

first book (1985) broached a significant historiographical theme relating to one key version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. The *Chronicles* and their chroniclers have preoccupied her for much of more recent decades, during which she has brought forth a brood of article-length studies, identifying locations, smoothing rough places, and unraveling mysteries, and, finally, producing a major work, now in press with Oxford University Press. It will surely need little, if any, revising for a very long time. The scale is—again—heroic: the outcome, a resolution of problems surrounding chronicles and chroniclers before and beyond the Conquest.

## The Influence and Importance of Pauline Stafford's *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers*

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I READ *QUEENS, CONCUBINES, AND Dowagers* for the first time during my first year of graduate school, and the book was a revelation to me about how one could study the power of medieval women, particularly through examination of the positions that medieval women held and the resources that they could control at each stage of their lives. One of the great strengths of *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers* is how accessible the writing style is. I had never studied early medieval history before I read this book—I had no idea who Lothar II was, nor did I know the difference between Louis the German and Louis the Stammerer—yet I could follow Pauline's argument and appreciate her points about the women of the Merovingian and Carolingian courts. I devoured the book in one sitting, then immediately went back to reread and take notes.

Two of the most influential aspects of the work for me were the ways that Pauline uses medieval sources and the emphasis that she places on the study of kinship networks. Medieval chronicles quite often use female behavior as an opportunity to moralize. Pauline read beyond the tropes of these narratives to study the situation of women in the early Middle Ages. Pauline has a talent for taking moralizing tales of piety or licentiousness and looking at the political and social reality. One example that always stayed with me was the story of King Edgar's attempt to woo and marry the nun Wulfhilde. According to the legend, he had the support of Wulfhilde's aunt, who was abbess of her nunnery, but Wulfhilde's

religious vocation won out, and the king ended up married to her cousin. Pauline argued that beyond the trope of the king burning with passion for the beautiful and virtuous nun, there appeared to be negotiations among her family members, shown by the involvement of her aunt. Edgar's eventual marriage to Wulfhilde's cousin suggests that a political alliance with Wulfhilde's kin-group was his goal. Kin-groups and networks of kin are central throughout *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers*. Pauline reminds us that men and women came with parents, brothers, sisters, aunts, and uncles, nieces, and nephews and cousins. Kin could provide support and alliances, or involve a new couple in feuds and wars.

The final thing, and the most influential on my own work, is the way that this book demonstrated that wives controlled the household treasure. Pauline uses the writings of Hincmar of Rheims and connects them to the poem *Beowulf* to show the role of the queen as the woman who controlled treasure and bestowed it upon favored members of the court. From this position within the court, and the way that queens could control wealth, patronage, and access to the king, it became clear to me that women in early medieval courts were powerful political actors at the center of government. This is where the breadth of this book really pays off. The range of examples shows that individual women were not exceptional, but that there were female roles—particularly wife, queen, mother, and widow—that gave women the opportunity for power and influence. The presentation of such a detailed analysis of female power, supported by examples of women from a wide geographical area and chronological span, opened my eyes to the possibilities of gender history and is the greatest triumph of this seminal book.

## Reflections on Pauline Stafford's Book, *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers*

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I FIRST READ *QUEENS, CONCUBINES, and Dowagers* in the late 1980s, when I was in graduate school and working on a dissertation project on royal women in medieval Spain. Accustomed to reading political history written by and about men, Stafford's book hit me like a thunderbolt that transformed my research methods, questions, and ultimately the