

## Here's to the First Edition!

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THE LEEDS CITY PUBLIC library holds Pauline Stafford's 1983 book, *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers: The King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages*, in its original form, with the book cover intact—lovely to see because libraries so seldom keep the original presentation of a published work. Inside the front jacket flap is the sentence:

Between the sixth and the eleventh centuries, many kings' wives exercised a profound influence on the politics of Western Europe. At one stage in the 980s for example, France, Germany, and Italy were all ruled by female regents.

The next sentence is striking:

This is the first comprehensive account of these royal women and the means by which they came to enjoy such immense power.

It is astonishing to think that this statement might be true.

Let us examine some publications from the 1970s. David Herlihy's collected papers included formerly little-studied data about female populations and changes in power between AD 700 and 1500.<sup>22</sup> In Italy Josef Fleckenstein confirmed that Empress Theophanu "displayed a sure hand both at home and abroad."<sup>23</sup> Stafford herself noted Karl Leyser's *Rule and Conflict* as an excellent study on numerous women in tenth-century Germany, with much wider implications.<sup>24</sup> In 2007 Kimberley LoPrete highlighted the pioneering studies by McNamara and Wemple, Konecny, Nelson, Wemple, and Stafford herself ("Sons and Mothers").<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> David Herlihy, *The Social History of Italy and Western Europe, 700–1500* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1978).

<sup>23</sup> Josef Fleckenstein, *Early Medieval Germany*, ed. Richard Vaughan, trans. Bernard S. Smith, *Europe in the Middle Ages: Selected Studies* (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1978), 167.

<sup>24</sup> Karl J. Leyser, *Rule and Conflict in an Early Medieval Society: Ottonian Saxony* (London: Edward Arnold, 1979).

<sup>25</sup> Kimberley A. LoPrete, "Women, Gender, and Lordship in France, c.1050–1250," *History Compass* 5, no. 6 (2007): 1921–41, at 1923, 1933; Jo Ann McNamara and Suzanne

Consequently Stafford was already writing within a consciousness of the significance of elite women by at least certain historians.

The sources clearly show that from early medieval times ruling women wielded great power—in Merovingian hagiography, in Charlemagne's capitulary about estates (*De villis*, 16, 27), in Hincmar's governance of the palace (*De ordine de palatii*), in the tenth-century Anglo-Saxon gnomic poet, and in *Beowulf's* lady with the mead cup. Such examples undoubtedly demonstrate more than merely influence and agency. The strident public accusations of adultery against particular queens show that their authority must be destroyed openly. Nevertheless, many modern historians ignored the power vested in elite women.

Not so Pauline Stafford, who clearly recognized the authority and power of queens and queenly women in the early Middle Ages and, moreover, not only in the English-speaking world. Take for example the following partial sentence from *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers*:

the empress Adelaide kept the daughters of Berengar II at her court after their father had lost his kingdom. (112)

There is a wealth of content and context in that apparently simple sentence. In imprisoning Adelaide, queen of Italy, in 951, Berengar had broken his oath to Otto I “usurping the crown and arbitrarily arresting the legally acknowledged queen.”<sup>26</sup> Berengar remained king of Italy as a vassal of Otto. The long siege by Otto against Berengar and his wife Willa at the fortress at Montefeltro did not completely overcome the couple's on-going threat to Otto's Italian overlordship until their deaths. After the siege Berengar's daughters were *kept* at Adelaide's court, not at the court of her husband Otto I. Women were deemed important as items of negotiation as well as custodians of the kingdom. Well-educated aristocratic women often taught young men and women at court or from their monasteries. Stafford's short, effective sentence reminds us of another captive,

Wemple, “The Power of Women through the Family in Medieval Europe, 500–1100,” *Feminist Studies* 1, no. 3/4 (1973): 126–41, rev. rpt. (1981); Silvia Konecny, *Die Frauen des karolingischen Königshauses: Die politischen Bedeutung der Ehe und die Stellung der Frau in der Fränkischen Herrscherfamilie vom 7. bis zum 10. Jahrhundert* (Vienna: Verband der wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaften Österreichs, 1976); Nelson, “Queens as Jezebels”; Suzanne Fonay Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister, 500 to 900* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981); Stafford, “Sons and Mothers.”

<sup>26</sup> Fleckenstein, *Early Medieval Germany*, 145.

held as security in an earlier fraught time by Otto I at his court. Otto kept the under-age Conrad, Adelheid's brother and heir to the Burgundian kingdom, close by his side to ensure control of the kingdom.

While one partial sentence displays a wealth of content and context, I detect also an empathy, a getting under the skin of those historical figures. Consequently we understand more about the people and their motives, without impugning the integrity of the sources. The depth and thoroughness of Stafford's mastery of the subject show in every sentence and in her breadth of coverage.

Stafford continued that mastery in her subsequent publications. I would like to mention two other of her works that particularly influenced my own writing. The first is *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, in which Stafford showed that it was valid to compare the lives of two women from different centuries, how we could be enlightened about them through their life-cycles and in the structures in which they operated, and that such enlightenment was validly presented in a thematic rather than a chronological organization. The second is "Writing the Biography of Eleventh-Century Queens" (2006), in which Stafford writes "Structures and roles do not ... determine and write the individual, they become effective through the individual."<sup>27</sup> Here she sets out a theory of writing biography that she clearly applied to *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*. The above factors provided a model for the structure and content of my book, *Empress Adelheid and Countess Matilda*.<sup>28</sup>

In the last thirty-five years since the first edition of *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers*, certain matters concerning historical depictions of women still need attention. Language barriers still prevent cross-cultural interchange: we need more publications of mixed-language articles. Women's lives need to be integrated better into general history. Encyclopedias are still woefully short of female names. Words like "offspring" or "issue" are often assumed to be male only. By and large the field of medieval history and studies (and indeed *all* history) remains divided along gender lines. With a few notable exceptions, men write about men, and women write about women—and men.

Nevertheless, I am encouraged by the fact that the careers of queens, elite women, and women in general have been examined much more fre-

<sup>27</sup> Stafford, "Writing the Biography of Eleventh-Century Queens," 109.

<sup>28</sup> Penelope Nash, *Empress Adelheid and Countess Matilda: Medieval Female Rulership and the Foundations of European Society* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).