

*Amalasuintha: The Transformation of Queenship in the Post-Roman World*, by Massimiliano Vitiello. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017. Pp. 312. ISBN: 9780812249477.

Massimiliano Vitiello's *Amalasuintha: The Transformation of Queenship in the Post Roman World* provides an important contribution to scholarship on Ostrogothic Italy and early medieval queenship. Born ca. 494/5, Theoderic's daughter Amalasuintha was raised at the Romanized royal court of Ravenna and married the Visigothic prince Eutharic as part of Theoderic's plan to unite the two groups of Goths under Amal leadership. Despite the Romanization of the Ostrogothic court and of her education, Amalasuintha assumed the traditional role for a Gothic queen in the fifth century, with no official political role, until the deaths of her husband and father. These events led to Amalasuintha's assumption of power, a situation with parallels in the late-Roman and Byzantine empire, but without precedent in the post-Roman successor states. As Vitiello shows, at the same time that kings in the post-Roman west were experimenting with forms of legitimation, in her role as regent mother and then co-ruler with her cousin Theodahad, Amalasuintha drew on late-Roman and contemporary Byzantine models of female rulership to justify her position in innovative ways.

In the introduction, Vitiello questions why scholarly work on Amalasuintha has been limited, stating that although the evidence is fragmentary, her life is better documented than other barbarian queens, and scholarly biographies of other empresses and queens have relied on similarly incomplete evidence. Vitiello draws parallels between Amalasuintha and empresses such as Galla Placidia, who have received more scholarly attention and were powerful and important during a period of major change, to argue for Amalasuintha's significance to understanding fifth- and sixth-century diplomacy and politics between Rome and Constantinople, as well as the development of queenship in the post-Roman kingdoms. He then gives an overview of the major sources for Amalasuintha's life and their limitations. Vitiello's integration of the major written sources from the period, Cassiodorus, Jordanes, Procopius, and Gregory of Tours, as well as material sources such as the consular diptych of Orestes, allows him to present a more detailed analysis of Amalasuintha than scholars have previously attempted. In addition to this source integration, however, Vitiello's main contribution is providing a monograph that asks feminist questions of this material. While scholars have published several monographs on Ostrogothic Italy in the past decade, including Vitiello's previous monograph on Theodahad, this is the first to use gender as a primary category of analysis, although scholars have published articles on gender and sexuality using the above sources.

Chapter 1, “Mother, Regent, and Queen,” examines female power in the sixth century in the post-Roman kingdoms and the Byzantine Empire. Vitiello begins by discussing Procopius’s and Cassiodorus’s praise of Amalasuintha as masculine in describing her regency in order to build his argument that Amalasuintha effectively began her queenship upon Theoderic’s death, by the latter’s design. He is thus arguing against the consensus view that assumed Amalasuintha only had institutional power as queen after the death of her son in 534. While Vitiello convincingly shows that Theoderic planned for Amalasuintha to rule as regent for her son, and that as such Goths and Romans, alike, saw her as exercising rulership, it is unclear whether everyone in the Ostrogothic kingdom agreed on Amalasuintha’s institutional position. Vitiello argues that since Amalasuintha appointed her cousin Theodahad as co-regent upon Athalaric’s death, she must have had institutional power as queen. However, in chapter 4 he acknowledges that the novelty of the coregency, and in particular Amalasuintha’s superior, or masculine, position within it, “must have seemed absurd” (155) to the Gothic army and aristocracy. Drawing on the example of Roman and Byzantine empresses, Amalasuintha and her supporters must have thought that she had such institutional power, but as Vitiello shows later in the work, there was most likely not a consensus over whether she did at the time.

Chapters 2 through 4 examine the phases of Amalasuintha’s life chronologically. Chapter 2, “Amalasuintha at the Palace of Ravenna: The Making of a Queen,” discusses Amalasuintha’s upbringing and Roman education in the Ostrogothic capital of Ravenna. Theoderic had Amalasuintha marry and bring to Italy Eutharic, a Visigoth who was purported to also be from the Amal line, to continue Amal rulership and allow for the acceptance of outsider by both the Byzantine emperor and the Ostrogothic aristocracy. Despite having an heir and Theoderic’s arranging for Eutharic to rule during his minority, Theoderic’s plans fell apart when Eutharic died in 522 or 523. Vitiello explains how in the last years of his reign, Theoderic placed his hopes for Amal rule on Amalasuintha, naming his grandson Athalaric as his heir and Amalasuintha as regent, a situation that was unprecedented in the Gothic world, but familiar both in late Roman Ravenna and in contemporary Constantinople.

Chapter 3, “A Regent with Imperial Ambitions,” focuses on Amalasuintha’s rule as regent, including difficulties with the Gothic aristocracy, and her work to repair the relationship between the Amals and the Byzantine emperor, the Roman Senate, and the Church. Based on a close reading of the major narrative sources, Vitiello shows that Amalasuintha fully ruled as regent during her son’s minority, and also argues that she modeled her position on late-Roman and

Byzantine empresses through her building of the royal palace, her appointment of the Roman Liberius to the highest military position, and her desire to educate Athalaric in a Roman fashion, which increased opposition by the Gothic aristocracy. The chapter ends with Athalaric's sudden illness and death soon before he came of age, and Vitiello successfully lays out the difficulties faced by Amalasuintha in order to explain how the coregency was her novel solution to maintain a right to govern that she already possessed.

Chapter 4, "Balancing Gothic Traditions with Roman Ideals," places the development and short duration of the coregency within the larger historical context, in order to understand Amalasuintha's intentions behind elevating Theodahad to the throne without marrying him. While Vitiello answers more traditional questions such as when Theodahad became coregent, the most interesting part of the chapter for scholars of medieval women or gender is the subsection "Reinventing Herself: Gender Reversal in the Co-Regency." Vitiello builds on his argument about Amalasuintha's imperial models by discussing coregency in late antiquity, asserting that the language Cassiodorus uses shows Theodahad as subordinate to Amalasuintha and in the traditionally female role.

Chapter 5, "Amalasuintha: A Meeting Point Between Kingdoms and Empire," analyzes Amalasuintha's innovations within the context of imperial and barbarian queenship in the fifth and sixth centuries, bringing in evidence from material culture to complement the written sources. In the epilogue, Vitiello discusses the implications of Amalasuintha's experiment in the development of early medieval queenship, particularly in Italy.

Overall, Vitiello provides a compelling argument that focuses on Amalasuintha's agency, as well as the options and exemplars available to her. Although the organization is generally successful, at some points discussion of historiographic questions and source issues detracts from his original contributions, and might be better addressed in a separate chapter, or more extensively in the footnotes. Nevertheless, this is an important work not only for those interested in gender and early medieval queenship, but also the transformation of the Roman world more generally.

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