Edited by

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Queens and Queenship IN MEDIEVAL EUROPE

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Anne J. Duggan

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Abbreviations

AASS	*Acta Sanctorum*, edd. J. Bolland and G. Henschen, 70 vols (Antwerp/Brussels, 1643–1944)
BO	J. F. Böhmer, *Die Regesten des Kaiserreichs unter den Herrschern aus dem Saechsischen Hause 919–1024*, ed. E. von Ottenthal, *Regesta Imperii, ii/1 (Innsbruck, 1893; repr. with supplement, Hildesheim, 1967)*
BMik	J. F. Böhmer, *Die Regesten des Kaiserreichs unter Otto II. 955–983*, ed. H. L. Mikoletzky, *Regesta Imperii*, ii/2 (Graz, 1950)
c.; cc.	capitulum; capitula
c.	*circa*
ch.	chapter
HJL	*Hessisches Jahrbuch für Landesgeschichte*
EHD	*English Historical Documents*
JDG	*Jahrbücher der Deutschen Geschichte*, ed. Historische Commission bei der Königlichen Academie der Wissenschaften (Munich/Berlin/Leipzig, 1863–)
JL	P. Jaffé, *Regesta Pontificum Romanorum ad annum 1198*, edd. W. Wattenbach, S. Loewenfeld, F. Kaltenbrunner, and P. Ewald, 2 vols (Leipzig, 1885–8)
Lex. des MA	*Lexikon des Mittelalters* (Munich/Zürich, 1979–)
LThK	*Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, edd. M. Buchberger *et al.*, 10 vols (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1930–38; 2nd edn, + Index, 1957–65; 3rd edn, 1993–)
Mansi	*Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, ed. J. D. Mansi, cont. I. B. Martin, L. Petit, 53 vols (Florence/Venice, 1759–98; Paris, 1901–27; repr. Graz, 1960–61)
Medieval Queenship, ed. Parsons	*Medieval Queenship*, ed. J. C. Parsons (London, 1993)
MGH	*Monumenta Germaniae Historica:*
Constitutiones	*Constitutiones et acta publica imperatorum et regum*, 8 vols (Hanover/Leipzig, 1893–1927) = *MGH Leges*, Sectio IV
DRG	*Diplomata regum et imperatorum Germaniae*, 8 vols (Hanover/Leipzig/Berlin/Weimar, 1879–1959; repr. 1956–57)

Epp.	*Epistolae*, 8 vols (Berlin, 1887–1939)
Fontes	*Fontes iuris Germanici antiqui in usum scholarum ex Monumentis Germaniae historica separatim editi*, 10 vols (Hanover/Leipzig, 1869–1984)
Libelli	*Libelli de lite imperatorum et pontificum saec. XI et XII conscripti*, 3 vols (Hanover, 1891–97; repr. 1957)
Poet. Lat.	*Poetae Latini aevi Carolini*, i–ii, ed. E. Dümmler, iii, ed. V. Traube (Berlin, 1881–86) = *Poetae latini medii aevi*, i–iii
SRG	*Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum ex Monumentis Germaniae historica separatim editi*, 61 vols (Hanover, etc., 1839–1935; variously re-edited and reprinted)
SRG, NS	*Scriptores rerum Germanicarum*, New Series (Berlin, 1922–)
SS	*Scriptores* (in folio), 32 vols in 34 (Hanover, 1826–1934)
NglL	*Norges gamle Love*, iii (Christiania/Oslo, 1849)
pd	printed
PL	*Patrologiae cursus completus, series latina*, ed. J. P. Migne, 234 vols (Paris, 1844–1955)
RS	Rolls Series: *Rerum Britannicarum medii ævi scriptores: Chronicles and Memorials of Great Britain and Ireland during the Middle Ages*, published under the direction of the Master of the Rolls (London, etc., 1858–1911)
repr.	reprint
SCH	*Studies in Church History*
s.a.	*sub anno*
s.v.	*sub vocabulo*
TRHS	*Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*

Preface

The papers in this volume were presented at the Second International Conference held under the auspices of the Centre for Late Antique and Medieval Studies at King's College London in the Great Hall of the College on 19–21 April 1995. The theme was 'Queens and Queenship in the Middle Ages', and the Conference was planned to enable comparisons to be made across time, from the fifth to the early sixteenth century, and between very different monarchical structures in the Middle Ages, embracing regions as diverse as England (before and after the Norman Conquest), France, Hungary, Scotland, the Romano-German empire, Scandinavia, Byzantium, and the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. Central and northern Italy did not have a monarchy during the greater part of the medieval period, but it was not without its powerful symbols of queenship. Lacking human queens, the papacy, some Italian city-states, and many confraternities adopted the Virgin Mary as their queen and protectress, and her image as Queen of Heaven became one of the most pervasive and potent images of queenliness in the Middle Ages. It was therefore appropriate that one of the highlights of the Conference was a performance of music in honour of Maria *Regina*, presented in the College Chapel by the Clerks' Group, under the direction of Mr Edward Wickham.

Our grateful thanks are due to the British Academy, the Goethe Institute, and the Humanties Research Committee of King's College London, all of whom provided financial or other assistance for various aspects of the Conference; and to the Isobel Thornley Bequest, whose generous grant made possible the publication of this volume. At the same time, the Centre for Late Antique and Medieval Studies wishes to record its gratitude to King's College London for the splendid facilities which were made available for the Conference and to the Dean who allowed us to use the College Chapel for the Marian concert.

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Introduction

Anne J. Duggan

The study of medieval queens is beset by problems. In addition to their virtual invisibility in many narrative sources, there is the presumed or actual bias of the predominantly male commentators. How objective, for example, is Michael Psellus's depiction of Byzantine empresses in the eleventh century or William of Tyre and his continuators' versions of events in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem in the twelfth, where five queens inherited the crown of that most military of military societies in the twelfth-early thirteenth century? Alternatively, there is the suspicion that even positive images of royal women are didactic programmes, not authentic portrayals of real women. How historically valid are the portrayals of holy queens and empresses? How far are we dealing with accounts of female power specifically constructed to channel and confine the feminine according to male-centred ideas of what is right and proper conduct for a woman? Is it possible to extract a true history of royal and imperial women from the stereotypes – negative and positive – which pictorial image, narrative history, and literary *topoi* have constructed? There are genuine difficulties in interpreting such material, but in emphasising the female stereotypes is there not a tendency to overlook the powerful effect of male stereotypes in the same sources?

In attempting to answer some of these questions, the papers in this volume reflect the wide range of current thinking on the subject of female rule. At one end of the spectrum, János Bak portrays queens as convenient scape-goats, easy targets of narrow-minded local nobilities, traduced by chauvinist historians, and sometimes physically abused or even murdered, while Sarah Lambert's analysis of the history of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem exposes a changing cocktail of uncertainty and hostility to the rule of queens. At the other end of the spectrum, Liz James's study on early Byzantine empresses and Pauline Stafford's work on the late Anglo-Saxon queen Emma both propose a re-interpretation of the conventional images and a re-valuation of the status and function of female consorts and rulers. While not discounting the bias of the sources, they ask new questions and suggest new ways of looking at the evidence.

Central to their approach is a re-interpretation of the surviving pictorial images. Liz James allows that the representations of Byzantine empresses can be read as images of isolation and sequestration; but she proposes an alternative reading. Whether it be the anonymous empress (pl. 7), or the consular diptych of Flavius Taurus Clementinus (pl. 8), with its twin images of Anastasios I and Ariadne, or

Theodora in her splendour in the famous mosaic in Ravenna (pll. 9, 14), these are all images of the exalted status and power of an empress. These imperial women are officially set apart from and above the rest of society. Dignified with the title of Augusta, crowned and bejewelled, they are paired with corresponding images of the emperor. The Theodora image can be seen as a splendid depiction of female isolation (she is surrounded by her household, occupying her own cloistered space), but it can also be read as a counterbalance to that of Justinian, who approaches the altar from the other side of the apse. What is emphasised here and in the diptych is the sharing of imperial power and dignity. The male and female images are balanced and complementary.

In an equally arresting manner, Pauline Stafford reassesses the significance of the two surviving depictions of Queen Emma of England. In the first (pl. 1), she finds not so much the subordination of a wife and queen to her husband as a sharing of royal status in a formal act. The queen, identified by her Anglo-Saxon name of Ælfgifu, stands on one side of an altar bearing a cross while King Cnut, drawn to the same scale, stands on the other; moreover, and not without significance, Emma stands beneath an image of the Virgin Mary, the mother of God, whose gestures she imitates, while Cnut stands beneath that of St Peter. The vertical pairing of the queen with the Virgin thus places her in the primary position, to the right of the altar. These are not chance associations. The picture thus 'stresses the special status of a king's wife, as queen, that is as a consecrated person, and as an office-holder'.

The difficulty of correctly interpreting such images derives partly from the application of modern norms and values to late antique and medieval constructs, partly from the ambiguous or polysemic character of the images themselves, and partly from the paradox which the images were intended to portray. The manifold images of the Virgin Mary, virgin-mother of God, Queen of Angels, Queen of Heaven, Mother of Mercies, Salvation of the Roman people, type of *Romana ecclesia*, etc., etc., present a bewildering range of possibilities and ambiguities. At the level of the pictorial representation, Mary is very much a queen, often clothed in imperial dress, crowned and enthroned. Hers indeed was the most widely-disseminated image of queenship, its iconographical form derived in part from the iconic representations of Byzantine empresses. She was, however, simultaneously Mother of God and archetype of obedience to God. Her obedience, expressed in the 'fiat' of the Annunciation, reversed the disobedience of Eve (and Adam) in the garden of Eden, and her position as Mother of God depended on that submission. Hers was a sublime example of the paradox of Christian abnegation: 'he who humbles himself shall be exalted' (Lk 14:11). Either the supreme elevation or the supreme self-abnegation can be emphasised. The cult of the Virgin from the fifth century onwards and the progressive construction of her queenly status can be seen as enhancements of queenly office – and were so appropriated by earthly queens (like Blanche of Castile, pl. 27), but that 'Marianizing tendency' could also, it is argued by Parsons and others, represent not so much an elevation as a confinement of the feminine, in which the queen's image was constructed as a 'paradigmatic figure of the completely perfect and totally absent woman upon whom the moral and social order depended'. Mary's acceptance of the role required of her could

be read as an image of female submission to and dependence on male authority, since her queenship of heaven was the consequence of her submission on earth. But her submission was to God not to her husband Joseph, who is usually depicted in the guise of protector of the Virgin and her Child, and it paralleled Christ's, who was 'made obedient to his father unto death, even death on the cross', in a reversal of the original disobedience of Eve and Adam.

Those who see the Virgin as a paradigm of womanly submission suppress both the universal application of her model to men and women alike and the implications of her sublime elevation. The Virgin was associated with her Son not only in the salvation of the whole human race but in His eternal rule. His Ascension was paralleled by her Assumption, and she took her place beside Him in heaven. The iconographical transformation of the Virgin into the Queen of Heaven, traced by Mary Stroll, tilted the balance from 'humble handmaid' to *co-adiutrix* (though without eliminating it), and it was in this guise that she was adopted by the papacy and adorned some of the great Roman basilicas erected in her honour.

This Queen of Heaven was her Son's spouse as well as His mother, enjoying a unique position of dignity and power to which no man could aspire. The duality of her position in relation to Christ thus made her an ideal model for queens, as wives and mothers of kings. It was an image which both elevated their role and differentiated it from that of male rulers, in that it emphasised the queenly and womanly virtues of mercy, benevolence, kindness and intercession. (It was as protectress and intercessor that some leading Italian city-states adopted her as a kind of surrogate queen.)[1] While kings inspired awe and fear, queens represented the milder aspects of the ruler's responsibility for widows, orphans, and the unprivileged. Feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, visiting the imprisoned were all practical expressions of active Christianity – and the traditional activities of Christian widows since the days of the early Church. The activities of the Byzantine empresses discussed by Liz James and Dion Smythe and of the German empresses and queens discussed by Kurt-Ulrich Jäschke and Volker Honemann all fit this pattern, and Christine de Pizan, writing for a young French princess, was still emphasising these duties in the mid-fourteenth century.

These aspects of the consort's role can be written off as historically insignificant varieties of 'women's work', safe side-lines, marginalisations of female talent; but it may be argued equally that these activities were not only socially respected but dynastically and politically important. Liz James's question about the relative importance in the Byzantine world of an emperor's success in battle and an empress's endowment of a church might with advantage be extended to the whole of the medieval Christian West. It might be argued also that to discount or de-value the role of queens and empresses in the social, charitable, and religious aspects of the life of their societies constitutes the real marginalisation of the feminine.

And what weight should be given to the crucial role of royal women in the sphere of family and dynastic politics? If family is narrowed to the domestic sphere of house-management, then the role of women within it is diminished. But if the

[1] See Diana Webb, ch. 11.

family is re-valued, as many of the papers in this volume suggest that it should be, then the place of women is correspondingly enhanced. As monarchy became progressively dynastic and legitimate birth an essential requirement in the transmission of the right to rule, royal women, as daughters, wives, mothers and grandmothers – and hence as princesses and queens – played a crucial role in the creation and protection of the legitimacy upon which male rulers depended for the transmission of the throne to their lawful offspring. Emma in England and Margaret in Scotland are two outstanding examples of this activity; but the key role of royal women in the area of dynastic continuity recurs again and again in this volume; and it is a role which extended far beyond the purely biological acts of conception and birth. Jäschke's study of Romano-German empresses and queens from the tenth to the fourteenth century shows their pre-eminent importance as continuators and transmitters of the dynastic claim, protectors of minor children, framers of family policy, and preservers of family tradition and reputation. To dismiss the familial, religious or cultural role of women, royal or otherwise, is to suffer the same myopia as the chroniclers whose bias is condemned.

Most queens-consort were foreigners in a foreign land, sometimes betrothed in the cradle and sent to the households of their prospective husbands to learn the language and customs which would shape their lives.[2] The isolation and vulnerability produced by this almost universal practice of royal exogamy is discussed by János Bak. Like the Irish princess Iseut in Beroul's *Tristran* (cited by Karen Pratt) their foreign origins made them easy targets for criticism or attack, whether contemporary or retrospective. It would, nevertheless, be misleading to erect a general thesis of queen-baiting on the basis of these exceptional examples. For most of the queens discussed in this book, the protective envelope of royal status and territorial endowment counterbalanced the negative features described by Professor Bak. Marriage treaties were carefully negotiated to ensure that the queen was properly maintained. The incomes bestowed on Henry II's daughter Joanna when she married William II of Sicily in 1177 were minutely recorded, for example,[3] and Philip II of France insisted on an appropriate endowment for his sister Margaret when she married Béla III of Hungary in 1186.[4] Queens had their own households, their own estates and incomes, their own seals, and their own powers of patronage, direct and indirect. Even the unfortunate Ingeborg of Denmark, discussed by George Conklin, was able to live in some state and make significant pious and charitable donations in her widowhood, and during Philip II's life, her crowned and anointed status afforded her some protection against the French king who had repudiated her on the day after their wedding.

The role of royal women in the cultivation of the courtly arts of music, poetry,

2 Cf. Elizabeth of Hungary, below, p. 265.

3 *Gesta Regis Henrici Secundi Benedicti Abbatis*, ed. W. Stubbs, 2 vols, RS 49 (1867), i, 172–4.

4 Z. J. Kosztolnyik, *From Coloman the Learned to Béla III (1095–1106): Hungarian Domestic Politics and their Impact on Foreign Affairs*, East European Monographs (Boulder, 1987), p. 212.

and modes of courtly conduct, as well as their patronage of painters and artists, needs to be examined further. Paul Crossley, for example, links the rapid spread of French Gothic style through central and eastern Europe to the family connections of St Elizabeth of Thuringia, enshrined in a new-style Gothic church at Marburg. Daughter of Andrew II of Hungary and Gertrude of Andechs-Meranien[5] and widow of Landgrave Henry IV of Thuringia, her network of relations embraced the royal houses of Hungary and France as well as the Piasts of Lower Silesia in Poland. For nearly every queen of the Middle Ages a similar network of international connections could be established. A 'foreign queen in a foreign land' may in some circumstances have suffered suspicion and isolation, but by her very presence she attested the international standing of the family into which she married. Awareness of their elevated family connections is evident in the elaborate tombs of Eleanor of Castile and Philippa of Hainault (queens respectively of the English kings Edward I and Edward III), the one displaying armorial bearings proclaiming Eleanor's distinguished ancestry and the other adorned with statuettes of Philippa's kin and the king's.[6]

But did queens- and empresses-consort exercise any real power? The answer to this question will depend upon the meaning given to the term, but if one accepts Pauline Stafford's definition of power as 'the ability to take part in the events . . . to have the means of strategic action', then most queens had it, to a greater or lesser extent. Her study of Queen Emma challenges both Enright's view of queens as powerless women confined to 'family politics' and Wallace-Hadrill's picture of queens as 'honorary men'. Neither stereotype fits Emma. Despite being a foreigner (Norman), this queen-consort was the richest woman in England, with the power to take independent action and to intervene forcefully in the turbulent political events of her time. It was through her that the legitimacy of the Old English royal house was passed from Æthelred to Cnut and then to the sons which she had borne for them. If Emma demonstrates the possibilities for a queen even in difficult circumstances, so too does Margaret of Scotland, whose life was constructed by her biographer Turgot to project an image of dynastic purity at a crucial moment in the evolution of the Scottish kingdom. In her case, legality, legitimacy, and conformity with reformed marriage codes helped to establish her claims. Despite being Malcolm III's second wife, neither crowned nor anointed (for Scottish kings were inaugurated in an ancient ceremony outside the church at Scone), the Scottish regnal lists from the late twelfth century emphasise her position rather than Malcolm's as the fount of dynastic legitimacy, the king being described merely as 'the husband of St Margaret the Queen'!

Even more striking examples of the effective exercise of authority are found in the Byzantine world. Pulcheria exercised imperial power from 414–53, first in the name of her brother Theodosios and then with her husband Marcian (450–3);

5 For her sister Agnes, see below, p. 271.

6 See Parsons, ch. 16. Similar consciousness of personal rank and status is evident in the seals of Queen Blanche of Norway and Sweden and Queen Philippa of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark (fig. 12).

Ariadne, eldest daughter of Leo I and Verina, transmitted the imperium first to her son Leo II, who died in childhood, and then to two husbands in succession (Zeno and Anastasios I), successfully resisting the determined efforts of her own mother to hold on to power; Zoe, likewise, in the eleventh century, succeeded her father and legitimised her three husbands. If these actions did not constitute effective exercise of power, one might ask, what did?

In the later Middle Ages, the queens of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark (discussed by Steinar Imsen) demonstrated the remarkable powers that could be exercised by queens consort and regnant. In his estimation, their territorial endowment, for which he has invented the telling term of 'queendom', was constructed not merely to provide an income for the queen but to support the position of the monarchy. The complementarity between kings and queens-consort which Pauline Stafford finds in the New Minster image of Emma and Cnut (pl. 1) could scarcely go further. Among these remarkable women, Queen Margaret of Norway (d. 1412), is described by Imsen as 'without any doubt the ablest Scandinavian ruler of the period'; her adopted daughter-in-law Philippa (daughter of Henry IV of England and wife of King Eric: 1406–30), played a full role in political affairs throughout his reign, even to the extent of equipping and organising a naval expedition to Stralsund. So too did Dorothea (d. 1495) and Christina (d. 1521). These queens-consort and -regnant were certainly not powerless adornments of their husbands' courts nor were their activities contained within a narrow stereotype of 'women's roles'.

Nevertheless, while the position of the queen- or empress-consort was fairly well defined in custom and in law, that of the queen regnant presented conceptual and legal difficulties. Queenship had been constructed as a status complementary to that of the male ruler, not powerless, as we have seen, but not in itself the source of power. A queen regnant was therefore anomalous and in the usual run of events exceptional. Moreover, her position was complicated by the elevation of her husband to the throne. The intrusion of a non-dynastic male might engender hyper-criticism, envy, and conflict among the nobility. The choice for the queen lay between marrying within the kingdom, and disturbing the balance of power between noble alliances and factions, or marrying a foreign prince, who might be unpopular, or submitting to a choice made by the leading barons of her realm. In the early modern period, England's Queen Elizabeth avoided these pitfalls by remaining unmarried, whereas her contemporary Mary Queen of Scots paid a heavy price for her choice of husbands. In the Middle Ages, England's 'Empress' Matilda suffered for the unpopularity of her husband (and from the uncertainty about the rules for succession to the crown).

For the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem in the twelfth century, the related problems associated with female rule and the marriage of reigning queens gravely disturbed the political equilibrium of the state. How far these difficulties were a consequence of misogyny or of self-centred exploitation by the nobility or of the military crisis faced by the kingdom, or a combination of all three, is open to debate; and in recording the crises, chroniclers could construct the story according to their own political programmes. They could choose to blame the queens, their husbands, or

self-seeking baronial factions for the resulting disarray, but it was lack of clear laws for female succession and the absence of precedents for the position of a king-by-marriage which created the problem. In a reversal of the principles applied to male rulers, husbands of regnant queens and empresses became kings and emperors, were crowned, and occupied the throne with them. As the nobles said to Jocaste in the *Roman de Thèbes*: 'Everyone wishes him to have the kingdom; and you, my lady, will be his wife; may you have the kingdom along with him.' But the rights of the king-by-marriage were ill-defined.

How exceptional were the woman rulers discussed in these pages? Certainly, some of them were women of exceptional character and foresight: Emma of England, Margaret of Scotland, Melisende of Jerusalem, Margaret of Norway, the western empresses Adelaide, Theophanu, Cunigunde, the Byzantine empresses Verina, Ariadne, Theodora, Zoe; but without the status they enjoyed and royal or imperial office they exercised, they would not have been able to affect the fate of dynasties and nations in the way that they did. That their methods and circumstances varied with time and location is not surprising; but there is a fundamental consistency in the foundations of their power and status. What they had in common was participation in a culture of dynastic power in which their elevated positions were marked by styles and titles, enhanced by ceremonial coronation and in many cases by sacred anointing, which ordained them for a specific function as sharers in royal government, responsible with the king for good rule. With few exceptions (e.g. Theodora), queens- or empresses-consort were women of high rank in their own right: daughters of royal or princely families, destined from birth to marry kings or princes. The position of a porphyrogenita princess, born in the porphyry chamber of the imperial palace in Constantinople, was exalted and exclusive, just as the dignity of being a king's daughter (*filia regis*) conferred special status. They were educated in a courtly milieu which accustomed them to the exercise of power. Their marriages were matters of political and dynastic significance, and their position, dignity, and economic welfare were defined in their marriage contracts. Liz James is probably right to lay more stress on the potentialities of the office than on the individual capacity of the office-holder and to argue that the effective exercise of power by Byzantine empresses was less exceptional than traditional historiography was prepared to allow. The same might be said of other royal consorts in other periods and places.

If a conclusion is to be drawn from this wide spectrum of female rule, it is that queens- and empresses-consort were not merely bearers of royal children and adornments of the court. In many kingdoms they were anointed for their office in ceremonies traceable to the ninth century and earlier (J. L. Nelson). That their role in the government and in the state was different from that of kings and emperors does not cancel out the fact that they played an important part in the maintenance of dynastic rule, in the cultivation of the arts, and in the maintenance of the *memoria* of their families. These women were powerful figures, even if, as Stafford emphasises, their effectiveness waxed and waned with their life-cycle and the opportunities of the time and place. They may not have been able to enter the male hierarchy upon which political and clerical power depended, but they could often