

Why Eastern Women Matter:
The Influence of Byzantine Empresses on Western Queenship during the Middle Ages

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For Mom and Dad

And

For Professor Tanner

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Introduction

In the English language, the adjective “byzantine” has a rather negative connotation, meant to describe a situation as deviously complicated. This usage of the word indicates a general, negative view of a medieval culture and civilization that lasted for over one thousand years and influenced western culture in profound and important ways. As a historian, it is one’s job to analyze the past in a way that brings cohesion to events, linking them into themes and trends that stretch across centuries and illuminate all aspects of the human experience. Only within the past three decades has scholarly emphasis been expanded from the male rulers of medieval Europe to the examination of the lives and influence of other groups or individuals, with a fair amount of work on queens and elite women being produced only within the last fifteen years. These two trends have led to an absence of study concerning the influence of Byzantine culture on the roles of women in medieval Europe. This work synthesizes various scholarly works dealing with early medieval queens and empresses to show the subtle but important influence Byzantine concepts and practices had in the west.

Queenship is a concept that evolved throughout the Middle Ages and varied in each kingdom. Medieval queenship in Merovingian Frankia, melded ancient Gallo-Roman traditions with Germanic tribal practices. The queen held a unique place in the kingdom because the political realm moved into the home, transforming both the domestic and the political activities of the realm. Four main areas of queenly power existed: religious patron, mistress of the household, royal adviser, and regent. Clothild, the wife of the first Merovingian king, Clovis, was a saint and queen. She served as a role-model for future Merovingians as well as the later Carolingians because of her

dedication to religious patronage and her success as a domestic ruler. Her successor, Radegund, a saint as well, served as an example of a devout woman dedicated to religious patronage. Two later Merovingian Queens, Brunhild and Balthild, are good examples of a queen's power as regent. All of these women's lives were recorded in chronicles or hagiographies, preserved for future generations.

One of the future generations to draw upon the lessons left by Merovingian queens was the Carolingians, upstarts and successors to the Merovingians. When Charlemagne became the first emperor in 800 AD, he and his successors built upon the Merovingian tradition by adopting and adapting Byzantine imperial dress and ceremony for special occasions in order to strengthen the legitimacy of the new empire. This adoption boosted the legitimacy of the Carolingians' claim to the imperial title because their subjects had a basic idea of what emperors and empresses should look like based upon various media carrying the imperial image that permeated the west, namely shipyard weights, coinage, and mosaics. Intermarriage between the two great courts was another tactic pursued by the Carolingians in order to gain imperial legitimacy; a tactic that never bore fruit, but had the side-effect of bringing Byzantine training to the potential Carolingian brides. This schooling changed the royal women's perception of what was expected of them as queens and empresses, and the ways in which they could exercise power in these roles.

The Ottonian dynasty, a family of rulers who succeeded to the imperial throne after the end of the Carolingian line in the eastern part of the Carolingian empire, inherited this obsession with legitimacy and intermarriage from their predecessors. Theophano, a Byzantine princess, married Otto II in 972 AD, producing the first

successful marriage between east and west after nearly two hundred years in pursuit of this goal. Entering an already strengthened concept of Saxon-Italian queenship, Theophano exercised a great deal of power during the reign of her husband as *coimperatrix* and after his death as regent of her young son. While one might expect such a woman to bring an efflorescence of Byzantine culture to the west, Theophano sought to adapt herself to the kingdom and system she ruled over instead of attempting to abruptly change it, training her son in Byzantine governance in the hope that he would be able to slowly change the Germanic ruling system. Unfortunately for Theophano, she suffered an early death, as did her son, and their goal of adopting Byzantine institutions to German governance died with them. The dream of a reunited Roman empire faded and a religious revival in the west began to paint the Byzantines as corrupt inferiors rather than as dazzling superiors. These changes took the concept of queenship in new directions, away from the purple-clad, ceremony bound empresses of the east.

From the time of Clovis to the death of Theophano, the concept of queenship evolved from its Germanic origins to incorporate aspects of the great influence, dynastic importance, and ceremonial significance afforded Byzantine empresses, changing how western queens were perceived by others and themselves.

Chapter One

What is in a queen? Expectations and realities of queenship in the west as established in Merovingian Frankia

There are several methods by which one can come to understand what it meant to be a queen in medieval Europe. One cannot simply generalize about an institutionalized role in which there were strict expectations for action when talking about queens; a royal woman's role was multifaceted and fluid because of the few extant institutions in the custom based medieval society. In addition, the sources upon which one must draw to get an adequate understanding of queenship pose difficulties. A major challenge is the lack of documents that focus specifically on a queen's actions; most charters, laws, and treaties deal with relationships between kings. When queens are mentioned in chronicles, it is usually in passing rather than as the subject of the tale. Faced with the dual difficulties of an uncertain manner by which to characterize the office of queenship and a lack of a copious pool of sources from which to draw, the historian must be cautious when making assertions. One should not rely solely upon descriptions of a single queen or the assertions of a contemporary author, despite the limited sources. Two methods can be simultaneously employed to gain a more accurate picture of queenly activity. First, one can limit the scope of one's inquiry to a particular location or general cultural area to limit the number of differences and maximize the similarities among the queens being used to make generalizations. The second method is to use a wide variety of the types of sources in order to get a balanced idea of contemporary expectations and actions of queens. Both of the aforementioned methods shall be employed throughout the following investigation, which explores the nature of queenship in western Europe. To effectively establish that concept it is necessary to focus on Merovingian Frankia and, to a lesser

extent, Italy, since it is these two areas and this era which shaped the practice of queenship in the Carolingian Empire and Ottonian Germany (part of which was northern Italy). By limiting the concept and understanding of queenship to the two earlier areas it becomes possible to establish general expectations for the way in which a woman would exercise her position as royal partner during later periods. Merovingian queens were in charge of the royal household, played an important role in religious patronage, and exercised the greatest amount of power as regents for their young sons.

In recent decades there has been substantial work on the subject of queenship and a discussion of how to properly evaluate female royal power. There is no need for one to ‘reinvent the wheel’ when it would be far more effective to draw upon the scholarship that is available with some reference to the primary sources to emphasize certain important points. The main analysis of early medieval queenship and the parameters of evaluation will be drawn from two scholars who specialize in the area, Pauline Stafford and Janet Nelson. Both of these historians have contributed much to the field and it is Nelson who argues that it is invalid to evaluate queens and queenly power in the same manner as kings. How one considers the word power must be adjusted. Power, for Nelson, is something that is not necessarily tangible and includes such actions as advising the king. Her expanded view on power allows for a wider scope of inspection of the exercise of queenly power, including the social and political, the informal and the formal.¹ For Stafford power is the ability to wield authority and to influence international interactions.² Janet Nelson’s work on Merovingian queenship and western queenship in

¹ Janet L. Nelson, “Medieval Queenship,” Women in Medieval Western European Culture, ed. Linda Mitchell (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999) 179.

² As quoted by: Liz James and Barbara Hill, “Women and Politics in the Byzantine Empire,” Women in Medieval Western European Culture, ed. Linda Mitchell (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999) 164.

general is especially helpful in establishing exactly how a queen was expected to and did act, specifically her essay “Queens as Jezebels” examining early Merovingian queens. In the essay Nelson focuses upon two Merovingian queens, Brunhild and Balthild, comparing their respective successes as queen-regents and how they were perceived by contemporary scholars in the exercise of their office.

The role of queen was more than simply being the wife of a king. As a result of the many responsibilities conferred by the royal title, being a queen meant a variety of opportunities to exercise power in different ways. According to Stafford there is a general recurring image of “the queen who counsels her husband, converts him to Christianity if necessary, produces and rears royal children, manages a family and household that are the very center of the realm.”³ The development of the household as the seat and center of royal power was perhaps the most significant for the ability of the king’s wife to have greater influence and an eventually institutionalized her role in the government. In Rome, the wives of all men had their place in the home and the business of governance and politics took place in a public setting, such as the Senate or other places of administration. In the early medieval era women were still confined to the home in terms of political expression, but the political world came into that home. Essentially, the domestic and political realms melded in the medieval royal home, transforming the queen from a king’s spouse into a mother with relation to her subjects. Close to home, the queen served as a kind of surrogate mother for her husband’s household men-at-arms.⁴ This matronly role was especially important to a queen’s power because it built personal relationships that fostered loyalty not only to her husband, but to

³ Pauline Stafford, Queens, Concubines, and Dowagers (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1983) 29.

⁴ “Medieval Queenship,” 181-182.

herself; personal relationships become particularly important to a queen in one of her most powerful roles, that of regent. Such a shift in the seat of power has some certain implications for the royal woman and her ability to influence political events. It is likely that the Germanic tribal tradition had an impact on this movement, for the king won power on the battlefield, but “he exercised it in his hall, and this [...] is the prime area of the queen’s activity.”⁵ Nelson points out that the supposed disadvantage faced by women in the political medieval world is less of a reality than it at first appears because the domestic setting of power allowed freer access to queens for royal powers.⁶ From this domestic setting of medieval governance all the queen’s other roles can trace their origin.

The basic roles of a queen as wife of a king, as outlined by Stafford, hold true throughout western queenship; however, that of Christian missionary to her husband was only true, for the most part, of the early Merovingian kings in this study. One important source for the discovery of what a queen did is a saint’s life, particularly so for this study as some Merovingian queens were also saints and had their lives recorded. These vitae are also important since future queens read these lives and used them for guidance in their own lives.⁷ The very first Merovingian queen, Clothild (c. 48?-544 AD), converted her husband Clovis, and was considered a saint. She and her husband ruled the Franks, one of the various Germanic peoples that invaded the Roman Empire, and effectively established a dynasty that would last two hundred and fifty years, until the Carolingian dynasty seized the throne. It is during this later era, the Carolingian period, in which the

⁵ Janet L. Nelson, “Queens as Jezebels,” Medieval Women, ed. Derek Baker (Cambridge, Great Britain: Crompton & Sons Ltd, 1978) 74.

⁶ “Queens as Jezebels,” 74.

⁷ “Medieval Queenship,” 179.

life of Saint Clothild was written.⁸ The very fact that it was written at this date shows that Clothild did have a significant impact and influenced later queens. While the specific deeds done by Clothild and Clovis within the vita, as well as the motivations cited, must be regarded as suspect because the writer was several centuries removed from the subject, there is still value to be found in it. The importance of Clothild's role in bringing legitimacy as a royal princess married to a newly established king and dynasty bear distinctive links to the Carolingians, who also had to establish themselves as royal after raising themselves from simple nobility. Legitimacy was a bedrock concern within all royal families because it is what distinguished them from their subjects and particularly from the noble families. Stafford addresses the important role a queen played in establishing the integrity of her family's royal claims, calling the king's designation of a wife as queen "part of a political strategy of succession" that did not guarantee his progeny's place on the throne, but strengthened their claims.⁹ While a simple designation as "queen" sufficed in Merovingian Frankia, ceremonies began to take on greater importance in the Carolingian period and later dynastic eras, which will be explored in greater detail in the following chapters. For the purposes of this work, legitimacy is considered as the ability to make a claim to royal standing based upon widely accepted royal characteristics and expectations, examples of which include being of royal descent, marrying a member of an existing royal family, and receiving divine approval through ceremony and the Church. An excellent example of legitimacy concerns influencing the selection of a queen can be found in marriage of Clothild to Clovis.

⁸ "Clothild, Queen of the Franks," *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, ed. and trans. Jo Ann McNamara and John E. Halborg (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1992) 60.

⁹ Stafford, 132-133.

Clothild is described as famous for her physical beauty, her manner, her royal birth and fitness to marry a king.¹⁰ Establishing a legitimate hold on power and transferring that to one's offspring was of primary concern to all kings, but particularly to those desiring to found a new dynasty. A queen's character and bearing were important once a woman became queen, but "the choice of a king's bride was a hardheaded act of policy" the large majority of the time.¹¹ For Clovis the most important thing Clothild could offer him was a large dowry and the alliances and claims her royal blood would allow him and his progeny to make. Thus, it is likely for this reason that Clovis negotiated for a marriage between himself and the niece of the King of Burgundy, who was his neighbor. The author of the saint's life emphasized that Clovis and Clothild were legally married, since the Merovingians routinely took mistresses.¹² The emphasis was to eliminate any doubt as to the legitimacy of the offspring, a tactic that will be later examined in greater depth. While these aspects of Clothild's life are important, her dedication to Christianity is what distinguished her in the minds of her later admirers.

Clothild was a Catholic woman in a world that was still largely divided between pagans, Arians, and Catholics. Religion for a king was important because in order for him and his kingdom to prosper he had to maintain good relations with the deity or deities. Clothild experienced Clovis' hostility to her religion when their first-born son died after being baptized. However, their second son survived an illness after being baptized and Clothild credited her prayers. It was only after having won a battle that seemed lost when he appealed to the Catholic God did Clovis relent and adopt

¹⁰ "Clothild," 41-42.

¹¹ Stafford, 54.

¹² "Clothild," 43.

Christianity.¹³ Christianity's connection to imperial Rome and victory in battle for faithful rulers helped to make it popular among queens and kings.¹⁴ The reference in Clothild's vita to Clovis as the new Constantine, the Roman emperor who converted to Christianity on the battlefield before winning a glorious victory,¹⁵ is a clear indication of the importance the Carolingian author(s) placed upon imperial Roman connections.¹⁶ The vita reveals to the reader that only through Clothild's conviction and right belief was Clovis converted and as a consequence the entire kingdom was in a better standing with God. The queen's royal and Christian duty to enrich her subjects and ensure the king's continued proper relationship with the divine. This was one of the ways that a queen could exercise power at court and throughout the kingdom.

The continued importance of the queen's responsibility to promote the faith can be seen in another Merovingian queen who is famed for her piety and a strong connection to the Church in early Merovingian Gaul. Radegund (c. 525-587 AD), queen of the Franks and wife of Clothar I, one of Clovis' sons, was famed for her dedication to Christianity; two saint's lives were written by individuals who knew her with varying degrees of intimacy. It is uncertain whether Radegund ever met Clothild; by the time she was captured by Clothar I his mother had already retired to Tours.¹⁷ This circumstance makes it unlikely that Clothild interacted with her daughter-in-law, giving her advice and helping her to adjust her to life at the Neustrian court. The story of Radegund is

¹³ "Clothild," 43.

¹⁴ Stafford, 123.

¹⁵ It is important to note that the conversion of Constantine before the battle of Milvian Bridge in 312 AD is now a debated issue, but when Clothild's vita was written it was accepted as fact.

¹⁶ "Clothild," 42. It is not a stretch to imagine that Clovis was hailed as the new Constantine in his own day when one considers the fact that he received the status of patrician from the Byzantine emperor and the Merovingians pursued a policy of "settlement with the old Gallo-Roman population." ("Clothild," 40.)

¹⁷ "Radegund, Queen of the Franks and Abbess of Poitiers," *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, ed. and trans. Jo Ann McNamara and John E. Halborg (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1992) 60.

illustrative of the cut-throat politics of early Merovingian Gaul. After a war with the neighboring kingdom of Neustria, Radegund, a Thuringian princess, was taken by Clothar at a young age and raised to eventually become his queen.¹⁸ Radegund was his third or fourth wife,¹⁹ not all of whom were given the title of queen, and the special status afforded Radegund by the title enabled him to make a more legitimate claim upon the Thuringian throne.²⁰ According to the nun Baudonivia, who wrote one of the accounts of Radegund's life, "she played the part of a wife only to serve Christ more devoutly acting as a model laywoman whom she herself might wish to imitate."²¹ It is this marriage to Clothar that directed the queen's actions and served as her chief source of political and religious struggle for the remainder of her life.

Radegund was famed for many virtues, most particularly for her generosity and her humility, both of which are connected to her role as royal spouse. Stafford proposes that queenly involvement in Church affairs could be, and often was, fruitful and this proposal is clearly borne out in the life of Saint Radegund. Queens exercised their power as royal advisers most effectively concerning ecclesiastical appointments and the supporters they gained through such actions strengthened the queen's position at court. This became particularly important if the king died before his child reached adulthood and the queen needed to secure the regency.²² Radegund's activity in the giving of alms is one of the main features of her biographies. Fortunatus, a poet and Radegund's close friend, writes that she gave nearly all of her wealth in alms to the poor and hermits.²³ She

¹⁸ "Radegund," 71.

¹⁹ Stafford, 52.

²⁰ Marcelle Thiébaux, "Three Consecrated Women of Merovingian Gaul," The Writings of Medieval Women (New York: Garland Publishing Inc, 1994) 86.

²¹ "Radegund," 87.

²² Stafford, 120.

²³ "Radegund," 72.

was famed for extending “food, baths and treatment to the sick and needy”²⁴ and giving up the vestments of her wealth as queen, “she cover[ed] herself with [...] sackcloth and ashes.”²⁵ In addition to her giving alms, Radegund founded a hospice for women at Athies.²⁶ All of these activities show a basic pattern of expected behavior for royal women and, as will later be seen, continues as an essential part of queenly behavior in the Carolingian and Ottonian kingdoms. In Radegund’s case it is important to note that, while she was highly admired and praised by those in the ecclesiastical community, her king was less pleased. “He [Clothar] accused her [Radegund] of being more nun than queen when she avoided the conjugal bed, [...] and] arrived late at the dining table, where she was expected to preside.”²⁷ While Radegund served her purpose in giving the king a claim to the Thuringian kingdom as well as a patron of the poor and the Church, she did not fulfill her household duties and this was a source of serious tension between herself and Clothar. It was less important to the hagiographers and the queens who followed except maybe to serve as an unspoken warning that Radegund went too far in her devotions without fulfilling her duties as queen. In addition to her almsgiving, Radegund is also famous for her dedication to the gathering of relics for her kingdom.

The acquisition of relics was an important way for the medieval queen to show her influence and importance in the realm. It is an example of another avenue for female action, especially in relation to ecclesiastical affairs.²⁸ Of all the Merovingian queens, it is most certainly Radegund who is most famed for her work in the collection of relics, serving as an example to future queens. The need for divine protection was seen by

²⁴ Thiébaux, 87.

²⁵ “Radegund,” 91.

²⁶ “Radegund,” 72.

²⁷ Thiébaux, 86.

²⁸ Stafford, 120.

Radegund as necessary in the bellicose world of Merovingian Frankia; she collected relics in order to mitigate the sins accrued through warfare.²⁹ Apparently her efforts were popular, successful, and far-reaching; according to Baudonivia the relics were given to Radegund in response to her pleas and because she was known to be collecting them.³⁰ The collection of relics served as an expression of queenly authority and prestige, but it also strengthened the dynasty's connection with the divine in a positive manner. For if the Christian God would allow so many of His saints to be sent to Radegund it signaled strength and divine favor. "From Jerusalem even to Poitiers God's praises resounded in her [Radegund] honor."³¹ This statement exemplifies the degree of interconnection between east and west that existed during the early Middle Ages and the reach of a queen's influence. It was the acquisition of one of the most holy relics in all of Christendom that earned her the highest praise. Baudonivia hails Radegund as a new Helena, a saint and mother of Constantine the Great, who was believed to have discovered the True Cross.³² It was in her garnering of a piece of the cross that Radegund managed to become a shining example to future queens because her reputation became associated with that of Saint Helena, who was already a role model for Christian medieval queens.³³ The acquisition of this relic also reveals the contacts between the Merovingian and Byzantine courts; Radegund successfully negotiated with the Empress Sophia for the relic,³⁴ for the Emperor sent emissaries carrying richly decorated gospels and a piece of wood considered to be part of the True Cross.³⁵ In addition, after the

²⁹ Thiébaux, 90.

³⁰ "Radegund," 95.

³¹ "Radegund," 96.

³² "Radegund," 97.

³³ "Radegund," 97.

³⁴ "Medieval Queenship," 185.

³⁵ "Radegund," 97.

defeat of the King of Thuringia, Radegund's father, her cousin Hamalafred fled to Constantinople, illustrating a striking degree of contact that existed between the east and west.³⁶ Radegund had contact with the Empress, likely facilitated by her family's presence, and recognized that the imperial woman had a degree of influence over the emperor, which is apparent through the success of the negotiations. A queen's role as religious patron was not unique to the west and women could orchestrate diplomatic relations through one of their more informal, yet immensely important, responsibilities.

It is the role of adviser that is the most important and politically fruitful activity in which a queen could and was expected to participate as royal partner. As previously mentioned, Stafford describes the recurring concept of a queen who counsels her husband.³⁷ Being the wife of a Merovingian king can be described as a "dependent and precarious [position], resting as it did on her personal [...] association with a husband."³⁸ It must be recognized that in all her actions a queen remained aware of her position and that her husband's goodwill and health were the foundation of her influence. Despite this limitation, a queen could act quite effectively in her role as royal counselor; the more effectively she fulfilled this role meant a greater influence over her husband's actions.³⁹ Stafford qualifies this statement by noting that while a queen was expected to advise and aid her king, there was a rather thin line between advise and dominate, particularly in the eyes of the medieval aristocrat. Queens who overstepped their bounds in the eyes of their contemporaries were often compared to the evil women of the Bible, particularly

³⁶ Thiébaux, 94.

³⁷ Stafford, 29.

³⁸ "Queens as Jezebels," 35.

³⁹ Stafford, 98.

Jezebel.⁴⁰ In her essay “Queens as Jezebels”, Janet Nelson examines Merovingian queenship while exploring this phenomenon through the lives of two important Frankish queens, Brunhild and Balthild. There are two roles inextricably connected to the queen’s prerogative to advise her mate, which derives from her prominent position within the royal household and thus, the center of the kingdom. These two roles were the management of the household and the production of an heir.⁴¹ As Stafford insightfully states, “the queen’s power at court depended partly on the centrality of that court to all politics, then on her capacity to influence the king.”⁴² Just as one came to understand the importance of queenship in its religious aspect through Radegund’s example, so it is advantageous to examine the lives and actions of Brunhild and Balthild, Merovingian queens of the sixth and seventh centuries, to understand the queen’s role as advisor and regent.

The similarities and differences between Brunhild and Balthild are equally striking when one examines these two royal women. Brunhild came to the Frankish kingdoms by her marriage to Sigibert I, King of Austrasia, one of the three Merovingian Frankish kingdoms of the time: Austrasia, Burgundy, and Neustria.⁴³ A princess from Spain, Brunhild was chosen by Sigibert because he wanted to give his children a royal mother, in contrast to his brothers who had married low-born women.⁴⁴ In Merovingian Frankia it was perfectly permissible for a king to marry a woman from a lower social class, showing his unique status concerning societal norms.⁴⁵ Balthild is an excellent

⁴⁰ Stafford, 25.

⁴¹ Stafford, 29.

⁴² Stafford, 98.

⁴³ “Queens as Jezebels,” 39.

⁴⁴ Gregory of Tours, The History of the Franks, trans. Lewis Thorpe (London: Penguin Books, 1974) 221.

⁴⁵ “Queens as Jezebels,” 34-35.

example of this practice, as she was a victim of the slave trade between Anglo-Saxon Britain and Frankia. It is not entirely clear how she rose from being a chambermaid of King Clovis II's Neustrian mayor to being the wife of Clovis himself.⁴⁶ Sigibert's brothers, as well as all the other Merovingian kings who married women of low social status, may have purposefully done so to make their queens more dependent upon them and their relationship rather than an aristocratic network of familial support.⁴⁷ In a kingdom full of rebellious aristocrats it would be of great advantage to keep these nobles from having a direct link to the royal bloodline. Kings had reason to fear the power and ambitions of their nobles once an heir was born because the nobles might kill the king and seize his son, placing him on the throne to use as a puppet to rule the kingdom.⁴⁸ In Brunhild's Austrasian family, duty and political interests walked hand in hand,⁴⁹ as was the case in all of Merovingian Frankia. Familial support could be very strong, keeping a queen in place and the only way to remove her would be to do away with both.⁵⁰ In the case of Brunhild and Balthild, natal familial support played no role when it concerned their own families; the family they depended upon was the one of their own making, their children. It was said of Brunhild that she had held the kingdom during her husband's lifetime, and indeed she had brought Sigibert funds when he was on campaign against the Neustrian king, Chilperic. While a criticism of her influence, it is telling of the power she must have held, not just in delivery of treasure, but also in her advisory role, in order to earn such a critique.⁵¹ Brunhild no doubt earned support from the ecclesiastical

⁴⁶ "Balthild, Queen of Neustria," *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, ed. trans. Jo Ann McNamara and John E. Halborg (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1992) 264-265.

⁴⁷ "Balthild," 264.

⁴⁸ Gregory, 524.

⁴⁹ "Queens as Jezebels," 42.

⁵⁰ Stafford, 96.

⁵¹ "Queens as Jezebels," 40.

community through her patronage of the cult of St. Martin, the Merovingians' family saint.⁵² Balthild's level of influence is described in a far more flattering light in her *vita*, describing her as a wife worthy of the utmost trust, even with the king's most intimate feelings, while she "humbly and assiduously suggested things to the king" for the benefit of the downtrodden.⁵³ While the *vita* frames the queen's actions in an idyllic light, it is doubtful that Balthild did not also have her own interests in mind when advising the king, particularly considering that most of the issues brought before the king did not concern the poor. Balthild's patronage of several monasteries during her regency, including St. Denis, Corbie, Jouarre, and Chelles, made them centers of royal influence. Her success in achieving the regency was in part due to an ecclesiastical party that she favored, because they rallied behind her and her mayor of the palace, Ebroin, when she took the regency.⁵⁴ The queen's influence or voice extended beyond just religious matters; all the business of the realm that entered the royal household entered the queen's sphere. However, a queen could only accumulate so much influence through her direct role of adviser to the king. What kind of position was a queen left in when her husband died?

There is no simple answer; the path a queen followed after the demise of her husband depended upon the amount of resources available to her and her own personal will power. Three chief sources of a queen regent's power existed--the loyalty of the nobility, the possession of her children, and the possession of a large amount of personal wealth and landholdings. Female longevity and the prospect of a transfer of royal power

⁵² "Queens and Jezebels," 40.

⁵³ "Balthild," 270.

⁵⁴ "Balthild," 265-266.

through remarriage served to keep dowager queens on the political stage.⁵⁵ A queen served as a kind of repository of royal power and, while she could not hold power on her own, she could pass it to a new husband.⁵⁶ Brunhild's remarriage to her nephew Merovech is a classic example of the danger a dowager could pose to others with claims to royal authority. Chilperic, King of Neustria and Merovech's father, strongly opposed the marriage between his son and Brunhild while he still lived because it gave his son a stronger position from which to seize either his deceased uncle's kingdom or Chilperic's own.⁵⁷ Possession of dowager queens could prove to be important and many Merovingian widows chose to retire to nunneries to protect themselves; Clothild and Radegund, both retired to nunneries, Radegund particularly retreated from the political life, depriving any prospective husband the advantages a union with her might offer.

Three of the sources of queenly power--religious patronage, advising, and bonds built as mistress of the household--could be drawn upon by a queen, with the availability of these sources of power determining the queen's success in maintaining her presence on the political stage. It is important to keep in mind that the women who met with the most success were those who had under-aged sons for whom they could act as regents.⁵⁸ A queen who had not produced an heir, particularly one who was not a member of an aristocratic family, was in a hopeless situation because she had few allies.⁵⁹

The family of a queen was one of her primary resources when she sought to gain the regency and secure the kingdom for her infant son. However, other factors were

⁵⁵ Stafford, 144. Many kingly pursuits made the widowed queen a common feature of medieval Frankia, particularly the hunt often leading to an accident resulting in the king's violent death.

⁵⁶ "Queens as Jezebels," 37.

⁵⁷ Gregory, 255. The marriage did not turn out to be very advantageous for Merovech, he was quickly separated from Brunhild and she managed to avoid ever being in his presence again in spite of his numerous attempts. Gregory, 272.

⁵⁸ Stafford, 146.

⁵⁹ "Queens as Jezebels," 35.

involved in a widowed queen's success in gaining the regency. If she could maintain close physical proximity to her offspring, she would likely be able to have the chance of attaining the regency.⁶⁰ Mothers were preferred as regents over any aristocrat because their claims to authority were linked to that of their minor son and his precarious position upon the throne.⁶¹ The nobles of the kingdom recognized the initially weak position of a queen and preferred her to a male relative or a noble because a male could seize the throne in his own name, while a female could not. In this manner, a potential weakness for queens was transformed into an opportunity to hold the regency, if the queen had the other resources and wherewithal to take it. Once a widowed mother had secured the regency, her power and influence were limited to the time until her son became an adult unless she could keep the familial bond strong between the two. Brunhild managed to raise a son who relied upon her counsel and wanted her continued presence at the royal court,⁶² whereas Balthild was quickly forced into retirement after her son's coming of age.⁶³ When Brunhild managed to become regent for her young son Childebert, she took control of all aspects of his education and became a commanding force throughout the rest of his short life.⁶⁴ "Brunhild, whose arrogant behaviour is encouraged by the support which he [Childebert] gives to her,"⁶⁵ ruled essentially as queen beside her son instead of relinquishing power. One of the most important points to be made about Brunhild's situation is that it is exceptional; most queen mothers retired after their sons married and a new woman was raised to the status of queen.⁶⁶ There was a surprising degree of

⁶⁰ "Queens as Jezebels," 58.

⁶¹ Stafford, 155.

⁶² "Queens as Jezebels," 41.

⁶³ "Balthild," 273.

⁶⁴ "Queens as Jezebels," 41.

⁶⁵ Gregory, 457.

⁶⁶ Stafford, 110.

understanding between Brunhild and her daughter-in-law Faileuba, likely stemming from the fact that Faileuba was a low-born woman with an apparently amiable nature, hardly a challenge to the royally born and well established Brunhild.⁶⁷ The stars seemed to have aligned in favor of a long political life for the adept Queen Brunhild; her son died in 596 after inheriting Burgundy upon his uncle Guntram's death. She became regent to her young grandsons, Theudebert in Austrasia and Theuderic in Burgundy.⁶⁸ When the boys came of age, it was Theuderic who embraced his grandmother as a close counselor much in the manner as his father had, while Theudebert was quite unwelcoming. It is likely that, under Brunhild's advice, Theuderic never married, for the introduction of a new queen would have only served to weaken Brunhild's position.⁶⁹ Without the loyalty of her offspring Brunhild would likely have faced the fate of most other queens, retirement.

While familial bonds were an integral part of attaining and retaining power, other material and political resources were equally essential. The resource most closely linked to a queen's familial situation was that of material wealth and landholdings. Four types of land were held by medieval queens: the dowry, the morning gift, a share of the royal revenue to provide for the royal household, and lands acquired through gift or purchase.⁷⁰ The morning gift is important because it provided the queen with property rights within the kingdom as well as a source of personal revenue.⁷¹ Childebert gave Cahors to Brunhild after he gained control of it; Cahors had been given to Galswinth (Brunhild's sister) as a wedding gift when she married Chilperic.⁷² It is significant that Childebert

⁶⁷ "Queens as Jezebels," 43-44.

⁶⁸ "Queens as Jezebels," 43.

⁶⁹ "Queens as Jezebels," 44.

⁷⁰ Stafford, 103.

⁷¹ Stafford, 101-102.

⁷² Gregory, 494.

gave it to Brunhild because she was perceived as the proper owner of the city. While the claim that the land belonged to Brunhild was politically convenient for Childebert's conquest, the very fact that the claim could be legitimately made implies that she did have some right to the land given to her sister. Possession of land and wealth was highly important in Merovingian Frankia, thus, the possession of land meant the powers associated with the land were the queen's to exercise. In addition, the queen was typically the one entrusted with the royal treasure.⁷³ Initially after Sigibert's death, Brunhild was separated from the royal treasure and her son, the two elements essential to establishing regency.⁷⁴ However, Brunhild had amassed a large personal treasure, enough of a safety net so that she was not ruined. Balthild also wielded full control over the royal treasury and exercised it often. Her hagiographer mentions the use of funds towards several monasteries, which built bridges between herself and the clerical community.⁷⁵ While Balthild did control a vast sum, most of which did not come from personal or familial holdings, there was a very large demand for funding throughout her son's kingdom. The precarious nature of Balthild's regency rested upon the fact that the endurance of the personal connections she had forged with the funds depended upon the continued issuance of said funds.⁷⁶ Formation of political bonds through patronage was the true wealth of the queen.

Personal bonds between the queen and her subjects, particularly the aristocratic and clerical elite, were the third leg of the tripod holding up a dowager queen's regency for her young son or grandson. It was the support of the aristocracy that either permitted

⁷³ "Queens as Jezebels," 36.

⁷⁴ "Queens as Jezebels," 40.

⁷⁵ "Balthild," 266, 273.

⁷⁶ "Queens as Jezebels," 71.

or prevented a queen from becoming regent for her minor son; this support was secured by the alliances the queen made during her husband's reign.⁷⁷ For both Brunhild and Balthild personal connections played an integral role in their respective regencies. It was the Austrasian nobles who requested Brunhild's release from Chilperic's control and her cooperation with Gogo, Childebert's mentor and a leader of the nobles, which enabled her to become regent. Once regent, Brunhild shared the responsibility of the regency with Gogo, repaid her allies, and exacted revenge on those nobles who had opposed her ascension.⁷⁸ The relationship between Brunhild and the Austrasian nobles was mutually beneficial, but one that took time and effort to develop through patronage and gifts and through the queen's role as the matron of the royal household. Brunhild's use of patronage, whether to religious communities or aristocratic families, provided her with a large and enduring base of support. She sought clerical allies to control the cities and influence the noble families to which they belonged.⁷⁹ Balthild relied more heavily upon the bonds of loyalty formed with young nobles in the royal household. In her *vita*, the Queen is described as behaving "as a mother to the princes, as a daughter to priests, and as a most pious nurse to children and adolescents."⁸⁰ The nature of these relationships is structured as the Church expected a Christian queen to behave.⁸¹ In her capacity as 'nurse' to the aristocratic children at the royal court there is little doubt that Balthild formed many bonds that later lent her the support needed to secure the regency.⁸² Like

⁷⁷ "Queens as Jezebels," 38.

⁷⁸ "Queens as Jezebels," 41-42.

⁷⁹ "Queens as Jezebels," 54.

⁸⁰ "Balthild," 270.

⁸¹ "Queens as Jezebels," 60.

⁸² "Queens as Jezebels," 48.

Brunhild, Balthild shared the regency with a nobleman.⁸³ For both queens their power and influence lasted only as long as the personal bonds held strong. Brunhild's career ended when she overestimated the loyalty and support of her aristocratic allies and was deposed after attempting to place her young great-grandson Sigibert upon the throne after Theuderic's death.⁸⁴ In Balthild's case, the bonds she had formed as a royal nurturer failed to keep her in office because her allies feared her wrath and turned against her, forcing her into retirement at a nunnery.⁸⁵ "Personal bonds held only so long as they were reinforced by real or prospective benefits."⁸⁶ The noble allies faced with an aging Queen Brunhild had little incentive to continue their support when long-term advantages looked minimal. It is likely that Balthild was forcefully removed from power and retired to a convent because her allies feared losing everything by gaining her ill favor.⁸⁷ Medieval politics normally centered on familial bonds, seeking the advantage for oneself and one's kin over all other considerations.⁸⁸ When these interests of the aristocratic families conflicted with a queen-regent's plans, the tenuous hold of the queen to her power and authority was often broken.

Power and authority for queens was a quality with many guises: patron, adviser, legitimating spouse, and regent; each with distinct value and importance to the maintenance of her realm. Clothild, the saintly wife of Clovis, was the first Merovingian queen and was an important religious patron and adviser to her husband. Radegund pursued religious patronage to an even greater extent, and her husband gained a claim to

⁸³ Whether it was her former master Erchinoald or the later Ebroin, the mayor of the palace served as her partner in the regency. "Balthild," 266.

⁸⁴ "Queens as Jezebels," 45.

⁸⁵ "Queens as Jezebels," 52.

⁸⁶ "Queens as Jezebels," 71.

⁸⁷ "Balthild," 267.

⁸⁸ "Queens as Jezebels," 45.

her family's kingdom and the saintly prestige she brought to him via her life and relic collection. Brunhild and Balthild exemplify the power of the regency and serve as examples of what positions a queen could reach in her realm if given the opportunity. Ample opportunities were provided in Merovingian Frankia, where kings typically died young and queens enjoyed longer lives. All of these expressions of power were transmitted to the Carolingian queens who succeeded the Merovingians. Although all of the Merovingian queens dealt with are from the earlier and more vibrant era of the dynasty, the norms of behavior for queens changed little over the intervening generations to the Carolingians. Byzantine influences upon Merovingian queenship are not detectable and, while interaction did exist, there is no evidence to suggest that an active effort to imitate imperial behavior, resembling the Carolingian pursuit, was present during this earlier period. The Merovingian experience established behavioral norms that served as a base from which Carolingian queens drew their actions, a base that was increasingly influenced by the new dynasties' fascination with the east.

Chapter Two

Peering East: Carolingian fascination with Byzantium and the imperial tradition

Charlemagne (768-814 AD), one of the most renowned kings of the Middle Ages, was the first man to be crowned emperor in the west since the fall of the western Roman Empire. While not the founder of the Carolingian dynasty, Charlemagne was the man who made his dynasty great, the king who united a large part of western Europe under his name. In keeping with tradition, Charlemagne was not merely a conqueror and ruler; he also fostered religious works and took a special interest in intellectual culture. Born from this patronage was the Carolingian renaissance, a flourishing of cultural and intellectual works under the rule of Charlemagne and his successors. Awareness of Byzantine imperial power in the west was widespread through a variety of media that carried the imperial image, particularly that of the royal female, such as counterweights, imperial coinage, and mosaics. These media established a widespread conception of what imperial power should look like, a concept that Charlemagne and his successors attempted to imitate in their court through imperial dress and ceremony in order to enforce the idea of their newly claimed imperial status. Intermarriage between the Byzantine and Carolingian imperial families was an enduring quest for the admiring westerners, who hoped to reunite the old Roman Empire and further entrench their dynasty as legitimate rulers. The training of princesses as future Byzantine brides and the continued failure of such betrothal plans to bear fruit led to the continuous presence of Byzantine scholars and teachers in the west. Irene (c. 750-803 AD), the first empress to rule in her own name (792-803 AD), also served as a striking example to western princesses of the power they could exercise under the Byzantine system. Carolingian queens were inundated with new expectations from their imperially aspiring spouses and

subjects, leading them to adopt new forms of dress and ceremony. Some of these innovations were taught to them by Greek scholars.

In order to better understand the pervasive presence of the imperial image in Byzantine controlled areas, it is useful to put oneself in the shoes of an average Italo-Byzantine citizen in the eighth century:

As you walk past the docked ships in early seventh-century Ravenna looking for some newly arrived item from the imperial capital you notice the weight being used to measure out some wine barrels soon to be loaded onto a ship. It is a bust of Athena; you are sure it is her, though worn and old. It resembles the image of the Empress Sophia on the copper coins in your pocket. Of course neither can compare to the splendid images of the Emperor Justinian and the Empress Theodora in the blessed church of San Vitale that you occasionally catch a shinning glimpse of at mass.

Each of the items in the above narrative was an important aspect of the way in which the imperial image was presented and disseminated. All of these images were a part of daily life and represented the stability and power of Constantinople and the Roman emperor and empress who reigned there. The common shipping yard counterweight was often fashioned in the form of a bust of an empress.⁸⁹ Many Byzantine imperial coins display the figure of the empress, or in some cases other imperial women and these coins spread along the imperial trading network. In some cases even artistic depictions of the imperial couple served to remind those who viewed them that the glory and power of Rome lived on in Constantinople. As a part of the Byzantine Empire, Ravenna and part of northern Italy served as a place of interaction

⁸⁹ Anne McClanan, Representations of Early Byzantine Empresses (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) 30.

between the western world and that of the east. It was not until the late eighth and early ninth centuries that the amount of Byzantine cultural influence increased to a detectable level in western Europe. It was catalyzed by the arrival of the Carolingians, Frankish upstarts who managed not only to seize the throne from the long-standing Merovingian dynasty, but to unite the majority of Western Europe into an empire rivaling that of the Byzantines. The Byzantine expression of, and tradition pertaining to, the imperial females' style of dress and adornment and the manner of her depiction, can shed light on how Carolingian queens perceived their counterparts in the east; women they eventually imitated themselves. All of these characteristics are exhibited by counterweights, coins, and mosaics, three important mediums of transmission for the imperial image.

When one thinks of depictions and representations of an empress, the images that often come to mind are grandiose marble busts and ivory carvings, things of beauty and wealth. While these are precious pieces of craftsmanship that have survived for centuries, these objects represent only a fraction of the output and the diverse media by which the imperial image was disseminated.⁹⁰ Byzantine imperial government differed little from earlier Roman practices when it came to the central importance of the emperor. The system was very hierarchical and the emperor was viewed as God's regent on earth.⁹¹ Subsequently, all depictions of members of the imperial family were, theoretically, meant to strengthen the emperor's position. To this end, emperors promoted depictions not only of themselves, but of their wives. Those media that received the widest dissemination or viewing were counterweights, imperially minted coins, and church mosaics. Counterweights, ordinary objects of measurement used

⁹⁰ McClanan, 29.

⁹¹ "Women and Politics," 158.

broadly in Byzantine ports are one example of the means by which the imperial image was spread among the commoners [see figure 2.1].⁹² The prevalence of the female image on counterweights throughout the empire is what is most striking about them, especially when one takes into account the preference given for the emperor's image on other forms of measure.⁹³ These imperial female images were produced and used alongside busts in the form of the goddess Athena, which was the second most popular type of image used for the counterweights [see figure 2.2].⁹⁴ In addition to the importance of the large-scale production of an authoritative female image, the location of the weights' production and the depiction itself reveal the importance and significance of the manner of distribution. A majority of the empress counterweights were used in Asia Minor and the eastern portion of the empire in general, with none being found in the more western territories of the empire.⁹⁵ Although used primarily in the eastern part of the empire, trade between western Europe and the Byzantines continued to bring western merchants into contact with representations of Byzantine central authority, which signified a reliable standard. The importance of the Mediterranean as the economic engine of Europe faded with the rise of the Muslim caliphate and the fall of the western half of the Roman Empire, which made the sea far more dangerous for trading vessels, trade and communication continued.⁹⁶ As mentioned in the preceding chapter, the Merovingian saint-Queen Radegund bargained with the Empress Sophia for a certain relic to be sent to Frankia, indicating some traffic between the two realms.

⁹² Liz James, *Empresses and Power in Early Byzantium* (London: Leicester University Press, 2001) 101.

⁹³ McClanan, 30.

⁹⁴ McClanan, 35.

⁹⁵ McClanan, 33.

⁹⁶ Michael McCormick, "Diplomacy and the Carolingian Encounter with Byzantium down to the Accession of Charles the Bald," *Eriugena: East and West*, ed. Bernard McGinn and Willemien Otten (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994) 16.



Figure 2.1 ⁹⁷



Figure 2.2 ⁹⁸

Material goods were not the only thing being trafficked between east and west, ideas and concepts were also exchanged. The idea of what an empress was thought to look like by the population of the west became important when the Carolingian queens began adopting the imperial dress. Without a widespread notion of what an empress ought to look like in the west, the wearing of the imperial Byzantine dress by Carolingians would have served much less of a purpose. Thus the wearing of the imperial dress worked because the Byzantine imperial image was already established; therefore, the sight of a queen or empress conforming to this established imagery bolstered her imperial claim, forming a positive feedback loop. The ability of the empress' image to exemplify imperial authority reflects the existence of female imperial

⁹⁷ McClanan, 35. Empress counterweight from Philippi, Greece.

⁹⁸ McClanan, 53. Early Byzantine Athena counterweight.

power.⁹⁹ The images the counterweights depict are important in terms of the concepts being transmitted, including the importance of having an imperial female and the ability of the female to hold imperial authority. There is an issue of dispute regarding the images, which is whether or not they represented individual empresses, as coinage did, or a more generic feminine imperial concept. Anne McClanan supports the latter conclusion, while previous investigators support the former; however, it is essentially immaterial when one is merely trying to establish how the counterweights served as symbols of imperial power.¹⁰⁰ There are basic features of all the weights which delineate them as empresses. The diadem is a common symbol of royal and imperial status and it is an element uniformly present on all of the empress counterweights.¹⁰¹ Many of the empress weights also depict jewelry, though there are examples of those more plainly dressed.¹⁰² One further feature that is common is the presence of a *mappa*, a traditional symbol of consular authority, in one of the empress figure's hands. These consular powers included *imperium*, which was the ability to command and punish, and *auspicium*, meaning the responsibility to maintain good relations with the gods via checking the auspices. The scroll, or *mappa*, indicates a respectable lineage or indication of authority for the woman holding it, thus, its presence in an empress' hand serves well the purpose of bolstering the imperial position.¹⁰³ McClanan quotes Richard Brilliant to show the underlying, culturally permeating importance of the empress weights when he notes that "the typological representation of royalty predetermined the viewer's cognitive response to the individual ruler portrayed. Thus the general propositional attitude took

⁹⁹ McClanan, 58.

¹⁰⁰ McClanan, 40-41.

¹⁰¹ McClanan, 45.

¹⁰² McClanan, 39-40.

¹⁰³ McClanan, 43.

precedence over the particular, even if the king or queen had a face that could be recognized.”¹⁰⁴ Put in simpler terms, when a contemporary saw one of the weights, it did not matter so much which emperor or empress was depicted as it mattered that they could tell it was an emperor or empress. Effectively the empress counterweights served as a passive but tangible manifestation of imperial power throughout the empire. While the counterweights show an emphasis of power through the image of a woman, they only give one a general sense of the empress’ power and influence.

Coinage was the most prominent and common location of imperial imagery, giving the observer a clear indication of the power of the individual whose image is on the coin. The medium is less ambiguous than the counterweights when it comes to the identity of the woman being depicted. How the women were depicted on the coins is truly the issue because members of all levels of society would have been apt to see the coins and form an impression of what an empress should look like based upon the coin’s image. As with the counterweights, notions of the Byzantine image in the west became important when Carolingian queens begin to imitate the Byzantine imperial dress. The most public display of the imperial image was on the coins minted by the empire and the practice of depicting the empress on these coins with her husband gradually became the standard.¹⁰⁵ The depiction of empresses on coinage in the eastern half of the empire seems to have started with Helena, the mother of Constantine the Great and the quintessential Byzantine empress.¹⁰⁶ The inclusion of the empresses on the coins seems

¹⁰⁴ McClanan, 46-47.

¹⁰⁵ “Women and Politics,” 163. Only eastern empresses were depicted on imperial coinage, with only two western exceptions: Galla Placidia and Licina Eudoxia, both from the reign of Theodosios II. There is no seemingly logical explanation for why some empresses have their images depicted and others do not in the early years of the empire. *Empresses and Power*, 102.

¹⁰⁶ McClanan, 17.

to be linked to their elevation to the status of Augusta.¹⁰⁷ Feminine imperial titles varied and the term Augusta was the most significant, until the later adoption of *basilissa* in the ninth century. For simplicity's sake, Augusta can be understood as meaning Empress, though it had an important symbolic meaning because it was traditionally conferred to the empress by the emperor just prior to their marriage, giving the imperial title symbolic precedence over the role of wife.¹⁰⁸ Two important and relevant points must be made about the issuance of coins from the time of the Empress Sophia, c. 530-601 AD, onward.¹⁰⁹ First, the depiction of the emperor and/or empress on imperial coins moved from a more individualized, person specific image to one that emphasized the imperial family.¹¹⁰ The significance of the shift is likely indicative of the more general medieval focus on dynasties rather than the Roman ideal of the most capable individual as emperor. The importance of the royal family in Merovingian Frankia has already been discussed in the previous chapter and one can see it as an overarching trend of medieval Europe in both the east and the west. Second, from the reign of Sophia, empresses were nearly always depicted with their husband, the emperor, which ended the practice of having disparate depictions of the emperor and empress on coins.¹¹¹ This is not to say that every subsequent empress was depicted on coins, but that when they were depicted, it was on the same coins as the emperor. It is the Empress Sophia's reign where the shift becomes permanent and the most likely starting point for an examination of the specific content of the depictions.

¹⁰⁷ Empresses and Power, 104.

¹⁰⁸ McClanan, 10. McClanan further notes that "the rank of Augusta was normally a singular role held by one woman, and this singularity was often defined by officiating over the many activities at court."

¹⁰⁹ McClanan, 150.

¹¹⁰ Empresses and Power, 112.

¹¹¹ Empresses and Power, 102.

The reign of Emperor Justin II and Empress Sophia, 565-578 AD, marks a fundamental shift in the portraiture of the imperial couple on the empire's coins. Their marriage had been arranged by the Emperor Justinian and Empress Theodora as a means of ensuring dynastic continuity and political support based upon the relation of both Justin and Sophia to their predecessors. Justin and Sophia succeeded to the throne after the death of Justin's imperial uncle. Sophia was the niece of Justinian's long deceased wife, Theodora, and her connection to the former ruler likely gave additional credibility to Justin's claim to the throne. As Emperor Justin slowly went mad, Sophia gained influence and power.¹¹² Her depiction on the imperial couple's coinage was meant to boost the legitimacy of their reign because of their relationship to the prior regime. Even Gregory of Tours, Bishop of Tours (573-594 AD)¹¹³ in far off Frankia, was aware of the situation and recorded it in his *History of the Franks*.¹¹⁴ It is in the context of Sophia's dynastic and personal importance that one must understand the coinage of the period.

As Anne McClanan concisely puts it, "reminders of Sophia's importance were pervasive, for her image blanketed the common coinage while her name echoed throughout the Byzantine capital's monuments."¹¹⁵ By common coinage McClanan means the copper coin, which was produced at a higher volume because of its lesser value than silver or gold.¹¹⁶ It logically follows that since each coin had a different value, they would be used by different parts of society and the image on each would be a message directed to those who used the coin most. The images on the coins confirm this,

¹¹² McClanan, 150.

¹¹³ Gregory, 9.

¹¹⁴ Gregory, 283.

¹¹⁵ McClanan, 152.

¹¹⁶ Gold coins were minted for state use in the collection of taxes and paying of the military, while bronze coins were minted more for private use in exchanges between individuals. Bronze coinage thus attained the widest distribution throughout the empire because of its more common use. Empresses and Power, 104.

with Sophia being absent from the gold solidus, but present on the silver and bronze coins and therefore, the imagery was directed at all levels of Byzantine society, not just the elite.¹¹⁷ Silver coins were rarely minted at the time, thus, putting the main focus on the bronze coinage, which was the primary means of distributing the imperial image to a widespread audience. Sophia is represented on the bronze coinage with Emperor Justin II; more interestingly the image puts her on equal footing with him.¹¹⁸ Nothing about the image is innovative except the prominence of the empress; both imperial figures are depicted in the common fashion of the time: the emperor holds a glove and the empress a cruciform scepter; both are nimbed and seem to be clad in the imperial dress. In essence, the coins led the viewer to conclude that the emperor and empress ruled jointly as a single, imperial force.¹¹⁹ Perhaps the most pertinent aspect of these coins for this work is that they were mass produced throughout the empire, in every province, including those in Italy.¹²⁰ Trade occurred across the Alps and into Frankia and the Byzantine standard would be the most stable and trustworthy mint, giving it, one would surmise, near universal acceptance in all areas that had knowledge of its reliability. One is tempted to point out that bronze is bronze; it spends the same no matter whose face is stamped upon it. However, there are times when the image depicted upon the Byzantine coin became symbolically more important than the bronze of which it was made.

Imagery can be seen as particularly important during the reign of the Empress Irene, whose image held a more prominent place on the coins minted than that of her young son for whom she was regent. Intriguingly, Irene did not appear upon coins with

¹¹⁷ McClanan, 158.

¹¹⁸ McClanan, 158-159.

¹¹⁹ McClanan, 159.

¹²⁰ McClanan, 160.

her husband, Emperor Leo IV, and there is no discernable reason for this absence.¹²¹ However, Leo IV died only five years after acceding to the throne in 780 AD, leaving Irene, as regent for her nine-year-old son Constantine, to defend it against the claims of his five uncles.¹²² During her regency, Irene had coins minted with her and her son's image [see figure 2.3]. Several aspects of these coins are subtly, but importantly, different. Irene is depicted with the imperial orb, not Constantine; she is referred to as the co-ruler of the empire; and finally, Constantine's name is printed on the reverse while Irene's is on the obverse.¹²³ All of these changes indicate a desire to keep within the established boundaries of expectation while adapting the practices to emphasize her own power as regent and empress. The true innovation came after the blinding of Constantine, when Irene took control of the empire as sole empress. Coins were minted with her image on both sides to emphasize Irene's new position as sole ruler [see figure 2.3]. On some of the coins the Greek title of *basilissa* is used instead of the Latin Augusta.¹²⁴ *Basilissa* equates the title *basileus*, or emperor, used by the imperial male and was a much more powerful term than Augusta.¹²⁵ On one coin minted in Sicily the title *basileus* is used, which would be a further indication of Irene's desire to emphasize the validity of her claim to the imperial throne. The distribution of her image on one of the most potent symbols of authority in the Byzantine Empire was quite important to Irene because she is depicted on all denominations, in all three metals. This universal depiction ensured the widest possible distribution of the coins to reinforce her status.¹²⁶

¹²¹ *Empresses and Power*, 112.

¹²² Lynda Garland, *Byzantine Empresses* (New York: Routledge, 1999) 75.

¹²³ Garland, 76.

¹²⁴ *Empresses and Power*, 114.

¹²⁵ "Women and Politics," 163.

¹²⁶ *Empresses and Power*, 114.

These coins most certainly made their way west with the various embassies exchanged between Irene and Charlemagne, which will be discussed later. It is intriguing that just as interest and focus in Frankia and the general west turns east, an incredibly powerful and successful woman occupies the imperial throne. While this circumstance had some tangible effects upon Carolingian behavior during the period, the final method of imperial depiction that would have been readily available to the Carolingian in Italy is the mosaic.

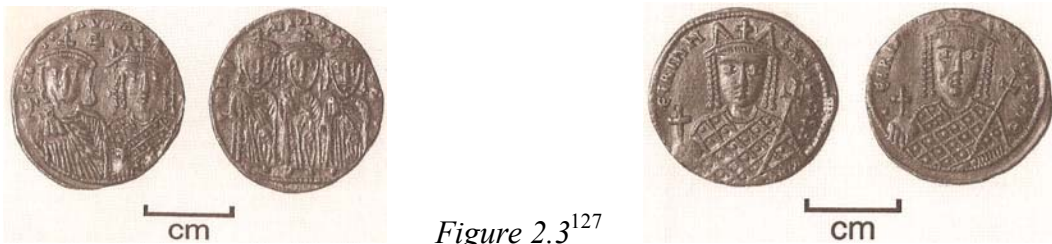


Figure 2.3¹²⁷

The most aesthetically pleasing and visually impressive of the forms of imperial depiction examined here, the mosaic, is important to the reinforcement of the emperor's power. Mosaics are often closely related to the patronage of churches and monasteries because the donor often specified what he or she desired to appear in the commissioned mosaic and they were often themselves depicted. When one's image was located inside a church, one of the cultural centers of medieval society, it was indicative of the power and wealth possessed by the one depicted.¹²⁸ Of all the pieces of artwork created by the Byzantines, one of the most famous is the collection of mosaics of the Emperor Justinian and Empress Theodora located in the church of San Vitale in Ravenna, Italy [see figure 2.4].¹²⁹ The mosaics depict the emperor and empress separately, facing each other across the altar, each surrounded by their court. Each imperial figure is haloed, supporting the

¹²⁷ *Empresses and Power*, 114-115. The coin on the left is of Constantine VI and Irene on the obverse and a grouping of past emperors on the reverse. Irene is depicted on both sides of the coin shown on the right.

¹²⁸ "Women and Politics," 165.

¹²⁹ It is intriguing to note that the imperial couple did not pay for the church, a local banker did, and yet it is they who are shown with the symbols of donation in the mosaics. McClanan, 123.

doctrine of the dual imperial identity, which is that of the earthly and divine nature of the imperial right to rule.¹³⁰ In Theodora's mosaic, she is seen wearing a chlamys, a military cloak that came to be part of the female imperial regalia and is shown on coin images of other empresses.¹³¹ For westerners seeking to imitate imperial dress, the grand mosaics in Ravenna were a readily available depiction of how an imperial couple should appear.



Figure 2.4¹³²

Unlike coins, mosaics are stationary, limiting their effect in terms of pervasiveness. On the other hand they were attractions in and of themselves. The mosaics of San Vitale had the fortune of being located in Ravenna, which served as the Ostrogothic capital of Italy in the early sixth century, and then the base of operations for later Byzantine attempts to retake Italy.¹³³ When the Carolingians came to Italy, Ravenna had served as a prominent and symbolically important location of regional control for the Byzantines. With the tangible evidence of Byzantine imperial patronage so near to them, it is probable that royal Carolingian women would feel an increased need to establish Frankish primacy in

¹³⁰ McClanan, 114.

¹³¹ McClanan, 133.

¹³² *Empresses and Power*, 28. Empress Theodora is in the center of the mosaic, flanked by religious figures and female attendants. The mosaic is located in the Church of San Vitale, Ravenna, Italy.

¹³³ McClanan, 135.

the region. Rosamond McKitterick explains that royal patronage in Carolingian culture takes on a heightened sense of importance, particularly under Charlemagne's grandson, Charles the Bald. In the case of Charles, he had an added need for legitimacy because he had fought and intrigued carefully to obtain the imperial title against his elder brothers and his claim was not initially well received.¹³⁴ In 876 AD he appeared in court with his wife, the empress, clothed in Byzantine imperial dress and wearing a crown.¹³⁵ Charles established a legitimate claim to the imperial title, in part, through his mimicking of Byzantine ceremony and through patronage. Byzantine patronage, in comparison, is intimately connected with the imperial image in some cases, while in others the image of the empress is used to represent the validity of the emperor's claim to the imperial throne and, in one extraordinary case, the empress' claim to rule. In all the images of imperial representation the empress is garbed in ceremonial gear, to a greater or lesser extent, to reinforce her power. It is through the ceremonial reception of her office by ritual that one finds the most significant influence on the behavior of western queens from the Byzantine world.

When Charlemagne was crowned as western Emperor by the Pope Leo III on Christmas Day 800 AD, there had not been an emperor in the west for several centuries. Only the Byzantines carried the mantle of Roman imperial tradition, of which the western kingdoms were well aware. The papacy had recently emerged from a period when most popes had been Greek-speaking refugees from the Iconoclast controversy that raged in Byzantium, so there was an increased awareness and knowledge of the east at the time.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Rosamond McKitterick, "The Palace School of Charles the Bald," The Frankish Kings and Culture in the Early Middle Ages (Brookfield, VT: Variorum Ashgate Publishing Company, 1995) 339.

¹³⁵ Frankish World, 119.

¹³⁶ McCormick, 21.

Charlemagne's imperial inauguration, conducted by the pope, consisted of two main ceremonies—coronation and anointment. The inauguration mimicked the Byzantine ritual by placing an emphasis upon the coronation, while the addition of anointing was purely western in nature and use.¹³⁷ Byzantine ceremonial practices continued to be used for later imperial Carolingian coronations, as did the additional anointing. There are several treatises, both Byzantine and Carolingian, that concern the rituals and behaviors of the empress, but only four shall be examined, two Byzantine and two Carolingian, in order to strike a balance between brevity and quality.

Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (905-959 AD)¹³⁸, Emperor of the East, composed treatises on the proper governance of the empire and on the imperial court ceremonies. While his works were written during the tenth century, they drew upon earlier sources and are not too far removed from the time of Charlemagne to be of some use.¹³⁹ In the *Book of Ceremonies*, written by Constantine VII as a guide to his son and heir, there are descriptions of the coronation of the emperor and empress, sometimes directly preceded by the couple's marriage. There are key features of the coronations that bear examination. Two situations could exist for the coronation of an emperor, either that the current emperor would designate his heir by crowning him as junior emperor, or the patriarch (leader of the church in Constantinople) would act as a surrogate senior emperor in crowning a new emperor in the event of the lack of an imperially designated heir.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Janet L. Nelson, *The Frankish World 750-900* (Rio Grande, OH: Hambledon Press, 1996) 102.

¹³⁸ Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio* (Locust Valley, NY: J.J. Augustin, 1967) 7.

¹³⁹ *Empresses and Power*, 50.

¹⁴⁰ Janet L. Nelson, "Symbols in Context: Rulers' Inauguration Rituals in Byzantium and the West in the Early Middle Ages," *The Orthodox Churches and the West*, ed. Derek Baker (Cambridge, UK: Ecclesiastical History Society, 1976) 107.

The patriarch would take the crown and place it upon the emperor's brow.¹⁴¹ This practice likely explains why the pope himself crowned Charlemagne in 800 AD. Irene sat on the imperial throne in Constantinople, her son deposed; the pope and Charlemagne saw a chance to crown a new emperor without challenging the established one in the Byzantine Empire.¹⁴² Charlemagne and the Pope were well aware of the opposition from Constantinople that would result if an emperor were to be crowned in the west, a move that would be and was regarded as hostile toward the Byzantines. They saw Irene's sole occupation of the throne as the perfect time to claim that they were acting in the best interests of Christianity by elevating Charlemagne's status to emperor when no other man claimed the imperial title. No woman had ever before held the imperial throne in her own name and Charlemagne, having been crowned by the Pope, could press a legitimate claim on the imperial throne based upon the Roman imperial traditions of military prowess that the Byzantines highly regarded. Irene, in contrast, relied upon the loyalty of her allies and the force of the rituals that had made her empress.

The *Book of Ceremonies* explains the rites that occur during an empress' coronation, which better explain how she was viewed. At the coronation ceremony, the patriarch prays over the empress' crown, and then hands it to the newly crowned emperor, who crowns his wife.¹⁴³ The coronation ritual was central to establishing the legitimacy of the imperial couple, everything about it was symbolically important and the emperor's crowning of the empress clearly established his superiority in the relationship, similar to the coronation of a successor. The Carolingians adopted the Byzantine

¹⁴¹ Constantinus VII Porphyrogenitus, *Le Livre des Cérémonies, Tome II*, trans. Albert Vogt (Paris, FR : l'Association Guillaume Budé, 1939) 2.

¹⁴² Garland, 87.

¹⁴³ Cérémonies, 11.

ceremony for both sexes and coronation became an essential rite in queen-making in the west. In 816 when Louis the Pious was anointed by the pope, the pontiff refers to Louis' wife Ermengard as Augusta and crowns her.¹⁴⁴ Clearly the specific rituals involved in the coronation, though slightly altered, share the same essential purpose, which is symbolic validation of divinely sanctioned rule.

Additional rituals and rites in Frankish queen-making were established, borrowed, or expanded by the Carolingians. Queens had undergone consecration and coronation ceremonies before Charles the Bald, who ruled during the mid-ninth century, but he put a great deal more emphasis on their use than other Carolingian kings.¹⁴⁵ Coronation of queens in the west began with Bertrada, wife of the first of the Carolingians, Pepin, in 754 AD and occurred several more times during the Carolingian reign. Queenship under the Carolingians was thus transformed into a more ritualized role. With the addition of the coronation, Carolingian queens had the force of the rituals behind their actions, rather than the simple royal designation the Merovingian queens possessed. Charles the Bald initiated the some of the most well documented queenly coronations, including the *ordines* of both his wife Ermentrude and his daughter Judith. An *ordo* is basically a type of liturgy used during a coronation that outlined the expected behavior of the person being crowned. *Ordines* were not typical for the coronation of queens, which was itself a new ceremony. The motivations behind Charles' request for an *ordo* for both his wife and his daughter are of true interest because of what he felt they would impart to the women and subsequently to his family. Nelson explicitly states that "the Carolingian

¹⁴⁴ Stafford, 130.

¹⁴⁵ Nelson, Janet L., "Early Medieval Rites of Queen-Making and the Shaping of Medieval Queenship," Rulers and Ruling Medieval Families in Early Medieval Europe, (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1999) 302-304.

rulers themselves were increasingly interested in the ideology of rulership, as articulated in texts but also as represented in symbolism and public ritual.”¹⁴⁶ This fascination with the various forms and uses of symbolism and public ritual was critically important to the willingness of the Carolingians to adopt Byzantine ceremony and appearance for public ceremonies to set themselves apart from their nobility. Charlemagne himself, however reluctantly, dressed in traditional Roman imperial attire when he was crowned emperor by the Pope in 800 AD.¹⁴⁷ It was this keen interest in and understanding of public perception that permitted the Carolingian family to retain several royal and imperial titles from the eighth to the tenth centuries.

A number of documents created for the Carolingian rulers by court scholars provided instruction to the later generations on how to behave in a royal manner. As has already been discussed, the western basis of leadership and power was the family. By the ninth century, the common idea and understanding of Byzantine feminine sanctity had shifted from the virginal saint to the married mother. With the most holy of female roles matching the natural position of the empress or queen, these imperially married women now possessed an elevated position in the eyes of their subjects independent of the titles they held. As a result, influence at court came more into the realm of the empress and the emperor’s other female family members.¹⁴⁸ The shift is pertinent because it made the two cultures, Byzantine and Carolingian, much more comprehensible to one another. With this increased similarity, the transmission of concepts between the two cultures became more probable. Evidence of this transmission can be found in the ordines and texts on ceremonies.

¹⁴⁶ “Early Medieval Rites,” 303.

¹⁴⁷ Einhard, The Life of Charlemagne (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2003) 51.

¹⁴⁸ “Women in Politics,” 168.

In the western courts these treatises were intended specifically to guide a ruler in proper action, some of which included guidelines for the sacred royal mother that the queen represented. Two of the documents give a much more practical and theoretical picture of queenship as it was practiced in Carolingian Europe: Sedulius Scottus' "On Christian Rulers" and Hincmar of Reims' "On the Governance of the Palace". One gets a clear impression in both documents that the emphasis on the royal or imperial family established during the Merovingian era remained the norm and was deeply rooted in the functioning of the new system. In Sedulius' work the ideal queen is a woman who is described as noble, beautiful, wealthy, chaste, prudent, and compliant in holy virtues.¹⁴⁹ Sedulius' emphasis on and continued use of references to imperial men and women as ideal examples of virtue are two of the work's important features that link it to Byzantine influences. Emperor Theodosios' wife, Placilla, is given as the example of a good wife and empress who does true acts of good will with her own hands.¹⁵⁰ Warning of the foolish wife who spends too much of the kingdom's wealth and is not loyal to her husband's nor her own friends are given by Sedulius, who emphasizes the importance of a wife as "an inventress of prudent counsels."¹⁵¹ Of course the mention of purple as the proper color of royal dress and other royal symbols hearkens to the importance of appearance and the ceremony that is quintessentially Byzantine.¹⁵² Hincmar of Reims, on the other hand, deals more with the specific interactions between the imperial couple and their court. "The good management of the palace [...] as well as the gifts given annually

¹⁴⁹ Sedulius Scottus, *On Christian Rulers*, trans. Edward G. Doyle (Binghamton, NY: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, State University of New York at Binghamton, 1983) 59.

¹⁵⁰ Scottus, 60.

¹⁵¹ Scottus, 60.

¹⁵² Scottus, 52.

to the officers [...] pertained especially to the queen, and under her the chamberlain.”¹⁵³ The existence of specific offices, such as that of chamberlain, had part of their origins in the Roman-Byzantine governance system, which Hincmar notes by claiming the origins of some of the offices to the time of Constantine the Great.¹⁵⁴ The linkage between Carolingian and Byzantine systems of ritual and governance all seem to lead back to one common thread, the court.¹⁵⁵ It was mainly through the use of Byzantine dress and ritual, such as the coronation, that the Byzantine influences on Frankish queens be observed. In addition, one must remember that queenship in the west, and court life in general, was much more informal than in the east; empresses interacted with their court in a different manner than queens in the west interacted with their own courts and there is no evidence that Byzantine women were comparably responsible for the imperial household as their western counterparts.¹⁵⁶ Ritual and tradition were important values in Byzantine society and Constantine VII recognized an important linkage between the Byzantines and the Franks in another of his works; a tradition related to the Carolingian quest for marriage between the two courts.

Intermarriage has been one of the most commonly used methods of quieting dissension between competing groups while strengthening one's own position. The Carolingians, upstart kings now making imperial claims, had ample enough reason to desire a marriage between one of their own and a member of the Byzantine imperial family. Surprisingly, this desire has deep roots in Byzantine tradition and a positive

¹⁵³ Hincmar of Reims, “On the Governance of the Palace,” *The History of Feudalism*, ed. David Herlihy (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1988) 219.

¹⁵⁴ Hincmar, 215.

¹⁵⁵ McCormick, 20.

¹⁵⁶ Of course one is wise to remember that ceremonies and rituals in Byzantium, as well as the west, were mutable in the details as time passed and according to the desire of the rulers. McClanan, 127.

reception, for the most part, on the Byzantine side of the equation. In his De Administrando Imperio, Constantine VII quotes an inscription made at the order of Constantine the Great saying “never shall an emperor of the Romans ally himself in marriage with a nation of customs differing from and alien to those of the Roman order [...] unless it be with the Franks alone.”¹⁵⁷ According to the inscription Constantine the Great seems to have made the exception because he himself was from the Frankish area, which used to be Roman Gaul.¹⁵⁸ New historical investigation has revealed that Constantine VII may have fabricated the inscription.¹⁵⁹ While this falsification is important to a modern understanding of the text, the reference would not have been obviously false to the contemporary reader. The very presence of such a falsified link between Constantinople and Frankia attests to the special relationship between the two peoples in the ninth and tenth centuries and confirms the level of awareness between the two cultures of Byzantium and Frankia.

Marriage was a powerful way to unite two disparate parties through a strong bond. In the Middle Ages it played an important role in politics as a way to unite former or potential enemies and to achieve political aims. Royal women were key in building and maintaining the royal family’s group of supporters.¹⁶⁰ The additional benefit of a foreign bride has already been discussed -- her lack of domestic connections prevented a domestic aristocratic family from gaining too much influence. It is then somewhat ironic that one of the greatest influences on Carolingian culture and queenship came from the extended and sustained interaction between the Franks and the Byzantines. After having

¹⁵⁷ Administrando, 71.

¹⁵⁸ Administrando, 71.

¹⁵⁹ During the course of the defense Byzantine specialist Anthony Kaldellis brought to the author’s attention said reference to Constantine the Great in De Administrando and labeled it as suspect.

¹⁶⁰ “Women and Politics,” 167.

been crowned as emperor by the pope, Charlemagne decided to propose marriage to the Empress Irene, a move that would have effectively united two empires. There were several motivating factors behind Charlemagne's proposal. Almost fifteen years earlier Charlemagne's daughter Rotrud had been betrothed to Irene's son Constantine, but the engagement had been broken.¹⁶¹ The existence of such an arrangement shows that Irene was at least willing to countenance a marriage alliance with the Franks. Pope Leo urged Irene to accept Charlemagne's offer, and it appears that she seriously considered doing so, but the eunuchs that she had so long depended upon began to usurp power from her. Nikephoros, a general, seized power while the marriage ambassadors were still in Constantinople and deposed Irene. She died in exile on 9 August 803, without having had the opportunity to respond to Charlemagne's offer and preventing the union of the two empires.¹⁶² While Irene's death meant the end of Charlemagne's quest to grandly expand his empire, it did not close the door on Byzantine influences or attempts by his descendants to bind the two empires with dynastic ties.

Marriages between the various royal Carolingian family members was discouraged, but the idea of a union between the old and new empires was kept alive from Charlemagne to Louis II, his daughter Ermengard, her son Louis the Blind, and further with the Italian Carolingians.¹⁶³ It was told that Charlemagne's son, Louis the Pious, found his wife through the Byzantine practice of a bride show, which Irene used in finding a bride for her son Constantine.¹⁶⁴ Byzantine influences were already apparent in Louis' reign with his first wife, who mimicked a Byzantine ceremony by kissing Louis

¹⁶¹ Garland, 80.

¹⁶² Garland, 21.

¹⁶³ Stafford, 47.

¹⁶⁴ Stafford, 56-57.

on his knees at a banquet. This is a purely Byzantine practice of respect for the emperor, recorded in the *Book of Ceremonies* as such, with no Frankish precedent.¹⁶⁵ As previously mentioned, Charles the Bald, Louis' son, actively continued a policy of adaptation concerning Byzantine customs, thus spreading the influence throughout his court. It was not just at the court that royal women were exposed to Byzantine influences; Gisla, the sister of Charles the Bald, and her husband Eberhard spent most of their lives overseeing the frontier of Byzantine Venice that was now controlled by the Carolingians.¹⁶⁶ After a life of exposure to Byzantine culture, it is highly improbable that Gisla did not bring back some of those customs to the court or transmitted them to an obviously interested Charles.¹⁶⁷

While all of these circumstances show an increased adoption of Byzantine practices, it was the marriage negotiations that brought Byzantine ambassadors to the Carolingians and Franks to Constantinople. During the period between 756-840 AD, four or five marriage alliances were arranged between the Carolingian and Byzantine dynasties. There were nine embassies from the Carolingians and twenty-one from the Byzantines, totaling fifty-five individual emissaries linking the two courts. Of course this is only taking into account those individuals who have been identified, all being important court members.¹⁶⁸ In addition to the ambassadors from Constantinople, one must take into account the eunuchs that surely came along to stay with the Carolingian princesses, training them in Byzantine etiquette, culture, and likely the Greek

¹⁶⁵ *Frankish World*, 121-122.

¹⁶⁶ McCormick, 22.

¹⁶⁷ It is of note that Gisla and Eberhard later became counts in what is now southern Belgium. The author was provided the previous information during the editing process by his adviser, Heather Tanner.

¹⁶⁸ McCormick, 25.

language.¹⁶⁹ When the betrothals fell through, as they invariably did, the newly trained princesses were married off domestically, carrying their teachings with them. Ermengard, the daughter of Louis II, was betrothed to a Byzantine husband, but that marriage contract fell through and she was subsequently married domestically.¹⁷⁰ The degree of education Ermengard received, having been educated at a nunnery in Brescia and by the scholar Anastasius, made her a particularly good example of a learned female Carolingian who would have had the necessary faculties to implement Byzantine ceremonies or appearances in an advantageous manner.¹⁷¹ In this way the Byzantines influenced the very concept and practice of queenship and the actions of Carolingian women throughout the dynasty's reign.

Charlemagne's imperial court at Aachen gives one the best insight into the effects of Byzantine influence on the behavior of Carolingian royal women, specifically Charlemagne's daughters. After his fifth wife, Liutgard, died in 800 AD and Irene died in 803 AD, Charlemagne never remarried nor proposed marriage to another, instead contenting himself with a series of concubines.¹⁷² For a period of fourteen years there was no queen at Charlemagne's side, a woman whose express duties would have been to manage the king's household and ensure the king's ability to focus on the military and political aspects of rule. The role of queen was essential to the administration of the kingdom; the office had to be filled, or at least the responsibilities shouldered, in order for the household, and by extension the kingdom, to be managed properly. Who would take up these responsibilities? Certainly not the concubines of the aged emperor,

¹⁶⁹ McCormick, 27.

¹⁷⁰ Stafford, 47.

¹⁷¹ Stafford, 54.

¹⁷² Frankish World, 237.

particularly when he was unwilling to marry and there were woman of royal blood in the household, the mature daughters of Charlemagne. The king's biographer, Einhard, relates their continued presence at the court, for Charlemagne "was never willing to marry any of them to a man of their own nation or to a foreigner, but kept them all at home until his death."¹⁷³ There is a contemporary Byzantine example of an emperor's daughters fulfilling the role of queen/empress when the Emperor Theophilos, who reigned from 829-842 AD, had his daughters named Augustae. While Theophilos lived after Charlemagne, his actions were not unique in Byzantine history and simply show that it was an accepted and not particularly unusual imperial practice. There were certain ceremonies that simply could not be performed in Constantinople in the absence of an empress.¹⁷⁴ While it was not the ceremonial aspect the Franks were concerned with, the absence of an imperial female figure at court would be a matter of concern. The distinction between domestic and political concerns in the royal household is misleading, as previously discussed, because the royal household was at the very center of the realm, making domestic concerns political concerns.¹⁷⁵ The women of the Carolingian court were well educated, particularly Charlemagne's daughter Rotrud.¹⁷⁶ Why Rotrud in particular? When her betrothal agreement was arranged between Charlemagne and Irene, a eunuch was sent along with the delegation to remain behind and instruct Rotrud in the letters, language, and customs of the Byzantine Empire she was now designated to rule.¹⁷⁷ While that marriage fell through, other opportunities at home with her father did

¹⁷³ Einhard, 48.

¹⁷⁴ McClanan, 131.

¹⁷⁵ Frankish World, 235.

¹⁷⁶ McKitterick, Rosamond, "Royal Patronage of Culture in the Frankish Kingdoms under the Carolingians: Motives and Consequences," The Frankish Kings and Culture in the Early Middle Ages (Brookfield, VT: Variorum Ashgate Publishing Company, 1995) VII 107.

¹⁷⁷ Garland, 76.

reveal themselves. Charlemagne's daughters and granddaughters moved to fill the space left after Liutgard's death, making for themselves a domestic, and hence political, role.

What exactly did this role look like, how it was exercised and what did it mean to others at the court? Janet Nelson postulates that the group of royal women functioned as a collective queen after 800 AD, when the court became permanently fixed at Aachen.¹⁷⁸ It is important to emphasize that "these women exercised no formal authority, could issue no capitularies, could not summon or lead armies, [and] could not even request charters."¹⁷⁹ Charlemagne's daughters did fulfill the important queenly role of household caretaker; as has previously been discussed, this was no minor position, but one central to the running of the realm. Charlemagne was not bound by the rigid ceremonial necessities of the Byzantine court; his daughters could serve as informal Augustae.¹⁸⁰ The story of a young cleric attempting to bring the king news of a rebellion is quite illustrative of the power the collective queen did exercise, for the messenger had to pass through seven doors before reaching Charlemagne, all guarded by royal women and their retainers.¹⁸¹ The power and influence the women derived from their proximity to the king was a threat to others seeking his ear, mainly noblemen. These men viewed the women as a 'monstrous regiment', to use Nelson's phrase; an administration run by women that possibly reminded them of the power hungry Irene and her, as they viewed it, improper exercise of power during and after her son's reign.¹⁸² Charlemagne's daughters and

¹⁷⁸ Frankish World, 239.

¹⁷⁹ Frankish World, 242.

¹⁸⁰ They each individually lacked the ceremonial and symbolic clout that would allow them or their lovers to pose a political threat to Charlemagne. His eight daughters and five granddaughters at court served, according to Nelson, much in the same way as Irene's eunuchs had served in terms of their dependence upon the central figure, but Charlemagne's daughters carried the extra benefit of a greater impetus to remain loyal derived from the familial bond. Frankish World, 241.

¹⁸¹ Frankish World, 237.

¹⁸² Frankish World, 236-237, 240.

granddaughters permitted him to rule his realm to an unlikely old age, helping to contain the rivalries between his grown sons and himself because as long as they remained unmarried, the balance of power would remain unchanged in the realm and firmly in the hands of Charlemagne.¹⁸³ After the death of Charlemagne the kingdom passed to his only living and legitimate heir, his son Louis. The new king's sisters and nieces, all unwed, now presented a problem and a possible political threat to his claim to power. There were illegitimate heirs aplenty at Aachen and Louis feared that if the women all moved to support one, he could lose the succession he had waited so long to gain. Thus, Louis moved quickly on Aachen, deftly disposing of his sisters and nieces through marriage or convent under a banner of moral reform. Women who exercised too much power were seen as corrosive, an invitation to vice.¹⁸⁴ Irene had been an example to both sides, an inspiration to the women of Charlemagne's court and a warning to the men who sought to maintain the 'proper' functioning of society. One might think that with the ascension of Louis to the throne, the influences of Irene and the experiment with Franco-Byzantine intermarriage would be spoiled because the threat the new imperial power posed to the old. The exact opposite is what, in fact, occurred.

Women in the imperial Byzantine system influenced the concept and practice of queenship in Carolingian Europe through several media, ranging from abstract images and symbols to the concrete adoption of ceremonies and an unceasing quest of intermarriage. Counterweights and imperial coinage were omnipresent ways of inculcating the public with the legitimacy of the imperial family. Mosaics were another way the imperial image was propagated. In terms of observable influence, the recorded

¹⁸³ Frankish World, 241.

¹⁸⁴ Frankish World, 240-241.

actions of both Byzantine and Carolingian rulers through court ceremonies is the most obvious and easily discerned. When one seeks to become the political equal of another, it is often through imitation that this goal is achieved. Such is the case with the Carolingians, who adopted Byzantine imperial dress (chlamys and the use of purple) and ceremony (coronation). Imitation became a desire to unite with the Byzantines through marriage. The tradition of betrothal had its roots with Charlemagne, who proposed marriage to the Empress Irene after the failure of the betrothal of their children. Unfortunately for the Carolingians, this initial failure to intermarry presaged the continued and consistent failure of all subsequent marriage contracts. While the Carolingians never managed to achieve their longtime goal of intermarriage with the Byzantines, one of their successor dynasties, the Ottonians of Germany, finally succeeded with the union of Otto II and the Byzantine Princess Theophano.

Chapter Three

Enter the Princess: Theophano, the Ottonians, and the climax of the quest for validation and reunification in the west

Germany in the tenth century was formerly a region of the great Carolingian empire that was increasingly characterized by fragmentation of royal power. The Liudolfings were a great family that had ties throughout the aristocracy. An important branch of the Liudolfings, the Ottonians, ruled Saxony and then most of Germany and northern Italy, reclaiming the imperial title and achieving the long sought after marriage with a Byzantine princess. While one might assume that the presence of a Greek empress in the west would have served to funnel Byzantine influence and tradition into Germany, particularly concerning the role of a queen, the evidence does not entirely support this conclusion. Mathilda (d. 968 AD), the Saxon princess who came to be recognized as a saint, was the established family matriarch of the Ottonian dynasty. Her lineage and lasting example, established through the hagiographies written about her, served as a recurring point of legitimacy to later Ottonian rulers. The popularity of Theophano's mother-in-law Adelheid (d. 999 AD), as well as her influence and longevity, further thwarted whatever lasting impact Theophano (d. 991 AD) might have made. Conflict between the two women over influence in the regency of Theophano's young son Otto III (d. 1002 AD) only worsened the situation. This is not to say that Theophano's importance to the exercise of queenship in Ottonian Germany was completely negated. Through her son she shaped imperial policy even after her death and her daughters became important aristocratic women and powerful abbesses. But her influence was mitigated by her early death and the early death of her son, the absence of direct, royal, female descendants, and more generally by the end of western fascination with the

Byzantines and with the restoration of a united Roman empire that sprang into being with the imperial coronation of Charlemagne.

The west seemed to come full circle, from the distant interest of the Merovingians to the waning interest of the Liudolfings after the end of the Ottonians. There are many comparisons that can be drawn between the Merovingians and the Liudolfings. Queens came to play a large role at the height of each dynasty's reign. The most significant of the Ottonian women was Mathilda, a Saxon aristocrat by birth, a German queen by marriage, and a saint by acclamation and political convenience. Whether or not Mathilda was genuinely recognized as a saint is only important to this study in so far as this belief helped to fortify the political position of her descendants. The unique focus and content of her *Lives* illustrate the basis of Ottonian queenship and the expectations with which Theophano was confronted. Mathilda's life and the content of her hagiographies had meaning to later Ottonians. Mathilda was the matriarch of the Ottonian dynasty. She was sent at a young age to a religious community to be educated, as were most aristocratic Saxon women at the time.¹⁸⁵ It was there that she met Henry, the son of Otto, Duke of the Saxons, and the match was made. The daughter of an old aristocratic Saxon family, Mathilda was the ideal spouse for Henry because her lineage would bolster the prestige of her husband and their children.¹⁸⁶ Henry "the Fowler" was chosen to succeed his father as duke of the Saxons, then to succeed the childless King Conrad as king of East Frankia.¹⁸⁷ Recognized as uniquely able to defend the throne because of his powerful duchy, Henry was designated by Conrad and elected king by the nobles in 919

¹⁸⁵ Sean Gilsdorf, *Queenship and Sanctity* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004) 4.

¹⁸⁶ Gilsdorf, 4-5.

¹⁸⁷ "The 'Older Life' of Queen Mathilda," trans. Sean Gilsdorf, *Queenship and Sanctity* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004) 75.

AD. He maintained his power through alliances and agreements with the nobles, which allowed him to suppress revolts.¹⁸⁸ Mathilda's *vita* outlines her pious behavior and miraculous actions, but also focuses on political events in her reign and that of her son Otto I.

Of course the model of royal sanctity was not a new one; the first *vita* of Mathilda is based upon Radegund's *vita*, which can be seen in the similar behavior of late night prayer sessions.¹⁸⁹ However, Mathilda does not forsake her marriage nor shirk her queenly duties to become a nun like Radegund. The basic theme evidenced in all the sources is that Ottonian queenship, as modeled by Mathilda, differed little in the basic responsibilities and self-image from Merovingian queenship; she was to be a benefactress, an adviser, mistress of the household and, if required, regent.¹⁹⁰ One of the most prominent recipients of Ottonian patronage was the abbey at Quedlinburg, a religious site that received the specific attention of Mathilda in her queenly quest to ensure the royal family's good standing with God.¹⁹¹ Religious patronage, as previously discussed, was one of the hallmarks of medieval queenship from the Merovingians to the Ottonians and its continued practice was derived from the same motivations. Female piety was still an influential factor in garnering the loyalty of the local clergy, the populace, and most importantly in case of family with imperial aspirations, the Church in Rome. Piety was not the only theme of queenly behavior that was expected of and exhibited by Mathilda; she also excelled in hospitality and generosity. Stafford notes that

¹⁸⁸ Gilsdorf, 5.

¹⁸⁹ "Older Life," 87.

¹⁹⁰ Mathilda's son briefly robbed her of her dowry and seizes all her worldly possessions until his first wife Edith requested that the dowry be restored ("Older Life," 78-79). It is evident from Otto's actions that the precarious position of queen dowager had changed little from the time of the Merovingians.

¹⁹¹ Stafford, 124.

Mathilda's biographer could point to her "presiding over the royal table and maintaining her dignity" as signs of an exemplary queen.¹⁹² Each dynasty had its own female familial role-models, often canonized, to which later queens could imitate when searching for a model of queenship.

Queens were not the only members of the royal family who looked to these ancestral saints, their male descendants also utilized and manipulated the reputations of these women to secure their own claims to the throne. Competition among Mathilda and Henry the Fowler's descendants meant that there was ample opportunity for their descendants to use Mathilda's reputation in the quest for legitimacy. Henry "the Fowler" (d. 936 AD), grandson of Duke Liudolf of Saxony, and Mathilda had five children. The eldest daughter, Hadwig, married Duke Hugh of West Frankia and was the mother of Hugh Capet, the first Capetian king of France.¹⁹³ King Otto I (d. 972 AD) and Duke Henry "the Wrangler" (d. 955 AD) of Bavaria were the two sons of Henry and Mathilda, and each son founded a line of descendants that competed for the German throne. Otto I married Adelheid and their son Otto II (d. 983 AD) married the Byzantine Theophano, who in their turn produced the third and final Otto. Otto III died without an heir in 1002 AD, allowing his cousin Henry II (d. 1024 AD), from the cadet line founded by Henry "the Wrangler", ascended to the throne.¹⁹⁴ As one can see, familial politics in Ottonian Germany, with the added dimension of their Capetian cousins in Frankia, was quite complicated and rife with competition. The two *vitae* of Mathilda reflect the competition between the two lines descended from Henry "the Wrangler".

¹⁹² Stafford, 101.

¹⁹³ Queenship and Sanctity, xvi.

¹⁹⁴ Queenship and Sanctity, xvi.

The major difference in the content of Mathilda's hagiographies when compared to other hagiographies is Mathilda's limited number of miracles and greater degree of prophecy. Those prophecies included in the *vita* always reflect well upon the royal attributes of the descendant responsible for commissioning the *vita*. Mathilda was truly a political saint.¹⁹⁵ This point is further evidenced by the presence of Mathilda's preference for Henry "the Wrangler" in the "Later Life" and not the older one. The "Older Life" was commissioned by Emperor Otto II as a record of his illustrious ancestors,¹⁹⁶ and it is quite understandable that Mathilda's family relations and descendants would be made special mention of, in particular a story of Mathilda prophesizing greatness for Otto II.¹⁹⁷ Henry II, successor of the childless Otto III from the cadet line of the Ottonian dynasty, had the second *vita* commissioned in order to strengthen his own claim to the throne.¹⁹⁸ The inclusion of Mathilda's support of her younger son Henry, grandfather of King Henry II, over Otto I is significant because it would give legitimacy to his own claim to the throne, just as its absence in the first *vita* shows that Otto II wished to avoid any hint of illegitimacy dealing with his own claim to the throne.¹⁹⁹ In any event, "Mathilda was a 'dynastic saint' who served to provide divine legitimation to an earthly lineage that claimed her."²⁰⁰ The difference between the two *vitae* is illustrative of the practical uses for which the *lives* of Mathilda were, at least in part, commissioned.

¹⁹⁵ Stafford, 7.

¹⁹⁶ "Older Life," 71.

¹⁹⁷ "Older Life," 80.

¹⁹⁸ Stafford, 7.

¹⁹⁹ "The "Later Life" of Queen Mathilda," trans. Sean Gilsdorf, *Queenship and Sanctity* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004) 100.

²⁰⁰ Gilsdorf, 44.

It is essential to understand Ottonian queenship through the lens of the hagiographies commissioned in honor of Mathilda because in medieval Germany sainthood was a local occurrence that symbolized the ecclesiastical, political, and familial interests of the area.²⁰¹ The importance of Mathilda as a symbol of dynastic legitimacy is shown by her popularity as a favorite Ottonian family saint.²⁰² Rosamond McKitterick observes that the *lives* of Mathilda demonstrate a distinctively political and feminine ideal of sanctity that was important to Ottonian self-identity.²⁰³ The *lives* also continued a long-standing theme of the queen as a ‘moral compass’ that began in Merovingian hagiography and had a strong influence on the behavior of later Ottonian queens.²⁰⁴ While Mathilda can be viewed as the founding matron-saint of Ottonian queenship, it is Adelheid, her successor, who enjoyed and suffered through the extremes of medieval queenship, Italian and Ottonian.

Adelheid (d. 999 AD) had a hand in three successive generations of Ottonian rule; she was a woman so skilled in the demands of her office that even Theophano initially took her cue from Adelheid. Adelheid came of age in the tenth century. It was a world characterized by the fragmentation of the Carolingian empire into smaller duchies and counties ruled by autonomous military commanders. In spite of the territorial breakup, the political, cultural, and religious achievements of the Carolingians left a powerful legacy.²⁰⁵ In addition to these influences, Adelheid was raised in northern Italy, an area long accustomed to Byzantine practices in gift giving and patronage that differed from

²⁰¹ Gilsdorf, 1.

²⁰² Stafford, 7.

²⁰³ Rosamond McKitterick, “Ottonian intellectual culture in the tenth century and the role of Theophano,” ed. Adelbert Davids, *The Empress Theophano* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 185.

²⁰⁴ Gilsdorf, 9. Perhaps Edith, the first wife of Otto I, took her cue from this idea when urging her husband to return Mathilda’s dowry.

²⁰⁵ Gilsdorf, 2-3.

traditional Saxon modes of treasure distribution; the Byzantine method was far more formalized and not based on the maintenance of the nobles' loyalty.²⁰⁶ It is in the context of a Europe largely unified by Carolingian ideology and increasingly divided after the demise of that great dynasty, that Adelheid should be understood.

The daughter of King Rudolf II of Burgundy, Adelheid was already positioned to play an important role through political marriage. Hugh of Arles, a French nobleman, took advantage of Rudolf's death by marrying Rudolf's widow Bertha and betrothing Adelheid to his own son, Lothar. Raised at Hugh's court for ten years, the two were finally married and ruled over the Italian kingdom for three years, until the death of Lothar.²⁰⁷ As the young widowed queen of an important kingdom, Adelheid again found herself sought after in marriage. The transmission of power through a widowed queen was one of the tools of medieval queens in the exercise of their power, though one that could easily be taken advantage of by opportunistic men.²⁰⁸ Adelheid recognized the power she possessed and escaped from the Italian noble Berengar, who had captured her in his own quest for the Italian throne, and allied herself with the invading Otto I in 951. With the marriage Otto gained a claim to the Kingdom of Italy, which stretched half the length of the peninsula and all the other lands of which Adelheid had possession, while Adelheid gained a strong king who was willing to give her a great degree of power and autonomy because of the challenges of ruling over two kingdoms.²⁰⁹ Their union was a culmination of close ties between the Germans and the Burgundians that also brought

²⁰⁶ Karl Leyser, "The Tenth Century in Byzantine-Western Relationships," ed. Derek Baker, Relations between East and West in the Middle Ages (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 1973) 48.

²⁰⁷ Gilsdorf, 6-7.

²⁰⁸ Stafford, 50.

²⁰⁹ Gilsdorf, 7.

northern Italy back under the control of a Germanic emperor. Otto I and Adelheid were elected king and queen by the Italian nobles.

Adelheid brought with her a clear understanding of her role as queen, as well as a clear demand for some sort of role above that of dependant spouse. In official documents of her reign, Adelheid bears the title “consors regni”, meaning partner in the kingdom, which was symbolic of the special status and land rights she owed to her Italian base.²¹⁰ Byzantine imperial protocol typically provided for the use of both imperial names on official documents, as well as the presence of empresses on coins and in murals. Angelberga, the wife of Louis II, used the title during the decade following 860AD and ensured the use of the title with all future Italian queens, including Adelheid. It is important to note that the use of the title was never legally required, but more a royal tradition that was symbolic of the unique cultural *mélange* that existed in Italy.²¹¹

While titles are important, they can be empty; it is late Roman property laws that gave a firmer basis for empowered Italian queens.²¹² According to Pauline Stafford, in Roman law women could own property that was distinct from that of her husband and control all of her husband’s possessions after his death. Such laws allowed the accumulations of large amounts of land by Italian queens. It was in Italy that these practices were copied by the Ottonians, with both Adelheid and Theophano intervening in royal charters more frequently. Theophano issued an imperial seal with her own name on it while serving as regent for her son only in the Italian provinces. In Italy Adelheid, and her successor Theophano, fully exploited the potential of their office.²¹³ The exercise

²¹⁰ Gilsdorf, 12.

²¹¹ Stafford, 139.

²¹² Stafford, 137.

²¹³ Stafford, 138-139.

of this power generated conflict between Adelheid and her son Otto II and later still with Theophano as regent for the young Otto III. Adelheid gave birth to three sons, the eldest being Otto II.²¹⁴ In 972 the Byzantine princess Theophano married Otto II and they, along with Otto I and Adelheid were anointed and crowned emperors and empresses.²¹⁵ After Otto I's death later that year, Adelheid ruled the realm along with her son and daughter-in-law. Following a disagreement over the administration of her dowry, Adelheid went to Burgundy where her brother Conrad ruled, but her stay was short-lived for she was soon reconciled with her son.²¹⁶ After the death of Otto II, Theophano and Adelheid worked together to ensure the succession for Otto III rather than his uncle Henry.²¹⁷ After their success, Theophano took the lead as her young son's regent until her death in 991. Adelheid returned to Germany and "dutifully managed the Roman empire" until her grandson reached his majority.²¹⁸ Nearing death, Adelheid retired to a nunnery, dying just before the dawning of a new millennium in 999 AD.²¹⁹ It is little wonder that Adelheid became the most influential Ottonian queen, outliving her husband by twenty-six years, her son by sixteen years, and her daughter-in-law by eight years. Part of Ottonian women's power, particularly in the case of Mathilda, Adelheid, and those who became abbesses, was their longevity, allowing them influence over multiple generations.²²⁰ While her presence was not always permanent, Adelheid influenced the

²¹⁴ Gilsdorf, xvi.

²¹⁵ Odilo Engels, "Theophano, the western empress from the East," ed. Adelbert Davids, The Empress Theophano (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 32-33.

²¹⁶ Odilo of Cluny, "The Epitaph of Adelheid," trans. Sean Gilsdorf, Queenship and Sanctity (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004) 132-133.

²¹⁷ Gilsdorf, 11.

²¹⁸ Odilo of Cluny, 134.

²¹⁹ Odilo of Cluny, 141.

²²⁰ P. Barge, "The image of women of the nobility in the German chronicles of the tenth and eleventh centuries," ed. Adelbert Davids, The Empress Theophano (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 150.

practice of Ottonian queenship through the record of her life in Odilo of Cluny's "Epitaph" and the transmission of her practices to her daughter Emma and to her daughter-in-law Theophano, both of whom were tutored by her.

Emma, Adelheid's daughter from her marriage with Lothar, married the French King Lothar, which served only to spread Adelheid's influence²²¹ and garner the famous queen the nickname "mother of kingdoms", for her descendants ruled most of Europe.²²² When it comes to Adelheid's influence over Theophano, the norms of the day support the idea that it was she and her daughter Mathilda, Abbess of Quedlinburg, who helped the newly arrived Theophano adjust to the expectations of Ottonian queenship.²²³ They likely instructed her in the queen's duties of the royal household, as well as the general nature of how the kingdom was ruled and the parameters of the queen's role. However, Adelheid would have had an interest in keeping Theophano under her own influence in order to maintain her position in much the same way that the Merovingian Queen Brunhild dominated her daughter-in-law Faileuba. Theophano was not so compliant and the two women had a competitive relationship that likely helped to spoil Theophano's reputation after her untimely death.²²⁴ Tension between the two was high during part of Otto II's reign, with Adelheid seemingly holding Theophano responsible for the failure of the invasion of Byzantine-controlled southern Italy.²²⁵ Their relationship obviously improved during the fight to keep Otto III on the throne because the women worked together, but after success was achieved Theophano again asserted her dominance in the

²²¹ Engels, 34.

²²² Gilsdorf, 7.

²²³ Judith Herrin, "Theophano: considerations on the education of a Byzantine princess," ed. Adelbert Davids, *The Empress Theophano* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 84.

²²⁴ K. Ciggaar, "Theophano: an empress reconsidered," Ed. Adelbert Davids, *The Empress Theophano* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 53.

²²⁵ Leyser, 45.

role of regent. The women demonstrated the importance of queen-mothers in the politics of succession, building a coalition even another member of the royal family could not overcome.²²⁶ The main conflict during the regency stemmed from the interests of both women in Italy, where both had large dowry possessions.²²⁷ Throughout all of these interactions and competitions, Adelheid managed to maintain enough support to become regent after Theophano's death.

Mathilda and Adelheid were the two great matriarchs of the Ottonian family and shaped the future practice of queenship through the legacy of their actions and the record of their lives in their respective *vitae*. As previously discussed, Mathilda carried on the legacy of Merovingian queenship that features the queen as responsible for the maintenance of the royal household, while Adelheid integrated this Saxon queenship with Italian concepts of female land rights. It must be noted that these Italian concepts were not carried into Saxony, but were put into practice by Saxon queens who controlled land in Italy. Only through the examination of these two prior queens of the Ottonian dynasty can Ottonian queenship be understood and Theophano's exercise of and effect upon it be measured.

Marriage between the imperial dynasty in the west, whether Carolingian or Ottonian, and the imperial family of the Byzantines in Constantinople was the defining characteristic of east-west relations for roughly two centuries. The obsession with intermarriage was part of the Carolingian legacy inherited by the Ottonian emperors. As previously discussed, there were five proposed marriage alliances forged by Carolingian kings after Charlemagne's death. By the exchange of embassies, the Byzantine presence

²²⁶ Stafford, 152.

²²⁷ Gilsdorf, 13-14.

at the Carolingian court was sustained for more than a century. It seems improbable, even impossible, that this exchange and the presence of eunuchs to train the young Carolingian brides-to-be in Byzantine ritual and etiquette would have had no effect on the way these women viewed themselves and the potential of their office. One of the most striking examples of a Carolingian queen exercising power is that of Angelberga (d. 888 AD). As the widowed empress of the Emperor Louis II of Italy, Angelberga benefited from the dual traditions of the adoption of Byzantine models by the Carolingians and the strong land rights given to Italian noblewomen.²²⁸ She had borne the emperor no sons, but her position as a consecrated empress and powerful landholder ensured that she could not be ignored in the decision of who would succeed her late husband. Byzantine empresses enjoyed a particularly large degree of power and autonomy at the end of a particular dynasty; for instance the sisters Zoe and Theodora, who brought several men to the imperial throne through marriage and ruled in their own name at the ends of their lives. At the Council of Pavia in 875 AD Angelberga was courted by all the major claimants to the throne, in 877 she led a faction in opposition to her cousin Charles the Fat's claim to the imperial title, and in 887 she attempted to sway the dying Charles into designating her grandson Louis 'the Blind' as his heir.²²⁹ Angelberga's actions serve to further support the idea of a strong Carolingian heritage of Byzantine influence passed to the Ottonians, a heritage that included the quest for intermarriage with the Byzantine imperial family.

Interestingly, it was not the long-time goal of sending a western bride to the Byzantine court, but the request for a Byzantine bride to come to the west that met with

²²⁸ Stafford, 171-172.

²²⁹ Stafford, 135-136.

success. This goal may have been realized by one of the last Carolingian emperors, Louis III ‘the Blind’, who some claim married Princess Anna. This “princess” was the illegitimate daughter of the Byzantine Emperor Leo VI.²³⁰ While the possibility of this pairing is intriguing, the uncertain evidence and Louis’ loss of the imperial title and subsequent marginalization limit any impact the marriage might have made. Another successful pairing between east and west was the marriage of Romanos II to Hugh of Arles’ illegitimate daughter. While this marriage is well documented, Bertha/Eudokia (for she was given a Greek name) died in 949, after only five years of marriage, and left no children. After her untimely death negotiations were started to procure a marriage between Romanos II and Otto I’s niece Hedwig, but these quickly fell through and each married another.²³¹ It was after the failure of this proposal, the first between the Byzantines and the Ottonians, that Otto I decided to attempt to procure a Byzantine princess for his son.²³² With this decision Otto succeeded where so many before him had failed.

When Otto I initially planned on marrying his son to a Byzantine princess, he did so for the specific reason of gaining imperial legitimacy and had a different bride in mind than the one he received. Luitprand of Cremona was dispatched to Constantinople in 968 to negotiate with the Emperor Nikephoros II Phokas, a usurper married to the widow of the Emperor Romanos II, for a marriage between Otto II and an imperial princess.²³³ Otto I’s embassy sought Anna, the daughter of Romanos II, her desirability coming from

²³⁰ Adelbert Davids, “Marriage negotiations between Byzantium and the West and the name of Theophano in Byzantium (eighth to tenth centuries),” *The Empress Theophano* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 106.

²³¹ “Marriage negotiations,” 106-107.

²³² Herrin, 68.

²³³ “Marriage negotiations,” 107.

being a porphyrogeneta, which roughly means “purple born.”²³⁴ The term refers to the imperial birthing room, the walls of which were covered in porphyry, but its true significance was in that it indicated the imperial child had been born to a ruling emperor.²³⁵ Logically, the child of a seated emperor had added dynastic legitimacy because of being born in the imperial palace as a prince or princess. They would automatically have an imperial title and the recognition of all the aristocracy. One can easily imagine why Otto I would want such a purple-born bride for his son. She would enhance the legitimacy of his dynasty that had only gained the imperial title in the previous generation. However, Luitprand’s request met only with hostility and expansive demands.²³⁶ He reported that the Emperor Nikephoros Phokas cited the Byzantine practice of refusing foreign marriage for a porphyrogennete for his reluctance to part with the princess; however, he was willing to part with the princess if Rome and Ravenna, along with all of the lands attached to these two cities were returned to the control of Byzantine forces.²³⁷ This demand clearly illustrates the continued Byzantine concern with recovering the great empire of Justinian and their worries over the Ottonian encroachment upon Byzantine holdings on the Italian peninsula. On the other side the Ottonians sought to regain and eventually surpass the Carolingian empire. In short, the first round of negotiations for a Byzantine princess was fruitless. Nikephoros Phokas was assassinated in 969 and a second envoy was dispatched to deal with the new emperor,

²³⁴ Herrin, 68.

²³⁵ “Marriage negotiations,” 100.

²³⁶ “Marriage negotiations, 99.

²³⁷ “Marriage negotiations, 99.

John Tzimiskes.²³⁸ The second delegation succeeded in bringing back a Byzantine bride, Theophano, who married, and produced an heir, the first successful pairing of its kind.

Before embarking upon an examination of Theophano's reign as Saxon queen and Ottonian empress, one must come to know who she was and how her relative lack of formal imperial training allowed her a degree of personal *carte blanche* when she assumed the mantle of a Saxon queen. Theophano was brought to Rome in 972 to be wed to Otto II and crowned empress. One of the indications that Theophano was not the sought after princess, the porphyrogennete, is the reference to the new bride as the *neptim clarissimam* of the emperor, which is roughly translated into 'most distinguished niece'.²³⁹ Judith Herrin gives an in-depth explanation of exactly who Theophano was and her relation to the Emperor John Tzimiskes. Theophano was the product of a marriage between two powerful Byzantine families, the daughter of Constantine Skleros and Sophia Phokas. Her mother was the niece of Nikephoros Phokas. It was through her paternal aunt, Maria Skleraina, who was married to John Tzimiskes that the important link existed because Skleros was a longtime friend and supporter of Tzimiskes. Being part of the ruling family from a young age, Theophano likely had contact with the imperial court.²⁴⁰ Her experience in court life was considered important, particularly so because she was a princess destined to go abroad. In the end, it was the fact that Tzimiskes was childless that truly opened the door to Theophano as being an ideal candidate for a diplomatic foreign marriage.²⁴¹ At the time of the marriage proposal,

²³⁸ Herrin, 69.

²³⁹ "Marriage negotiations," 107.

²⁴⁰ Herrin, 79-80. It is interesting to reflect for a moment on the complicated familial relationships of Theophano and that if she had remained in Constantinople she may have played an important role in reuniting aristocratic support under Basil II, the son of Romanos II, who suffered the presence of usurpers on the throne for so long.

²⁴¹ Herrin, 80-81.

Theophano served the dual purpose of garnering peace in the west so that Tzimiskes could focus north and east,²⁴² and strengthening his own position by claiming a level of legitimacy that would allow him to export relatives as an expression of imperial power while keeping the porphyrogennetoi under his own control. Of course this is conjecture, as one cannot know exactly what Tzimiskes was thinking when he agreed to the marriage. While Theophano's background will remain important to her later reign, the immediate effects it had on her reception in the west are also worth quickly noting. Thietmar of Merseberg, a bishop and member of a Germanic aristocratic family, wrote the *Chronicon* shortly after the deaths of Theophano, Adelheid, and Otto III. Concerning Theophano, Thietmar relates that John Tzimiskes "sent across the sea to our emperor [Otto I], not the desired maiden, but rather his niece, Theophanu, accompanied by a splendid entourage and magnificence gifts."²⁴³ Otto I perceived the importance of the marriage in relation to the maintenance of Ottonian control in northern Italy against renewed Byzantine interest. Additionally, he reports that some of the nobles tried to persuade Otto I to refuse the bride and send her back to Constantinople. Instead he persuaded the German and Italian nobles to support her marriage to Otto II.²⁴⁴ Theophano's ultimate acceptance in the west and by her future in-laws was determined by the nobles' recognition that her Byzantine and royal pedigree were valuable even if she was not the sought after porphyrogennete, Anna.²⁴⁵ The identity of Theophano was integrally important to what she did and how she behaved as an Ottonian empress

²⁴² Herrin, 81.

²⁴³ Thietmar of Merseberg, "The Chronicon," trans. David A. Warner, *Ottonian Germany* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2001) 103.

²⁴⁴ Thietmar, 103.

²⁴⁵ Ciggaar, 52.

because she was not raised in the palace and had likely not received the traditional training given to all Byzantine princesses at court.

After the marriage and coronation in 972 AD of Otto II and Theophano events progressed quickly to clear the path to power for the young couple. Otto I died later that same year,²⁴⁶ leaving the newly wedded imperial couple to rule over a loosely controlled empire. Of course, the first necessary tasks set to Theophano would have been to learn the language of her new empire and get acquainted with the intricacies of Germanic rule.²⁴⁷ Theophano benefited from an expanded and empowered concept of queenship that was her mother-in-law Adelheid's legacy.²⁴⁸ As has been discussed, Adelheid and her daughter Mathilda likely gave Theophano a helping hand in adjusting to Ottonian life. One of the easiest ways to evaluate how a queen or empress was viewed by her contemporaries is the title given her. The terms by which Theophano was referred to most often were: *consors regni* and *coimperatrix*. Adelheid had been referred to as *consors regni*, which had signified her importance and relative power in the realm and was in fact a title first used in the west by Richardis (d. 895 AD), a Carolingian queen. However, *coimperatrix* is another matter because it had not previously been used in the west. The term probably originated from Byzantine influences, but, as Rosamond McKitterick suggests, the conditions and activities of western queens had been extant and practiced in the west, but lacked the terminology to express the term.²⁴⁹ Titular usage is most prevalent in 'petitio' (petitions) and other requests for imperial patronage, an

²⁴⁶ Gilsdorf, xvi.

²⁴⁷ Karl Leyser, "*Theophanu divina gratia imperatrix augusta*: western and eastern emperors in the later tenth century," ed. Adelbert Davids, *The Empress Theophano* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 20.

²⁴⁸ Gilsdorf, 13.

²⁴⁹ "Ottonian intellectual," 187.

established as part of queenly power. Diplomas were drawn up whenever patronage was granted and the empress' petitions were duly noted; the surviving diplomas from the reign of Otto II show Theophano intervening seventy-six times. There is also evidence of occasional interventions by Adelheid, though these fade as her influence at court progressively waned after the death of Otto I.²⁵⁰ Theophano's quick mastery of the Ottonian system of patronage is impressive due to the rapidity with which it was achieved.

It is likely that Theophano's progress in learning the language of her subjects matched her mastery of the manner of Ottonian rule. Using the diplomas as an example, Theophano seems to have brought little change to the language of official documents. Only the titles *imperatrix augusta* and *coimperatrix* seem to be innovative and particularly linked to Theophano.²⁵¹ Concerning the learning of Latin, there are Psalters produced during the Ottonian period in Latin with Greek translations under each line that would allow a native Greek speaker to learn the Latin words for the same psalms. The presence of these Psalters in German monasteries indicates the presence of literate Greeks in the west and a fairly high level of interaction among the learned.²⁵² Paradoxically, there is little evidence that Theophano took a very active role herself in fostering either Latin or Greek culture in Germany. This lack of cultural patronage is likely the result of a number of factors, such as Theophano's unfamiliarity with Latin and Ottonian intellectual culture in general²⁵³ as well a greater concern with securing her son's throne after the death of his father. In terms of artistic creations, the most famous surviving

²⁵⁰ "*Theophanu divina*," 20-21.

²⁵¹ "*Theophanu divina*," 21-22.

²⁵² "Ottonian intellectual," 182.

²⁵³ "Ottonian intellectual," 187.

depiction of Otto II and Theophano is an ivory plaque showing the imperial couple being crowned by Christ [see figure 3.1].²⁵⁴ The writing is in Greek and the style of the image is so clearly Byzantine in style that it is considered likely that Byzantine artists, either brought with or by Theophano to the west, created it. Inspection of the ivory reveals the equality in the size and detail of the emperor and empress, as well as the ornate clothing both are wearing.²⁵⁵ When comparing the ivory to the mosaic of Theodora at Ravenna, one notices the similarities of the headdress with the long string of pearls on either side of the queens' faces. Imperial dress appears to have changed little over the intervening five hundred years, which supports the view that the images from counterweights, coins, and mosaics established the imperial image in the west, an image still in production with the ivory of Otto II and Theophano. Both the size and details of the images indicate a powerful empress and a high degree of Byzantine influence.



*Figure 3.1*²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴ "The Crowning of Otto II and Theophano," http://www.musee-moyenage.fr/ang/pages/page_id_18197_u112.htm.

²⁵⁵ "The Crowning of Otto II and Theophano," NP.

²⁵⁶ "The Crowning of Otto II and Theophano," NP. Christ is crowning Otto II (on the left) and Theophano.

It is also believed that Theophano's arrival helped to develop iconography of the Virgin Mary in the west. These images are significant because they helped to propagate Byzantine culture and the image of female imperial power in Ottonian Germany.²⁵⁷ Mary's image was particularly helpful because she was depicted as the empress of Heaven, a divine example of feminine imperial power. It is generally accepted that Theophano's arrival in the west helped to foster those artistic innovations introduced by the Carolingians, but did not result in a paradigm shift in either western artwork or relations between east and west, serving only to enhance what was already in place.²⁵⁸ Theophano fulfilled her full potential as a Byzantine princess and an Ottonian empress only after the death of her husband and her career as queen-regent for her young son.

With the death of Otto II in 983 AD,²⁵⁹ Theophano was afforded the opportunity given to the other powerful queens, particularly Brunhild and Irene, the chance to be queen-regent for an underage son. Stafford's maxim about the preference for a queen-regent because a minor's mother posed less of a threat to the nobles than a male relative, seeing as "their own survival was bound up with his [the son's]," applies here.²⁶⁰ It is likely that this preference helped Theophano gain the regency after Otto II's death and the seizure of the young Otto III by his cousin, Duke Henry of Bavaria.²⁶¹ With the help of a coalition formed with the aid of Adelheid and Mathilda of Quedlinburg²⁶² and headed by Archbishop Willigis of Mainz, Theophano regained control of her son to become sole regent.²⁶³ Adelheid's cooperation with her daughter-in-law after Otto II's

²⁵⁷ Ciggaar, 59-61.

²⁵⁸ "Byzantine-Western Relationships," 43.

²⁵⁹ Gilsdorf, xvi.

²⁶⁰ Stafford, 155.

²⁶¹ Thietmar, 148.

²⁶² Engels, 37-38.

²⁶³ "*Theophanu divina*," 23-24.

death is particularly striking since they were estranged most other times.²⁶⁴ Once firmly in control of her son's empire, Theophano began issuing diplomas dated from her own coronation, not that of her son, and using the male title "*imperator augustus*." These diplomas were issued in Italy in Otto III's absence and the use of a male title for female rulers was not unheard of in tenth-century Italy.²⁶⁵ Theophano was drawing upon Byzantine methods of diplomacy and concepts of imperial responsibility and universal authority, as well as Adelheid's example.²⁶⁶

One of the challenges faced by Theophano during her reign, but even more so in posterity, was the perception that she was a dominant, overambitious woman who imbued her son with her Greek ideas.²⁶⁷ The perception is based upon the assertion that Adelheid held Theophano responsible for Otto II's failed ventures in southern Italy and of her son's subsequent obsession with the area. Negative comments concerning Theophano emanate from the *Epitaph of Adelheid* as well, which were read by subsequent generations that judged Theophano harshly.²⁶⁸ It is through her son, Otto III, that Theophano had the greatest influence on events after her death. Unlike the typical noblewoman, Theophano undertook the education of her children herself.²⁶⁹ She thereby ensured that they would inherit the distinct cultural heritage of their mother just as much, if not more so, than that of their father. The Greek retainers that had accompanied Theophano west, or some who later joined her there, might have contributed to her children's education.²⁷⁰ It is known

²⁶⁴ "*Theophanu divina*," 21.

²⁶⁵ Engels, 38.

²⁶⁶ Herrin, 83-84.

²⁶⁷ Ciggaar, 51.

²⁶⁸ Ciggaar, 53.

²⁶⁹ Herrin, 85.

²⁷⁰ "Byzantine-Western Relationships," 44.

that Otto III had a Greek tutor, Johannes Philagathos,²⁷¹ which further helped to focus his attention on northern Italian rather than Saxon concerns later in life, which illustrate his Byzantine orientation. His ambition to imitate and surpass the achievements of Charlemagne²⁷² and his southerly focus were the legacy of Theophano, who died prematurely on 15 June 991.²⁷³ Thietmar of Merseberg, while cautious in his praise of Theophano, does laud her for the protection of her son's throne with 'male vigilance.'²⁷⁴ In the end, the limitations of Theophano's influence on queenship in spite of her presence in the west are the most truly surprising results of her reign.

Theophano's influence on the concept and practice of queenship in the west was limited for several reasons. The introduction of a Byzantine princess into the west should have been an important synthesizing development and Theophano's influence on the direction of Ottonian imperial policy was tangible in the actions of Otto III, but short lived. Otto III aspired to greater achievements than those of his father and grandfather, he hoped to rival Charlemagne and Justinian, the great men of whom he had likely read.²⁷⁵ During Otto III's reign western imitation of Byzantine imperial practices reached their peak. He wanted to found an *oikoumene* and a family of rulers tied to him.²⁷⁶ He conferred Byzantine titles and offices on uninterested Saxon nobles for this reason. Unfortunately for Otto, the conversion of a western king's comitatus, which is a loose group of loyal nobles, into an eastern emperor's aristocratic bureaucracy proved far more difficult than the young emperor could manage in the short span of his adult life.²⁷⁷ The

²⁷¹ "Ottonian intellectual," 177.

²⁷² "Ottonian intellectual," 179,181.

²⁷³ Herrin, 83.

²⁷⁴ Bange, 155.

²⁷⁵ Herrin, 85.

²⁷⁶ "Byzantine-Western Relations," 44.

²⁷⁷ "Byzantine-Western Relations," 44.

changes introduced by Otto III and the heightened influence of Byzantine culture in Ottonian politics were not popular. However, “Otto did not live long enough for any of this to become permanent.”²⁷⁸ He died in 1002 AD at the age of twenty-one, less than a month before the long desired porphyrogennete princess arrived in Italy to marry him.²⁷⁹ One can only speculate about what kind of effect this might have had on Ottonian culture if Otto III had lived and the marriage produced an heir, but one must keep in mind that discontent with Otto’s Italian focus was taking a toll on the loyalty of his Germanic nobles. “With his death [...] the dream of reuniting ‘both East and West in one empire in the manner of Justinian’ was over.”²⁸⁰

What of Theophano’s other children? Two of Otto II’s and Theophano’s daughters entered monasteries where they subsequently became abbesses, Adelheid of Quedlinburg and Sophia of Gandersheim.²⁸¹ These women had influence over two of the main cultural centers of the Ottonian Empire; the only real foray they made into the political world was to support their cousin Henry from the cadet line to become emperor after the death of their brother.²⁸² The only other surviving child of Otto II and Theophano, Mathilda, married Count Palatine Ezzo,²⁸³ effectively ending the imperial line descending from Theophano. Even the influence of the abbesses faded as religious reforms and disputes moved scholarly study away from monasteries. Gandersheim,

²⁷⁸ “*Theophanu divina*,” 27.

²⁷⁹ “Marriage negotiations,” 109.

²⁸⁰ “Marriage negotiations,” 109-110.

²⁸¹ Bange, 163-164.

²⁸² Gilsdorf, 47.

²⁸³ Gilsdorf, xvi.

which had been a cultural mecca during the time of the Ottonians, faded as its literary prestige declined after the death of the famed poet Hroswitha circa 973.²⁸⁴

While the two greatest limitations to Theophano's impact on western queenship were the short lives of Theophano and Otto III as well as the loss of influence by all of her descendants, general shifts in western society during the eleventh and twelfth centuries served to further limit Theophano's influence. The empress, so celebrated at the time of her marriage, came to be derided for her extravagance and Greek heritage. A vivid example of Theophano's negative post-mortem portrayal is recorded in the "Life of Bernward of Hildesheim," in which a nun has a vision of Theophano who laments her torment in hell for introducing "Greek luxury, jewelry, and fashions into the *Reich* [Ottonian Empire] where they had hitherto been unknown."²⁸⁵ Clerical reformers of the era after Theophano saw the Byzantines as an example of sin and luxury, not something to be imitated.²⁸⁶ In addition to the newly developed negative view of the Byzantines, who had for so long been idolized, diplomatic relations between the two imperial courts became overshadowed by a new and vigorous traffic of pilgrims from France and other western regions, to the Holy Land.²⁸⁷ These broad societal changes served to further mitigate Theophano's effect on the idea and practice of queenship in Germany and Italy.

While there were limitations on Theophano's influence, this does not negate her legacy entirely. Henry II, Otto III's successor, also died without an heir in 1024, leaving the dowager Empress Cunegunda to rule with the help of her male relatives until a new

²⁸⁴ Anne Lyon Haight, *Hroswitha of Gandersheim: Her Life, Times, and Works, and a Comprehensive Bibliography* (New York: Clarke & Way, Inc., 1965) 34.

²⁸⁵ "Byzantine-Western Relationships," 45-46.

²⁸⁶ "Marriage negotiations," 111.

²⁸⁷ "Byzantine-Western Relationships," 46.

emperor could be elected.²⁸⁸ Cunegunda likely benefited from the long tradition of strong, powerful Ottonian empresses, represented by Adelheid and Theophano, when she gained the regency, albeit briefly, after her husband's demise. In 1056 the widowed queen of Henry III, Agnes, was the regent for her young son Henry IV, though she was later deprived of it by jealous dukes wishing to gain further influence over the young king.²⁸⁹ While the position of dowager queen regents has been established as weaker because of the lack of an adult male to which her power is tied, it is important to note that the longstanding strength of a queen's position in Ottonian society had begun to weaken by the middle of the eleventh century because the strength of dynastic legitimacy, which female rulers depended upon, was also weakening. However, further intermarriage was still sought by the western emperor in 1027 AD, when an envoy was sent to Constantinople by Conrad II.²⁹⁰ While the mission failed and the dream of a reunited Roman empire faded, there was still some impetus a quarter century after Otto III's death to gain the legitimacy that might have been offered by a Byzantine bride to stabilize the dynastic claims of the post-Ottonian rulers.

Theophano, Byzantine princess and Ottonian empress, should have had an indelible impact on the concept and practice of queenship in the west, but her influence was mitigated by a combination of dynastic failure, circumstances peculiar to the era, and a general fading of interest in the Byzantine model due to religious reform. The contributions of the family saint, Queen Mathilda, and the mother of kingdoms, Adelheid, to the Ottonian concept of queenship are necessary to get an accurate understanding of the situation Theophano entered into when she married Otto II in 972. The tradition of a

²⁸⁸ Bange, 160.

²⁸⁹ Bange, 160-161.

²⁹⁰ "Byzantine-Western Relationships," 33.

powerful, influential queen permitted Theophano to exercise an exceptional degree of power particularly after Otto's death. While Theophano's presence helped to spread Greek culture, language, and art in Ottonian Germany, magnificently illustrated by the coronation ivory, there was not an artistic revolution comparable to the Carolingian Renaissance. Of all her actions, the education of Otto III by a Greek tutor and the inculcation of Greek ideas into the young prince was her most significant, if short-lived, legacy. Otto III's early death, the presence of his sisters in monasteries fading from the apex of cultural importance, and a general religious movement against the luxuries of Greek court life all combined to severely limit, though not destroy the influence of Theophano on western queenship. It is perhaps ironic that the union sought after for nearly two centuries would, in the end, prove as fruitless as those that had been aborted.

Conclusion

Queenship during the medieval period was established in the west most prominently by the Merovingians, but queenly power truly came to the fore under the Carolingian and Ottonian dynasties due, in part, to the eastern influences on the practice. Women facilitated the exchange of culture and political power between the Byzantines and the newly reformed western empire through various media such as religious icons and imperial titles. Marriage betrothals fostered scholars to train the princesses and the arrival of a Byzantine princess in the west with a large entourage and a stupendous amount of wealth brought Byzantine influence.

Merovingian queens had contact with the east, but travel and communication were more difficult than in earlier and later ages. The relative isolation of the Merovingians permitted the formation of the western concept of queenship that derived the majority of its power from the shift of the political realm of the kingdom into the royal household. Typical female duties involved serving as partner to the king, producing heirs, and maintaining the royal household. There are four areas of power that developed in the Merovingian system: religious patron, mistress of the household, royal adviser, and regent. Clothild and Radegund are the most celebrated examples of women rulers who became saints, their lives becoming guides to later generations. Two later Merovingian queens, Brunhild and Balthild, exemplify women who exercised the greatest level of authority as regents for their young sons, usually ruling with the help of an allied nobleman to maintain their legitimacy as rulers. The Merovingian queens fleshed out what it meant to be a queen in early medieval Europe.

The Carolingians made queenship glamorous, adopting Byzantine style imperial dress and ceremonies in order to illustrate their claims to the imperial title in the west. Carolingian reasoning behind the adoption of an eastern image was the widespread knowledge of what an empress looked like because of the use of the imperial image on coinage, which spread all over Europe, and, to a lesser extent, the use of counterweights carved in the likeness of an empress. The mosaics in Italy, specifically the one of Theodora in Ravenna, also served as transmission points between the two cultures. Charlemagne, the revered emperor, engaged his daughter to a Byzantine prince, in an effort to boost the legitimacy of his dynasty's claim to the royal and imperial title, starting a quest that would span two centuries and two dynasties. All of the engagements were broken by one party or another over the centuries, but when a Frankish princess was betrothed to a Byzantine, Constantinople would dispatch eunuch instructors to teach the young girl Greek, the court ceremonies, and the proper way to lead a Byzantine life. These trained girls would then be left behind, adapting their training to the political realities of the west.

Theophano also adapted her political method to that of the west. As the Byzantine bride of Otto II, Theophano might have been able to spur an even greater interest in the west toward Byzantine culture, but she instead chose to adopt the lifestyle of her husband. Ottonian queenship had a distinct Saxon-Italian flavoring to it provided by Mathilda and Adelheid, Theophano's two predecessors to the Ottonian throne. It was in Italy that the power of the queen/empress was most evident. Theophano brought with her imperial dress, imagery, and training, but in order to function successfully in the Saxon system she had to adapt to the political practices of the west. The real legacy of

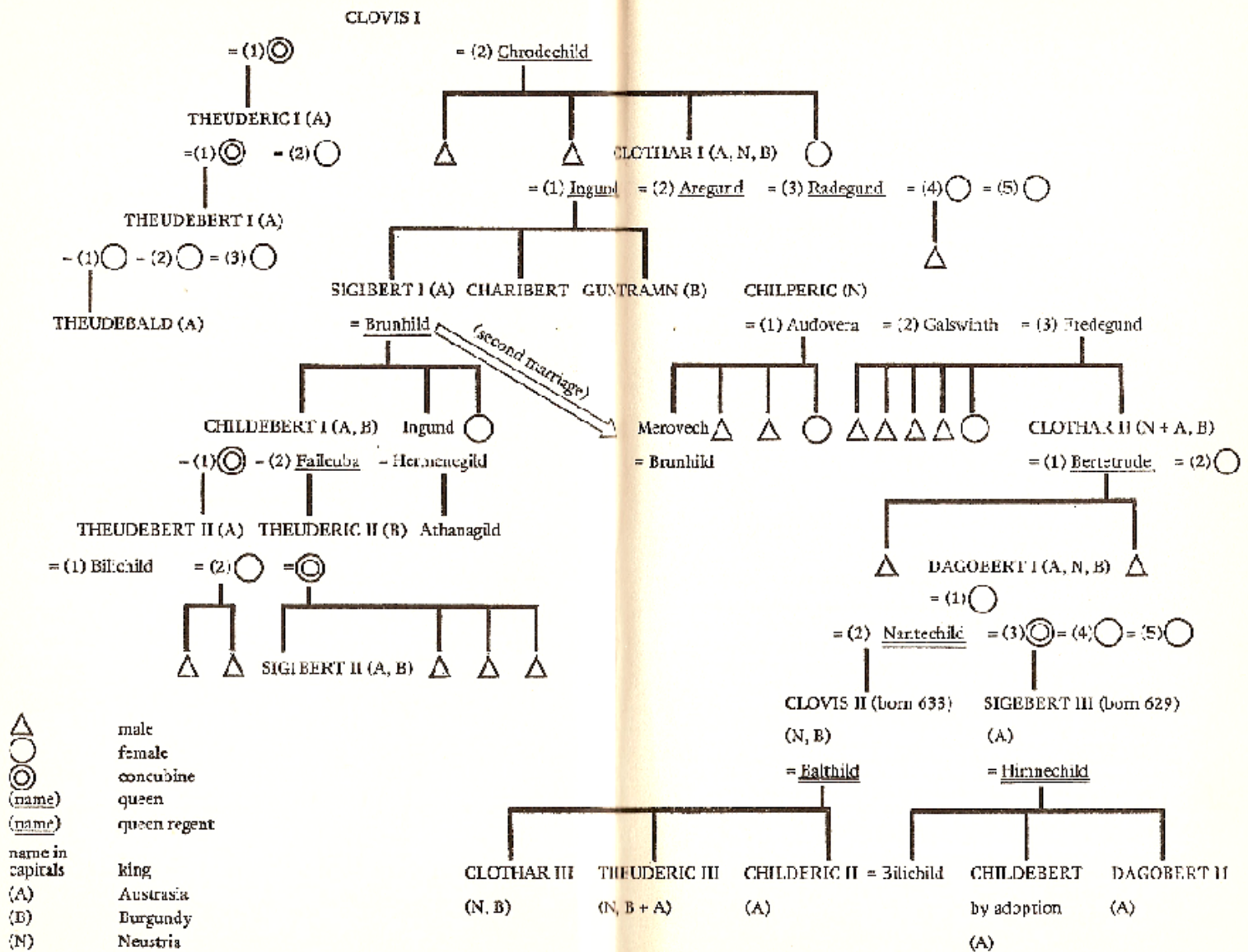
Theophano lies not in her own actions, but in those of her children. Otto III focused directly on southern Italy, an indication that his Byzantine teaching had given him a strong Byzantine identification and goals. Unfortunately for Theophano, her son died at the young age of twenty-one, leaving no heir to his throne or his Byzantine inheritance. The lack of eligible royal daughters because of prior marriage or dedication to the religious life and the general fading fascination with the Byzantines also contributed to limiting Theophano's influence on later queens. After her death, the growing distrust of things "Greek" led to Theophano's 'bad reputation' as a corrupt Greek aristocrat who brought sin and ostentatious displays of wealth to the German court.

In the final analysis, Byzantine women and eunuchs brought much more than an appreciation of stylized dress and ceremony to the west, they brought a different way of thinking about what a queen meant. These concepts combined with the real power exercised by western queens in the household created an amazing phenomenon of powerful women in an age typically characterized as backward. One must deal with medieval queenship on its own terms rather than measuring it by today's standards, appreciating the contribution to future generations of women made by those first queens.

Genealogical Charts

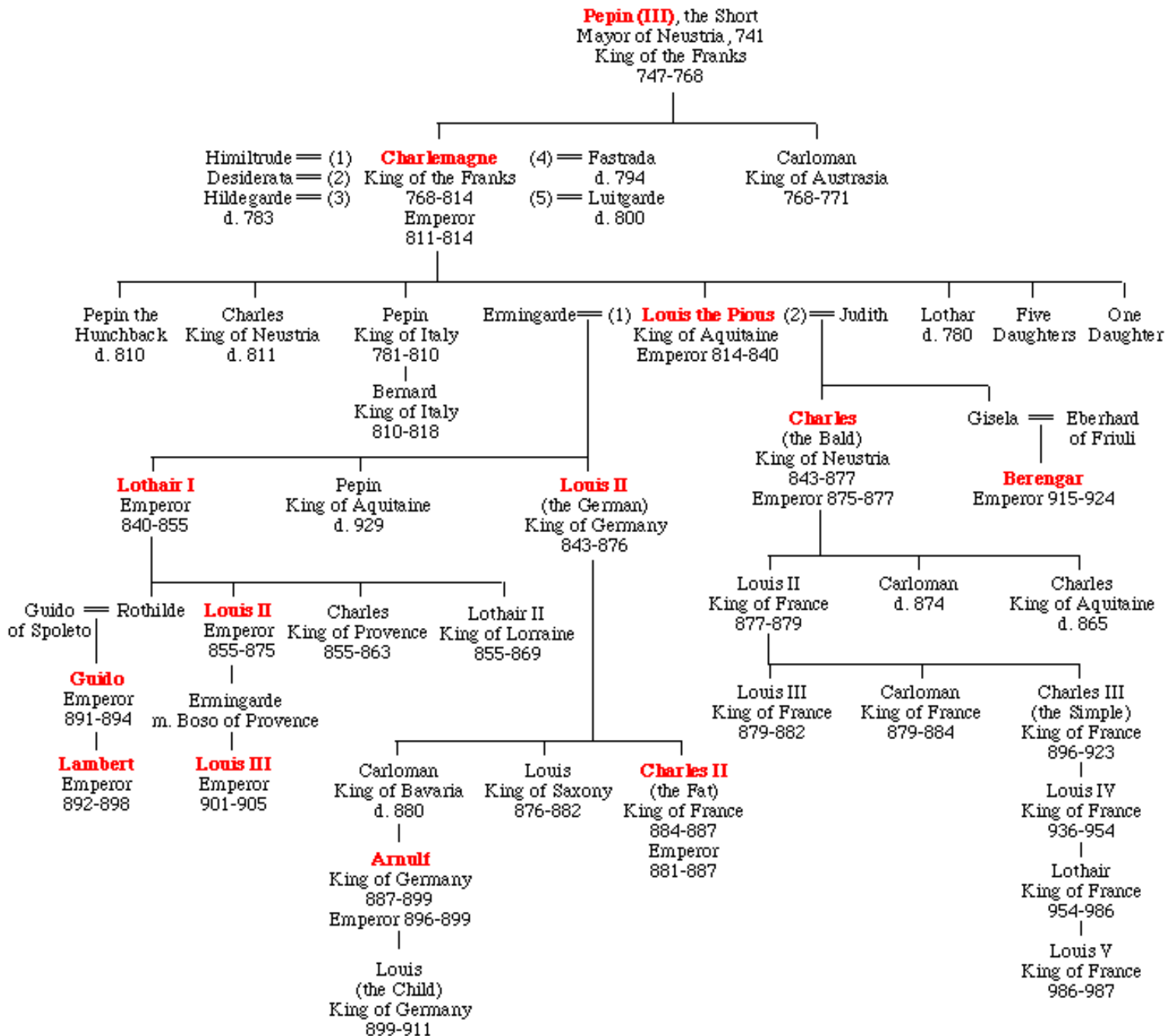
Merovingian Royal Family²⁹¹

Table showing the Merovingians, their queens and concubines, dealt with in this paper.



²⁹¹ "Queens as Jezebels," 30.

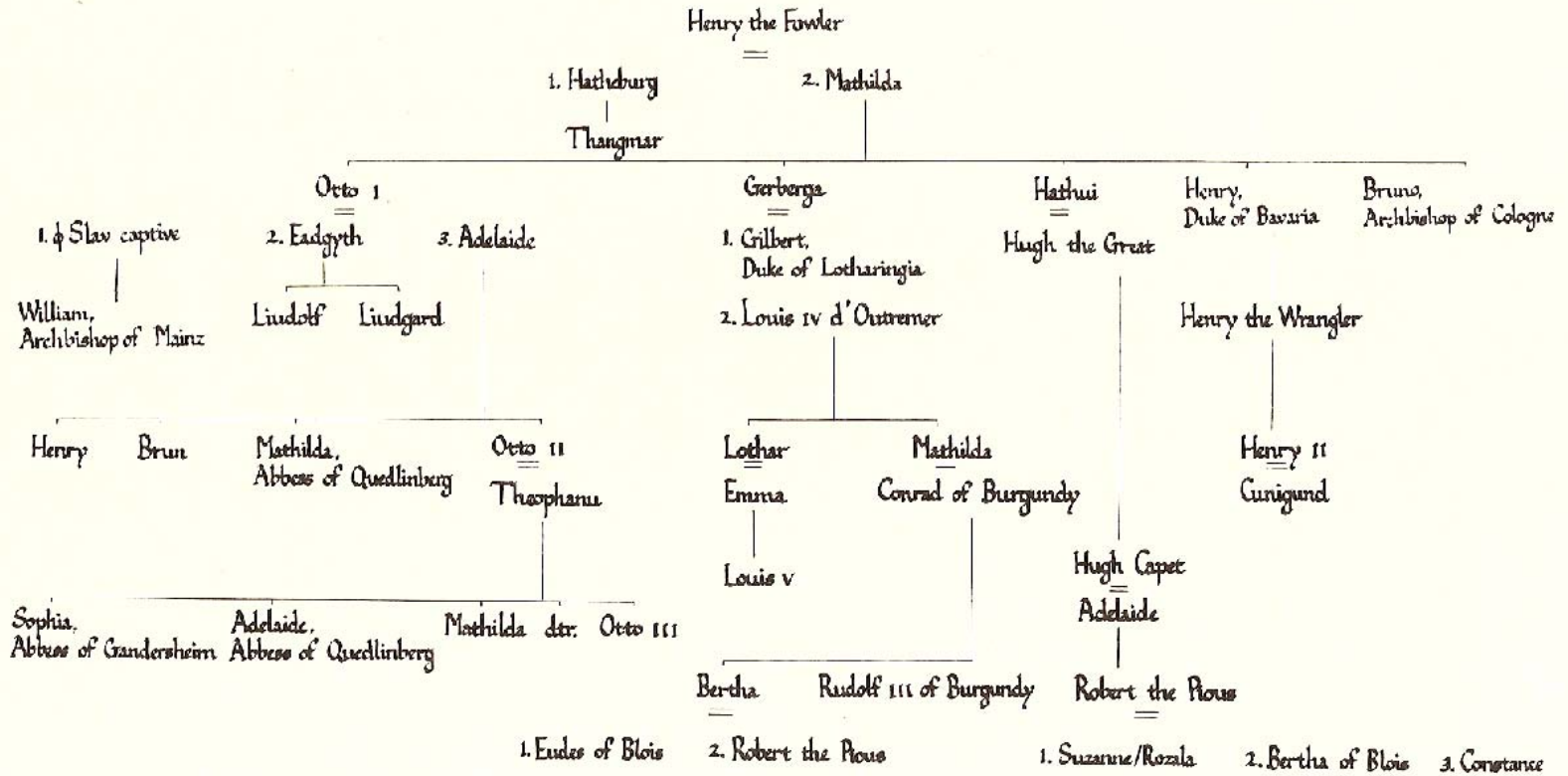
Carolingian Royal/Imperial Family²⁹²



²⁹² Ed Stephan, <http://www.ac.wvu.edu/~stephan/Rulers/charlemagne.html>

Ottonian Imperial Family²⁹³

4. OTTONIAN ROYAL HOUSE (not complete: order of marriages and children not always certain)



²⁹³ Stafford, 234.

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Note to the Reader: All translations of quotations from French to English concerning primary and secondary works were performed by the author.

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*Source used only for graphical purposes.