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1 Introduction to Early Modern European Queenship

When we think of a queen, dressed in lavish robes, dripping in jewels, wearing a crown, and sitting on a throne, we often conjure up images of Europe’s early modern queens. At the beginning of this era was the formidable Isabella of Castile, who reigned jointly with her husband Ferdinand of Aragon, conquered the Spanish Muslims, and funded Christopher Columbus’s initial voyage to the new world. Or, perhaps the most famous queen of all time, Elizabeth I of England, who reigned confidently as an unmarried virgin queen and gave her name to a particularly illustrious age of English history. More than any other queen in history, Elizabeth’s historical image has been perennially reproduced in countless popular histories, novels, and feature films.

Almost as famous was Elizabeth’s cousin and bête noire, Mary Queen of Scots, whose queenship has for centuries served as a historical counterpoint to Elizabeth’s allegedly much more successful reign. For generations of historians and novelists, the Mary Queen of Scots story was the cautionary tale of a tragic queen destroyed by her passionate romantic nature. And, at the end of the early modern era, we have the regal mastery of Catherine II of Russia, known during her lifetime as “the Great,” who deposed her husband and assumed his place on the throne as she furthered Russia’s progress towards modernity with firm yet enlightened imperial majesty.

Today, the queens of Early Modern Europe capture our popular imaginations in films and in cable television series like Reign, Ekaterina, Versailles, and Isabel, where they are usually cast as sexualized and romanticized heroines and villainesses. In the history of Early Modern Europe, however, queenship was not quite as exciting; there was very little that was romantic about queenship, while actual and consummated romantic love was a physical and emotional luxury that few queens ever enjoyed unless it happened within the context of their marriage. Queenship was in fact a vocation, in the sense that there were responsibilities to perform, such as being a wife, a mother, and a household and estate manager. This book seeks to uncover the processes
behind being a queen in Early Modern Europe, to flesh out the possibilities of what a queen could accomplish, and to measure the performances of Europe’s early modern queens as a uniquely trans-European phenomenon. While most Early Modern European kings remained in their kingdoms for the duration of their reigns, leaving only to fight wars or go on pilgrimages, their queens were drawn from a peripatetic class of women who functioned as the great pollinators of European culture and society, adapting to new homes in foreign kingdoms yet bringing their native cultures with them.

What emerges from the analysis of queenship in this book is a form of template that identifies certain trends and behaviors that proved to be identifiable strategies for queenly success and failure. As historian Clarissa Campbell Orr has noted, there is a difference between studying queens individually and studying the forms and means by which women exercised queenly power. Indeed, in Early Modern Europe there were numerous types of queens (to be discussed below) who exercised myriads of forms of power and influence within a variety of dynamic social, cultural, and political contexts. As Early Modern European monarchies “progressed” through the early modern era, so did forms of queenship, which played an integral role in Europe’s political, religious, and cultural life.

WHAT IS QUEENSHIP?

In their general usage, the terms “king” and “queen” are a binary construction, assigned to individuals like King Louis XIV of France or his Queen Maria Theresa of Spain. Most students of Early Modern European history tend to study the reigns of individual kings and queens, outlining their differences from one another in terms of intelligence, aptitude, accomplishments, and leadership ability. But there is also the study of kingship; the act of being a king, of inhabiting the role and exercising its powers. For the historian, this involves measuring and evaluating kingly strategies as they developed through time in response to the dynamic social and historical forces that shaped the history of Early Modern Europe. The study of kingship, rather than the study of individual kings, looks for similarities and patterns in the ways in which kings governed their kingdoms, rather than the differences between individual kings. Similarly, this book seeks to uncover the defining features of queenship. What were standard practices, if any, that most queens followed? Which strategies, observed over a three-century period, periodically led to queenly success or failure? How did queenship evolve over the early modern period in response to societal and religious pressures? Thus...
queenship, in the context of this book, is that collective body of experiences that European queens shared, which are reflective of or reactive to a pan-European template of queenship that possessed certain universal characteristics but was subject to regional variations.

WHAT IS A QUEEN?

As a descriptive term, “queen” is a bit more complicated than “king,” which does not need to be qualified to understand its meaning, unless of course the king is a consort, which was for the most part an anomalous, restrictive, and ambiguous male role. In contrast, in Early Modern Europe there were several different types of queens. The most prevalent form was a queen consort, a queen who enjoyed her title and position because she was married to a king, such as the French queens Catherine de Medici, Anne of Austria, and Marie Antoinette, and the six women whose fate it was to be married to Henry VIII of England. Most Early Modern European queens were this type of queen, and all the queens of monarchies that did not allow a female succession, such as France and the Holy Roman Empire, were consorts. In theory, European queen consorts were recognized as reigning alongside or in conjunction with kings, and they were often crowned and anointed either alongside their husbands or in separate ceremonies, which conferred even greater dignity as well as sanctity upon their queenships.

The notion that the wives of male monarchs should enjoy formal recognition of their status alongside their husbands has been well entrenched in virtually every human culture and has made the transition to modern, republican forms of government in the concept of a first lady. Like contemporary first ladies, queen consorts functioned as social helpmates to their husbands while presiding over the administration of their own royal household. As the premier married couple in their kingdoms, the most successful kings and queens were able to provide a positive example of domestic marital harmony and stability for their subjects to emulate, regardless of dynastic considerations that did not always consider compatibility a primary factor in the making of royal marriages.

If kings were idealized as the ultimate role model for their male subjects, emulating male gendered virtues such as leadership, martial virility, courage, rationality, and paternal care and protection, queens were expected to do the same thing for their female subjects, as the most successful of early modern consorts embraced Christian piety and chastity, compassion, charity, obedience to male authority, and motherhood while serving as intercessors between
Queenship in Early Modern Europe

a king and his subjects. But kings and queens also worked together for their mutual benefit. As Joseph F. O'Callaghan has argued, a successful royal marriage bolstered the power of kingship: “the queen who was honored, loved, and protected by her husband would love and honor him, and thus would offer a good example to all the people of the realm.”

But consorts also played more overtly political roles. As the wife of a king, they had access to their husband’s ear, especially in the royal bedchamber, away from the constraining influence of male advisors and the public and formal institutions of royal government. Consorts also possessed the ability to influence the distribution of patronage, an integral facet of royal power, and participate in the raising and education of their children. Some consorts were actively recruited for their potential to wield political power, like Louisa Ulrika, sister of Frederick the Great of Prussia, who was the power behind the throne of her weak-willed husband, Adolph Frederick of Sweden. But the most talented and politically adept consorts shared their husband’s royal power in various capacities and degrees, such as serving as regents for their husband when they were temporarily out of their kingdoms, usually to fight wars, or when there were multiple dominions under one crown, such as that of the sixteenth-century peripatetic Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, who employed his empress, Isabel of Portugal, as his regent in Spain. Additionally, queens often filled the political vacuum created when husbands were either incapacitated or unable to perform their duties as kings, such as the seventeenth-century Catherine of Braganza, who served as regent in Portugal for her brother, and the eighteenth-century Maria Carolina of Naples, who wielded a kingly authority in place of her husband Ferdinand IV during the years of revolutionary tumult and the Napoleonic Wars.

Yet even though Maria Carolina reportedly loathed her husband, it did not stop her from propagating the dynasty, which has always been the benchmark for queenly success. In fact, the production of heirs was the essential prerequisite for Maria Carolina’s assumption of regal power, as dynastic reproduction was the primary task of queenship in hereditary monarchies. Often queens were married soon after the onset of puberty, beginning annual reproductive duties for the duration of their childbearing years. Because of dynastic inbreeding, many queens were physically frail. Nonetheless, many spent much of their married lives pregnant, while death in childbirth was the leading cause of queenly mortality, as many early modern queens were literally bred to death, like Queen Claude, consort of Francis I of France, who died at age twenty-five after seven grueling pregnancies, which ruined her health. Conversely, several Holy Roman Empresses from Maria of Spain to Maria Theresa delivered upwards of a dozen children, most of whom survived to maturity.
Despite the dangers, pregnancy was always a welcome development, as even the most capable and popular of queens could find themselves sidelined by their inability to bear children, as the matrimonial career of Henry VIII of England aptly demonstrates. Other queens, however, such as Irina Godunovna, consort of Feodor I of Russia, overcame the handicap of childlessness to enjoy successful and productive queenships. Conversely, queens who suffered marginalization at the hands of their husbands, such as the French queens Catherine de Medici and Anne of Austria and Juliana Maria of Brunswick-Wolfenbuttel, queen of Denmark, later enjoyed enhanced political power following their husband’s deaths during the reigns of their underage sons.

Most early modern queens also strove to create a reputation for religious devotion. The most successful of early modern queens were also the most pious, a pan-European method of earning queenly prestige. This took several forms, such as attending church services regularly, dispensing charity to the poor and to religious houses, going on ritualistic pilgrimages to religious sites, often to pray for fertility, and setting an example of moral probity. Emulating the Virgin Mary, queens served as intercessors between king and subjects, as Catherine of Aragon famously did for the evil May Day rioters of 1517. The most ambitious of queens also founded and built monastic establishments, churches, hospitals, schools, and orphanages, while exhibiting Christian care for their subjects. Even secular-minded queens such as Catherine II of Russia were ostentatiously devoted to their religious observances and responsibilities.

With the notable exception of Catherine II’s Russia, guaranteeing the legitimacy of heirs was considered extremely important in hereditary monarchies. While kings were free to engage in extramarital sexual activities, queens needed to guard their chastity, both before and after marriage. Most European queens were surrounded in their own households by ladies who constituted a twenty-four-hour per day chaperone service, with the queen’s sexuality highly regulated within the structures of the royal court and her personal relationship with the king. On those occasions when the paternity of a royal heir was suspect, queens were subject to divorce or exile, such as Carolina Matilda of Denmark. Conversely, many queens had to accept the presence of royal mistresses and their progeny within the spaces of the royal court.

For the most part, with a few exceptions, royal and aristocratic women, and occasionally daughters of wealthy merchants, became queens because of arranged marriages which formed part of a treaty or diplomatic alliance, the way in which women from Catherine of Aragon to Marie Antoinette became queens. Indeed, the conduct of pan-European marriage brokering was a key factor in the making of Early Modern European dynastic alliances, as well as
a powerful source of queenly power. Negotiations, often conducted between royal and aristocratic women through kinship networks, included provisions for the dowry, the money and/or property the bride brought to the marriage from her family, as well as the dower, or jointure, which a king provided for his queen should she outlive him. The ability to broker the marriages of children and close relatives was the final benchmark for queenly success.

Once the marriage had been negotiated, a consort needed to walk the delicate line between loyalty to their homelands and their adoptive kingdoms. Thus, most consorts were foreigners in their kingdoms and were expected to learn the language and adopt the customs of their kingdom; not surprisingly, some of the more successful Early Modern European queens were brilliant linguists, which proved beneficial in relations with ambassadors as well as the conduct of marriage brokering. Second to their ability to perpetuate the succession, negotiating this process was a key element, whether to becoming a popular queen, like Caroline of Ansbach, who took a crash course in English language and customs prior to her arrival in England, or a detested one, like Elisabeth Farnese of Spain, vilified for her perceived contempt for the Spanish people. It was also advantageous for a queen to create a companionate marriage, which, along with the production of heirs, was the surest route to queenly power and influence.

For those consorts who survived their husbands into the reign of the next monarch, their status changed from consort to dowager. Dowager queens often retained much of the political and economic power they wielded as consorts if they were the mother to the next monarch. And, in the case of a royal minority, dowagers could function as regents for their underage sons, such as the French dowager queens Catherine de Medici, Marie de Medici, and Anne of Austria. Most dowagers gave up queenly apparel for widow’s weeds, signifying their devotion to their dead husband and legitimizing the power they wielded on their children’s behalf. Some dowagers, however, remarried, like Margaret Tudor, who married Archibald Douglas, Earl of Angus after the death of her husband, Scottish king James IV, or found a powerful male advisor to assist them in their minority governments, as Anne of Austria did with Cardinal Mazarin. But for dowagers who were unable to perpetuate a hereditary succession, like Catherine of Braganza, the consort of Charles II of England, their widowhoods were often spent in obscurity, as their queenly power and influence was assumed by the next queen consort.

But the next form of queenship is fundamentally different from either consorts or dowagers. Queens regnant, women who in hereditary monarchies inherited the kingly office usually because of a temporary lack of viable male heirs, occupied an anomalous position in Early Modern Europe. They were,
in form and function, *female kings*, women who inherited the estate and occupied the office of king. As such, they possessed the eternal body politic of kingship, as conceptualized in many European monarchies, but they bore the responsibilities of both kingship and queenship, as they were responsible for wielding kingly power as well as the queenly responsibility of providing for a hereditary succession. However, several early modern queens regnant, such as Elizabeth I of England and Christina of Sweden, came to their thrones unmarried but then declined to marry and instead provided for the succession through collateral male members of their ruling dynasties.

In comparison to their male counterparts as kings, queens regnant often faced significant obstacles to maintaining their authority. The most formidable problem that all regnant queens faced was that they were performing the male gendered role of king as women, a gender-bending role fraught with difficulties. Female rulers rarely played the role of military leader, one of the more visceral functions of kingship, with women limited to playing a military role in purely symbolic or allegorical terms. Female authority also ran counter to prevailing notions of female inadequacy and subordination grounded in biblical and classical texts. By and large, female rulers succeeded by demonstrating to their contemporaries that they were exceptions to these rules, rather than arguing against their veracity.

But since most Early Modern European queens were consorts, describing female kings as *queens* is theoretically analogous to describing contemporary female chief executives as *first ladies*, which both mislabels and obscures the actual political role they performed. In both English and the Romance languages, the terms *king* and *queen* are gender specific, which has meant that the female kings of Early Modern Europe have always been identified as queens. But despite the fundamental differences between consort and regnant queens, there was some permeability between these two seemingly distinct roles; while regnant queens frequently performed the office of king, they also performed the same queenly duties as queen consorts. Isabella of Castile was simultaneously a consort, as the queen of Ferdinand of Aragon, as well as regnant Queen of Castile. Mary Queen of Scots was born a regnant queen of Scotland but also served as a queen of France as the consort of King Francis II, only returning to Scotland to rule as queen after his death. Following her forced abdication and flight to England, Mary endured nearly twenty years of imprisonment as an exiled Scottish dowager queen. Perhaps the most striking example of a simultaneous consort and regnant was Maria Theresa of Austria. Unable to be elected Holy Roman Empress in her own right because of her gender, she nonetheless facilitated the election of her husband, Francis Stephen, who functioned as her *de facto* consort.
Another responsibility shared by queens, consort and regnant alike, was in personal adornment. Indeed, one of the easiest ways to chart the evolution of styles of clothing, hairstyles, shoes, and various queenly accessories, including coaches and jewels, is from early modern royal portraiture and material culture. Many queens took seriously the challenge to be the best coiffed, best dressed, and most bejeweled woman in their royal court, to bolster their influence as well as create their queenly legacy, which meant that queenly patronage extended to jewelers, wig makers, cobblers, clothiers, perfume makers, furriers, and purveyors of cosmetics. This was true of even the most devoutly religious queens, who also recognized that their role was to project the majesty of their kingdoms, particularly in religious spectacles such as coronations, christenings, and rituals surrounding the clerical holiday calendar. Purchasing jewels was a common pastime among Early Modern European queens, but jewels were not only for adornment; they also represented liquid assets when the monarchy was in trouble and needed quick cash. Isabella of Castile, Henrietta Maria of England, and a host of other queens routinely pawned their jewels to obtain emergency funds.

Personal adornment carried enormous weight in constructing an image of monarchy, not only for the royal court but also for the monarch’s subjects who, by and large, grew progressively more literate and aware of the functions of monarchy, including that of queenship, over the course of the early modern era. Queens not only appeared in court and went on procession through their kingdoms; they also were painted, often with their children, and if widowed in their widow’s weeds, to create an image of queenship for public consumption. The ability to create representations of their queenships was a form of “soft power” in which subjects were persuaded to support the regime by the messages embedded in commissioned works of art and building projects such as churches and monasteries. Queens also worked to make Europe increasingly more cosmopolitan. Adam Morton has discussed how queens across the continent of Europe created “cultural encounters” by patronizing foreign artisans, musicians, writers, and scientists, stimulating the export of both the Renaissance and the later Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment to Central, Eastern, and Northern Europe.

QUEENSHIP AND EARLY MODERN EUROPE

The early modern era in Europe (circa 1500–1800) bridged the medieval and modern epochs. This was a period when many aspects of what can be termed as modernity crept into the many differing facets of European culture, society,
economics, and politics, represented by the Renaissance and Reformation, the European Enlightenment and Scientific Revolution, and the transition from providential to material world views. We generally consider the epoch to properly begin with the spread of the Italian Renaissance to Western, Central, and Northern Europe at the end of the fifteenth century and to end with the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789. At the beginning of this period, the rebirth of classical civilization reinvigorated European culture both intellectually and artistically, as medieval queenship gave way to a more literate and worldlier Renaissance queenship; queens such as Elizabeth I of England and Christina of Sweden rank among the most educated rulers of the entire early modern epoch. Queens with access to patronage, such as Marie de Medici of France and Catherine II of Russia, were great art collectors and patrons of Renaissance artists from Titian to Rubens and Velasquez, an important component of queenly legacy building.

The discovery of the new world and the formation of global empires broadened the perspective of queenship as early modern queens consort and regnant emerged as global figures on the world stage. Isabella of Castile, noted for her Christian piety, a textbook strategy for successful queenship, initiated the conversion to Christianity of the indigenous peoples of the New World. Elizabeth I of England hid behind the screen of plausible deniability while rewarding pirates like Francis Drake and John Hawkins for their audacious attacks on trans-Atlantic Spanish shipping, while at the end of her reign Elizabeth granted a charter to the East India Company, heralding the beginning of the British Empire. A century later, Queen Anne of Great Britain presided over her empire’s participation in the War of the Spanish Succession, the first truly globalized European war, and at the end of her reign pushed through the ratification of the Peace of Utrecht (1713) in the face of significant domestic opposition. In Eastern Europe, Catherine II of Russia brought increasing numbers of Muslims and other ethnic minorities under the rule of an imperial Russian empire.

Queens also played significant roles in the religious changes that swept the early modern period. The Protestant Reformation, which shattered the medieval unity of the medieval Christian Church, and the Counter-Reformation, in its efforts to revitalize the Roman Catholic Church, provided the context for European queens of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to play pivotal roles on the European stage. Isabella of Castile played a central role in initiating the Spanish Inquisition, founded to root out Jewish and Muslim conversos in Spain. In Scotland and in France, Mary of Guise and Catherine de Medici played the queenly role of peacemaker in their attempts to mediate the religious polarizations of sixteenth-century Europe. In England, the
Tudor half-sisters Mary I and Elizabeth I, operating from opposite poles of Christian belief, played significant roles in the religious history of their kingdom, while Stuart queen consorts of the seventeenth century practiced a Catholicism at odds with the religious beliefs of most of their subjects, contributing to the causes of both the English Civil War and the Glorious Revolution.

Elsewhere in Europe, Christina of Sweden, who strove to achieve the platonic model of a philosopher king, converted to Roman Catholicism, which led to her abdication. Conversely, Catherine II of Russia, a Protestant German by birth, shed her native Lutheranism to embrace the Russian Orthodox religion that served as a powerful bolster to her power as empress and tsarina. In a much broader sense, Holy Roman Empresses Consort practiced a form of religious devotion known as the *pietas austriaca* to bolster the power and influence of their queenships, while also serving as patrons of baroque artists to create visual representations of their queenships. While the Protestant Reformation created a confessional divide between Catholic and Protestant kingdoms that restricted the pre-Reformation pan-European kinship network, the breach was not insurmountable, with several queens converting to Catholicism and vice versa, while others, such as England’s seventeenth-century Catholic queens, maintaining their religion despite the hostility of their adopted country.

The development of Protestant denominations and the continued rise of European literacy, a direct result of the invention of the printing press, brought Early Modern European queenship under increased critical scrutiny, symbolized by the 1558 publication of John Knox’s notorious treatise, *First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, which cited classical and scriptural evidence to argue against female rule. For the remainder of the early modern era, European queens often faced pressure and resistance to their authority and their influence from the increasingly literate societies over which they reigned. Consorts who failed to culturally adapt to their adopted homelands were often lampooned or attacked in various forms of print media, as Marie Antoinette and the Catholic queen consorts of seventeenth-century England learned to their detriment.

The early modern era also witnessed the increasing sophistication and secularization of European economies and the rise of monarchical absolutism, which placed considerably more power in the hands of early modern queens than their medieval counterparts. Royal women all over Europe played the role of dynastic marriage brokers, influencing the balance of power between France, Britain, and Spain, the principalities of Italy and the Holy Roman Empire, and the Baltic regions and the Russian Empire. Other queens, such as...
Bona Sforza of Poland and Sophie of Mecklenburg-Güstrow of Denmark, set examples as sound business and estate managers.

Over the course of the eighteenth century, the transition from providential to material world views and the development of the Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution all affected the evolution of Early Modern European queenship, as Christina of Sweden, Maria Theresa of Austria, and Catherine the Great of Russia endeavored to present themselves to their subjects as enlightened monarchs. Conversely, Marie Antoinette of France found herself the victim of increasingly modern notions of statehood that were at odds with the public’s perceptions of her as queen, as the French Revolution put into action the ideologies of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Nonetheless, the forms and functions of medieval queenship continued to inform how the queenly role was performed throughout the early modern era, especially in the continued emphasis on wifely chastity, queenly religiosity, the intercessory role, and the raising of royal children and the brokering of royal marriages.

**EARLY MODERN EUROPEAN QUEENSHP IN HISTORY**

Most Early Modern European queens did not enjoy the luxury of controlling the narratives of their queenships, which were usually created by contemporary male commentators, who were usually more focused on describing kingly rather than queenly activities. Conversely, women historians were often drawn to the subject of queens, perhaps most strikingly in Agnes Strickland’s sprawling eight-volume mid-nineteenth-century *Lives of the Queens of England*. This work, influenced by the social mores and gender stereotypes of early Victorian Britain, presented its queens as individualized studies who did not necessarily have any historical relationship with each other, nor did Strickland suspect that their collective experiences might add up to something called English queenship. Most historians have followed this model in their respective studies of European queens.

Studies of continental queens also mostly appear as individualized studies. The most recognizable, Isabella of Castile, Catherine de Medici, Marie Antoinette, Christina of Sweden, and Catherine II of Russia, have long been the subjects of historical inquiry and have captured the lion’s share of historical attention directed towards early modern continental queenship. In the cases of Isabella and Catherine II, conventional biographical studies usually consider these queens as exceptional women whose achievements are considered unusual for the female sex, while assessments of Mary Queen of Scots and Marie Antoinette inevitably lead to the trope of a tragic queen, unable to
cope with the harsh realities of royal politics. Then there are the rest of the early modern queens, whose reigns are usually considered unimportant side-shows to the reigns of their husbands, but whose collective experiences are, like those of their more famous colleagues, also critical in assessing early modern forms of queenship.

Most of the recent comparative work on early modern queens has concentrated on either regnant or consort queenship. Studies of consorts, despite their obvious strengths, usually exist in splendid isolation from each other, although Clarissa Campbell Orr published a pair of well-received volumes on both early modern British and European consorts in the first few years of this new century, while Helen Watanabe O’Kelly and Adam Morton published a wide-ranging volume on early modern consortship in 2016. These and other recent studies have employed the strategies of gender studies, which have done much to transform our understanding of women in history, particularly queens. As social historians integrated studies of race and class to broaden our historical perspective from “the bottom up,” feminist scholars have deployed gender analysis as a mean to understand how women staked out and contested forms of power and influence in Early Modern European societies. As Joan Scott made clear in a groundbreaking article from the 1980s, the social construction of gender roles for men and women was the construction of systems of power.

As feminist-oriented scholars have rightly pointed out, queenly power and influence is often obscured in conventional histories. To quote a much-abused cliché, most histories that discuss women were written by men for other men with a narrow definition of what constituted queenly power. While historians, most of them men, in the past identified narrow parameters in their definitions of queenly power, feminist historians have broadened this scope, rejecting more traditional notions that only located the exercise of power within the public and formalized spaces of royal government and administration. Instead, feminist historians have identified those more informal or private spaces where queenly power and influence was routinely exercised, in terms of marriage brokering, educating their children, running their royal households, managing their estates, directing the distribution of patronage, patronizing prominent artists and scholars who created forms of material culture with visual and literary representations of queenly power, and setting examples of queenly piety and charity.

The following chapters comprise a set of comparative case studies which conceptualizes a series of four concentric circles emanating out of Europe’s major kingdoms – England, Scotland, and Great Britain; Iberia and Spain; the Holy Roman Empire and the Habsburg dominions; and Denmark, Sweden,
Poland/Lithuania, Prussia, and the Russian Empire – which illustrate the trans-European character of European queenship. Each chapter begins with an introductory discussion of a queen whose queenship was emblematic of that region before moving on to a broader chronological discussion of queenship within that geographical area.

ISABELLA OF CASTILE: BRIDGING THE MEDIEVAL AND THE EARLY MODERN

As the following chapters all open with a historical description of a queen emblematic to that region, this introduction concludes with an examination of one of Europe’s most influential queens, Isabella of Castile (1451–1504), whose Janus-like figure straddled the medieval and early modern epochs. The daughter of King Juan II of Castile (r. 1406–1454) and his second wife Isabella of Portugal, Isabella was recognized as heir to her elder half-brother Enrique IV (r. 1454–1474), after the death of her younger brother Alfonso in 1568. We know very little of Isabella’s actual education, other than that her father had assigned courtier Gonzalo Chacon as her tutor. Isabella also received a form of queenly tutelage from both her Portuguese grandmother, Isabella de Barcelos, and her own mother, who suffered from mental illness during her widowhood. Isabella’s own sense of royal deportment and destiny was undoubtedly instilled in her by these women. Isabella was also trained in the domestic arts, like all the queens of Early Modern Europe. This is exemplified by her skill at needlework, which she displayed throughout her life, making her husband Ferdinand’s shirts for him, a skill passed down to her daughter Catherine of Aragon, who performed the same task for her husband Henry VIII of England. Isabella was also exposed to and trained in the ideals of chivalry, especially cherished by a Crusader kingdom determined to expel the Moors from Spain.

As a Castilian female heiress, marriage was an inescapable part of Isabella’s future, as it was for nearly all Early Modern European queens. But as a woman who was heir to the powers and prerogatives of Castilian kingship, how this would be affected by marriage remained to be decided. Just prior to her marriage to Ferdinand of Aragon, Martin de Cordoba, an Augustinian friar, presented Isabella with a copy of A Garden of Noble Maidens, a treatise on Eve and original sin, whose fundamental message was that a woman could be an effective leader provided she avoided the pitfalls of her feminine nature, by acknowledging her shortcomings and having checks, like a husband, on their power.25
Nonetheless, Isabella was determined to be her own woman within the context of her marriage. In direct defiance of both her brother Enrique IV and wider European social mores which dictated that unmarried women submit to the will of their male guardian, Isabella chose as her husband her cousin Ferdinand, heir to the Aragonese and Sicilian thrones, a distant cousin whose royal line was a cadet branch of the Trastamara dynasty. It appears that Isabella selected Ferdinand of her own free will, and married him in haste in Valladolid on October 19, 1469, when she was eighteen and he one year younger.

While Isabella unquestionably developed a genuine love for her husband, the marriage also made sense dynastically, uniting Castile and the various states under the crown of Aragon, and in the long term, resulting in the eventual political unification of Spain. In terms of land and resources, Castile was by far the larger, wealthier, and more powerful kingdom; Ferdinand possessed little leverage in the marriage negotiations. But just as important were Isabella's intelligence and force of character, which compelled her to clearly outline her expectations for the power sharing that would ensue when she became Queen of Castile. In acquiescing to the terms of the Capitulaciones, a form of pre-nuptial agreement, Ferdinand gained Isabella's hand by recognizing her position as sole proprietress of the Castilian crown and its powers and prerogatives. He also agreed to obey Castile's laws and pledged to not take Isabella or their future children out of the kingdom.

At the same time, Isabella couched other aspects of the agreement firmly within acceptable gendered parameters. Ferdinand would take precedence over her and they would sign everything jointly and share all titles. This agreement set a European precedent for future queens regnant; Isabella and Ferdinand's great grandson Philip II agreed to all these stipulations in a marriage contract ratified as a parliamentary statute prior to his marriage to Mary I of England in 1554, which was used as the prototype during various marriage negotiations for Elizabeth I of England. While it may partially be the result of a highly successful hegemonic hagiography surrounding their marriage, contemporaries and subsequent scholars have agreed that Ferdinand and Isabella were entirely successful at creating the perception that they loved and respected one another, the cornerstone of their public images as monarchs. Their successful marriage also created a positive example for their married subjects to emulate, an archetypal function of monarchy.

Although the marriage was successful as royal marriages go, Isabella demonstrated her monarchical independence following her brother's death on Dec. 11, 1474. Unlike other Western European states such as England and France, kings of Castile were not crowned, but underwent a form of inauguration, usually an acclamation, that signified their accession to the throne.
Isabella wasted no time by literally proclaiming herself Castile’s next sovereign in Segovia before Ferdinand could join her and participate in her accession. Ferdinand was somewhat alarmed; Isabella had borne before her the sword of justice, which had previously only been done for Castilian kings, which, on paper, Ferdinand now was.

But Isabella knew exactly what she was doing. Early on, she realized that if she were to be a successful queen, her marriage must be perceived as harmonious. Although they had been married for five years prior to Isabella’s accession, her new status as queen inaugurated an initial period of adjustment as the issues of joint sovereignty were negotiated between the pair. In his acquiescence to Isabella’s sole proprietorship of the Castilian throne, Ferdinand shared jointly in aspects of his wife’s royal prerogative, serving as her military commander in Castile. In time, Isabel relaxed the restrictions of the Capitulaciones, allowing Ferdinand wider latitude in his position as a representation of their joint selves, symbolized by the motto, “Tanto monta, monta tanto” (“It’s one and the same, Isabella the same as Ferdinand”).

As Christian belief comprehended marriage as being of one flesh, Isabella and Ferdinand gave this concept a tangible political dimension by the way in which their joint power flowed between them and out into their kingdom, which allowed Isabella to enjoy her sovereign rights as queen without damage to Ferdinand’s masculine reputation as king consort. While she herself exercised the prerogatives of kingship within her council chamber, for public consumption Isabella inhabited the more recognizable role of queen, even though she was, for all intents and purposes, Castile’s ruling prince, while Ferdinand inhabited the recognizable male gendered role of king. By playing public roles that outwardly conformed to gendered expectations for kingly and queenly behavior, Isabella never became the target for the kind of theoretical challenges to female rule that plagued later sixteenth-century regnant queens.

Isabela was also able to reap the final benefit of a long-lived queenship by playing the role of dynast and marriage broker. While Isabella’s success as queen was not questioned, Castile remained a kingdom, which required heirs, preferably male, to perpetuate the dynasty. Isabella gave birth to her namesake daughter in 1470 but her next pregnancy did not occur until 1475, during the succession war with Afonso V of Portugal and Juana La Beltraneja, the daughter of Enrique IV. This pregnancy resulted in the stillborn birth of a son, which represented a clear conflict between Isabella’s kingly and queenly imperatives. Only with the conclusion of this war did Isabella conceive again, giving birth to her son and heir Juan in Seville in 1478. Three more daughters followed, Juana in 1479, Maria in 1482, and Catalina (or Catherine of Aragon) in 1485. The birth of Isabella and Ferdinand’s male heir was wildly celebrated.
Queenship in Early Modern Europe

in the Spanish kingdoms as it conferred even greater legitimacy upon Isabella’s
queenship, which was interpreted not only as a sign of God’s approval but as an
assurance that the dynasty would revert once again to a line of male kings. But
Juan’s untimely death in 1497, at age 19, after his marriage to the Habsburg
Archduchess Margaret of Austria, the daughter of Holy Roman Emperor
Maximilian I, meant that Isabella would be succeeded by one of her daughters.

It was in the raising of her four daughters that Isabella displayed her
flair for queenship, as opposed to the kingly prerogative she exercised as
a queen regnant. Rodrigo Maldonaldo de Talavera, in the printed version
of a 1475 sermon, counseled her to raise her children in good works and
emulate the noble customs of Old Testament matriarchs, citing the chastity
of Sarah, the modesty and diligence of Rebecca, Leah’s hard work, and the
discretion and judgment of Deborah. Above all, de Talavera emphasized
the virtues of the Virgin Mary, whose perfect humility and compassion
served as a contrast to the laziness, chatter, and light life of Eve, that Old
Testament archetype of failed womanhood. Isabella’s daughters also
received Renaissance humanist educations. Isabel herself lamented her
own relative lack of scholarship, and in the middle of her life painstakingly
learned Latin not only to demonstrate her intellectual equality with
other Renaissance princes, but as an example for her own daughters, all
of whom would shoulder the burdens of Renaissance queenship themselves.

Isabella’s daughters were raised to be queens, and the marriages Isabella
brokered for them balanced intra-Iberian and wider European dynastic
concerns. The eldest, Isabella, had been recognized as her mother’s heir in
Castile until the birth of her brother, and was married to Afonso, Prince of
Portugal, in 1490. Following her husband’s death in 1491 and her brother’s in
1497, which made her once again Castile’s heir, Isabella married Manual I of
Portugal, and died in childbirth. Following the death of Isabella’s infant son
Miguel in 1500, Isabella’s oldest surviving daughter, Juana, married to Philip
the Handsome of Burgundy, Margaret of Austria’s brother, became Castile’s
heir. Juana was allegedly mentally unstable, although she had produced a
bumper crop of male and female heirs who would continue the Habsburg line
in both Spain and the Holy Roman Empire.

ISABELLA’S QUEENLY LEGACY

Early on in her reign, like other Renaissance monarchs, Isabella recognized the
power and utility of the written word to create both her public image and her
historical legacy. Over the course of her reign, Isabella patronized a team of
influential hagiographers, Fernando del Pulgar, Alonso de Palencia, and Elio Antonio de Nebrija, whose works extolled her legitimacy, her virtues, and her accomplishments, as well as the success of her marriage, laying the historical cornerstones of her reputation as a good queen who engineered the moral and religious regeneration of Spain.\textsuperscript{30}

Isabella also recognized the power of material culture in the creation of her public image, another form of “soft power” that persuaded her subjects of the righteousness of her queenship. In the public spaces of her royal court, Isabella displayed her skill in adorning herself with rich fabrics and jewels that represented the wealth and prosperity of her kingdom. Because Ferdinand outlived her, Isabella never had to resort to dressing in the spare and somber widow’s weeds adopted by Mary of Guise, Anne of Austria, and Maria Theresa, queens who experienced lengthy widowhoods. Instead, like her granddaughter Mary I of England, Isabella was free to drape herself in dazzling apparel and jewels within the spaces of a royal court that practiced ritual and spectacle to project queenly power and majesty. One contemporary, Rodger Machado, claimed he never saw the Queen in the same outfit twice.\textsuperscript{31}

But what worked for the present did not necessarily work for creating her legacy. As Marvin Lunenfeld has noted, Isabella preferred to be depicted in portraiture in conservative dress, often veiled and kneeling in prayer or with her eyes downcast, quite unlike Elizabeth I of England and Catherine II of Russia, who both represented themselves in portraiture in lavish dress, wearing wigs, and dripping in precious stones as they make eye contact with the painting’s audience.\textsuperscript{32} A similar dichotomy existed in Isabella’s behavior at court. While Ferdinand had a wandering eye, eventually siring three illegitimate children, a son and two daughters, whom he acknowledged, Isabel recognized that her own wifely chastity was crucial to maintaining her authority, refusing even to dance at court with other men if her husband was not present, despite the gaiety and splendor of her courtly entertainments. At the same time, Isabella encouraged a dialogue that employed gallantry, flowery praise, and the language of courtly love, a form of discourse Elizabeth I of England would later develop to dazzling heights. Isabella’s confessors had a difficult time adjusting to such Renaissance forms of courtly life, which Isabella assured them was part and parcel of maintaining a successful queenship. But nearly all contemporaries who described her reign downplayed this aspect of her queenship, emphasizing her virtues and piety rather than the racy dialogue of courtly love.

Isabella also erected architectural monuments to celebrate the many facets of her queenship, one of the most durable forms of queenly image-making. In Miraflores, just outside Burgos, Isabella commissioned a magnificent
tomb for her parents Juan II and Isabella of Portugal within the Carthusian monastery that had originally been built as a royal palace. As a good daughter, Isabella elevated her parents to a place they had not achieved in their own lifetimes, as symbols of the power and prestige of the Castilian monarchy, with their effigies flanked by Old Testament prophets and angels guarded by the four evangelists. More than anything, the tomb’s iconography emphasized the complementary functions of kingship and queenship that Isabella and Ferdinand’s reign personified. The same message can be found in the church of San Juan de los Reyes in Toledo, which was adorned with eagles, sibyls, and images of St. John the Evangelist, Isabel’s patron saint. Like her parent’s tomb, the church’s iconography is a powerful testament to the indivisibility and success of Isabella and Ferdinand’s marriage and the strength and durability of the Castilian monarchy.

Isabella and Ferdinand’s own tomb at the chapel royal in Granada remains her final material testament. Isabella considered the conquest of Granada her greatest achievement, and in her final months she and Ferdinand made the decision that a joint tomb be built for them within the Alhambra. Isabella had requested that the tomb be humble, rather than ornate, in keeping with her attitude towards the construction of her historical legacy. Because the decision to construct the tomb had been made just a few months prior to her own death in November 1504, Isabella was not able to supervise its construction, which Ferdinand completed. The tomb turned out much grander than she had envisioned, with two gold sarcophagi sitting center stage in a marble mausoleum decorated with cherubs. But on the altar is a polychrome wood carving of Isabella, which depicted her in somber Franciscan dress, with her hair in a wimple and her eyes downcast, reflective of the piety and the austerity of her life that she wished her queenship to be remembered for.

Isabella’s reign makes an instructive beginning for this study of Early Modern European queenship, as her reign virtually defined the template of Early Modern European queenship. At the end of her life, Isabella was recognized throughout Europe as a legendary queen as well as a Catholic king, who transcended the gendered differences between men and women, as Pedro Martir noted in 1502, two years before her death, “stronger than a strong man, more constant than any human soul, a marvelous example of honesty and virtue; nature has made no other woman like her.”33
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