

Finally, *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers* incorporated a wide range of evidence touching on early medieval queens, but in the age of increasing digitalization of texts, objects, manuscripts, and archival catalogues, we now have greater access to the sources required to consider more deeply the material culture surrounding queens and their expressions of queenship. The extant remnants—from the tomb and body of Queen Edith of Saxony in Magdeburg to the image of Theophanu on the Codex Aureus of Echternach to the relics of Adelheid in the portable altar of Countess Gertrude—should be more fully integrated into queenship studies, alongside the current work of art historians and archaeologists. Indeed, Stafford herself incorporated non-textual sources into *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers*, such as the Otto–Adelheid–Pfenninge, yet current numismatic research and important details remain to be more broadly discussed, such as the fact that on a few surviving coins, Adelheid's name alone surrounds the bust. Furthermore, the rise of digitalized manuscripts allows us to see the visual dimensions of many texts, such as the place and position of Anglo-Saxon queens in royal charters' witness-lists.

As medievalists, we strive to provide new answers to old questions and to push scholarship in new directions. Yet, what Stafford did with her remarkable work went far beyond such routine academic labor. She illuminated a whole new area of inquiry, and pioneered a new way of analyzing historical figures left too long in the shadows. *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers* continues to be a guidepost to show us the way.

(Continuing) Inspiration from Stafford's Innovative Approach to Queenship

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STAFFORD'S *QUEENS, CONCUBINES, AND Dowagers* is a key work in the field of queenship studies and one that I repeatedly recommend to students, no matter what period they are studying. Indeed, although my own work is based in the late medieval period and some of my queenship modules (courses) extend past the French Revolution, I have still found Stafford's work on early medieval queens incredibly powerful and relevant to my teaching and research. For me, there are several elements of *QCD* that demonstrate the ground-breaking contribution of

this particular work that have ensured its long-term importance to the field, even pointing the way to research which still needs to be done over three decades later.

One element which is a real hallmark of *QCD* is its comparative approach, drawing together queens across England, France, and Germany from the sixth to the eleventh centuries. Queenship studies was born out of a long-term fascination with the lives of queens which had found expression over the years in premodern collective biographies such as Mary Hays's *Memoirs of Queens* and the Strickland sisters' *Lives of the Queens of England* as well as biographies of individual queens which have continued to form an important part of the academic field and popular market.⁴⁵ Yet Stafford took a different tack here by completely weaving the lives of various queens together, rather than individual full-length, or a series of short collective biographies. This collective, comparative approach combined with a transnational outlook that took in the whole of the early Middle Ages helped refocus the narrative on the challenges of queenship itself rather than the experience of one woman or a few particular individuals.

Another key element of *QCD* is the life-cycle-based approach which traces the important stages of queens' lives from "Bride to Be" to "Retirement and Death"—taking the full gamut of royal women's experience from childhood to tomb. Over the course of this exploration of the life-cycle, Stafford examined important aspects of the queen's role including marriage, childbirth, and maternity, management of the household, navigating the royal court, and engagement with secular politics and ecclesiastical powers. Her inclusion of and focus on dowagers was significant and pointed the way to an area which queenship scholars could arguably probe further today. While queens regent have clearly garnered a great deal of focus due to their enhanced visibility and more obvious political agency, and have been a deservedly popular area of study both individually and collectively, the lives of most dowager queens who did not serve as regents are underexplored.⁴⁶ There has also been considerable scholar-

⁴⁵ Mary Hays, *Memoirs of Queens: Illustrious and Celebrated* (London: T & J Allman, 1821); Agnes Strickland, *Lives of the Queens of England*, 12 vols. (London: H. Colburn, 1840–48). For further discussion of the role that collective biographies played in 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, 2018), 21–36.

⁴⁶ Excellent examples of work in this area include Katherine Crawford, *Perilous Perform-*

ship on widows and widowhood in medieval and early modern Europe, but it has not necessarily extended to extensive consideration of widowed queens.⁴⁷ Some scholars may have neglected this area of queenship as queens are often mentioned in many chronicles and histories only when they are bearing heirs and marrying kings, making them arguably harder to find after their childbearing years are finished and during widowhood. Yet turning to other documentary sources including financial records and letters can reveal the long and fascinating lives that many women had far beyond their period as a consort queen.

Joan of Navarre is a perfect example, having had two dowager periods, one of four years as dowager duchess after the death of her first husband Jean IV of Brittany and another twenty-four years as dowager queen from the death of Henry IV in 1413 until her own death in 1437. During her first dowager period she ably ruled Brittany for her young son while secretly arranging another marriage which upgraded her position from duchess to queen. Later, during her second widowhood in England, she continued to engage in local and international politics, maintained contacts on both sides of the Hundred Years' War, rebounded after a prolonged house arrest on a charge of witchcraft, and worked to maintain her queenly status, patronage, and connections, as well as assert her rights to her extensive properties in England and Brittany even as the generations between her and the throne widened. The assumption that dowager queens were all packed off to convents or were quietly rotting away on their dower estates is outdated and needs to be challenged with scholarship like Stafford's which includes, rather than ignores, this important third age of queenship. Stafford's life-cycle approach brought this element of queenship firmly into the discourse of the field. More scholars need to take up this banner and explore the full life-cycle of queens.

mances: Gender and Regency in Early Modern France (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Silvia Z. Mitchell, *Queen, Mother, Stateswoman: Mariana of Austria and the Government of Spain* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2019).

⁴⁷ For examples see the case studies in Sandra Carvallo and Lyndan Warner, eds., *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Harlow: Longman, 1999); an excellent study on the financial situation of widows in Rowena Archer, "Rich Old Ladies: The Problem of Late Medieval Dowagers," in *Property and Politics: Essays in Later Medieval English History*, ed. A. J. Pollard (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1984), 15–35; and Linda E. Mitchell's study of Joan de Valence's entire life-cycle including a substantial focus on her latter years as a widow: *Joan de Valence: The Life and Influence of a Thirteenth-Century Noblewoman* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

In sum, *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers* remains a highly significant and innovative work thirty-five years after publication. It is more than just a “classic” to be lauded and stuck on the shelf as part of the canon of queenship studies. Stafford’s work is still inspiring and challenges us to follow her lead and bring comparative and transnational dynamics to our own research and to examine the entire life-cycle of queens in order to increase our understanding of the lives of royal women and the practice of queenship itself. The innovative and exciting approaches showcased in *QCD* can be applied to any geographical region or temporal period to gain greater insights for the field at large. We should all be rereading the copies of *QCD* on our shelves and lending them to the next generation of queenship scholars to inspire and shape their own research.