

*Royal Mothers and Their Ruling Children: Wielding Political Authority from Antiquity to the Early Modern Era.* Edited by Elena Woodacre and Carey Fleiner. *Queenship and Power.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. Pp. xi + 253; 5 b/w illustrations. ISBN: 9781137513106.

MANY SCHOLARS RESEARCH and speculate about the power dynamics of medieval and early modern European kingship. Palgrave Macmillan's "Queenship and Power" series seeks to "broaden our understanding of the strategies that queens—both consorts and regnants, as well as female regnants—pursued in order to wield political power within the structures of male-dominated societies" (i). The thirty-first volume in this series, *Royal Mothers and Their Ruling Children*, edited by Elena Woodacre and Carey Fleiner, seeks to examine and clarify the complicated relationship between a royal mother and her offspring and how that physical relationship affects personal political power and leverage within a reign. This volume offers an in-depth look at how queens manipulated politics in favor of their own legacies as mothers and heads of dynastic houses.

Building on a childhood interest in queenship and power, Woodacre organized the Kings & Queens Conference series and Royal Studies Network. Woodacre and Fleiner's volume embodies the scholarly goals set forth by the "Queenship and Power" series, situating itself at the heart of discussions among feminist medievalists about how motherhood affected queens and ruling women and how this biological function served to define them in terms of power and historical legacy. Woodacre's specialization in queenship in the medieval and early modern eras as well as the gendered nature of rulership provide a theoretical framework for this volume. Fleiner's expertise in Carolingian Europe as well as Imperial Rome complete the span of history this volume covers. While the focus is mainly the European Middle Ages, contributors to the volume offer ten case studies that range from tenth-century China to the Stuarts in seventeenth-century England. This range across political, chronological, and geographic spans shows the complexity of the queen's role within the domestic and political spheres.

Each chapter offers an extensive analysis of one particular queen or dynasty of queens within their historical and cultural context. The scholarship is detailed and rigorous, providing interesting insights into the thoughts and motivations that may have inspired medieval and early modern queens across Europe and Asia. This volume's essays are not limited to queenship alone, but cover all aspects of a queen's life, including pregnancy, legitimacy, motherhood, regency, and other factors that influenced a queen's, queen consort's, or queen regent's

power within the political machine. Woodacre's jest of "maternal ambition and historical 'bad mommas'" is quite apropos in describing this volume. The breadth of essays sheds new light on women's "struggles and ambitions, triumphs and tragedies" as Woodacre points out in the acknowledgements so that we are better able to understand the plights, politics, and joys that queenship and motherhood afforded these women.

This volume is divided into three parts: "Maternal Ambition for Their Offspring," "Regency and Maternal Authority," and "Maternal Influence." The chapters within each part tie in thematically and explore that particular aspect of queenship and power. Diana Pelaz Flores, for example, discusses the issue of legitimacy and how small details like wedding and birth dates can complicate the role a woman plays within her own house, as is the case of Juana of Portugal and her daughter, Princess Juana. Germán Gamero Igea considers the same time period in an essay that contextualizes Juana Enríquez as both "bad" and "good" stepmother. Jitske Jasperse offers a comparative look at two half-sisters, Judith of Thuringia and Bertha of Lorraine, and the "minor arts" (83) of coinage and seals to show how motherly authority can vary in its intensity and its reception, even within the same family. Sarah Betts considers the matriarchs of the Stuart house, pointing out the politics of combining family lineages and how the stakes are raised for royal brides, who bring their own political leanings and complications with them when they marry into a powerful family. Penelope Nash offers a look at Empress Adelheid and her diverse roles as ruler and mother in tenth-century Germany and Italy. Hang Lin presents an especially fascinating look at the only non-European dynasty in the volume, the matriarchal regency of the Khitan Liao and how this dynasty subverted the patriarchal culture of imperial China. Carey Fleiner examines the ideal Roman mother, how easily Agrippina, mother of Nero, violates that particular paradigm, and how that relationship ended in Nero calling for his own mother's murder. Janice North's cleverly titled "Queen Mother Knows Best" shows the power of medieval politics in the crafting of one's legacy when she examines the underlying ambitions that inspired María de Molina's rule as queen mother in late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century Castile. Kathleen Wellman looks at the positive and negative connotations of royal maternity in early modern France as she considers Louise of Savoy's own powerful political influence and its impact on her children. Estelle Paraque's essay on Catherine of Medici's influence on her son, Henry III of France, closes out the volume as it examines how Catherine's own position as "powerful politician" and "authoritative mother" taught her son to rule.

Authors carefully situate their case studies within the larger conversation

among feminist medievalists, with precise historical documentation to present a cross-generational study of how complicated relationships became once political lineage and legacy are considered. While, again, featuring predominantly Western European queens from the medieval period, the collection does cover a wide chronological span, helping to bring queens ancient through early modern into conversation with each other. The editors provide no unifying conclusion to close out the volume, but the chapters individually entice scholars with their excellent attention to detail and analysis and offer a glimpse into what the editors' second volume on royal mothers, *Virtuous or Villainess? The Image of the Royal Mother from the Early Medieval to the Early Modern Era* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) will offer. Not for the novice medievalist, this collection offers a multifaceted look at how motherhood is never simple, especially not when one's offspring are considered both political pawns and powers in their own rights.

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