

A COMPANION TO GLOBAL QUEENSHIP

Edited by
**ELENA
WOODACRE**



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INTRODUCTION: PLACING QUEENSHIP INTO A GLOBAL CONTEXT

ELENA WOODACRE

THERE HAS BEEN a long tradition of interest in the history of queens, arguably stemming back to the classical period with treatments of the lives, reigns, and loves of Dido and Cleopatra. This interest was kept alight by contemporary chroniclers and biographers over the centuries, who documented and discussed the lives of royal women. An early example is Fan Ye's biographies of the Chinese empresses and consorts in the *Hou Han shu* of the fifth century CE.¹ Queens featured regularly in European collections of women "worthies" from Boccaccio in the fourteenth century onwards, with many collective biographers creating collections dedicated exclusively to queens from the early modern period to the heyday of queenly prosopography in the nineteenth century.² While many works, such as the well-known multi-volume *Lives of the Queens of England* produced by the Strickland sisters, take a nationalistic approach, Mary Hays's *Memoirs of Queens* (1821) is an example of collections that feature female rulers and consorts from beyond Europe. Indeed, Hays's work encompassed various periods and geographical locations, including figures such as Panthea, queen of Susa, and the Mughal empress Nur Jahan—demonstrating perhaps an early interest in the premise of global queenship.³

The modern discipline of queenship studies has built upon this long-term interest in the lives of queens, but taken the study of their reigns in new directions. While biography has not been ignored by queenship scholars, there has been an emphasis on other areas that had been previously underexplored, such as queenly patronage, political agency,

household dynamics, reputation and representation, and, more recently, diplomatic activity.⁴ Queenship studies, like the aforementioned collective biographies of queens, have also seen nationalistic and dynastic groupings in various collections, such as *Queenship and Political Power in Medieval and Early Modern Spain* (2005), *Tudor Queenship* (2012) and *Early Modern Habsburg Women* (2013).⁵ Queens have also been grouped by type, such as queens consort, which are the focus of the "Marrying Cultures" project, or queens regent, in the case of Katherine Crawford's insightful *Perilous Performances: Gender and Regency in Early Modern France* (2004).⁶

Yet, while this impressive and ever-increasing study in the field of queenship has considerably improved our understanding of particular queens, as well as their activities and role in both the political dynamic of the realm and vis-à-vis their natal and marital dynasties, the field has focused almost exclusively on a European sphere, from the early medieval to the end of the early modern period. This is not to say that examinations of queens and royal women do not exist beyond these boundaries; in temporal terms there have been studies of queens and queenship in the ancient and classical period, such as Lana Troy's examination of Egyptian queens or Altay Coşkun and Alex McAuley's study

¹ Mou, *Gentlemen's Prescriptions*.

² Examples include Florez, *Memorias*; and de Coste, *Les éloges et vies de reynes*. See also Woodacre, "Well Represented."

³ Hays, *Memoirs of Queens*; and Strickland and Strickland, *Queens of England*.

⁴ For examples, see Mitchell, "Marriage Plots"; Nolan, *Queens in Stone and Silver*; Silleras Fernández, *Power, Piety, and Patronage*; Germann, *Picturing Marie Leszczyńska*; and Akkerman and Houben, *The Politics of Female Households*.

⁵ Earenfight, *Queenship and Political Power*; Hunt and Whitelock, *Tudor Queenship*; Cruz and Stampino, *Habsburg Women*.

⁶ See Watanabe-O'Kelly and Morton, *Queens Consort*; and Crawford, *Perilous Performances*.

of Seleukid royal women.⁷ Studies of modern queens (defined here as subsequent to the eighteenth century) have also been numerous, but with a greater emphasis on biographical treatment, rather than comparative works that seek to assess their reigns upon the same framework employed by queenship scholars of earlier periods.

A brief survey of recent works in the field demonstrates an attempt to redress this imbalance, both in terms of increasing the number of studies of queens and royal women beyond the European sphere and in terms of bringing diverse case studies together to understand queenship in other religious contexts and cultural settings. For example, Sarah Milledge-Nelson has edited a collection that examines ancient queens around the world through archaeological finds.⁸ There has been a surge in works that examine queenship within the framework of Islamic monarchy and culture. Fatima Mernissi has challenged the notion that Muslim royal women had little or no engagement in the political sphere in her work, *Forgotten Queens of Islam*.⁹ Leslie Peirce's insightful study of Ottoman royal women is incredibly useful for understanding how Islamic queenship operated in the context of the polygamous harem.¹⁰ Sher Banu A. L. Khan disputes the assumption that regnant queenship was an impossibility in the framework of Muslim monarchy with a collective study of the seventeenth-century sultanas of Aceh.¹¹ Moving further east, Jack Weatherford has explored the legacy of the female descendants of Genghis Khan, with a particular case study on the political and martial successes of Queen Manduhai.¹² Keith McMahon has published two studies that bring together the lives of the empresses and royal concubines of China from 1250 BCE until the end of the Qing dynasty in the twentieth century.¹³ Finally, a truly global and comparative perspective is offered in Anne Walthall's collection *Servants of the Dynasty* (2008), which makes a valuable contribution by bringing together work on women from the classical Maya court to the halls of Versailles, though this collection is not focused exclusively on queenship, as it

includes examinations of servants, concubines, ladies-in-waiting, and other royal women.¹⁴

Our collection aims to embrace and further develop this trend towards an increasingly global outlook for the field of queenship studies. We have deliberately mixed case studies of women from different periods, places, and religions in order to compare and contrast the realities of queenship in varied settings. We have aimed to draw out lesser-studied examples of queens and areas that have not benefitted from much examination, but we have not excluded fresh perspectives on more familiar figures and regions. The aim of this collection is twofold: to increase our understanding of both individuals and groups of queens who have been understudied; and to encourage comparison of the framework and practice of queenship in various contexts. Expanding the horizons of queenship studies beyond its normal geographical "comfort zone" and bringing together case studies of queenship in divergent cultural contexts enables us to ask this question: are the theories and ideas about the norms of queenship solely applicable in a European framework or are there constants in the practice and parameters of the queen's role and function that we can apply in any temporal, cultural, or geographical situation?

There are a few important issues that must be acknowledged first. While we are taking a global perspective, it has not been possible, due to the constraints of space, to take in examples from every historical realm or civilization in this work. However, we hope that this volume encourages other future monographs and collections to build on our premise, and to include case studies of queens in geographical and cultural contexts that we have not been able to include here. In addition, although it would be ideal to include examples from both the ancient and classical eras as well as modern monarchies, as discussed earlier, it is beyond the scope of this particular work to do so due to the temporal focus of this series. However, this work is closely linked to two publications that do have a wider temporal scope: the *Royal Studies Journal*, and the *History of Monarchy* collection, which does feature both ancient and modern examples of global queenship.¹⁵

We must also address the nomenclature being used here. Clearly, the word "queen" itself is an entirely European construct. Indeed, it is a word of Germanic origin that evolved from the Old English word *cwēn* to the Middle English *quene*.¹⁶

⁷ Troy, *Patterns of Queenship*; Coşkun and McAuley, *Seleukid Royal Women*.

⁸ Milledge-Nelson, *Ancient Queens*.

⁹ Mernissi, *Forgotten Queens*.

¹⁰ Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*.

¹¹ Khan, *Sovereign Women*.

¹² Weatherford, *Mongol Queens*.

¹³ McMahon, *Women Shall Not Rule*; and *Celestial Women*.

¹⁴ Walthall, *Servants of the Dynasty*.

¹⁵ Woodacre et al., *The Routledge History of Monarchy*.

¹⁶ Harper, Online Etymology Dictionary.

This word links to the concept of wife—that is, the queen as the wife of the king—which in itself is more limiting in scope than the Latin word *regina*, the root word for “queen” in all Romance languages, which is the female equivalent of *rex*, or “king,” rather than merely a descriptor of the ruler’s spouse.¹⁷ Moreover, titles can be linked to the political entity itself; the first lady of the land might be an empress in an imperial context or a princess in a sovereign principality, but her role is clearly the equivalent of a queen. Fatima Mernissi discusses the lack of a clear equivalent to the word “queen” in Arabic, nor is there a direct counterpart in many other languages and cultures where the political framework is different from the European conception of monarchy.¹⁸ Indeed, we recognize that there is a considerable difference between the political structures and succession mechanisms of the realms that feature in this work, which range from seventh-century China to nineteenth-century New Zealand and feature examples from across Africa, Asia, the Indian subcontinent, and Europe. Differences in matrimonial customs, particularly regarding whether monogamy or polygamy (or even polyandry) was practised, also had a clear impact on the place and position of the “queen” within her societal and political framework. While recognizing these linguistic and cultural differences, for the purposes of this volume we are using the word “queen” as a way of expressing the position of the pre-eminent woman in the political and societal context of the realm. Likewise, the concept of “queenship” itself can be used, beyond its original European context, as a means of understanding the political agency, activity, and position of those women, who were at the epicentre of power in their respective territories.

Finally, it is important to consider the full cycle of queenship that is normally denoted by adding the modifiers “regnant,” “regent,” “dowager,” and “consort” to the title of “queen.”¹⁹ These words are more than mere adjectives; they have clear connotations as to the specific role that the queen held and the means through which she accessed power. As a queen moved through her life, her title might change. For example, a woman might first become a queen consort on her marriage to a king; then serve as queen regent, if her husband predeceased her, leaving an underage heir; finally,

when her child reached maturity, her regency might finish, and she would become a queen mother or dowager queen. Given the etymology of the word “queen” as discussed earlier, without an adjective we might assume that the woman in question was the consort of a king. As consort, her access to power was through her spouse; while this factor delimited her authority, consorts could have considerable political agency, becoming true and relatively equal co-rulers, or even exercising the sovereign’s role on behalf of an absent, incapacitated or incompetent husband. The agency of queens consort has often been dismissed as difficult to quantify due to its often subtle, behind-the-scenes nature, yet recent scholarship and the case studies in this volume demonstrate that, whether consorts were ruling visibly or using techniques of “soft power,” their political activity cannot be denied.²⁰

It might be easy to assume that, once a queen consort’s husband had died, her access to power died with him, yet regency could offer a queen an enhanced access to power; even if a consort had co-ruled with her spouse, being regent would make her effectively sole ruler until her child came of age. As Jeroen Duindam and several case studies in this volume highlight, such as Seokyoung Han’s study of the dowager queens of Korea, queen mothers and dowagers often played a crucial role in the succession of the realm, as a physical link between one reign and the next—whether she produced, or selected, the heir.²¹

A regnant queen wielded power in her own right as sovereign, normally inheriting the right to rule as an heiress—though, as Belinson’s survey of Russian empresses in this volume demonstrates, she could also rise to power after the death of a spouse, even engineering it herself to seize the throne. Regnant queens normally had to negotiate co-rulership with their king consort, which could prove challenging, as case studies of Tamar of Georgia and the queens of Jerusalem in this collection by Huneycutt and Bassett demonstrate.²² Yet other regnant queens were able to rule alone—either unmarried, as in the case of Elizabeth I of England, or after the death of their spouse, as in the case of Wu Zetian as featured in Colla’s study in the next chapter. This collection considers all of these facets of queenship to be equally important, and these case studies include examples of each of

¹⁷ See Silleras Fernández’s discussion of the equivalent to “queen” and “queenship” in Romance languages, in “Queenship in la Corona de Aragón.”

¹⁸ Mernissi, *Forgotten Queens*, 9–25.

¹⁹ See Earenfight’s discussion of queenly modifiers in “Without the Persona of the Prince.”

²⁰ For further European case studies, see Watanabe-O’Kelly and Morton, *Queens Consort*.

²¹ Duindam, *Dynasties*, esp. chap. 2.

²² For examples, see Beem and Taylor, *The Man behind the Queen*; and Woodacre, *Queens Regnant*.

the various “types” of queens. By bringing together examples of all variants of queenship from diverse periods, places, and religious contexts, we aim to reveal both differences and constancy in the roles that queens occupied over their lives. Indeed, some of the chapters in this collection directly compare and contrast European examples of queen mothers, regents, and consorts to their African, Asian, and Islamic counterparts, so as to further our understanding of the mechanism of queenship itself.

With these considerations in mind, it remains to turn to the contents of this particular collection, which are divided into three, fairly equal, parts. The first, “Perceptions of Regnant Queenship,” examines case studies of regnant queens from seventh-century China to New Zealand in the early nineteenth century. There is an emphasis in this part, as the subtitle suggests, on how the power and authority of these women has been perceived, both in their own time and over the long term. Given that female rule could be a controversial and uncommon practice, these women had to work hard to establish and justify their position, employing various strategies to ensure that their authority was accepted—strategies that were not always successful or may have not have ensured an enduring legacy.

The first chapter in this part, Elisabetta Colla’s examination of the controversial rule of Wu Zetian, China’s only ruling empress, discusses Empress Wu’s effort to embed her rule through religious patronage, enhancing her titles and linking herself to a pantheon of “sage queens” and goddesses. Through these stratagems, Colla argues that Wu Zetian was able to undermine the traditional patriarchal structures of power in Imperial China and create a “parallel universe” in which a woman could hold supreme power. Lois Huneycutt also examines strategies to promote female authority in her study of Tamar of Georgia. Huneycutt notes the positive language used to celebrate Tamar’s rule in contemporary literature and the deliberate links made between Tamar and St. Nino, a beloved female saint who had been called the “Enlightener of Georgia.” Huneycutt contrasts this laudatory language with the negative “virago” terminology that frequently denigrated Tamar’s contemporaries in Europe.

While the next four chapters diverge considerably in terms of their period and place, there is a connecting thread in the unusual means by which women were able to succeed to the throne, as proximity in blood or relationship to a previous ruler might be able to trump the issue of their gender. Hayley Bassett’s chapter examines the situation of the queens of Jerusalem, where women formed a key dynastic link to

confirm the authority of the tenuous Christian rulers of the Crusader states. Melisende, the first of the regnant queens of Jerusalem, was confirmed as her father’s heir, as his eldest child, in the absence of any legitimate sons. However, her husband, Fulk of Anjou, was selected with the approval of the barons of the realm to rule alongside her, merging the kingdom’s original premise of elected rulership with Melisende’s hereditary claim. Razia bin Iltumish became the female sultan of the Delhi Sultanate, sharing with Wu Zetian the distinction of being a realm’s only regnant queen. Like Melisende, Razia was also designated as her father’s heir, though her claim was initially bypassed by her half-brother; however, Razia was able to eliminate this obstacle, and eventually obtain the crown of her father, at least for a brief period.

Anna Jagiellon, the focus of Katarzyna Kosior’s study, was also considered to be a desirable option to rule because of her lineage. Like the early Kingdom of Jerusalem, Poland–Lithuania had an elected monarchy, which had been dominated by the Jagiellon family since the marriage of Władysław Jagiełło of Lithuania and Jadwiga I of Poland in 1386. After a period of instability following the unexpected departure of Henri de Valois, who ruled for a matter of months, Anna’s accession or election was felt by many to be a means of re-establishing the status quo through her connection to the Jagiellon dynasty. Yet Kosior notes the ambiguity of Anna’s position. Like Melisende, Anna provided the dynastic linkage but was married to a man of the *sejm*’s choosing, Stephen Bathory, the duke of Transylvania. Unlike Melisende, Anna had never been a clear heir to the throne, nor is her position as a queen regnant agreed among modern scholars; it is perhaps this lack of clarity about her role and her death without issue that has led to the mixed perception of Anna’s agency and authority. Finally, Orel Beilinson provides a survey of the empresses regnant of Russia in the eighteenth century, comparing their reigns and the varied means through which these women gained supreme power in the realm. Beilinson argues that a unique blend of societal and political circumstances, as well as legal reforms and situational factors, “allowed this unique ‘female century’ to happen,” when four women ruled for approximately 65 years combined between 1725 and 1796.²³

The last two chapters in this part provide interesting examples of the perception of Western powers regarding the female rule in two island nations, Madagascar and New

²³ See Beilinson, chapter 7 in this volume, 79–94.

Zealand. Jane Hooper and Aidan Norrie provide insights into the societal mechanisms that permitted women to wield authority. However, they also highlight how colonial powers misunderstood the role of these women, clumsily equating their power with European equivalents who they were more familiar with, which did not provide a nuanced understanding of these ruling women's agency and their significance within their own society. Moreover, both authors note how female rulers were underestimated in accounts written by colonial agents, or even, as Hooper argues in the case of the Madagascan queen Béti, portrayed as a sexually louche and exotic "other" in order to minimize her authority.

The second grouping, "Practising Co-Rulership," looks at both consort and regent queens who ruled alongside their husbands and sons. While consort and regent queens can often be sidelined in dynastic histories that put their emphasis purely on the actual occupant of the throne, recent focus on the corporate nature of monarchy has placed greater emphasis on wives and mothers who played key roles as co-rulers. This part begins with two case studies of medieval queenship in areas at the fringes of Europe that have been in need of further exploration: Kyivan Rus' and Wales. Both Talia Zajac and Danna Messer craft insightful studies of the unique societal context of queenship in the two regions. Zajac argues that, in spite of source material that often minimizes the agency and activity of the princesses of Kyivan Rus' and a political framework that prevented female succession, careful analysis reveals their effective partnership in rule with both husbands and sons and their important religious patronage. Messer's chapter aims to redress the balance in scholarship that has given prominence to Welsh rulership during the "Age of Princes" but has failed to adequately examine the significant role that their consorts played in both the court and the realm.

The next two chapters examine the role of consorts and royal mothers in an Islamic framework in the eleventh century—on both sides of the Straits of Gibraltar. Inês Lourinho examines the important role that Zaynab bint Ishaq al-Nafzawiyya played in the Almoravid Empire in this century. Zaynab's political and business acumen and lively intelligence led her contemporaries to call her "the sorceress." Yet Lourinho reveals the difficult path that Zaynab had to navigate to reach the epicentre of power at the side of her third husband, Yusuf ibn Tashfin, and earn recognition as his effective co-ruler. Next, Ana Miranda explores the influence of al-Dalfa', who rose from slavery to become extremely influential in the sometimes deadly court politics of the Umayyad Caliphate in

al-Andalus. Both these case studies demonstrate the importance of motherhood, particularly becoming the mother of a son, in raising a woman's prestige in the framework of the harem. For al-Dalfa', earning the status of *umm al-walad*, as the "mother of a child," made her more than just a slave and set her on the path to political prominence as the mother of 'Abd al-Malik al-Muzaffar. After his untimely and controversial demise al-Dalfa' continued to play an important role in the court, as a prime mover in the succession as a means to avenge her son's death.

The final three chapters in this part take us to Asia, with a trio of case studies on the political agency and dynastic importance of royal mothers. Hang Lin argues that, contrary to the widely held view that royal women in China were sequestered with limited access to power, Chinese imperial history demonstrates a strong legacy of female regents or empresses dowager who ruled on behalf of their sons. Lin notes that the regents of the Liao offer an exceptionally strong group of female rulers, whose authority was plainly visible not only in court circles and the administration but even in military affairs, which were normally an entirely male function. SeoKyung Han's case study offers an interesting contrast; her examination of dowager, regent, and consort queens in Chosŏn Korea demonstrates a more subtle but still discernible influence on events, particularly in managing the succession. Han's thorough genealogies highlight the significance of maternal lineage in Chosŏn history and the crucial role that royal women played not only as dynastic progenitors but as arbiters of the crown itself. Finally, Lennart Bes offers a fascinating study of female rulers in south India, drawing attention to these significant and powerful women who have been largely unexamined in the context of queenship. Bes notes that regional tradition, culture, and political philosophy were not naturally supportive of female rule, yet the four Nayaka queens who form the basis of his contribution managed to access power by co-opting or ruling on behalf of a minority king "in her lap." Like Colla's study of Wu Zetian, Bes notes the means through which these queens crafted their image to enhance their authority, and examines the reflection of this self-fashioning that can be seen in modern media's depiction of these women today. Connections can also be seen with the work of Hooper and Norrie in Bes's use of colonial sources—in this case, documents of the Dutch East India Company—to understand the perception that foreigners had of these ruling women's political agency and activity.

The third, and final, part, "Breaking Down Boundaries: Comparative Studies of Queenship," includes case studies that

bring together queens and courts from different geographical and cultural contexts, to help increase our understanding both of how royal women functioned in different settings and the constant elements of queenship itself. The first two chapters in this part offer comparative studies with strong connections. Stefany Wragg argues that Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine, was a model of early medieval queenship who served as inspiration for the two eighth-century queens in her study, the Byzantine empress Irene and the Mercian queen Cynethyth. While these two queens offer contrasting case studies in many ways, both are examples of female power and agency in the early Middle Ages. Wragg also notes an interesting connection between the two—that, although they were able to attain impressive authority and influence in their lifetimes, ultimately their dynastic lines both failed. Lledó Ruiz Domingo's chapter offers a study of two Hohenstaufen women, both named Constance, whose lives offer an excellent opportunity to compare the practice of medieval queenship at opposite ends of the Mediterranean, in Greece and Iberia. Ruiz Domingo demonstrates that, although the women's role placed them in divergent cultural contexts, the comparison between the two consorts demonstrates the continuity in queenship: that queens were fundamentally dependent on their ties to their male relatives, constrained by similar expectations of their role, and that motherhood was the key means of obtaining long-term security and influence.

The following chapter is also set in Iberia, but it focuses on royal women in the fifteenth-century Kingdom of Granada, offering interesting comparisons and interactions with Christian queens in Portugal and Aragon. Ana Echevarría and Roser Salicrú i Lluç frame their research within a wider academic movement to bring the "forgotten sultanas" of the Islamic courts out of obscurity, digging into the often limited source material to find evidence of their political activity and agency. They demonstrate that, while the roles and life experiences of Nasrid princesses may have been different from their Christian counterparts, that correspondence with the rulers and consorts of neighbouring realms reveals the deep engagement that these Granadan royal women had in diplomacy and politics.

The final three chapters in the volume offer wide-ranging and often unexpected comparisons between more familiar European and lesser-studied global examples. René Langlois offers an insightful comparison of royal mothers and regents in France and the Ottoman Empire during the early modern period. Both realms experienced an unusually high concentration of female authority in this period, which provoked

considerable comment and controversy among their contemporaries. The three French regents, Catherine and Marie de Medici and Anne of Austria, ruled for and with their sons during periods of significant political turbulence; the criticism of their authority can be still be seen in Catherine's "black legend," which modern historians continue to wrestle with. The *validé* sultans of the period, including the powerful regent Turhan, provoked the nickname for this period as a "Sultanate of Women," whereby royal mothers exercised greater power than their sultan sons. Langlois demonstrates the means through which these women projected and solidified their authority, by constructing robust networks to ensure loyalty, through cultural and political patronage and the careful use of court ritual and spectacle.

Tracy Adams and Ian Fookes also leverage the early modern French court as a basis for their comparative study. However, they provide a less obvious, but intriguing, comparison with Japan in their examination of court women and the role of courtesans in both contexts. Adams and Fookes parallel the *Ôoku*, or "great interior," of the Japanese court with that of early modern France and also compare French salon culture with the Yoshiwara, which was home to elegant and refined courtesans. They reveal that, although France lacked a true courtesan culture in the same overt way as could be found in the Yoshiwara, both courts offer interesting similarities in terms of the framework of court culture to which women had to conform to thrive and survive.

Our last chapter offers another comparison with clear contrasts and connections in Diana Pelaz Flores's study of queen mothers in Europe and Africa. While there are clear differences in terms of polygamy in many of the African societies, versus monogamy in European realms, and different mechanisms of succession, which both impacted on dynastic structure, Pelaz Flores is able to highlight continuity in the role of the royal mother in both contexts. The chapter brings together both theoretical discussion of the role of royal mothers and examples that illustrate the importance of queen mothers in dynastic continuity and rulership. The themes in Pelaz Flores's study resonate with Han's chapter on Korean queens who acted as arbiters of succession, and with the studies of other queen mothers and regents in the collection from China, India, and Europe who became effective and influential rulers alongside or on behalf of their sons.

Taken together, these chapters demonstrate that, while the practice of queenship was undoubtedly influenced by specific and divergent cultural contexts, including religion, contemporary political philosophy, succession mechanisms

that favoured or barred female rulers and marital practices that placed one woman by the ruler's side or offered that opportunity to many, the experience of many queens had clear continuity across variations in time and place.

Regnant queenship might be more feasible in realms in which law, succession practice, and precedent made it possible, but, whether the door to power was already half open or nearly shut tight, a woman required effort to push it open. Once there, ruling queens had to work hard to cement their position by selecting allies and/or male consorts to bolster their authority rather than undermine it, and through a careful crafting of their image to enhance their power and ensure their legacy, which could easily be undone by outside observers who did not fully understand their political agency.

Motherhood and queenship are inexorably intertwined. However, as Jeroen Duindam has argued and these case studies demonstrate, "Women rarely acted only as passive vehicles of reproduction or as disinterested outsiders in succession conflicts."²⁴ Whether as consorts or regnant queens, women played a key role in dynastic continuity; the lack of an heir had the potential to create instability, which could threaten the queen's own position or cause conflict over who the designated heir might be. Yet, in the absence of

an heir of her own body, adoptive motherhood could allow a queen to direct the course of the succession, as the example of the Chosŏn consorts demonstrates. Motherhood could offer a queen a springboard to political power, either as the regent, ruling on behalf of a child, or as a co-ruler, reigning with her offspring.²⁵ The examples offered in these case studies demonstrate the enduring influence of royal mothers, even if their children predeceased them, as al-Dalfa's role in the succession struggles after her son's untimely death has shown.

Finally, the diverse examples examined in this collection have highlighted the central spot that women occupied at the heart of the realm. They demonstrate that, whether we name them "queen" or "empress" or "malika" or "rangatira," there is always a vitally important place for women in the core mechanism of monarchy. The women in these case studies rose to prominence in different ways, all facing opposition or encountering obstacles of varying kinds on their path to power. Yet all were able to make their mark, either leading from the front or as the power behind the throne, and demonstrated that, no matter what societal framework they operated under, women could be equally effective administrators, patrons, and leaders as their male counterparts or consorts.

²⁴ Duindam, *Dynasties*, 89.

²⁵ For further case studies and considerations of royal motherhood, see Woodacre and Fleiner, *Royal Mothers*; and Fleiner and Woodacre, *Virtuous or Villainess?*.

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