

Queens and Queenship

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Elena Woodacre

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (print) 9781641891899
e-ISBN (PDF) 9781641891905
e-ISBN (EPUB) 9781641891912

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Printed and bound in the UK (by CPI Group [UK] Ltd), USA (by Bookmasters),
and elsewhere using print-on-demand technology.

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Introduction

Studying queens in the twenty-first century might seem to be flying in the face of modern societal and academic trends. Images of queens consort “standing by their man” or in the shadow of their husband could be seen as nearly an affront to feminist ideology. Studying “women worthies” or famous figures from the past could also be understood as running counter to modern historical approaches which have sought to break down “great man” studies and instead focus on the lives of everyday men and women rather than well-known elite figures. Monarchy itself is seen by many as an outdated institution, a relic of the past even, and therefore somehow backward looking to focus on. Given these prevailing sentiments, what then is the point of studying queens in this day and age?

A deeper understanding of queenship studies and indeed of queens themselves, allays these potential concerns. In many ways, nothing could be more appropriate in our modern era, influenced by feminism and ideals of gender equality, than studying women who were politically active and incredibly influential in their own time and beyond. Indeed, many queens—whether ruling in their own right, on behalf of children and spouses or co-ruling with them—were important political leaders who often challenged the patriarchal frameworks of power and demonstrated that women could be effective rulers, leading the way for today’s modern female politicians. Queenship studies challenges androcentric nar-

ratives and debunks notions of “great man” political history which tends to focus on particular kings and their reigns by emphasizing the historical practice of co-rulership and corporate monarchy, where rule was enacted collectively with both men and women involved, even if only one man often bore the title and crown. Indeed, studies of regnant queenship have shown that female rule was more common than often assumed, as succession practices and situational factors opened up opportunities for ruling queens not only in Europe but in Africa, India, China, and even on the Arabian Peninsula. Monarchy itself has continued to exist and evolve in line with the changes in society itself over millennia. While many of today’s monarchs may not have the absolute power of their predecessors, many of them are female, including the long-reigning Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom. Royal succession laws have also been evolving in step with modern ideas of gender equality to allow equal primogeniture, ensuring that the rights of female royal children are protected and that reigning queens are not just a result of the absence of a direct male heir.

Finally, queenship studies offers not just a greater understanding of obvious or elite figures—looking at queens opens up a wider network of men and women from the relationship of queens with subjects and tenants who sought her assistance and influence, to the men and women of their household from stable boys and household clerks to seamstresses and damsels of the chamber, her officials and stewards who could be spread across the realm as well as artists, artisans, architects, and more who owed their livelihood to the queen’s commissions. This wide web of relationships is central to the practice of queenship and opens up a myriad of potential protagonists to examine, from the very highest to the very lowest of social status—it is not just about the woman at the centre.

Thus, queenship is a complex and exciting area of study which is firmly in step with modern interests in gender and a challenge to, not a product of, traditional historiography. This book’s purpose is to give the reader a thorough grounding

in queenship studies, from its earliest beginnings to current themes and theories and directions for future research as well as examining key aspects of the queen's office and the role she played in the function of monarchy and the wider history of her realm and period. Due to the slim nature of this volume, the intention here is to give an intensive overview rather than create a comprehensive textbook. While not every possible situation or scenario can be brought to the fore, the ideas will be illustrated by relevant examples from the premodern period with not only more familiar European figures but those from various geographical and cultural settings. In addition, restrictions of space mean that the full context of every queen's life or the history of particular dynasties used as examples cannot be given here, yet it is hoped that these tantalizing glimpses will encourage readers to learn more about figures and cultures less familiar to them. Taking a *longue durée* and global approach to queenship is vital in order to gain an understanding of the variability and constants of the queen's role over time and place, as well as the impact of different cultures and religions. Each of the main chapters of this book will focus on one of three core aspects of queenship: Family, Rule, and Image. The first chapter will examine the importance of family, both a queen's natal dynasty and the family she marries into as well as the family she creates through maternity. The second chapter looks at aspects of rulership, including co-rule with husbands and children as queens consort and regent as well as female succession and the particular situation of regnant queens. The final chapter will focus on a range of activities which were central to not only the practice of queenship including image creation, ceremonial, and patronage. For queens, the personal and the political were always deeply entwined, as each of these chapters will demonstrate.

Studying Queens

Before these core aspects are addressed however, it is important to begin with a quick overview of the field of queenship

itself in order to understand the particular perspective that scholars in the field bring to the study of queens and royal women. Key debates and ideas will be foregrounded here which will inform the discussion in the following chapters as well.

The lives of queens have been studied and written about, both individually and collectively, for centuries. Collective biographies in particular played an important role in keeping the interest in and memory of premodern queens in the public eye, from Boccaccio's *Famous Women* up to the Strickland sisters' popular *Lives of the Queens of England*.¹ Queenship studies as an academic discipline emerged out of the wider movements of women's and gender history, even though it draws on scholarship and specialists from a number of different areas such as literature, art history, archaeology, cultural studies, and political history. One of the earliest key works in the field of queenship studies, which was also important for beginning to define the idea of queenship itself, was Marion Facinger's 1968 piece "A Study of Medieval Queenship."² Facinger argued that the power and influence of Capetian queens steadily declined over this period, reducing the queen's role to being that of a dynastic broodmare and largely ceremonial. While Facinger's argument that the queen's official role had been diminished by the reorganization of royal households and the development of administrative apparatus has been subsequently challenged, her examination of the practice of queenship itself and the notion of the queen's office was important for the field. These two elements have become central to the development of queenship studies—that the early interest in biographical studies of

1 On the role of collective biography on the development of queenship studies see Elena Woodacre, "Well represented or missing in action? Queens, Queenship and Mary Hays," in *The Invention of Female Biography*, ed. Gina Luria Walker (London: Routledge, 2017), 21–36.

2 Marion Facinger, "A Study of Medieval Queenship: Capetian France, 987–1237," *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* 5 (1968): 3–48.

particular women has become fused with a wider examination of the theory and practice of queenship and a desire to understand the mechanisms of the queen's office.

Facinger was not the only scholar to suggest the notion of diminishing power for royal and elite women in Europe during the high and later Middle Ages. Moving forwards into the 1970s, 80s, and 90s where there was increasing research into women's studies generally as well as queenship specifically, influential work by McNamara and Wemple as well as the French historian Georges Duby reinforced Facinger's hypothesis of a law of diminishing returns for royal women's authority.³ They argued that the apogee of female power occurred around the first millennium and declined over the eleventh and twelfth centuries, leaving late medieval women in a significantly reduced position compared to their foremothers. However, later generations of feminist historians and queenship scholars have questioned this paradigm and the notion that female power was wielded rarely and only by "exceptional" women, resulting in a series of roundtables, conferences, and publications which have worked to demonstrate the constant presence and trajectory of female authority throughout the Middle Ages and beyond.⁴ Indeed, queenship

3 Jo Ann McNamara and Suzanne Wemple, "The Power of Women through the Family," *Feminist Studies* 1 (1973): 126–42; Jo Ann McNamara, "Women and Power through the Family Revisited," in *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowalski (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 17–30; Georges Duby, "Women and Power" in *Cultures of Power: Lordship, Status and Process in Twelfth-Century Europe*, ed. Thomas N. Bisson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 69–88.

4 See the output of two roundtables which debated the notion of declining power at the medieval congresses at Kalamazoo and Leeds in a special issue of *Medieval Feminist Forum* 51, no. 2 (2016) and the output of the 2015 "Beyond Exceptionalism" conference, *Medieval Elite Women and the Exercise of Power, 1100–1400: Moving beyond the Exceptionalist Debate*, ed. Heather Tanner (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

scholars are still exploring the nature of power and debating over the use and understanding of the terminology that we use to describe it—unpicking the use of “power,” “agency,” “influence,” and “authority.” While all of these terms are important and useful to describe the activities of queens, Theresa Earenfight has noted that we tend to use the term “power” more often with kings and “agency” with women, thus possibly diluting or tacitly underplaying their role.⁵

Terminology has been a challenge even with regard to the terms “queen” and “queenship” itself. As I have discussed elsewhere, these terms have significantly different meanings in different languages which can reflect different understandings of the role of royal women in dynastic government.⁶ For example, the English word “queen” etymologically stems from a term which specifically refers to the wife of a king, whereas Romance languages use terms which derive from the Latin *regina* which is the female form of *rex* or ruler, rather than denoting a consort’s role. Taking a global perspective makes terminology even more complicated as there is no clear or simple equivalent of “queen” in languages such as Arabic for example. Different monarchical structures also make it challenging to simply equate the European model of “queen” to the position that other royal women held in other geographical and cultural contexts. In some polygynous models there may be no one clearly identified as a “queen” or even a chief or principal wife like the ancient Macedonian court. Confusion can be caused when titles which equate to queen are used for multiple women in the royal family as seen in high medieval Portugal or the use of *basilissa* by Ptolemaic daughters as well as wives. In spite of these issues,

5 Theresa Earenfight, “A Lifetime of Power: Beyond Binaries of Gender,” in *Medieval Elite Women*, ed. Tanner, 271–94.

6 Elena Woodacre, “Introduction: Placing Queenship into a Global Context,” in *A Companion to Global Queenship*, ed. Elena Woodacre (Bradford: Arc Humanities, 2018), 1–12. See also Stefan Amirell, “Female Rule in the Indian Ocean World (1300–1900),” *Journal of World History* 26, no. 3 (2015), 443–89 at 446–49.

given the lack of a universal equivalent, or until one is developed, we can still use the terms “queen” and “queenship” to discuss and explore the role of royal women across time and place, as long as it is used with these caveats in mind and not as an attempt to generalize the experience of all women or to brand all cultures inaccurately or insensitively with a European framework.

With all these challenges in terms of how we conceptualize and describe the queen’s role, how do we approach the study of queenship? Sources can pose a difficulty as the role of royal women has often been minimized, obscured or even omitted in administrative or official documents, annals and histories and even material culture, whether deliberately or subconsciously.⁷ A further hurdle can be the survival of sources—while this is always a challenge for premodernists in particular, it can be exacerbated by archival practices, where the sources relating to kings and male members of the dynasty can be prioritized for retention over that of royal women who are seen as less central to the function of government. Indeed, in rare cases even material culture relating to particular queens can be destroyed in an attempt to erase their memory, for example Henry VIII’s work to remove traces of Anne Boleyn’s brief tenure as queen of England in the decoration of Hampton Court and other royal residences after her execution in 1536. Queenship scholars, like all scholars of women’s and gender history, have sought to read between the lines of existing sources and gain clearer perspectives by collecting and comparing all existing sources in order to counter the androcentric master narrative and reinsert these women into political and monarchical history.

Part of this effort has been raising awareness of the practice of corporate monarchy—while there has been an excessive focus on the individual who wore the crown, in reality a “reign” is the product of a group of people who rule with, or

7 Theresa Earenfight, “Highly Visible, Often Obscured: The Difficulty of Seeing Queens and Noble Women,” *Medieval Feminist Forum* 44, no. 1 (2008): 86–90.

even in place of, the royal figurehead. This concept of monarchy as a “flexible sack” which can accommodate a varied number of individuals including rulers, consorts, favourites, lovers, advisors, and dynastic members of both sexes is vital to understanding queenship.⁸ As we will discuss in chapter two, queens were co-rulers, sharing power in formal roles as consorts and regents and less formally as members of the dynasty—as mothers, sisters, daughters, aunts, and cousins. Regnant queens too were co-rulers, as all monarchs are, sharing power with their consorts, lovers, and relatives in the same way as their male counterparts. Even unmarried regnant queens, like the well-known “Virgin Queen” Elizabeth I of England, ruled with favourites, including William and Robert Cecil, Francis Walsingham, and Robert Dudley. The balance of power might be shared out relatively equally or be heavily weighted in favour of one individual, be it ruler or any member of the ruling coterie. This group can be a simple partnership of two individuals—a royal couple, ruler and favourite, mother and child—or it can be as large a group as the ruler desires, or needs require. Yet, the role of women as a part of this ruling group or partnership has often been overlooked, in part due to the understated way in which queens often engaged in co-rule. Their influence on their partners was often exercised in private, through their relationship with the ruler, be it their spouse, child, or sibling and thus was rarely documented and can be hard to identify or quantify. While some women did publicly and explicitly demonstrate their authority, others were equally powerful but far more discreet as a “power behind the throne” or behind the screens which often separated Muslim and Asian royal women from the public.

8 For this “flexible sack” theory, see Theresa Earenfight, “Without the Persona of the Prince: Kings, Queens and the Idea of Monarchy in Late Medieval Europe,” *Gender and History* 19, no. 1 (2007): 1–21.

Expectations of Queens and Ideals of Queenship

A queen was clearly a crucial part of the mechanism of monarchy, not only as a co-ruler, a representative of her natal family and a dynastic progenitor as we will discuss in chapter one. She was also the premier woman of the realm and as such had a great responsibility to project and conform to ideals of queenly and female behaviour as an example to all others. In Korea, the queen was the “state mother” and as the official exemplar to all the women of the kingdom, her behaviour was considered to be vitally important—indeed King Seongjong in his *Annals* claimed “The rise or fall of a state is linked to the demeanor of the queen.”⁹ Her conduct was thus closely scrutinized and any deviation from expectations could evoke not just criticism but could lead to her downfall. Seongjong defended his divorce and deposal of his wife Yun for her “transgressions” and “lack of virtue” from her plotting to eliminate rivals in the royal harem, arguing she had to go as “She is incapable of being a model for the royal ancestors above or for the people below.” A queen’s perceived failure to conform to queenly ideals could also have a catastrophic impact on her husband, as the case of Marie Antoinette aptly demonstrates. While the French Revolution was caused by many factors, the queen’s failure to craft and project an image that resonated positively with her subjects and satisfied their expectations of queenly behaviour contributed to the downfall of the monarchy. In the final chapter, we will explore the vital importance of image creation in order to demonstrate a queen’s adherence to societal ideals of queenly behaviour and queenship itself.

These societal ideals and expectations can be gleaned from a variety of sources. In the same way as the literary genre of “Mirrors for Princes” which advised heirs to the

⁹ *The Annals of Seongjong* in Shin Myung-ho, *Joseon Royal Court Culture: Ceremonial and Daily Life*, trans. Timothy V. Atkinson (Seoul: Dolbegae, 2004), 125.

throne and current rulers of how to rule effectively and behave in an appropriately kingly manner, there were also “Mirrors for Princesses” such as the *Speculum dominarum* written by Durand de Champagne for his patron, Juana I of Navarre, at the turn of the fourteenth century. “Mirrors” for both kings and queens exhorted them to exhibit an extensive list of qualities that were often impossible for a mere mortal to possess in order to exercise the queen’s office well and be an effective model to all other women of the realm. These advisory guides could also be less formal in nature—just as Emperor Charles V wrote an advisory tract for his son Philip II of Spain on how to be king, Charles’s sister Catalina of Austria, Queen of Portugal, wrote a similar piece for her daughter, Maria Manuela, when she married Philip II in 1543. This advisory piece instructed Maria on how to navigate the Castilian court and how to be a queen, advising her to emulate the late Empress, Isabel of Portugal, who was revered as a model of Iberian queenship. Nor were “Mirrors for Princes” or princesses a purely European phenomenon—advisory guides for royal men and women can be found in Islamic and Asian culture as well, including the fifteenth-century Empress Xu who wrote her “Instructions for the Inner Quarters (or *Neixun*)” as a set of moral teachings and guide for the Imperial wives and concubines.

Conduct literature, aimed at women generally to communicate gender ideals and desired behaviour could be scaled up to court and royal women. Indeed, many of these books which advised women on appropriate behaviour were written by court “insiders” such as Ban Zhao’s *Lessons for Women* or Christine de Pizan’s *Treasure of the City of Ladies: Or the Book of the Three Virtues*. While some conduct books explicitly counselled royal women on their behaviour, such as Pizan’s frequent admonitions to the “good princess” others did so more subtly. Even tracts ostensibly aimed at a wider female audience still demonstrated what was expected of queens and royal women—as the premier woman of the land, a queen was expected to be a paragon of virtue and therefore the perfect woman. As William Caxton noted his description of

the ideal queen in the late fifteenth-century *Game and Playe of the Chesse* “she is above all others in estate and reverence so she should be an example to all others.”¹⁰

Yet another way in which ideals of queenship can be gleaned is through histories and literary sources, particularly collective biographies. The examples given by the lives of queens and royal women of the past were used to demonstrate how one should, or should not, behave—creating “worthies” or historical examples that later women were encouraged to pattern themselves on or “anti-worthies” who served as salient examples for the repercussions of poor womanly or queenly conduct. These “anti-worthies” or negative examples of the past, powerful women who were demonized like Cleopatra, Wu Zetian, the Merovingian queen Fredegund, or Catherine de Medici were often used by detractors of female rule to demonstrate the destructive impact of bad queenly behaviour—resulting in the downfall of rulers, dynasties, and the destruction of the realm. These historical, or even legendary, examples of great queens of the past gave royal women patterns to copy, or models to avoid which could endure for centuries or even millennia in the case of Liu Xiang’s *Biographies of Women* which was written in the first century BCE but “remained influential into modern times.”¹¹ Indeed the preface to the section of this work which features biographies of the “Worthy and Enlightened” specifically addresses queens, noting that “Consorts and empresses who attend to these phrases/Will bring to their names lauds and praises.”¹²

10 William Caxton, *The Game and Playe of the Chesse*, ed. Jenny Adams (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2009), 27 (modernized English above by me).

11 Robert Joe Cutter and William Gordon Crowell, “Women in Early Imperial History and Thought,” in *Empresses and Consorts: Selections from Chen Shou’s Records of the Three States with Pei Songzhi’s Commentary* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), 44.

12 Anne Behnke Kinney, trans. and ed., *Exemplary Women of Early China: The Lienü Zhuan of Liu Xiang* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 25.

The Empress Xu in her “Instructions for the Inner Quarters” also urges her readers, the Imperial wives and concubines, to pay heed to these biographical “worthies” by “taking the ancients as models and trying to emulate them.”¹³

While gender roles and expectations of womanly behaviour are subject to variation over time and in different cultural settings, there are some ideals of queenship which are nearly universal in a historical context. For the purpose of condensing these down into a memorable and concise framework, these can be summarized or categorized into the following “four goods” and “three Ps.” As well as being the ultimate “good woman” and a model of virtuous behaviour as discussed previously, queens were also expected to be good wives, good mothers, and good rulers. In addition, they were expected to be pious, peacemakers, and pretty. This may be a brief and seemingly trite summary, but the following discussion aims to flesh out these overriding principles of queenly behaviour.

Queens were expected to be a model of virtue to their household, court, and subjects. This notion of virtue encompassed all of the positive traits and behaviours that contemporary women were expected or encouraged to possess. In her *Enseignements* Anne of France (or de Beaujeu), daughter of Louis XI and virtual queen as regent for her brother Charles VIII in the late fifteenth century, advised her daughter Suzanne to “devote yourself completely to acquiring virtue [...] whatever you do, above all, be truly honest, humble, courteous and loyal.”¹⁴ These same traits were expected of queens, including—surprisingly perhaps—humility. Christine de Pizan in her chapter “How the good princess will wish to cultivate all virtues” begins by advising this princess to particularly “cultivate earthly humility.” Pizan urges the princess

13 Empress Xu, “Instructions for the Inner Quarters (*Neixun*),” in *Sources of East Asian Tradition*, vol. 1, *Premodern Asia*, ed. William Theodore de Bary (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 427.

14 Anne of France, *Lessons for my Daughter*, ed. and trans. Sharon L. Jansen (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004), 31.

to remember that God reigns supreme and that “she is a poor mortal creature, frail and sinful and that the rank that she receives is only an office for which she will soon have to account to God.”¹⁵ Part of this humility is the princess’s modest behaviour: Pizan notes that the good princess “will behave respectfully and speak softly [...] greeting everyone with lowered eyes.” The courtier Ban Zhao’s *Lessons for Women* also equates humility and modesty with ideal behaviour. She urges her reader to “control circumspectly her behavior; in every motion to exhibit modesty [...] to speak at appropriate times; and not to weary others (with much conversation).”¹⁶ Durand de Champagne in his advisory “Mirror” also emphasized the need for queenly humility, advising her to listen and learn meekly and quietly, avoiding frivolous conversation.¹⁷

The next chapter “Family” will engage with the ideal that queens must be good wives and mothers. Given the centrality of marriage and maternity to queenship, many texts advised royal women on this aspect of their lives. Queens, like all women, were expected to be good wives—the aforementioned quality of humility was part of this role. The seventeenth-century Japanese writer Kaibara Ekiken advised women of the ruling samurai class that “In her dealings with her husband, both the expression of her countenance and style of her address should be courteous, humble and conciliatory.”¹⁸ Pizan also advised the princess to be humble

15 Christine de Pizan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies or the Book of the Three Virtues*, trans. Sarah Lawson (London: Penguin, 2003), 19. Subsequent quotations are from this translation.

16 Ban Zhao, “Lessons for Women,” in *Images of Women in Chinese Thought and Culture: Writings from the Pre-Qin Period through the Song Dynasty*, ed. Robin R. Wang (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003), 184–85.

17 Rina Lahav, “A Mirror of Queenship: The *Speculum dominarum* and the Demands of Justice,” in *Virtue Ethics for Women 1250–1500*, ed. Karen Green and Constant J. Mews (New York: Springer, 2011), 37.

18 Kenneth G. Henshall, *Dimensions of Japanese Society: Gender, Margins and Mainstream* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 14.

towards her husband as her lord and to “love her husband and live in peace with him, or otherwise she will have already discovered the torments of Hell” (24–25). Ban Zhao warned against excessive love between man and wife, arguing that excessive time in one another’s company will lead to lust and licentiousness. This may have been a coded reference to the emperor’s relationship with his wives and concubines, as Chinese annalists often equated the excessive interest of emperors in their imperial harems with poor government and the destruction of reigns.

Yet even more important than restraining male lust was the necessity for the queen to remain chaste. Chastity was held up as a key ideal of womanhood by many societies. The Romans emphasized three key qualities for women: *constancia*, *fides*, and *pudicitia* (steadfastness, loyalty, and chastity or sexual virtue). The latter was particularly prized, indeed while chastity could not make a Roman woman a queen, it could bring her a crown—a *corona pudicitiae* which was awarded to those women who remained chaste and loyal to only one husband over the course of their life. Female chastity was equally prized by the Chinese, as this short segment of the influential *Classic for Girls* (or *Nüerjing*) illustrates:

First of all a woman’s virtues
Is a chaste and honest heart,
Of which modesty and goodness and decorum
form a part.¹⁹

While chastity was a prized quality for women generally for queens it was absolutely essential. As dynastic progenitors, the queen’s chastity was paramount to ensure the purity of the royal line, particularly in monarchical systems based on hereditary succession. William Caxton’s description of the ideal queen in *The Game and Playe of the Chesse* appears to

19 Anon., “Classic for Girls (Nüerjing),” in *Images of Women in Chinese Thought and Culture: Writings from the Pre-Qin Period through the Song Dynasty*, ed. Robin R. Wang (Indianapolis: Hackett: 2003), 442.

be nearly obsessed with the concept of chastity—it is mentioned no less than five times in his short overview of the “forme and maners of the quene” (26–31). It is the first quality mentioned in his list of qualities that a queen must possess, it is then repeated again with two anecdotes which underline the importance of queenly chastity, next he returns to it with his description of her manners and comportment, noting that it is impossible for a queen to be appropriately “shamefast” or modest without also being chaste. This connection may well reflect the fact that the root word of the aforementioned Latin term *pudicitia* for chastity is *pudor* which equates to “a sense of modesty.” The final two mentions are with regard to the queen’s children, noting that she must encourage her sons and daughters to “kepe chastité entirely.” Caxton argues that chastity is also vital to becoming a queen, “for we rede of many maydens that for their virgynyte have ben maad quenes,” citing the case of two princesses who used rotting chicken flesh to prevent being raped by invaders and were later rewarded by becoming queens of France and Germany. Just as Caxton instructed queens to keep their children chaste, Chinese empresses were responsible not only for their own chastity but was charged with finding chaste women for the Imperial harem, to ensure that the emperor had a plethora of virtuous women to choose from to ensure the continuation of the royal line.

The link between chastity and royal succession can also be seen in what could be called the “fear of Guinevere.” This legendary queen was a staple of medieval romances, as the Arthurian tales had considerable reach and longevity across Western Europe and beyond. Guinevere could be seen as an “anti-worthy” or cautionary tale for other queens or princesses preparing for queenly life who might be reading the saga of how not to behave. Even if Guinevere’s behaviour was not explicitly criticized in many versions of the Arthurian tales, she illustrates two of the greatest concerns about a queen—that she might be barren and unchaste. Indeed, Guinevere’s failure to bear an heir for King Arthur and her affair with his greatest knight, Sir Lancelot, are arguably at the heart of the

fall of Camelot. Other cautionary tales of legendary queens whose lack of chastity brought down rulers and realms can be seen in the tale of the Songstress Queen of King Dao of Zhao in the *Biographies of Women* or in the life of the infamous Roman empress Messalina who flagrantly engaged in illicit affairs and was killed for reportedly plotting to overthrow her husband and make her lover the new emperor.

The importance of motherhood, for queens and indeed women generally, can also be seen in religious texts and traditional proverbs. These foundational elements of society and culture are also another way through which ideals of queenship can be communicated. The high value placed on motherhood and resulting respect and reverence for mothers can reinforce queenly authority, particularly as queen mothers and regents. This can be seen in Islam for example, where the often-quoted story from the Hadith of the Prophet Mohammed's thrice repeated insistence that one should serve and be dutiful to one's mother—before he answered that one should also serve one's father. African societies also deeply value the role of mothers—the Yoruba proverb that "Mother is Gold," sums this idea up succinctly. In chapter three, we will discuss how Islamic and African monarchies accorded powerful positions, indeed arguably the most powerful position for royal women, not to consorts but to queen mothers—reflecting how these societal values can be translated into monarchical practices.

Ideals of queenly motherhood can also be communicated through religion in more direct ways. For example, in the sixteenth century John Calvin wrote a commentary on the Book of Isaiah in the Old Testament of the Bible which he addressed to the ruling queen Elizabeth I of England. In his commentary, he stressed a particular passage from Isaiah (49:23) "And kings shall be thy nursing fathers and their queens thy nursing mothers." While this passage does clearly reinforce the idea of queenly motherhood, Elizabeth was unmarried and thus had no children of her own. Calvin used this passage instead to reinforce the idea of sovereign duty, that a queen could be a mother to her people in a larger sense, rather than

just a dynastic progenitor. The accession of another regnant English queen Anne Stuart in 1702 also drew heavily on this verse from Isaiah and reinforced the idea of queenly “nursing mothers,” both in the sermon given by John Sharp, the Archbishop of York, and in Jeremiah Clarke’s coronation anthem which deliberately emphasized the word “queen” in his musical setting for this biblical verse.²⁰ While Anne too was a mother in the metaphorical rather than biological sense as her seventeen pregnancies had failed to produce a surviving heir to the throne, she could also leverage this biblical verse to reinforce her position as a queenly mother to the nation. Biblical verses and figures, such as Deborah, the Judge of the Israelites, were used to express queenly ideals and reinforce female authority but conversely were also used by detractors of gynecocracy, such as John Knox, in an attempt to undermine a queen’s position. For every Deborah and Esther who were used to demonstrate ideals of queenship, “anti-worthies” like Jezebel, queen consort of Ahab who was demonized for her extravagance and worship of false prophets, could be held up as warnings of the negative repercussions of queens who failed to conform to the high expectations of queenly conduct.

In addition to being good wives and good mothers, queens were also expected to be good rulers. As discussed above, the duty of a queen to look after her people as well as her own children was highlighted. A key element in this was wisdom, which can be seen as a central focus in the aforementioned “Mirror for Queens,” the *Speculum dominarum*. Durand de Champagne’s work was based, like Calvin’s commentary for Elizabeth I, on biblical verse—in this case on Proverbs 14:1, “The wise woman builds her house.” Here the queen is the wise woman and her house is the kingdom; wisdom gives her good judgement and virtue enables her to be an effective co-ruler with her husband. The Chinese *Nü Sishu* also empha-

20 Matthias Range, *Music and Ceremonial at British Coronations: From James I to Elizabeth II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 112–13.

sizes the importance of queenly wisdom in creating a successful ruling pair by listing examples of the sage judgments and actions of early empresses before concluding, "Therefore, is it not simply true that since the ancient times all accomplished great emperors must have had wise empresses?" (Wang Xiang, 225). In addition to these textual works, another way to demonstrate ideals of queenship and queenly behaviour is through visual images. Several examples of late medieval illustrated manuscripts from the French court, including the *Jeu des echecs moralisés*, the *Livre du gouvernement des roys et des princes*, and the *Grandes Chroniques de France* use visual depictions of the queen and royal couple to reinforce the ideal of queenly wisdom, stressing her role as wise counsellor to her husband and able educator of her royal children.²¹ Indeed many queens were very well educated themselves, including Elizabeth I who was a renowned linguist, as well as many other contemporary royal women both in Europe and in Safavid Iran.

Having discussed the expectations that queens should be good women, wives, mothers, and rulers, we turn now to three further qualities that royal women were expected to possess: being pious, peacemakers, and pretty. The first quality of piety is central to queenship in multiple cultures. In one Islamic "Mirror for Princes," the *Kutadgu Bilig* advised rulers to "choose a wife for her piety," urging them to "find a good and God-fearing woman."²² In Christian Europe, queens modelled themselves in terms of their projected image and religious activities, subconsciously or overtly, on the Virgin Mary, or Queen of Heaven. The lives of saints, some of whom like St. Margaret of Scotland were queens themselves, could also provide models for pious queens to emulate, in the same way as biographies of other women "worthies." This can also be seen in tales of the lives of Islamic sufi saints or mystics

21 See Cécile Quentel-Touche, "Charles V's Visual Definition of the Queen's Virtues," in *Virtue Ethics*, ed. Green and Mews, 53–80.

22 See Marina Tolmacheva, "Female Piety and Patronage in the Medieval Hajj," in *Women in the Medieval Islamic World*, ed. Gavin R. G. Hambly (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 199), 173.

as “hagiographies relay messages about the proper or perhaps ideal behavior of women,” emphasizing devotion to God, prayer, poverty, and charity.²³

The latter activity, charity, became a key way for queens to demonstrate piety—perhaps one which they, as women with considerable means at their disposal, were particularly suited to. Christine de Pizan discusses charity and piety extensively in the *Treasure of the City of Ladies* and devotes an entire chapter to “the habits of pious charity that the good princess will cultivate.” Pizan argues that a queen must engage in charity as a means of wealth redistribution as “you have received more plentifully than many others” and notes that the good princess must be “ever mindful of this principle so that she may accomplish works of mercy, although she may be well established in her grandeur, preserves the virtue of her station” (24–25). Pizan advises the princess that she should work with her almoners to give money to the poor and go out to visit hospitals and those in need herself, setting “a good example to those who see her perform such work and with such humility, for nothing influences the common people so much as what they see their lords and ladies do.” This idea of the public performance of piety was a vital part of the exercise of queenship in Christian Europe, from regularly attending services at court and in towns and cities as well as engaging in religious festivals and rituals, such as washing the feet of poor women during the Royal Maundy in England. While their Islamic counterparts may not have been able to publicly perform piety in the same manner due to the seclusion of royal women in the harem or zenana, they were able to engage in acts of patronage which carried strong messages about royal women’s piety and charity out across the realm. Examples of the demonstration of piety and charity by queens will be discussed further in chapter three.

In addition to counselling the good princess to be pious and charitable, Christine de Pizan also highlights another of

23 Ruth Roded, *Women in Islamic Biographical Collections* (Boulder: Rienner, 1994), 94.

the ideal qualities of a queen—to be a peacemaker. She links a queen's peacemaking abilities to her "pure, mild and holy charity" which makes her the ideal mediator and argues that "This work is the proper duty of the wise queen and princess: to be the means of peace and concord, to work for the avoidance of war because of the trouble that can come of it" (21-23). Pizan not only considered the queen's peacemaking qualities theoretically, she wrote two letters directly to her patron, Isabeau of Bavaria, Queen of France, urging her to use these qualities to broker a peace between the rival factions in the royal family which were threatening the stability of the realm.²⁴ The senior women of the Mughal dynasty were also expected to broker peaceful resolutions to dynastic disputes, while younger women could be offered in marriage as a means of seeking peace with neighbors and erstwhile rivals. These peacemaking activities: intercession, brokering peace treaties and queens' roles as players and pawns in matrimonial diplomacy, will be revisited in the following two chapters. A further type of peacemaking which was seen as vital for queens in polygamous monarchical structures, was keeping peace within the harem. One of the reflections on "queenly virtue" in the *Mao Commentary* was that a good empress was able to create peace in the palace through ensuring harmony among the wives and concubines.²⁵ Peace and order at the heart of the dynasty and court were absolutely crucial to the stability of the realm; thus the efforts of queens and empresses to keep peace between members of the royal family, the women of the court and harem and rival factions, would have a wide-ranging impact.

Finally, queens were expected to represent contemporary ideals of beauty and were often portrayed or described in idealistic manner, even if their actual appearance was not

24 See Tracy Adams, "Recovering Queen Isabeau of France (c.1370-1435): A Re-Reading of Christine de Pizan's Letters to the Queen," in *Fifteenth-Century Studies*, 33, ed. Edelgard E. DuBruck and Barbara I. Guisick (Rochester: Camden House, 2008), 35-54.

25 McMahon, *Women Shall Not Rule*, 30-33.

necessarily as attractive. Contemporary ideals of beauty vary greatly over time, place, and culture, yet just as a queen was meant to be the ultimate woman in demonstrating all the expectations of female behaviour, she was also meant to reflect ideals of beauty in her appearance and dress. Indeed, Caxton begins his description of the ideal queen by claiming “She ought to be a fayr lady sittynge in a chayer and crowned with a corone on her heed”—the very first quality he attributes to her is being fair or beautiful (26). Ideals of queenly beauty can also be seen in the descriptions of queens in the medieval Welsh Triads—some of these literary works describe queens as “the most beautiful women ever seen.”²⁶ Indeed, it has even been argued that “Beauty [...] was a cultural requirement for a queen,” using the example of Elizabeth I who “had to nurture and sustain the legend of her beauty” as a means of ensuring the continuing loyalty of her courtiers and subjects, and as a vital element of the myth of Gloriana.²⁷ If beauty was a means of security for a regnant queen like Elizabeth, it was equally important for consort queens. Alfonso X of Castile in his *Siete Partidas* argued that beauty was a key element in selecting a royal bride as “The more beautiful she is, the more he will love her, and the children which he has by her will be more handsome and more graceful; which is very fitting for the children of kings, in order that they may make a good appearance among other persons.”²⁸ In this way, many of the elements discussed above as the ideals of queenship are tied together as Alfonso argues

26 Danna R. Messer, “The Uxorial Lifecycle and Female Agency in Wales in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries” (PhD diss., Bangor University, 2014), 132.

27 Anna Riehl, *The Face of Queenship: Early Modern Representations of Elizabeth I* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 45–46.

28 *Las Siete Partidas*, ed. Samuel Parsons Scott and Robert I. Burns. 5 vols., vol. 2 *Medieval Government: The World of Kings and Warriors (Partida II)*, ed. Scott and Burns (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 298 (Title 6), available online at muse.jhu.edu/book/21372.

that being beautiful will make a queen a good wife, a good mother, and the ideal woman, and a positive example as the foremost female in the realm.

Taken together, these ideals of queenship form a useful foundation for a wider consideration of queens. In the following chapters, we will test these ideals and expectations against examples of the practice of queenship by women from various kingdoms and cultures across time and place. Understanding what was expected of royal women gives us a framework for exploring the queen's office which will be fleshed out by the realities of individual women's experience of queenship in the chapters that follow.