

INTRODUCTION: BODIES OF POWER

In the third century BCE, Ptolemy II, together with the architect Timochares, imagined a new kind of representation to commemorate his deceased sister and wife, Arsinoe II. The Elder Pliny explains how Timochares put his special knowledge of materials to work: he planned to construct the vaulting of Arsinoe's Alexandrian temple out of lodestone – a dark mineral with magnetic properties – to suspend her partially iron portrait statue above the heads of viewers, achieving the effect of a levitating deity.¹ Had the plans come to fruition, the visual experience would have, perhaps, filled the king's subjects with terror and wonder.

Arsinoe's magical cult image was never realized, for, as Pliny tells us, both Ptolemy and Timochares died before they could complete the sculptural and architectural installation. Whether it is historically accurate or apocryphal, Pliny's anecdote offers an example of the creative strategies and experimental approaches that both artists and patrons were developing to portray royal and dynastic women in the Hellenistic world, which describes a vast geography encompassing the Mediterranean (including Italy further west, north Africa, and Asia Minor) to the Iranian plateau up to the Indus. Communities throughout the Hellenistic world encountered these women and engaged with their memories through their representations: their presence filled viewers with desire, awe, and a sense of political stability. Art in the Hellenistic world had transformed, articulating the importance of royal and dynastic women in

conveying concepts of dynastic consolidation, continuity, and identity through material and visual culture.

The Art of Queenship in the Hellenistic World focuses on the visual cultures, spectacles, and representations of royal and dynastic women from the fourth to second centuries BCE, just before the conquests of the Argead king, Alexander III, and a couple of centuries after, and with a particular geographic focus on the eastern Mediterranean and western Asia.² In this project, the term “dynastic” – whose root *dunasteia* means power or dominion – refers to any woman who belonged to a ruling clan or family, while the term “royal” references the *basileia* – monarchy, kingdom, or rule over a vast territory – and the state of wielding or being closely associated with authority.³ The term “*basilissa*” is even more specific: while translating literally to “female *basileus*,” it also denotes a particular familial relationship to the king, either his mother or wife, and sometimes his sister. Throughout this volume, I use the broad terms “queen” and “queenship” to speak not specifically of a woman with the express political power to rule (a relative rarity in the Hellenistic world), but of the entire category of royal and dynastic women who served as important subjects and patrons of visual and material culture, as well as the qualities of the idealized feminine category “queen” that these artworks constructed.

Although their titular proximity to the center of power varied, royal and dynastic women expressed complex ideas associated with queenship in various artistic, social, and political contexts throughout the Hellenistic period. Here, queenship provides a framework for assessing the diverse representations of royal and dynastic women, and the roles of such representations in maintaining dynastic rule and conveying dynastic power. In other words, this book does not focus on women’s political power or agency within ruling dynasties, but rather on the agency of the art and objects of queenship. This volume considers the ways in which the material and visual cultures of dynastic and royal women were used to explain and convey dynastic consolidation, continuity, and legitimacy to viewers. Using queenship as an analytical category, I examine both how dynastic and royal women were used to consolidate, legitimize, and maintain power in art, and how some of these women actively participated in constructing dynastic identity and continuity through their patronage of and engagement with visual and material culture.

Thus far, studies of Hellenistic dynastic and royal art have mostly focused on kingship, with the king’s portrait viewed as the primary symbol of dynastic consolidation and continuity. However, as I show in this volume, dynastic women and conceptions of Hellenistic queenship were equally important, and an analysis of their visual and material representations provide a new perspective on issues that are central to the art histories and archaeologies of the eastern Mediterranean and western Asia: the movements of people and things across geo-cultural zones, legacies of Greco-Macedonian and Achaemenid power in

Hellenistic visual culture, and the development of portrait cultures that symbolized systems of rule. I use key works in various media – coins, gems, vessels, written decrees describing ephemeral performances, architecture (remains and textual descriptions), sculpture in the round and in relief – to assess how queenship was constructed, perceived, and engaged in the Hellenistic world, helping us more clearly see the role of dynastic and royal women in expressions of power, affective relations, and kinship in order to legitimize a particular dynasty's political rule.⁴

BEFORE THE HELLENISTIC PERIOD

Scholars view the Hellenistic period as an age of major transformations in visual culture in terms of iconography, style, material technologies, and subject matter from the Mediterranean to central Asia.⁵ However, few scholars have attended to the art-historical changes in the ways that dynastic and royal women were represented across visual and material culture in this period. In this book, I explore these themes, showing how representations of royal and dynastic women consolidated dynastic power in several important ways, particularly by facilitating affective, communal, and civic engagements with queenship and powerful dynastic families. Of course, royal and dynastic women were sometimes represented throughout the eastern Mediterranean and western Asia before the Hellenistic period, as I will discuss shortly. However, the consistency and frequency with which royal and dynastic women were portrayed throughout the long Hellenistic period, as well as the myriad new strategies for expressing Hellenistic queenship, merit their own dedicated study. Here, I will first provide a brief overview of the visual and material articulations of queenship across the eastern Mediterranean and western Asia throughout the first half of the first millennium BCE.

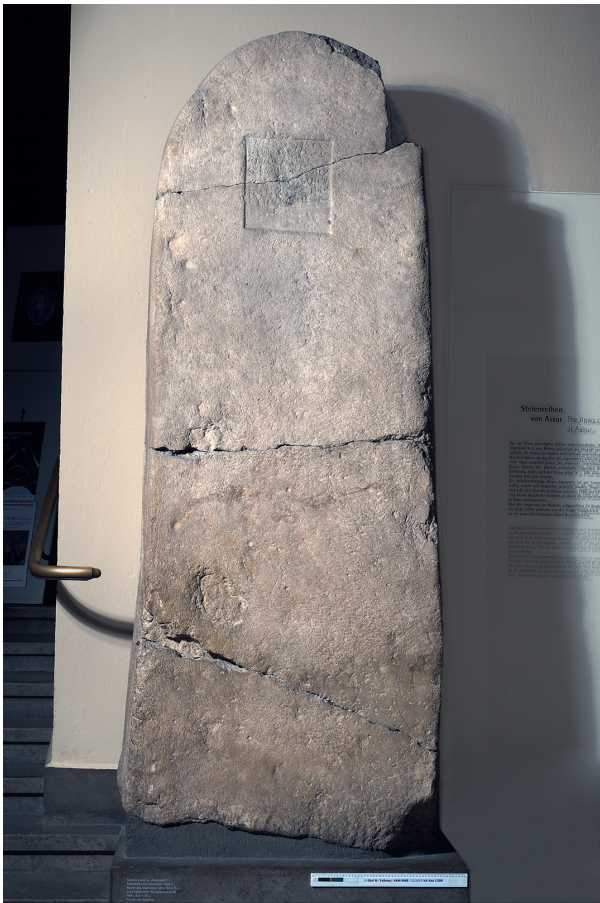
As I discuss in detail in Chapter 1, early fourth-century changes to royal and dynastic art are observable in the sculptural arts throughout the Aegean, just a few generations before the conquests of the Argead Macedonian dynast, Alexander III. The large-scale figural representations of dynastic women in the Aegean region follow the practices and protocols of setting up portraits or *eikōnes* in Greek cities in the fifth and fourth centuries, in which the mothers, wives, and daughters of high-ranking men were afforded public honors and praise,⁶ sometimes receiving honorific statues that were dedicated at sanctuaries and other times appearing in family group portraits.⁷ However, the fourth- to second-century examples I analyze here also differ from their Aegean predecessors: royal and dynastic women were represented via a variety of techniques and materials and in different contexts, thus enabling various modes of engagement with queenship.

Other non-sculptural or monumental examples of pre-Hellenistic material and visual cultures for dynastic and royal women exist as well. In Macedon, a

cluster of tombs at Vergina-Aigai provides evidence for the commemoration of high-ranking or dynastic women in prominent spaces as early as the late sixth century. Called the “queens’s cluster” by Angeliki Kottaridi, the nine tombs date between the sixth and mid-fourth centuries and contained portable luxury objects from around the eastern Mediterranean.⁸ Among them were objects interred with the so-called Lady of Aigai (ca. 500), a woman who died in her early thirties and was interred in a wooden cist tomb, clothed in garments embellished with gold sheets and gold jewelry.⁹ Other artifacts from her tomb included twelve bronze repoussé bowls, one silver repoussé bowl with an inscription, a bronze hydria, an iron *exaleiptron* (small container for women’s toiletries) with golden bands, iron spits, a silver wand, a wooden scepter decorated with amber and ivory, a silver and gold tube, an iron model of a cart, and six terracotta busts of women.¹⁰ Such objects offer a sense of the material splendor associated with socially or politically important women and allow us to imagine the spectacles of luxury that the Lady of Aigai’s burial may have engendered. Indeed, the location of the “queens’s cluster” near the city’s gate and other prominent features – a sanctuary to Eucleia, a theater, an administrative building – suggest that dynastic and/or high-ranking women may have been publicly commemorated by broad audiences in funerary practices as early as the mid-sixth century.

In western Asia, the art-historical evidence for royal women comes primarily from Neo-Assyrian contexts. In ca. 809 BCE, Shammu-ramat received her own aniconic stela in the row of stelai at Assur among kings and other elite men (Figure I.1). Shammu-ramat was certainly exceptional, for she also dedicated a limestone statue of the Babylonian god Nabu at his temple at Nimrud along with her son, King Adad-Nirari III, in ca. 810–800.¹¹ Perhaps the most famous example of a figural representation of a Neo-Assyrian queen comes from the so-called Garden Party scene, a palatial relief depicting King Ashurbanipal banqueting with his consort Libbali-sharrat in a garden (ca. 645) from the palace at Nineveh (Figure I.2).¹² In Egypt, stone statues, bronze statuettes, and temple reliefs sometimes represented royal daughters who were elected as the divine consorts of Amun, who were prevalent during the Kushite (Dynasty 25, ca. 745–645) and Saite periods (Dynasty 26; ca. 664–525), the latter of which was the last indigenous Egyptian dynasty to rule before Persian conquest (Figure I.3).¹³

During the two centuries of Persian hegemony and Achaemenid imperial rule, dynastic women, royal consorts, and even feminized personifications were rarely depicted in the corpus of large-scale Achaemenid palatial art (Figure I.4). No material representations of Achaemenid royal women survive at that scale. And although Herodotus tells us that Darius I commissioned a portrait of his most beloved wife Artystone, hammered out of gold,¹⁴ this reference is unique. In 1941, Ernst Herzfeld concluded that “in Achaemenid



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1.1. Stele of Shammuramat from the Rows of Stelae at Assur, Iraq, ca. 809 BCE, limestone, Ht: 2.72 m. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Vorderasiatisches Museum, VA Ass 1200, acq. between 1906 and 1926. Photo: Olaf M. Teßmer.



1.2. Relief of the “Garden Party” banquet scene with Libbali-sharrat and Ashurbanipal, ca. 645–635 BCE, gypsum, 58.42 × 139.70 cm, the North Palace at Nineveh, Iraq. British Museum inv. 124920, acq. 1856. Source: © The Trustees of the British Museum.



1.3. Relief of Amunirdis II (right), a God's Wife of Amun and daughter of King Taharqa, and a woman named Diesehebsed (left), from the north of the chapel of Amunirdis I, Medinet Habu, Egypt, ca. seventh century BCE, painted sandstone, 51 × 69 × 18.5 cm. Chicago: Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures, inv. E14681, acq. 1929.



1.4. Detail of the enthroned King Darius receiving audiences with Xerxes behind him on the Apadana reliefs, sixth century BCE, Persepolis, Iran. Reproduced with the kind permission of Alexander Nagel.



1.5. Greco-Persian seal with a Persian woman holding an alabastron, chalcedony scaraboid, 27 mm, Megalopolis, Greece. Berlin Inv. Nr. FG 181, acq. between 1764 and 1892. Photo credits: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Antikensammlung / Johannes Kramer CC BY-SA 4.0.

sculpture no woman is pictured, and evidently it never became a normal subject.”¹⁵ It must be noted, however, that the preserved corpus of Achaemenid palatial and royal art is limited; beyond relief sculpture and monumental architecture, very little else (such as graphic arts) survives.¹⁶ Small-scale luxury objects that were probably affiliated with high-status people within the Achaemenid Empire, including Greco-Persian gemstones from across the eastern Mediterranean and sealings found within the context of the Persepolis fortification tablets, do sometimes include female figures (Figure I.5).¹⁷

TOWARD AN ART HISTORY OF HELLENISTIC QUEENSHIP

It was throughout the Hellenistic period that expressions of queenship and representations of dynastic women continued to develop, in many cases reshaping centuries-old traditions of imagining power in materially present and visually immediate ways. To write an art-historical account of Hellenistic queenship is also to grapple with the histories of women in proximity to political, ruling power. The Hellenistic period was an age of transformation

of the modes and protocols of political address. New terms were adapted or invented to describe powerful dynastic women, like the title “*basilissa*,” literally a “female *basileus*,” or “female king.” This title is first attested in the late fourth century as a component of inscribed honors and dedications for women, around the same time that men were first called “*basileus*,” and its usage was multivariate, differing across dynasties throughout the Hellenistic period. As I will argue, the rise of this title coincided with public portrayals of dynastic women and their prominent acts of patronage. Not all dynastic women were given the title of “*basilissa*.” Ivana Savalli-Lestrade argues that the term was invented to transfer power securely from one king to the next – that is, from the king to his son, mothered by the *basilissa*.¹⁸ Similarly, Daniel Ogden’s model of amphimetric strife (that is, the struggle that emerges when two or more sons share the same father but have different mothers) explains that “*basilissa*” was more or less universally recognized as the official title of the mother of the next king.¹⁹ Rolf Strootman sees the title as emphasizing a dynastic woman’s relative status among the *basileus*’s many wives, especially within a Seleucid context.²⁰ Some historians think that women who were given the title “*basilissa*” had courtiers as well as personal attendants with other administrative roles, suggesting that these women had political privileges that others did not possess.²¹ In other words, the term’s exclusivity suggests that hierarchies existed among dynastic women within a single court. Nevertheless, Elizabeth Carney cautions that “no one English word conveys the meaning of *basilissa*, when used as a title. The terms ‘royal woman’ or perhaps ‘female royalty’ is the best one can do.”²²

The debate around this particular title informs my choice of terms throughout this book. Although the women in this study were born or married into a particular dynasty, not all of them should be considered “royal women” and even fewer “queens” in the way that we understand them today; modern European titles translating to the word “queen” typically refer to a woman leader with actual ruling power, although there are varying levels of authority and prestige attached to the title in different places.²³ In this book, the differences between “dynastic” and “royal” have to do with the scope of power and control wielded by the women’s immediate families. “Dynastic” is a more capacious term; it can mean any relative, even quite distant ones, of the male ruler. “Royal” denotes women who had a closer familial relationship to the male ruler: his mother, his sister, his wife, his daughter. All royal women belonged to a dynastic family, but not all dynastic women should be understood as “royal.”

Furthermore, my use of the term “queenship” throughout this volume is neither a direct translation of the title “*basilissa*” nor an assessment of their political agency. Instead, queenship here provides a conceptual framework for understanding the specific art-historical phenomenon in which dynastic

women became important to articulating and expressing dynastic and sometimes even imperial power throughout the Hellenistic world. In other words, the works I analyze all contribute to a new sense of the role of the dynastic woman in securing political stability – her responsibilities and the qualities that she should ideally possess. It is important to note that the material I examine is highly complex and diverse, for different dynasties and communities did not always conceptualize or represent royal and dynastic femininity in the same ways or hold the same ideals of the feminine. There were multiple material, visual, and narrative approaches to articulating queenship. For example, expressions of queenship were sometimes conscious appropriations of preceding traditions within local contexts. I embrace such instabilities, identifying patterns and shared rhetorics when they emerge, in order to present a nuanced art history of Hellenistic queenship that also enriches existing historical scholarship on Hellenistic power.

Especially in the past decade, historians have moved scholarship on political power forward by surfacing stories about dynastic and royal women. Such studies have illuminated the roles of women within dynastic worlds and court systems. Women were important in producing heirs and forging diplomatic alliances through marriage, as in royal contexts across many cultures. Sometimes, these women assumed roles and activities usually associated with dynastic men, extending their political power outside their traditional gendered domains.²⁴ This book forms a dialogue with these recent political histories of Hellenistic dynastic and royal women with its synthetic study of the visual and material cultures of queenship across the Hellenistic world. *The Art of Queenship in the Hellenistic World* seeks to do in the field of art history what these recent scholars have done in political history: to surface the meanings of royal and dynastic women's representations and the role of art in expressing dynastic power. The book contributes to conversations about power and our understanding of royal art and dynastic (self-)representation by shifting its art-historical focus away from the body of the king and toward the spate of representations of dynastic and royal women throughout the Hellenistic world. There are as yet few extant synthetic studies of royal women's visual and material culture,²⁵ though there are several studies for royal men. For example, this book follows somewhat in the footsteps of R. R. Smith's *Hellenistic Royal Portraits* (1988) and Andrew Stewart's *Faces of Power* (1993), which are still influential texts on images of dynastic power, and especially on the king's ruler portrait.²⁶ Smith and Stewart both look at visual expressions of kingship across the Hellenistic world, focusing on anthropomorphic portraits and visages of men. While Smith's book looks at the ruler portraits of different Hellenistic dynasts, Stewart primarily studies the portraiture of Alexander and its legacies. These studies are not only important catalogs of objects but also foundational examinations of the conceptions and

ideologies related to figural expressions of kingship. *The Art of Queenship in the Hellenistic World* seeks to do similar work for the expressions of dynastic and royal femininity, which, in turn, augments our broader understanding of dynastic and royal art. I present a synthetic account of depictions and portrayals of women across political dynasties (e.g., Hecatomnid, Argead, Ptolemaic, Seleucid, Attalid), geographic areas (the Aegean region, Macedonia, Egypt, western Asia), and periods (between the fourth and second centuries), as well as across multiple types of art objects (e.g., statues, luxury portable objects, performances), to show that royal and dynastic women were integral to expressions of political ideology and dynastic stability as well as to the development of cultural and artistic work.

METHODOLOGIES FOR AN ART HISTORY OF HELLENISTIC QUEENSHIP

The title of this introduction, *Bodies of Power*, affirms the historical existence of dynastic and royal women by gesturing toward their corporeal presence. These women are present in objects of dynastic visual and material culture, from public monuments to cultic statues to text fragments that record royal spectacles and performances. Throughout this book, I will demonstrate how these various representations and expressions of queenship were used to explain, materialize, and maintain dynastic rule. As I have discussed, several art-historical studies of dynastic art have focused on the aesthetic modes and practices by which power was made manifest through the figure of the king, with an emphasis on monuments to his military might and manliness. However, any art-historical study of dynastic royalty (and dynastic masculinities, for that matter) is incomplete without a nuanced analysis of royal femininity and its material and visual articulations: the notions of femininity expressed in representations of royal and dynastic women across different Hellenistic kingdoms and dynasties (re)produced and sometimes negotiated the traditional gender binaries that are central to the construction of masculine power.

In the Hellenistic world, political power was conceived as inherently masculine, with kingship as “the dominant political form.”²⁷ Such gendered notions of power are unsurprising, especially when we consider what came before the Hellenistic period in artistic practice and cultural thought: in Achaemenid visual culture, bodies with absolute authority were male, and in Greek contexts, male bodies were conceived as inherently superior to female bodies.²⁸ Conceptions of power as masculine have bounded modern art-historical explorations of the art of power in the Hellenistic age. Of the complex corpus of Alexander’s portraiture as a “technology of power,” Andrew Stewart argues,

“Power to” is dynamic, is wielded by agents, and is an integral feature of all social relations; “power over,” which always involves “power to” (the