third earl of Salisbury and uncle to Henry III, but then to Alexander II following Roger's marriage to Isabella.<sup>73</sup> At this time Roger was probably thirteen;<sup>74</sup> Isabella's birthdate is unknown but was previous to her brother's in 1198, making her at least twenty-seven (but almost certainly older) at the time of finally being wed, sixteen years after the initial agreements of her marriage into England's Plantagenet family. With her husband's wardship passed to Alexander, Isabella, in effect, was back in the care of her own brother. Both Margaret and Isabella had been in gentle captivity amongst the English for perhaps as many as sixteen years; both may have been adept at knowing or at least watching the powerful men around them jockey for favour, and their marriages may have provided no different an atmosphere than their previous situations, save the difference of being wives instead of hostages or guests of the crown.

Both princesses also married below their ranks with only Isabella coming close to a match that might have behoved her station. It was a far fall: Hubert de Burgh, although undoubtedly a powerful man and even the widower (of sorts) of a former queen, was a man 'raised from the

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<sup>72</sup> Morris, *Bigod*, 5.

<sup>73</sup> Robert C. Stacey, 'Bigod, Roger (III), fourth earl of Norfolk (c. 1212–1270),' *ODNB*, accessed 20 August 2014, doi: 10.1093/ref:ondb/2380. Bigod's wardship was no doubt complicated by the fact that Bigod's overlord would have been the king, who was also himself a minor; Morris, *Bigod*, 4.

<sup>74</sup> Stacey, 'Bigod, Roger (III).'

dust' in John's reign,<sup>75</sup> a man from a family of minor landholders who may best exemplify the possibilities of raising one's own power and rank through royal service. At the time of his wedding to Margaret, he was not a man without power, but certainly a man without a noble lineage. Even after his marriage to Margaret he still was not seen as suitable to mix with the upper echelons of England, as the episode with the countess of Salisbury demonstrates. It should be noted that this marriage apparently came with the approval of her brother Alexander, who certainly would have otherwise used her hand in marriage elsewhere to secure other international alliances, as seen before with the potential alliance with Champagne. Margaret's tie to one of the most powerful men in England, ennobled or not, could have been beneficial to Alexander in his new stance of playing politics with England, although it might have been a short-sighted move to approve of a marriage to de Burgh as opposed to Henry III himself. Perhaps after all this time and very little control of the situation, it was a matter of simply taking what Alexander could get.

Isabella's match might come closer to the expectations of marriage for a princess. The Bigod family had been secure in their earldom since its creation in 1141 but with a firm grip on their lands in East Anglia since Roger (I) Bigod's tenure as sheriff of Norfolk in the 1080s and his later reappointment in 1091.<sup>76</sup> The Bigods were, as Marc Morris has pointed out, 'a family worth

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<sup>75</sup> See Ralph V. Turner, *Men raised from the dust: Administrative service and upward mobility in Angevin England*, Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988).

<sup>76</sup> A.F. Wareham, 'Bigod, Hugh (I), first earl of Norfolk (d. 1176/7),' *ODNB*, accessed 20 August 2014, doi: 10.1093/ref:odnb/2376.

marrying into.’<sup>77</sup> Though the underage future earl of Norwich may not have been a particularly personally palatable match for a woman nearing thirty, the marriage would have provided her with an acceptable rank and position, though not the same as she might have expected with a marriage to John’s son.<sup>78</sup> Roger (III) Bigod may not have been the *intended* match for Isabella, but was a relatively secure one. That Bigod’s wardship was given first to William Longspee followed by Alexander certainly signified royal investment in the young earl alongside, undoubtedly, the control of the young earl. The shifting sands of the quasi-hostageship of Isabella was transferred to the wardship of her husband, so in essence from the king to Longspee and finally her own brother before Roger’s majority. In modern terms an extensive amount of subcontracting took place for her custody. It is worth pointing out as well that an adult woman, moving from a quasi-hostageship to a marriage with an underage husband, was still treated as the minor her husband was despite her age; her position as wife fell under that of her husband’s, and her husband’s minority trumped all. Bigod finally received his knighthood and was invested as earl in 1233.<sup>79</sup>

Of the two sisters, Margaret’s marriage seems to have been the most politically successful in terms of Margaret’s own survival and authority. Despite de Burgh’s contentious fall from power in the 1230s, Margaret managed to hold her own and come out after de Burgh’s death with their lands and her own authority over them intact. Her secret arrangement of marriage between their

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<sup>77</sup> Morris, *Bigod*, 2.

<sup>78</sup> Marc Morris, however, considers this marriage ‘preordained’: *Bigod*, 5.

<sup>79</sup> Stacey, ‘Bigod, Roger (III).’

daughter Megotta and the underage Richard de Clare, ward of the king in custody of de Burgh,<sup>80</sup> holds a whiff of control over her daughter's future that neither she nor her sister particularly experienced during their hostageships or wardships. After de Burgh's death in 1243, the agreements that made Margaret and him joint holders of their land held firm, and Margaret can be seen actively acting on behalf of her own lands for the rest of her life.<sup>81</sup>

Isabella's fortunes in perhaps the more fortuitous of the two marriages are less well known. In 1245 Roger Bigod began annulment proceedings, alleging consanguinity, though the church found in favour of the marriage in 1253.<sup>82</sup> This allegation twenty years after their marriage probably much to do with their lack of children; without an heir, and with Isabella reaching nearly fifty or so, the earl was undoubtedly trying to plan for the future of his family. Though the proceedings found in favour of the marriage, Bigod accepted this with 'apparent equanimity;' the

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<sup>80</sup> West, 'Burgh, Hubert de;' Scott, 'Margaret.' Richard de Clare was a grandson of William Marshal and thus a cousin of Isabella's husband Roger (III) Bigod, earl of Norfolk, and nephew of Isabella and Margaret's sister's husband, Gilbert Marshal (see below); another of Richard de Clare's uncles, Richard Marshal, had guarded Hubert de Burgh upon his fall from grace in 1232—which had necessitated Margaret, Megotta and Richard de Clare's sanctuary at Bury in the first place.

<sup>81</sup> Bain, I, nos. 1582, 1617, 1620, 1714, 1718, 1729, 1730, 1733, 1734, 1735, 1736, 1754, 1764, 1771, 1773, 1779, 1810, 1814, 1850, 1937, 1939, 2059.

<sup>82</sup> Stacey, 'Bigod, Roger (III).'



couple were still married at the time of their deaths in 1270.<sup>83</sup> Although Isabella's heart was interred alongside her husband's at the parish church of Framingham,<sup>84</sup> her body was laid to rest at Blackfriars in London, where Margaret had been buried after her death in 1259.<sup>85</sup> The sisters were together again.

The potential marriages of Margaret and Isabella dominated their early lives. From their taking by John in 1209, the women were kept in good form—no one would have cause for complaint about the care and keeping of the princesses, and to whit there is no record of complaints outside of their lack of marriages—and they were duly displayed as a symbol of John's power over

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<sup>83</sup> Morris, *Bigod*, 100.

<sup>84</sup> Morris, *Bigod*, 100. Morris notes that the rest of Bigod was buried at Thetford.

<sup>85</sup> Scott, 'Margaret.' A third sister, Marjorie, married to Gilbert Marshal, seventh earl of Pembroke, had been buried at Blackfriars in 1244, the first of the three to be interred there: Scott, 'Ermengarde.' As a point of interest, Gilbert Marshal was the uncle of Roger (III) Bigod, Isabella's husband. Gilbert Marshal's brother, Richard Marshal, sixth earl of Pembroke, had guarded Margaret's husband, Hubert de Burgh, upon his fall from grace in 1232; Isabella's husband, Roger (III) Bigod had stood with his uncle Richard Marshal on his brief rebellion in 1233: D. J. Power, 'Marshal, Richard, sixth earl of Pembroke (*d.* 1234),' *ODNB*, accessed 25 Aug 2014, doi: 10.1093/ref:odnb/18124; Stacey, 'Roger (III) Bigod.' The brief if controversial marriage of Megotta de Burgh and Robert de Clare, a grandson of William Marshal, further tied the family of the Scottish princesses to the Marshals. The three sisters' marriages were just as fascinatingly intertwined as had been the two sisters' quasi-hostageships.

Scotland. Indeed their lack of marriages in the 1210s can be read as another power play, first by John, then by Henry III (or rather, his men). These two women were in the control of the English crown, not the Scottish one, and thus their dispensation to appropriate husbands was kept back, lorded over, and played close to the chest. This was in the interest of the English kings; John would have probably held his hand with the princesses until forced, which he never was; but he could have very well been waiting for a match for the princesses that would politically benefit him the most. Due to the arrangements of the Treaty of Norham and Henry's age at the time, John's delay in marrying Margaret to Henry was easily explainable, though the continued holding of the women beyond the terms of the Treaty create more questions as to their use and indeed their status. Perhaps after 1217, with the failure of arranging the marriages according to the Treaty and their original purpose for being in England unrealized, the sisters might legally be considered hostages regardless of the fact that their social use and day-to-day situations had not changed.

The broken promises of the 1210s and 1220s, however, were not put to rest and as late as 1237 the royal marriages of Margaret and Isabella were still on minds. When Alexander II relinquished the 1209 agreement alongside quitclaiming Northumberland, Cumberland and Westmorland,<sup>86</sup> the agreement made a point of mentioning the offered marriages between Henry,

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<sup>86</sup> Rothwell, Harry, ed., 'Treaty between the kings of England and Scotland, 1237,' *EHD* Vol. 3, 1995, accessed 29 October 2015,

[www.englishhistoricaldocuments.com/document/view.html?id64](http://www.englishhistoricaldocuments.com/document/view.html?id64); Stones, *Relations*, no. 7;

Richard, Margaret and Isabella. Considering the possibilities that might have been, it should be no doubt that Hubert de Burgh's fall from grace in the 1230s would particularly render this a sort point for the king of Scotland.

### **Conclusions: The Stuff of Legends**

Writing in 1263 or 1264, the chronicler of Melrose chose to list William giving up his daughters amongst seminal events such as the martyrdom of Thomas Beckett, the Battle of the Standard, the burning of Roxburgh and Berwick, and the foundation of Melrose Abbey itself.<sup>87</sup> The English custody of the Scottish princesses and their subsequent marriages were no longer just a matter of diplomatic fodder and a long memory of broken promises: it had become the stuff of historical legend.

The ambiguity with which contemporary and later sources have treated Margaret and Isabella have muddied many of the issues of their lives. Medieval writers flexibly interchanged how they referred to the princesses. The Treaty of Norham itself speaks of the daughters being delivered to John,<sup>88</sup> with no references to hostageship, but then again there is no mention of hostages whatsoever in the recently-found text though male hostages were certainly delivered to John as

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Stringer, 'Alexander II;' Oram also notes that in 1237 '[a]ll copies of the 1209, 1212, and 1221 treaties were to be returned to the respective parties for destruction': 'Overview,' 15.

<sup>87</sup> Anderson, *Early Sources*, 560-561.

<sup>88</sup> 'W. rex Scotie tradidit nobis duas filias suas,' Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, 474.

well. The annals of Dunstable for 1220 refer to them as *in custodia*.<sup>89</sup> The later continuation of Gervase of Canterbury's *Gesta Regum* writes that William sent his daughters to John *per nuntios fideles*; he later mentions that Alexander too was sent to John but specifically not as a hostage.<sup>90</sup> Roger of Wendover writes that William's two daughters were delivered to John in hostageship in order to establish a more secure peace.<sup>91</sup> Later annals from the reigns of Edward I and II call Margaret and Isabella hostages,<sup>92</sup> as does Matthew Paris.<sup>93</sup> The *Chronicle of Huntingdon*, however, again simply refers to Margaret and Isabella as in John's custody.<sup>94</sup> David Carpenter

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<sup>89</sup> *Annales Monastici* III, 58.

<sup>90</sup> *Gervase* II, 103. As there is no other record of Alexander going at this time, this might have been conflating this with Alexander's later knighthood bestowed by John.

<sup>91</sup> Wendover, II, 50: '...et insuper ad majorem securitatem traderet ei duas filias suas in obsidatum, ut per hoc inter eos pax firmio haberetur.'

<sup>92</sup> *Chron. Ed.I and II*, I:14: 'tradidit duas filias in obsides.'

<sup>93</sup> Sir Frederic Madden, ed., Matthew Paris: *Historia Anglorum*, vol. II (London: Longmans, Green, Reader & Dyer, 1866), 119: 'traderet eidem duas filias suas in obsidatum.' *MPCM* II, 525: 'et insuper ad majorem securitatem traderet ei duas filias in obsidatum, ut per hoc inter eos pax firmior haberetur'; unsurprisingly almost identical to Roger of Wendover's version of events.

<sup>94</sup> William. F. Skene, ed., *Chronicles of the Picts, Chronicles of the Scots, and other Early Memorials of Scottish History* (Edinburgh: H.M. General Register House, 1867), 213: 'Et filie Willelmi Regis scilicet Margareta et Isabella tradite sunt in custodiam Domino Regi Anglie.'

keeps references to Alexander's 'hostages' and 'sisters' as two separate entities.<sup>95</sup> In Richard Oram's recent volume on Alexander II, the terminology used for the princesses are equally confused: John was given 'the right to arrange [the marriages] of [Alexander's] older sisters';<sup>96</sup> or there was John's 'seizure' of the sisters as 'political pawns "contrary to the wishes of the Scots."<sup>97</sup> Perhaps our unwillingness to call particular medieval women hostages is a simple reflection of the same hesitation in the medieval world: perhaps high status women such as Margaret and Isabella were generally not to be thought of as hostages but women in custody, regardless of the little difference between the two. The potential and probable change in status after 1217 from custody to hostage no doubt does little to elucidate this due to the lack of change in situation for the sisters. The medieval confusion over the status of Margaret and Isabella should serve us both as an illustration and a warning. Perhaps our modern confusion over female medieval hostages is a reflection of a medieval delicacy in calling royal women in custody for peace by the same name.

And by the same token, perhaps our modern scholarship should open our eyes wider to the possibilities of medieval women in custody seen, by their contemporaries and by us, as hostages: perhaps comfortable, and delicately guarded without actual guards as opposed to with lock and key, but hostages nonetheless. Indeed the custody of Margaret and Isabella most closely

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<sup>95</sup> Carpenter, *Magna Carta*, 353.

<sup>96</sup> Oram, 'Overview,' 8.

<sup>97</sup> Keith J. Stringer, 'Kingship, Conflict and State-Making in the Reign of Alexander II: The War of 1215-17 and Its Context,' in Oram, *Alexander II*, 101, citing *Melrose*, 54.

resembled that of Eleanor of Brittany with the large exception of the always-explicit custody of the princesses for their potential marriage. If the marriage mandate were removed, Margaret and Isabella would have been held for reasons no differently than the other hostages of 1209: to maintain the terms of a treaty and act as a check on Scottish aggression. If we try to define what a medieval hostageship means by too strict a definition, we might lose sight of those like Margaret and Isabella whose status might have been shifting, dependent on circumstances around them, and apparently unclear even to those producing the records we use to reconstruct the past.

The course of the lives of these two women were irretrievably altered in 1209 in a way that has led historians for centuries to comment on their lives usually in a bare line or two focusing on the lowest common denominators: that they were hostages, or wards, or wives. But beyond this, viewing Anglo-Scottish relations in the early thirteenth century through the traditional, masculinized lenses of warfare and diplomacy erases any other experiences, and marginalizes the importance of marriage diplomacy via either treaty or hostageship. A close examination of Margaret and Isabella, however, provides a much richer idea of their lives and status, and highlights two crucial points: first, that making politically expedient marriages dominated the social landscape around them as part of a much greater construction of Anglo-Scottish power relations, and second, the danger that is incurred by seeking to define too closely what a female hostage *was* in the Middle Ages.

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