

# INTRODUCTION

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## QUEENSHIP, GENDER, AND COURT STUDIES

This collection of essays is a pioneering survey of queenship in eleven different European Courts between 1660–1815. Its aim is to suggest the importance and usefulness of interrogating the structure and ethos of Courts through an investigation of the consort's role. By beginning with the consort, it is more likely that an understanding of the composition and function of a Court will be arrived at than if the focus rests on the ruler, when it is all too easy for investigation to begin and end with his personality, policy, style of rule, and connection to male ministers. If a wife or mistress is significant, her role tends then to be looked at anecdotally rather than analytically. But monarchy in the later early modern period was still a dynastic, family business; looking at queen consorts reminds us of this. Courts were polycentric, with the king's household being only one among several, which could include a dowager queen, the heir, once he was of age, royal siblings, and a publicly recognised mistress. As these chapters demonstrate, international relations were also underpinned by dynastic links, though queens did not always advance the interests of their paternal house, and reasons of state invariably overrode family ties when diplomacy became war. A queen cannot be studied in isolation from her dynastic connections, so a study of her role inevitably dents nationalist myopia. For all these reasons, it is historiographically useful to look at Courts through the lens of queenship, and throughout this collection, it is *queenship* rather than *queens* that is the focus of attention: essays analyse the role, rather than offer merely biographical treatment. Nonetheless, many of

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these women are fascinating individuals in their own right. Some adapted adroitly when very young to being the most important woman in the state; others held their own against adverse political or international circumstances; many proved to be judicious patrons of culture or religion; a handful enjoyed genuine companionship within an arranged marriage; two or three exercised extraordinary levels of power.

At such an early stage of research into the role of queens in the *ancien régime*, it is too early to be definitive. Thus as well as providing incisive discussion of selected facets of their role, these chapters also suggest an agenda for future research and invite the reader to make comparisons. To date, some individual Courts have been more thoroughly researched than others; even where a Court has been well studied, some eras are relatively neglected (for instance the Court of Louis XV in comparison to that of Louis XIV); and only a few individual queens, notably Marie Antoinette of France, have attracted sustained analytical – or biographical – attention. The fact that three notable women in the eighteenth century reigned in their own right – in Great Britain, Queen Anne; in the Austrian Habsburg lands, Maria Theresa; and in Russia, Catherine II (after a sequence of three other tsarinas: Catherine I, studied here as a consort, see ch. 5, Anna, and Elizabeth) – has probably contributed to the neglect of the consort role. Conversely, the role of the male consort to a female ruler merits attention, though this book was unable to address it. The inter-disciplinary nature of Court studies means that many aspects of the queen's role could be explored. The main themes that emerge here are their political role, their contribution to cultural matters, especially religion, and their part in international dynastic networks.

In addition to the neglect of queenship, there is very little comparative work in English on any facet of European Court life in the period from 1660 to 1815. Though admirably broad in geographical scope, both John Adamson's collection *The Princely Courts of Europe, 1500–1750*,<sup>1</sup> and G. Asch and Adolf M. Birke's *Princes, Patronage, and the Nobility: The Court at the Beginning of the Modern Age*,<sup>2</sup> begin sooner and end earlier than the period chosen for this book, as does Jeroen Duindam's more concentrated and probing comparison, *Vienna and Versailles: The Courts of Europe's Major Dynastic Rivals, 1550–1780*.<sup>3</sup> The first two have little to say about royal women, with some honourable exceptions. A. G. Dickens's still valuable *The Courts of Europe: Politics, Patronage and Royalty 1400–1800*<sup>4</sup> in practice concentrates more on the earlier period and pre-dates the emergence of gender studies. T. C. W. Blanning's vivacious *tour de force*, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture: Ancien Régime Europe 1660–1789*, explores the shifts from a representational to a more commercialised public culture in an age of monarchies, concentrates its

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comparisons on the triangle of Britain, France, and Germany – mainly though not exclusively Prussia – and explicitly disavows consideration of gender, though in practice some individual queens are discussed, and women’s emergence as writers and readers in the expanding realm of print culture is noted.<sup>5</sup> However, its panorama of the changes to the European public sphere is an essential complement to the case studies represented here, and in my view provides a definitive critique of Jürgen Habermas’s seminal discussion of the public sphere for all *ancien régime* historians.

In the absence of specific English-language studies of European Court life, there are nonetheless anthologies on other aspects of political culture: *The World of the Favourite*,<sup>6</sup> *Absolutism in Seventeenth-Century Europe*,<sup>7</sup> and *Enlightened Absolutism: Reform and Reformers in later Eighteenth-Century Europe*.<sup>8</sup> Using the approaches contained in this book, the critical reader can integrate what he or she has learned about gender in Court life to these other approaches to analysing political power. Central to an understanding of sovereignty, especially in states which were a composite based on dynastic claims, is the anthology on *Royal and Republican Sovereignty in Early Modern Europe* edited by Robert Oresko, G. C. Gibbs, and Hamish Scott.<sup>9</sup> Also of great importance to Court studies is an understanding of political elites, as the Court functions as the most important fulcrum of crown–elite relations. Hamish Scott’s anthology, *The European Nobilities*,<sup>10</sup> and the monographs by Jonathan Dewald and Jerzy Lukowski, both called *The European Nobility*,<sup>11</sup> therefore provide important insights on the families who provided the courtiers for the queen’s household, as well as the king’s. Chapter 7 in this book demonstrates the importance of exploring the composition of a consort’s household and its connection to political faction, as does chapter 8 from the point of view of a mistress and her clan of supporters.

The chapters here cover most geographical areas. In Iberia, the Spanish chapter on the new Bourbon rulers includes some discussion of a Portuguese consort, Bárbara of Bragança, while the chapter on Savoy covers the Portuguese marriage of its subject’s sister. The House of Savoy provided the ruling family that a century later united Italy: in Maria Giovanna Battista’s lifetime alone, Savoy acquired Sicily, later exchanged for Sardinia. France is represented by a virtually unknown consort, Marie Leszczyńska, wife of Louis XV (ch. 7) and a morganatic consort, Madame de Maintenon (ch. 3). The Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation is represented by a chapter on Imperial consorts (ch. 4), by one on the ambitious House of Württemberg, which never quite acquired electoral status under the old Reich but became a kingdom courtesy of Napoleon, (ch. 8), and by chapters on three of the Electorates who also acquired kingdoms: Brandenburg-Prussia

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(ch. 11), Saxony-Poland (ch. 9), and Hanover-Great Britain (chs. 10 and 14). Another way of describing this last political entity would be to say that while chapter 10 demonstrates the commitment of George II and Caroline of Ansbach to ‘anglicise’ the dynasty, Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz helped to remind the British Hanoverians of their German connections (ch. 14). In either case, the continental dimension to the Court at St James’s is thereby underlined.<sup>12</sup>

The elective monarchy of Poland figures through a Protestant electress who refused to be crowned Queen of Poland (ch. 9, Christine Eberhardine) but also by ex-king Stanislas Leszczyński, who improbably for a deposed monarch supplied a wife to Louis XV (ch. 7). Chapters 2, 12, and 13 offer a consideration of five different Scandinavian consorts, while chapter 5 illustrates the possibilities for a consort’s role when the entire Court culture of Russia was being re-invented and secularised under Peter the Great’s westernising impulses.

There are thus different typologies of power and of Court structure on display in the book, which moves in time from the era of reconstruction in Europe after the Thirty Years War, the Polish-Swedish wars, and the French Frondes, to the heyday of enlightened monarchy and the end of the *ancien régime*. Several chapters (1–6, 8, and 9) deal with various examples of the representational culture characteristic of Baroque monarchy, with its theatricalised rituals, including female participation in the hunt (chs. 1, 4, and 9; but contrast chs. 6 and 14). These chapters also stress the relatively limited room for manoeuvre to be found in its stage-managed projection of royal power. In Württemberg and Saxony this Baroque manner of rule could be at variance with the *Ständestaat* traditions of the German states and their ability to appeal on constitutional matters to the Holy Roman Emperor, which could sometimes help a consort at variance with her husband. Queens had even less room for political manoeuvre in limited monarchies: hence Louisa Ulrica’s failure in Sweden (ch. 12), though as a mother she helped determine the course her son Gustavus III took in returning Sweden to absolutism. In Great Britain, it is argued here (ch. 10) that Caroline acquired influence through partnership with her husband rather than domination; Charlotte (ch. 14) was politically more deferential in British matters, though probably felt more able to suggest ways of exercising patronage in the Hanoverian side of the family’s dominions. The case of Prussia (ch. 13) raises the question of whether in an age of Enlightenment a Court could find a rationale, but shows that Courts and consorts had a use even in Frederick the Great’s rationalist, free-thinking world.

Each national area has its own historiography to consider, transcend, or – in cases where there is virtually no history of the Court, such as Russia or Spain – to supply (chs. 5 and 6). The French chapters (3 and 7) exemplify trends in current

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French historiography such as the reconsideration of faction and networks in the *ancien régime*, and the treatment of the pre-revolutionary era as a period in its own right. For the British Court, there is a need to demonstrate that the Court still retains its symbolic and social centrality, even though queens functioned in a society where a highly developed civil society and commercial sector provided counter-attractions. The chapters on Savoy and Prussia both show how the historiography has been dominated by nineteenth-century scholars wanting to celebrate the new, bureaucratic, unifying nation state, and the need to revise this. The German and Russian chapters more widely reflect the fresh understanding of the old Reich as a viable political entity, with more attention being given to the ‘third Germany’, and the opening of new archives after the end of the Cold War.

## FERTILITY, LONGEVITY, AND FIDELITY

All queens, whether they belonged to an ‘absolute’ representational Court or a more limited *standestaat* or parliamentary monarchy, had essentially the same primary function, which reflects a fundamental psychic as much as a political role: to suggest in idealised form the symbolic harmony of male and female, the potency and fertility of the ruling male, and the continuity of the dynasty. Historians probably need the help of social anthropology and group psychology to provide a full explanation of why human beings, even today, in modern secular democratic cultures, need to invest other human beings with such charismatic significance, and why this leaves us, despite our knowingness about image manipulation, susceptible to the pull of celebrity, whether royal or not. The queens in this book ruled in an age which still invested monarchy with divine authority and derived legitimacy from the hereditary principle. ‘Dynastic capital’ (see below) was therefore a part of the repertoire of female power.

Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Baroque Court culture was designed to project ruler and consort on a heroic scale, reinforced by religious teachings underlining the divine sanction of monarchy. Courts where it was difficult or impossible to project this image of heterosexual harmony were at a disadvantage. As chapter 10 shows, the divorced George I, with his entourage of shadowy female figures whose role was not clearly defined, was at a disadvantage compared with his son and daughter-in-law, who could represent a wholesome normality by contrast. In Frederick the Great’s Prussia, there was no disguising the oddity of his homosocial circle in Potsdam compared with the formal round of Court occasions kept going by Elizabeth Christine; his occasional appearances were no compensation when their relationship was suspected of being incomplete.

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The greatest pressure on a queen was to produce a male heir and ideally several 'spares'. Some queens (chs. 1, 2, 8, 9) successfully produced a single male heir before the early death of the ruler or their estrangement from him; others ruined their health in the effort to provide sons as well as daughters (ch. 4). The contingencies of health could result in the early death of a well-loved queen who had provided several children (ch. 6, Marie Louis Gabrielle in Spain and ch. 13, Louisa in Denmark). Early death cut short a queen's opportunity to deploy her power as a mother and dowager but was no inhibitor of popularity. In contrast Queen Charlotte in Great Britain, figured here as a matriarch-progenitor to several kings and queens, had no trouble in producing fifteen children with no still-births or miscarriages (ch. 14). It was useful to Hanover-Great Britain and to Saxony-Poland that the dynasties ruling these personal unions were biologically successful, facilitating the actual or potential deployment of younger sons through secundogenitures and prince-bishoprics (chs. 9, 10, 14). The childless queens Bárbara of Bragança (ch. 6) and Elizabeth Christine of Prussia (ch. 11) were not, however, a liability in dynasties which had plenty of nephews and step-brothers to inherit. A second wife like Elizabeth Farnese (ch. 6) was therefore able to fulfil her ambitions for her own children. Juliana Maria of Denmark by contrast was thwarted, since her predecessor had provided an heir (ch. 13). The biological bad luck of the French Bourbons whereby Louis XIV outlived so many of his progeny gave the morganatic wife Madame de Maintenon opportunity to mediate in family tensions between Louis XIV's legitimate and legitimated offspring and their complex inter-marriages to Bourbon and Orléans candidates.

Courts are polycentric, not monocentric. The larger the dynastic family, the more the centres of power proliferate, most obviously in the household of the heir to the throne. Outliving a spouse might sideline a dowager or underline her matriarchal power; Hedwig Eleonora of Sweden and Maria Giovanna Battista were formidable mothers-in-law (chs. 1 and 2). The latter, like Elizabeth Farnese in Spain, Maria Josepha in Saxony-Poland, and Marie Auguste in Württemberg (chs. 1, 6, 8, and 9), yielded power only reluctantly to their sons or stepsons. The Hanoverians were notoriously on bad terms with successive Princes of Wales (ch. 10). In Vienna (ch. 4), the presence of three empresses, two of them widows, spelt competition in arranging dynastic marriages and determining the succession. The prolific Hohenzollerns and their numerous households in Berlin meant that Elizabeth Christine was always jostling for due respect, fatally undermined by the separate domicile of Frederick the Great.

Some but not all of the consorts in this book had to compete with royal mistresses. Courts varied as to how far the role of mistress was recognised and even

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institutionalised. Remarkably the Court at Madrid, as Charles Noel (ch. 6) shows, had no place for a mistress. The Spanish Bourbons were notably uxorious in the first part of the century. Beginning with Philip V, a break occurs with the Habsburg traditions of conciliar government and the Royal Household becomes the political centre of government. Ministers met in the shared bedroom of the king and queen – not a separate female set of apartments. Elisabeth Farnese and Bárbara of Bragança benefited from the hidden matriarchy of Spanish society despite its vaunted machismo, as well as echoes from the Habsburg practice of appointing aunts, mothers, and sisters as Regents or governors of various family provinces.

The French Bourbon Court however continued the already-established pattern of the royal mistress. As John Rogister shows (ch. 7) the choice of mistress was invariably linked to a Court faction and was reflected in the composition of the queen's household. Peter Wilson (ch. 8) emphasises the 'limited script' of a mistress in the Baroque German Court, and the precariousness of her position even when she had factional backing, while the structure of Imperial politics enabled the wronged consort Johanna Elisabethe and her male relatives to appeal to the Emperor. German princely families could marry morganatically, though this practice was not understood in Britain: hence the confusion over George I's female entourage.<sup>13</sup> George II's consort Caroline faced cultural rather than political competition from Henrietta Howard, but suffered on a more personal level from the Countess of Darlington (ch. 10).

Savoy, Württemberg, and Denmark also present the reverse phenomenon of a consort or Regent who takes a lover. Maria Giovanna Battista's partners (ch. 1) reflect the waxing and waning of Court faction. In Denmark (ch. 13) Caroline Matilda did not bring Struensee into power, but his subsequent liaison with her was the most convenient pretext for getting rid of him; like some female mistresses, he had no power base independent of royal friendship. Danish and Spanish consorts who had the trauma of living with mentally unstable spouses probably had the most unusual experiences in the lottery of queenship, with entirely contrasting results. While their husbands' manic-depressive tendencies empowered Elisabeth Farnese and Bárbara of Bragança, Caroline Matilda's affair with the doctor appointed to help her schizophrenic husband led to her deposition – the most spectacular failure of a consort in the entire period.

## POLITICAL AUTHORITY AND POWER

A queen's power could be formal or informal, and exercised politically, socially, or culturally. Formal power or, as Wilson (ch. 8) calls it, authority, normally came

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only when she was vested with a regency, usually when the heir was under age, the ruler absent in other dynastic territories or on campaign, or ill. The composite character of the lands acquired by ruling dynasties gave opportunities for Charles VI's wife, Elizabeth Christine, to act as Regent in Spain when he inherited the core Austrian territories and for Caroline of Great Britain and Hanover and Maria Josepha of Saxony-Poland to represent their husbands when they were not in London or Dresden. Frederick II's consort kept the regime going in Berlin in the critical days of the Seven Years War before deciding on the Court's evacuation to Magdeburg (ch. 11).

Regency powers were usually carefully delimited in scope and duration. Hedwig Eleonora of Sweden (ch. 2) had two votes on the Regency Council, but although she was conscientious over state paperwork appears to have had no political ambition of her own, and ceded power readily. Maria Giovanna Battista of Savoy (ch. 1) seized her opportunity much more vigorously and yielded it reluctantly. Both women continued to exercise power after their formal regencies were over through various means, notably, through their cultural patronage. Hedwig Eleonora used her vast wealth to build up the cultural infrastructure of Court life, closely following French models. She insisted in pre-eminence over her daughter-in-law in Court protocol, and through her longevity provided a symbolic continuity to the Swedish monarchy after the rupture of Christina's abdication, through to the years of the Great Northern War which marked Sweden's decline. She and her granddaughter were an important symbolic presence during Charles XII's long years on campaign. The similarly long-lived Maria Giovanna Battista followed an equally important cultural policy before, during, and after her regency, embracing learning, as well as building.

In the duchy of Württemberg (ch. 8), mistrust of a female regent meant she was normally provided with a male co-regent. The structure of the Holy Roman Empire meant that political disputes over a regent's decisions could always be appealed to the emperor. Marie Auguste of Thurn und Taxis proved particularly adept at steering between the Emperor, the Estates of Württemberg, and the Privy Council and obtaining a satisfactory co-regent after an attempt to exclude her altogether, and although she was not able to sustain her influence, especially after her son came of age, she did obtain substantial financial support from the Estates.

The queens discussed here demonstrate that some were able to obtain considerable political power aside from the authority conferred by the office of Regent. Most interesting perhaps are the Spanish Bourbon consorts discussed in chapter 6, whose influence rested on a combination of personal compatibility with mentally unstable husbands combined with a new kind of concentrated government.



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Bárbara of Bragança's co-operation could make or unmake key ministers: she was virtually a *valido*. In Bourbon France, the two consorts in this book present a piquant contrast. Madame de Maintenon (ch. 3) was not an official consort, but the absence of an officially recognised queenly role may have been the very factor that enabled her to acquire such political influence. An official queen would have been distanced from the king by her own household and role in the theatre of power, whereas Maintenon could be a discreet presence in the king's private apartments where decision making took place. She then graduated to being present in the *conseil d'en haut*'s meetings and became virtual prime minister. Like the Spanish wives, the foundation of her influence was the need to support a king who was subject to weariness and despondency. Louis XV's queen Marie Leszczyńska (ch. 7) by contrast early became a victim of Court faction, and it was made crystal clear to her that political interference was not what was required. Instead she should concentrate on her procreative and representational role.

At the Danish Court (ch. 13) the mental illness of both Frederick V and Christian VII did not provide an opportunity for either of the English queens, Louisa or Caroline Matilda, to obtain political power. Danish absolutism was so constructed that in the former case power devolved on Lord Chamberlain Moltke. Queen Louisa made 'gentle gestures' towards the newly emergent bourgeoisie, but did not live long enough for any further political initiatives – even supposing she had wanted to make them. Caroline Matilda lost her role and narrowly escaped execution instead of becoming the power beside the unstable Christian VII. However, her death a few years later also ended her usefulness as the figurehead of opposition plots, for a queen could give legitimacy to political opposition in an hereditary and absolutist monarchy, which took the form of dynastic rivalry. The Dowager Juliane Marie, second wife of Frederick V, was needed to give 'cover' to the coup deposing Struensee, which was presented as way of 'rescuing' the king from attempted assassination. Her own motivation was maternal ambition. The 'Age of Liberty' in eighteenth-century Sweden, in which aristocratic Swedish political culture was polarised between pro-French 'Hat' factions and pro-Russian 'Cap' factions, by contrast gave scope to Adolf Frederick's queen, Louisa Ulrica, to construct a queen's party. She emerges as one of this book's most politically ambitious – though not politically adept – queens (ch. 12).

## INFORMAL POWER: CULTURE, RELIGION, MANNERS, AND MORALS

Informal power accrued through a number of variables: the queen's own personality or ambition, her dynastic capital, her social skills, her piety, her cultural

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abilities – and the happenstance of whether an arranged marriage grew into a personal bond or not. These variables in turn could only facilitate power if the Court and state structures in which she was placed, together with her financial means, gave her suitable opportunities, and she had the drive or skill to make use of them. Different Courts had slightly different expectations of what the consort's role should be. It can be very difficult to disentangle the different facets – dynastic, cultural, and social – of this power, and to separate it from political factors.

Many Courts took their cultural cues from Louis XIV's Versailles, from Sweden in the north (ch. 2) to Savoy in the south (ch. 1) where Maria Giovanna Battista perpetuated the elaborate *cour de ballet*. In Spain (ch. 6) opera and spectacular entertainment were nearer to their Italianate sources, which were also beginning to supplant French architectural tastes. But religion was everywhere a more empowering factor. In Vienna, the drama of courtly power was enacted in an essentially religious mode: chapter 4 explores the contribution made by three successive consorts to *pietas austriaca*. Eleonore Magdalene has an important role in schooling her newly converted daughter-in-law Wilhelmine Amalia of Brunswick-Lüneburg in the dynasty's religious practices. In turn her daughter Maria Josepha was able to assist her own husband, the second generation Catholic Augustus III of Saxony-Poland, in creating an authentically Catholic Court culture (ch. 9). In both Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox cultures, convents and *damenstift* could be a vehicle for royal women to exercise a particular type of power and creativity (chs. 4, 5, and 10).

Saxony's wealth had ensured that from the Renaissance it had possessed one of the most elaborate and representational Court cultures in Europe, using the panoply of classical and religious imagery for queens to the full. Christiane Eberhardine's resolute refusal to convert to Catholicism, however, meant that she could be differently projected in Protestant oratory as a 'pillar of Lutheranism'. Similarly Caroline of Ansbach could be portrayed as having 'rejected an empire' for her faith, a major asset for the Hanoverian's public image in Great Britain (ch. 10). In Peter the Great's Russia (ch. 5), Catherine too could draw on religious resources to project her image, even though the Tsar was determined to create a new Court calendar less interlinked with the liturgical year.

Both French consorts here underline the *dévot* strand in French Court culture. There was always a oscillation between Catholic observance and libertinism of the kind typified by the contrasts between Marie Leszczyńska and the various royal mistresses, though Rogister argues that the queen's support for the *dévots* as a political 'lobby' was passive rather than active (ch. 7). Madame de Maintenon's religious influence on Louis XIV was generally agreed to have made Versailles a