QUEENSHIP AND POWER

Queenship, Gender, and Reputation in the Medieval and Early Modern West, 1060-1600

Edited by

Zita Eva Rohr
and Lisa Benz

Queenship and Power

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For our families and friends

Acknowledgments

This volume of collected essays was the brainchild of Rachel C. Gibbons, who sought to mark the passing of two decades since the influential and durable publication of John Carmi Parsons' *Medieval Queenship*. Her aim was to highlight the contributions since made by early and mid-career researchers as well as doctoral students to suggest a "New Generation" of queenship studies that both builds upon and departs from the considerable scholarship of previous decades. Unfortunately, due to circumstances beyond her control, Rachel was unable to bring her project "to market." In an effort to continue and build upon Rachel's initial vision, we assumed the editorial role. We have made considerable changes to the way in which the collection was first framed and conceived, and trust that the reader will find the collection a worthwhile point of departure for further reflections on the nature of queenship and power as viewed through the lenses of gender and reputation.

We would like to acknowledge and thank the series editors, Carole Levin and Charles Beem, for their support and unwavering encouragement. Kristin Purdy (History Editor at Palgrave Macmillan) has been enthusiastic, constructive, and kind throughout the process of bringing this collection to press. Engaged, caring, and efficient, Chelsea Morgan (Production Manager) and Michelle Smith (Editorial Assistant) have been of invaluable assistance. We acknowledge the scholarly dedication and hard work of our contributors who accepted our sometimes exacting editorship in good humor, wholeheartedly embracing our joint vision for their collection.

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Zita Eva Rohr and Lisa Benz
(Sydney, Australia, and Salem, MA)

Contents

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the power sharing dynamic between the queens and their kings consort. In addition to presenting her research at several international conferences in recent years, Woodacre is the co-organizer of the "Kings & Queens" conference series. She is the French and Spanish editor for the Female Biography Project, which has drawn together an international group of over a hundred scholars to annotate the works of Mary Hays with modern research. She is also the founder of the Royal Studies Network (www.royalstudiesnetwork.org), a resource which aims to bring together scholars who work on monarchical topics to enable them to collaborate and share information on their research.

List of Figures

Introduction

The year 2015 marked the 50th anniversary of the International Medieval Congress held annually at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan. It is also just over 20 years since papers from two sessions at the 1989 and 1991 Congresses were published in John Carmi Parsons's influential and durable *Medieval Queenship*.[1] This body of work played a formative role in conceptualizing research into the lives of medieval queens and the office of queenship. Since then, the study of medieval queenship has developed into a vibrant and dynamic field with scholars exploring the queen's landholdings and household; her networks embedded therein; her artistic, religious, and literary patronage; and her role in court, government, and the medieval political milieu. Since 1989, papers and roundtables focusing on medieval queens have appeared in sessions at every Medieval Congress, either as entire panels dedicated to queenship studies or as individual papers in sessions covering a vast array of topics such as art, literature, archeology, religion, history, and politics. Papers and sessions dealing with medieval queens now extend to a wide range of geographical areas and historical periods, and their scope is illustrative of just how interdisciplinary the field of queenship studies has become.

This present collection features articles developed from papers presented over the last few years at the International Medieval Congress in Kalamazoo. It celebrates the current breadth of queenship studies, the collaborative nature of the discipline, and the diversity of its practitioners, with contributions from the fields of political and cultural history, legal history, literary studies, literary and feminist theory, material culture and art history, gender

studies, and female biographical research. It offers the reader an array of western European geographical and cultural spaces encompassing the central European kingdom of Hungary, states of the Holy Roman Empire such as Swabia and Savoy, as well as Sweden, England, France, and Italy, and stretching to the Pyrenean kingdom of Navarre. The chapters cover time periods ranging from the central Middle Ages to the early modern period. This diversity is anchored to the collection by an expanded and enriched exploration of its unifying themes of queenship, reputation, and gender. The breadth and scope of these articles reflect the evolution in the ways in which queens have come to be studied.

During the nineteenth century, works on medieval queens mainly centered on England and France, taking the form of individual biographies and personal narratives not part of the political histories produced in academia; the queen's place in medieval society therefore was given very little critical or theoretical attention. Agnes Strickand's *Lives of the Queens of England* and Mary Anne Everett Green's *Lives of the Princesses of England* are two of the most notable examples of this genre of biographical literature.[2] These works were informed by nineteenth-century gender rules and restrictions, which divorced women from the economic and productive roles they had performed in preindustrial societies, largely relegating them to the domestic sphere.[3] Strickland and Green judged medieval women against Victorian gender norms and as a result they tended to focus on extremes, either idolizing or condemning their subjects.[4] For instance, Strickland's depiction of Eleanor of Aquitaine suggests that she was flighty and irrational: "Queen Elanora acted in direct opposition to his [the king's] rational directions. She insisted on her detachment of the army halting in a lovely romantic valley, full of verdant grass and gushing fountains."[5] Likewise, Strickland's Isabella of France was certainly a villainous queen: "They perceived, too late, that they had been made tools of an artful ambitious, and vindictive woman, who, under the pretense of reforming the abuses of her husband's government, had usurped the sovereign authority, and in one year committed more crimes than the late king and his unpopular ministers together had perpetuated during the twenty years of his reign… Isabella's cruelty, her avarice and hypocrisy, and the unnatural manner in which she rendered the interests of the young king, her son, subservient to the aggrandizement of her ferocious paramour, Mortimer, excited the indignation of all classes."[6] While these works are problematic and of little use to the modern historian, whose main interest is in queenship as an office, it is important to acknowledge that Strickland

and Green were themselves subject to Victorian gender norms and were writing the types of histories that were considered suitable for women.

The feminist movements of the twentieth century changed the ways in which academics viewed women's place in the world, and therefore the way in which women were studied. Medieval scholars began to consider issues of gender, power, and the status of medieval women.[7] As part of the new approaches to studying medieval women, researchers concerned with medieval queens moved away from the biographical sketches that focused on the colorful events and myths surrounding individual queens and started to think about the queen's experiences and what it meant to be a queen. Hilda Johnstone's studies during the 1920s and 1930s of the queen's household administration are prime examples of this departure.[8] They serve as evidence that women were being gradually drawn into the inner sanctums of male political and administrative historians, rather than being relegated to the romantic "histories" of Strickland and Green.[9] Johnstone's articles were grounded in archival research and were published in seminal studies of English administrative history, namely T.F. Tout's *Chapters in the Administrative History of Medieval England* and Bertie Wilkinson's *The English Government at Work*. Johnstone considered particular issues relating to the queen's lands and estates and began to explore ideas about the type of power that queens held within this sphere. Tout illustrated the manner in which the administration of the English crown became more bureaucratic in the later medieval period and Johnstone identified that the queen's household became a separate administrative unit from that of the king's household as this new bureaucracy emerged. Johnstone's focus on the administration of the English queen's household, and its place within the mechanisms of the institution of the crown, provides a congruent opportunity to demonstrate the interaction of mainstream political, administrative history with the new feminist movement of the twentieth century and its concern with the public and private dichotomy.

First-wave feminism's main focus was to bring women out of the private sphere and gain equal opportunities for them in public institutions. They felt that contention for political activity depended on access to the public sphere and that women were denied this access.[10] For these modern feminists, the public sphere was the area in which work, business, and politics occur while the private sphere was made up of domestic life—the home and the family. With second-wave feminism, liberal feminists continued this shift to bring women into all public institutions. The writings of Betty Friedan,

for example, explore the misery experienced by women who had no public careers and the anguish they felt as unwaged housewives and consumers.[11] This concept of the public/private divide was utilized by medieval queenship scholars. In applying the view that the public and private were disparate spaces, scholars concluded that the queen was increasingly relegated to private, domestic spaces as her household was separated from the king's. The most notable example of this line of thinking is Marion Facinger's influential 1968 article "A Study of Medieval Queenship: Capetian France, 987–1237."[12] Facinger found the same separation of the king's and queen's households in medieval France that Johnstone had found in England.[13] Facinger argued that in Capetian France, after the mid-twelfth century, the centralization of royal power and the separation of the king's and queen's households resulted in the distancing of the queen from the monarchy and her loss of an official office. Consequently, the queen's only influence on government was through a personal relationship with the king as her husband or son. She was no longer a part of the public arenas of the king's household and court. Facinger believed this new status led to a queen's marginalization from public power and authority. The research of Johnstone and Facinger notwithstanding, throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the study of queens continued to focus on queens who "excited the most popular interest" and still depicted them as "moral pendants to husbands or sons," focusing on their lives, not their offices.[14] Part of this lack of interest in queenship studies as an office might be explained by the trend to focus on socioeconomic research that concentrated on women of lower social status as well as by the unpopularity of administrative and institutional history among feminist scholars of the time.[15]

Despite the dearth of analytical study on queens, Facinger's line of reasoning sparked a lively discourse in scholarship produced on medieval women. In 1987, Joan Kelly-Gadol wrote that these Western examples of public and private are inappropriate for describing sexual hierarchies in countries where the sexual division of labor does not fit into the binary opposites of the public and private divide; this notion also applies to historical settings, particularly those pertinent for the study of medieval women.[16] This still did not, however, completely eliminate the idea that women and queens were marginalized as government became more bureaucratic. For Jane Tibbets Schulenburg, the pre-eleventh-century household served as the noblewoman's "powerhouse" by providing "nearly limitless opportunities for women whose families were politically and economically powerful."[17]

Notwithstanding this, Schulenburg concluded that as government developed into impersonal institutions in the eleventh and twelfth centuries the powerbase was removed from the household, and women lost their formal positions of influence. However, in 1989, a year after Schlenberg's study was published, Caroline Barron argued famously that the medieval household continued to be the fundamental institution from which emerged industry and politics; consequently, the later Middle Ages was a "golden age" for women.[18] By way of contrast, Judith Bennett claimed that the merging of the household and workplace did not provide women with an egalitarian working relationship with men, but that it was rather a social phenomenon that reflected patriarchal authority.[19] As a consequence, medieval scholars of the period tended to agree that the public and private spheres overlapped in the household, but the extent to which these roles were either limiting or empowering for medieval women was vigorously debated.

The late 1970s and 1980s also brought forth a fresh emergence in the study of queenship as an office or an institution.[20] Accordingly, while the validity of the terms public and private were being reevaluated and redefined in discussions about medieval women in general, they were also being called into question for medieval queens.[21] Scholars began to argue that, while there is no denying that the nature of the queen's powers changed after the eleventh century, the queen was not marginalized.[22] Significantly, John Carmi Parsons's 1994 collection of essays, *Medieval Queenship*, drew attention to the need for new terminology. In his introduction, he writes that queens make an ideal case study for reconsidering the public/private categories precisely because of their high visibility in medieval society.[23] The fundamental theme of Parsons's collection is the familial context in which queens operated. The essays in the collection "argue against describing their position and roles as 'private' or 'domestic'" because they "reveal women as fully functioning members of royal families."[24] In doing so, these essays demonstrate the necessity for a new vocabulary to discuss the queen's place within the royal spheres of power, authority, and government; Parsons utilizes Louise Fradenburg's suggested term "interstitial" because it denotes a more flexible and inclusive role for the queen.[25] Parsons concludes his introduction by highlighting the fact that "all aspects of medieval queenship need much further investigation" particularly within a wider geographic range. He argued likewise for the necessity of more comparative anthologies.[26]

Scholars in 1990s and 2000s heeded Parsons's call and there was an explosion of studies on queenship, with research focusing on individual queens' fulfillment of the office as well as comparative studies of queens and their queenships. While there is still a strong interest in French and English queens, the geographical area that some of these studies cover has grown extensively, particularly in relation to Iberian and pan-Mediterranean kingdoms and their queens and royal women. This upsurge in interest and diversity has meant that the study of medieval queenship has developed into a lively and ever-changing field with researchers exploring a multiplicity of queens' experiences in an effort to better understand queenship as an institution, essential to less gendered notions of rulership and government. Contemporary scholars draw from a wide range of disciplines and theoretical paradigms as analytical tools. Post-second-wave feminism and the rise of women's studies have assured the study of queenship a dominant presence within feminist research, influenced by diverse disciplines and theoretical agendas. Scholars of medieval queenship have embraced with alacrity the ideas of theorists such as Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick who posit that gender was performative in nature and that it is problematic to project conclusions about modern heteronormative society onto the past.[27]

Medieval historians have begun to argue that gender is an unstable term, and that applying modern theory without an awareness of cultural specificity risks the production of ahistorical and distorted conclusions. Gender should be utilized as a mode of historical inquiry because political historians can no longer focus on traditional politics, and need to take into account society, culture, and economics. With this in mind, historians argue that analyses of queens must include contemporary understandings of manhood and womanhood, kingship and queenship; the *retrospectoscopes* are being packed away.[28] They have also looked to feminist discourses on social theories of power. These feminist discourses engaged with traditional theories of Marx, Weber, and later Foucault, Lukes, and Giddens, in attempts to define a feminist theory of gender and power.[29] Historians of medieval women have found modern feminist scholarship, and anthropological studies about power and gender, useful in making distinctions about the types of power available to medieval women. One example among many others is Helen Maurer who, influenced by anthropologists Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, makes distinctions between power and authority: authority as the publicly recognized right to give direction and expect compliance; and power as the ability

to get people to do things or to make things happen involving pressure, influence, persuasion, and coercion.[30] These constructions of power and authority have permeated scholarly conceptualizations of the queen's experiences and they are utilized in the wider of study of medieval women as well.[31] More recently, a significant number of scholars have gravitated toward the term "agency," or a queen's ability to act independently, rather than focusing on ideas of power and authority.[32] Nevertheless, power and authority continue to occupy a legitimate place in queenship studies alongside agency. Enriched by these discussions of gender and social theories of power, the status of queens has become a fertile field of inquiry. Scholars who study medieval women have come to varying conclusions as to whether or not women constituted a "sex class," that is, should women be categorized alongside men of their rank, or do all women fit into a separate group based on shared experiences that derive from being women? Theresa Earenfight writes that "women were not rigidly defined by extremes of power and powerlessness because the relational dynamic between men and women depended upon social rank, age, marital status and economic resources" and that queens formed an unusual elite among women.[33] Such lines of inquiry have led those who study queenship to look at queens' experiences in the context of other analogous medieval women, that is, elite and royal women, as well as their closest male counterparts, that is, the king, the princes of the blood, and the male high nobility. In so doing, a framework by which to study queens has been developed. This framework has come to include, but is by no means limited to, the investigation of the queen's motherhood, her intercession, her patronage, and her household. Within this framework scholars typically seek to find the level of agency, power, or authority that was afforded to, or indeed manipulated by, the queen, evaluating how and if these areas contributed to her participation in the governance of the realm.

One of the chief purposes of marriage in the pre-modern period was to ensure the survival of the dynasty and a continuation of its heritage; motherhood was the expectation of all married women.[34] For medieval and early modern women of all ranks, the emphasis on motherhood stemmed from the necessity to provide heirs to their husband's familial legacy.[35] Scholars interested in queens have found that, for the queen, motherhood not only defined her domestic role, it was an important source of power.[36] Those studying the coronation rituals have discovered that a queen's coronation served to legitimize her children as heirs to the throne, creating a direct connection between the office of queenship and motherhood.[37] Historians

have pointed out that a queen's position became secure only when she produced a male heir, and she could use this power to her advantage.

The dowager queen often relied upon her sons to buttress her political relevancy and prestige in the royal court after the king's death. Queens who were fortunate enough to have sons in their minority at the time of the king's death realistically could aspire to be appointed regent.[38] Through regency, motherhood gave queens the opportunity to exercise political influence and even authority in some cases.[39] This is why Violant of Bar, dowager queen of Aragon, fought hard to convince her successor to the post of queen consort, María de Luna, that she was pregnant with the late king's heir.[40] It may also be why the coronation of Philippa of Hainault, consort of Edward III of England, was delayed, possibly at the instigation of the dowager queen, Isabella of France, during Edward's minority.[41] Daughters too could be sources of power, and interactions between mothers and daughters perpetuated the roles and powers ascribed to queens. Daughters, in common with nieces and female cousins, acted as cross-cultural, diplomatic, and political conduits between reigning dynasties which sometimes had little else in common and frequently held divergent and/or conflicting geopolitical interests.[42] John Carmi Parsons's study of Plantagenet queens in *Medieval Queenship* has been especially important in revealing mother/daughter interactions.[43] Queens were able to expand their powerbases by using the concept of female networking with their own daughters, by widening their domestic spheres of influence, and by increasing their influence in foreign affairs.[44]

Moreover, influence could be just as powerful as "official" authority, and one of the major manifestations of influence was queenly intercession. The queen's use of intercession as a wife and mother is one of the major applications of influence studied by historians. There were several ways in which queens might act as intercessors: queens could be peacemakers between the king and his subjects or his foreign counterparts; they could secure a privilege such as a pardon, grant, or appointment from the king at the behest of someone else; and they could intercede on their own initiative, beseeching the king to grant their own request. Queens acted as intercessors throughout their life stages, with husbands, sons, and foreign relatives (fathers, brothers, uncles, and cousins) and allies. Parsons argues that the exclusion of queens from the central government in the twelfth century made intercession more important than in the earlier Middle Ages as a "means to create and sustain impressions of power."[45] Intercession was a particularly emphasized role for medieval queens and

several scholarly studies have noted how the connections made between the queen and female biblical figures such as Judith, Esther, and especially the Virgin Mary permeated medieval culture.[46] A queen's subjects might seek a new queen's aid without any real-life evidence that she was a particularly effective mediator or intercessory. A successful and canny queen could manipulate these requests into a currency of power and, as long as she maintained that image, she would increase her power and influence.[47] According to Parsons and Janet Nelson, one way for the queen to earn the king's favors was to use her "feminine wiles," and as a result, the queen's intercession with the king had sexual implications.[48] Due to the sexual implications of the queen's intercession, they could be suspected of improper influence over the king, and adultery was one of the first charges brought against a queen when detractors sought to discredit her. Another popular biblical image against which the queen was compared was Jezebel.[49] Such scholarly arguments exemplify the fine line the queen had to negotiate between legitimate power and criticism of overreach.[50]

Throughout the Middle Ages and early modern periods, patronage was a critical part of effective royal lordship regardless of gender; consequently, the queen's participation in the culture of patronage could be a significant indicator of her power, and could be pragmatically deployed to extend that power base.[51] Women who had access to significant economic resources exercised patronage, which included the support and promotion of favored monastics, members of the urban elite, the gentry, and the aristocracy.[52] We also find these women commissioning books, religious artifacts, "statement" jewelry, gold and silverware intended for their religious establishments, buildings, and religious institutions themselves.[53] The level of agency women exercised through this patronage is indicative of their ability to act independently and to potentially extend their influence beyond their "domestic" spheres. The queen was potentially one of the most influential patrons among the landed and urban elite. Parsons's study of Eleanor of Castile reveals the extent to which the queen consort relied upon conveying a sense of wealth and command through public displays of liberality and patronage to spread her influence throughout the kingdom. If she used her wealth to patronize artists, writers, religious institutions, and so forth, then she had fully exploited the sources of income available to her, demonstrating her power and, to some extent, her authority.[54] Studies of queenly patronage have shown that the types of works a queen commissioned could spread her influence in a variety of ways: it could have an impact on the court and king; in cases where she