

quently—especially the roles that they took in disputes, in warfare, in negotiation, and when husbands and kin were absent. The precision and clarity that Pauline Stafford brought to her writing in the whole of her life’s work contributed in a major way to those shifts.

Arguing With Pauline Stafford

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WHEN I OPENED MY marked-up paperback copy of *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers* to prepare for our panel at Kalamazoo, and started rereading the preface to the original hardback edition, I realized, maybe for the first time, that Pauline Stafford had first published this book way back in 1983. That sent me down to the basement, to my box of work from Queen’s University to the essay I wrote there in 1987, a bibliographic survey of every book I could find on medieval women written in preparation for my senior year BA thesis on Christine de Pisan. 1987 was a time when an ambitious undergraduate could still hope to read every book in English (and some in French) on the subject of medieval women.

But Stafford’s *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers* was missing. It had not crossed my path; our library did not own it, or maybe it was too early medieval, too royal for a project that would look at the self-image of medieval women. The field of medieval women’s studies drifted in that general direction, away from attention to women in power, towards attention to women as subjects, especially religious subjects. I told Toronto in my graduate school application essay that I was going to work on Hildegard of Bingen, and that was a common direction through the 1980s and 1990s, especially in North America, following Caroline Bynum and Barbara Newman and others into the world of women mystics and gendered voices. So, I do not think I read Pauline Stafford at all until the 2000s when, first book in press, I began working on king’s daughters in early medieval Spain, and confronted directly the subject of women and power in the Middle Ages.

Stafford’s most useful works to me were her monograph, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, and even more, her two articles “Emma: The Powers of the Queen in the Eleventh Century” and “The Portrayal of Royal Women in England, Mid-Tenth to Mid-Twelfth Centuries,” both of which

I used regularly in my graduate class on “Gender, Power, and Religion in Early Medieval Europe.”²⁹ I taught that class last in spring 2017 while waiting for the publication of the book the course was designed to help me think through, and I realized, as I assigned the students the introduction to my book alongside the Stafford articles, that in ways only visible to me, my introduction is an argument with Stafford.

We do not argue with those we think are completely off base. We argue most with those who are close to us and inspire us; those on whose shoulders we stand. Taking another look at *Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers* allowed me to see how revolutionary Stafford was and how she pointed to revolutions yet to come.

The book covers the early Middle Ages, from 500 CE to the mid eleventh century. It is a key authorial choice to see this period as a unit and to separate it from the world after the Gregorian reform or 1066. Another choice, a momentous one, was to organize the book not chronologically, not geographically, but by the life-cycle of an ideal queen, with chapters on betrothal, marriage, motherhood, widowhood, and death. Stafford thus laid down a marker that queenship was a thing and that it could be studied as a thing, as a transnational phenomenon, not just as an accident of personality or of dynastic fortune.

Her argument that what a queen was, and how much power she held, depended on her stage in her own life-cycle is unquestionably the most long-standing legacy of her book, and it has dominated later studies of medieval queenship. It is a view I think needs a parallel argument—that the power of royal men also depends on their stage in their own life-cycle—an argument only possible because of Stafford’s focus on life-cycle. But it has been field-shaping.

I do regret that she excluded the Visigothic kingdom in favor of England, France, Germany, and Italy, though I understand why. We know little about Visigothic queens, and it was a field even less accessible then to non-specialists than the many others she opened up. But Visigothic monarchy was so influential on that of later European kingdoms in its adop-

²⁹ Pauline A. Stafford, “Emma: The Powers of the Queen in the Eleventh Century,” in *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe: Proceedings of a Conference Held at King’s College London, April 1995*, ed. Anne J. Duggan (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1997), 3–26; Pauline A. Stafford, “The Portrayal of Royal Women in England, Mid-Tenth to Mid-Twelfth Centuries,” in *Medieval Queenship*, ed. John Carmi Parsons (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1994), 143–67, 217–20.

tion of Byzantine formalities, and in the export of its legal tradition to the rest of Europe. Leaving it out means we do not see how much queenship in this period, depicted as a kind of steady state by her decision to proceed chronologically though the life of a composite queen, was, in my view, a time when queenship was invented. Queenship was in a state of becoming during this period.

Her second preface, a scant four pages long, written for the 1998 paperback edition, is incredibly rich. It points not only backwards to developments since the hardback, but towards how the field would develop and still is developing. She hits squarely on the problematic nature of the public/private dichotomy as “at best contestable and at worst misleading” for explaining the power of medieval queens (xv). She addresses the linguistic turn, the way “writing about women is often a vehicle used to comment on and think about other issues” (xvi). She discusses the long-standing debate about whether women lost power after 1100, and stakes her ground arguing for continuity in the roles of the medieval queen, which I think is where the field is for the most part right now. I myself might argue that, while women did not lose power across the board, in the early Middle Ages their power was derived from who their fathers and brothers were and by 1100 it was a product of who their husband was. This is why I prefer an argument that shows early medieval queenship in a state of becoming rather than as a stable institution.

I see that when I first read the book I underlined and starred page xviii from the 1989 preface, “I would wish to point to certain recurring structures, like the network of female relationships created by dynastic marriage.” Dynastic marriage, yes, and not only networks created through marriage. Stafford was prescient in her attention to networks of relationship as a source for and structure of power. Finally, on the same page she writes, “I would now end most firmly with a statement of the contingency of queenship and women’s power, if not of all power.” I might say “indeed of all power” but emphasis aside, this statement shows how attune with the current moment Stafford was—thirty years ago!