GENDER, POWER, AND REGNANT QUEENSHIP IN THE LATIN KINGDOM OF JERUSALEM

by

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Abstract

This thesis will explore the relationship between regnant queenship and power in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. Specifically, the reigns of Queens Melisende (r. 1131-1153), Sibylla (r. 1186-1190), Isabella (r. 1190-1205), Maria (r. 1205-1212), and Yolande (r. 1212-1228) are considered here. Through analyzing their reigns and the ways in which these queens regnant exerted power, this thesis will propose that current notions of power as military and political in nature are too limited to fully appreciate the ways in which medieval queens regnant were able to exert power.
Acknowledgements

I have come to learn that it takes a village to write a thesis, even one as short as this, and so I would like to take a moment to acknowledge mine. First and foremost I would like to thank Dr. Adnan Husain for his guidance, support, and patience throughout my research and writing process. Dr. Husain introduced me to Sibylla, the queen with whom my passion for queenship studies began, and I am extremely grateful for that introduction. I would also like to thank my examiners Dr. Margaret Pappano and Dr. Richard Greenfield, whose excellent advice and counsel has not only helped me with this project, but will guide me in my projects to come. Their considerations of my work have proven invaluable. Furthermore, I am indebted to Dr. Ariel Salzmann, who generously agreed to serve as my committee chair, and to the entire administrative team in the Department of History at Queen’s University, whose endless kindness and encouragement has helped me along my journey. My greatest debt of gratitude, however, goes to Cynthia, Rebecca, Fritz, and Felix Summers, and to Jamie Bonar. The love and support of these five individuals saw me through thick and thin, and through successes and setbacks. Each and every one of them has contributed to my success in incalculable ways, and I could not be more grateful. To all these people listed, and to everyone else who contributed in any way to this project, thank you. I could not have asked for a better village.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

What is a queen? This is not as simple a question as it might seem at first. A queen can embody endless, often contradictory, roles. She may be a wife, a widow, a mother, a daughter, or a sister. She may be a foreigner or a local. Queens are expected to be diplomats, and they are asked to provide heirs. Queens are meant to be visible at their husbands’ sides, while they are also meant to be hidden in the margins of political life. So who and what is a queen? More importantly, how might we understand the power of queens and the sovereignty associated with queenship in its many forms?

Medieval queenship studies remains a largely underdeveloped field. While some work has been done to deconstruct medieval queenship and the relationship between gender and power, queens are often still painted with a broad brush: the nuances of queenship remain unexamined in favour of studying the lives and narratives of kings. Androcentrism has plagued the study of monarchy throughout its long historiography and remains pervasive to this day. This is evident in the majority of modern descriptions of medieval queens as an historical group, where it is not even mentioned that some queens were the heiresses to their thrones rather than the wives of the heirs. Charles Beem thus describes medieval royal women as “the kinswomen of powerful male elites… in close proximity to the sources of political power in the state.”¹ Amalie Fössel writes about

gender and rulership, but writes exclusively of queens regent and of the “royal wife.”

David Herlihy sums up women at court as having three roles: advisors to husbands, regents, and stand-ins while husbands were away. Sarah Rees Jones, in describing the relationship between queens and kings, writes that “queens maintained their own bedchambers, but … their [the king’s and queen’s] political power was not equal.”

While these statements and descriptions are not inaccurate in individual cases, within surveys of queenship and women’s power, which are designed to explore the breadth of women’s power, such totalizing cannot be accepted as accurate and allowed to result in the erasure of certain queens. Simply put, a queen regnant cannot be understood if queenship studies routinely denies the possibility of such a queen existing.

Not all the historiography is so grim. Elizabeth Casteen has written about the complexity of the position and reception of medieval queens regnant in their political and social spheres in her work. She writes both that, “The common understanding of queenship was that queens were the wives (or consorts) or mothers of kings,” and that “[Johanna I of Naples’] success suggests that her contemporaries were not as intransigently opposed to female rule as one might expect, and that there were conditions

under which it was accepted and even celebrated.” Theresa Earenfight has published a great deal of work dedicated to clarifying the roles of queens regnant and consort in the medieval Latin world, and writes, “It is a mistake, however, to consider powerful queens the exceptions who prove the rule of patriarchy... The need to perpetuate a dynasty superseded even the most entrenched attitudes and prejudices, making medieval queenship fluid and dynamic.” While these works are important contributions to the field, such examples are scarce. The dominant narrative in queenship studies remains one in which queenship entails marriage with a king. In reality, queenship amounts to a collection of diverse and individual lived experiences and represents the multifaceted nature of female sovereignty. While the historiography of queenship studies has laid the groundwork needed to explore the ways in which medieval queenships were made manifest, the nuances of these roles have yet to be fully explored.

This thesis will contribute to this discussion by examining the variability of regnant queenship. While other writers have published articles and books about individual queens regnant, relatively few have undertaken a comparative investigation in one polity to expose the diversity of queens regnant and what it meant for various queens to have inherited a throne. This thesis will attempt to do so by examining the lives and the queenships of five queens regnant of Jerusalem: Queens Melisende (r. 1131-1153), Sibylla (r. 1186-1190), Isabella (r. 1190-1205), Maria (r. 1205-1212), and Yolande (r. 1212-1228). What makes these queens particularly relevant for this study and its aims is that all ruled the same kingdom as it experienced an extended but diverse period of

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6 Theresa Earenfight, “Medieval Queenship,” *History Compass* 15, no. 3 (2017): e12372.3.
instability and political struggle. Superficially, their circumstances were quite similar. However, a closer look at their lives, their queenships, and the impacts they had on their kingdom demonstrate the fact that despite ruling the same kingdom, the experiences of these queens regnant defy historiographical tendencies to discuss queenship as fixed. The prevalence of regnant queens in the Kingdom of Jerusalem is notable, particularly considering that the norms of Latin inheritance preferred male succession to female succession. This abnormality may be explained by the circumstances of their kingdom; the instability of which Earenfight argues demanded flexibility in dynastic practices. The Kingdom of Jerusalem is therefore a space in which historical questions of queenship can be explored, due in large part to the unusual circumstances in which it existed.

1.1 Rulership in the Latin Kingdom

The kingdom of Jerusalem was founded following the First Crusade. The Frankish ruler Godfrey of Bouillon (r. 1099-1100) was elected its first ruler, though William of Tyre made it clear that his election was not unanimous. In any case, he only ruled for one year. Following his death in 1100, he was replaced by his brother Baldwin I (r. 1100-1118), the Count of Edessa. Baldwin greatly expanded the kingdom’s territory. He captured Arsuf and Caesarea in 1101, Acre in 1104, Beirut in 110, and Sidon in

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7 Amalie Fößel, “The Political Traditions of Female Rulership in Medieval Europe,” 76. 
10 Ibid., 415.
Additionally, his support of the Count of Toulouse aided in the capture of Tripoli in 1109.

Baldwin I was followed by Baldwin II (r. 1118-1131), his cousin and the Count of Edessa from 1100-1118. His reign was marked by ongoing conflict with Muslim forces, included the Battle of the “Field of Blood,” in which Latin forces suffered a major defeat at the hands of the Artuqids of Aleppo. Having had no sons, his daughter Melisende was raised as heir presumptive. Melisende took the throne in 1131 and ruled until 1153, alongside both her husband and her son. She reigned throughout the Second Crusade, however, the most controversial military engagement of her rule was the civil war against her son, Baldwin III. Baldwin III reached the age of majority in 1145, however, Melisende maintained her rule until 1152, resulting in military conflicts between them and the temporary division of the kingdom (see pp. 19-20 below). He reigned until 1163, and in that time managed to capture Ascalon. However, the powerful Nur ad-Din was gaining military power in Syria, and when Baldwin III died in 1163 Nur ad-Din posed a major threat to the Kingdom of Jerusalem.

Baldwin III was succeeded by his brother, Amalric I. Throughout Amalric’s reign the Muslim states surrounding the Latin Kingdom were unified under Nur ad-Din and then Salah ad-Din, creating a powerful military threat that would nearly drive the

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12 Ibid., 478.
13 Ibid., 517.
14 Ibid., 531.
16 Ibid., 225.
17 Ibid., 295.
18 Ibid.
kingdom to extinction in the decades to come. Baldwin III was succeeded by his son, Baldwin IV (r. 1174-1185), who was diagnosed with leprosy at a young age.\textsuperscript{19} In 1177 he led his forces to victory at the famous Battle of Montgisard, besting Salah ad-Din in the process.\textsuperscript{20}

When Baldwin IV died in 1185 he was succeeded by his nephew, Baldwin V.\textsuperscript{21} However, Baldwin V was very young, and died at the age of nine in August 1186. He was succeeded by his mother Sibylla, whose reign saw major territorial losses following the Battle of Hattin in 1187 and who died in 1190.\textsuperscript{22} She in turn was succeeded by her sister Isabella.

Isabella reigned from 1190 to 1205, and had three husbands and seven children during this time. She was succeeded by her daughter Maria. Maria died shortly after giving birth to her daughter Yolande, however, her father John of Brienne ruled as her regent for many years.\textsuperscript{23} He was one of the leaders of the Fifth Crusade, and was very active in the fall of Damietta in 1219. He was also the first ruler of Jerusalem to visit Europe to campaign for support in the Holy Land. In 1225 his daughter Yolande was married to the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II, and he usurped John’s position in the

\textsuperscript{19}William of Tyre, \textit{A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea}, vol. 2, 397,
\textsuperscript{20}Ibid., 430.
kingdom. John and Frederick remained in conflict from that point onward, including a conflict in which John led a papal army against Frederick’s forces in 1229. Following this the kingdom was seized by factionalist disputes and increasing Muslim threats, and by the end of the thirteenth century had been reduced to a few ports clinging to the coast of the Mediterranean.

1.2 The High Court of the Kingdom of Jerusalem

The Kingdom of Jerusalem boasted a diverse population, but its nobility was exclusively Christian, both Eastern and Western. Throughout its two hundred year history it faced internal conflicts such as barons’ revolts and civil war, and the ever-present military threat posed by the Muslim forces surrounding it. The kingdom was influenced by extremely powerful nobles such as the Counts of Tripoli and of Ramla (the Ibelin family), whose influence over the kingdom was at times threatening to its sovereigns.

The sovereigns of Jerusalem ruled alongside the High Court, a governing body that consisted of all the barons and bishops of the kingdom. The court was responsible for electing the sovereign, implementing laws, minting currency, collecting taxes, and deciding upon matters of state. The High Court was initially designed to control the Latin Kingdom; however, La Monte notes that under the rules of Kings Fulk (r. 1131-1143), Baldwin III (r. 1143-1163), and Amalric (r. 1163-1174) the court “became subject to the royal will.” Following this, due to the illness of King Baldwin IV (r. 1174-1185)

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24 Guy Perry, *John of Brienne*, 133.
27 Ibid., 88.
and the military triumphs of Salah ad-Din, the High Court once again became the governing body of the Latin Kingdom.\textsuperscript{28} This meant that any decision Queens Sibylla, Isabella, Maria, and Yolande or their kings made had to be made in accordance with the will of the High Court. It also meant that the High Court had control over who became the sovereign of the kingdom.

The High Court had roots in the foundation of the kingdom, when Godfrey of Bouillon was made sovereign after being selected by a group of noble electors.\textsuperscript{29} This began a tradition of strong noble influence over the kingdom, and which was formalized in the form of the High Court. The first laws of the kingdom were established at the Council of Nablus in 1120, and Benjamin Kedar demonstrates that they remained in force throughout the twelfth century and became increasingly irrelevant throughout the thirteenth, with that decline roughly coinciding with the timeline of this thesis.\textsuperscript{30} However, despite ruling collectively, the High Court was not always a unified body. Factionalism existed within its ranks, and its members did not always agree on the decisions they made. This is most evident during succession crises, when the nobility often disagreed on the candidates for the throne.

This Court was, as La Monte demonstrates, particularly strong during Sibylla’s reign, and therefore occupied itself with the majority of state business. Their influence over their queen-elect is perhaps most clear in their ability to compel her to annul a legal marriage (see p. 25 below). Although the sovereign was considered first among equals within the High Court, their actual influence varied depending on their circumstances and

\textsuperscript{28} John L. La Monte, \textit{Feudal Monarchy in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem}, 88-89.
\textsuperscript{29} William of Tyre, \textit{A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea}, vol. 1, 382.
the other members of the court. Sibylla’s annulment is an excellent example of the sovereign’s own will being made secondary to the will of the Court. Her re-marriage to Guy, however, demonstrates the ways in which a sovereign could push back. As a member of the High Court and as the recipient of much of its scrutiny, the sovereign lived in tension with the Court. The relationship between the two was simultaneously adversarial and cooperative during the time period discussed here, as the Court was active in selecting marriage partners for its queens, and in setting the limits of power for those queens and their husbands. This could be a source of frustration for the kings consort of Jerusalem.

The High Court therefore was at the heart of all political decisions and involved in all the conflicts in the Latin Kingdom. As the queens examined in this thesis married, had children, and engaged with their kingdom, they always did so in the shadow of the powerful High Court at whose behest they ruled.

1.3 The Medieval Sources

The events of the Latin East were of particular interest to historians and writers across medieval Europe, and thankfully a good deal of their writing is still available to us today. The most famous of these chroniclers is William of Tyre, a twelfth-century archbishop who wrote from the courts of Kings Amalric and Baldwin IV of Jerusalem. Peter Edbury and John Gordon Rowe consider his Historia “a work of critical perception,” based on critical responses to earlier work and responses to events contemporary to him.31 William was affiliated with the Ibelin family, who were extremely influential in the Kingdom of Jerusalem and the other Latin Kingdoms. His

account was based largely on his own observations and is lacking Greek and Arabic influences and perspectives due their being unavailable to him.\(^{32}\) He seems to have been fond of the ruling family, and Edbury and Rowe note that he wrote particularly favourably of Melisende.\(^{33}\) William’s work encompassed the earlier years of the Latin Kingdom through to Sibylla’s marriage to her second husband Guy, and is therefore very useful in illuminating the lives of Melisende and Sibylla.

This thesis also relies heavily on the *Chronique d’Ernoul et de Bernard le trésorier*, which draws on and continue the narrative of William of Tyre’s *Historia* and constitutes part of the Old French continuation of William of Tyre. It is unclear exactly who Ernoul was, though it has been suggested that his chronicle was written by a servant of Balian of Ibelin’s named Ernoul.\(^{34}\) In any case he was very pro-Ibelin, and his chronicle tells the story of the Kingdom of Jerusalem from its foundation through to 1229. Morgan notes that while the former half of the kingdom’s history fluctuates in tone and perspective, by the mid-1800s it “becomes a perfectly serious and very full account of those crucial years,” and it is at this point that this thesis begins to draw on this source.\(^{35}\) Bernard the Treasurer’s chronicle is strikingly similar, but provides narration until 1231. The *Estoires d’Outremer et de la nassiance de Salehadin* is also cited in this thesis, and is a very mixed text. It fluctuates between fantastical accounts, including a genealogy which describes Salah ad-Din’s French ancestry, and serious historical

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\(^{32}\) Ibid., 44.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 80.


\(^{35}\) Ibid., 11-12.
narrative.\textsuperscript{36} The information it is used to support in this thesis has been verified by other historians both medieval and contemporary, and therefore can be trusted.

Roger of Howden is another source found here. Roger became parson of the church of Howden in Yorkshire in 1173 or 1174, and was in the royal service by 1174. In this capacity he travelled to Acre with Richard I in 1191, and died approximately two years later.\textsuperscript{37} His writing often came from his own memory, when possible, or from reliable sources when he was not present for the events he was describing. Roger’s writing is very factual, with very little of his own interpretation. Michael Staunton observes that, “With no intention of writing a history with literary flourishes and analyses of cause, he did not stop to reflect as he wrote.”\textsuperscript{38} While this makes Roger’s account slightly less exciting than other chronicles, it does make it a useful tool for understanding the events of the twelfth century. Roger of Howden’s writing influenced and informed Roger of Wendover, who wrote his \textit{Flores historiarum} between 1204 and 1231 while a monk at St Albans in Hertfordshire.\textsuperscript{39}

Another chronicle provided by King Richard’s retinue is the \textit{Internarium Peregrinorum et Getsa Regis Ricardi}, which was written c. 1191-92 by a crusader and

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 64.
compiled in its final form between 1217 and 1222 by Richard de Templo.\textsuperscript{40} It seems to have been written in the Holy Land, and details Richard’s travels to the Holy Land, his participation on crusade, and the major political events of his time there. Guy of Bazoches also wrote primarily about the Third Crusade but touched upon the political history of Jerusalem, as well. Despite their marriage having taken place well before Guy arrived in the Holy Land as part of Henry II of Champagne’s retinue, he wrote about Sibylla’s coronation with her husband, Guy de Lusignan.\textsuperscript{41} Other examples of chronicles being written by knights includes Robert de Clari and Philippe de Novare, both of whom travelled to the Holy Land from France in order to participate in the Crusade and both of whom wrote about the events of the former half of the thirteenth century in the Latin East.\textsuperscript{42} This thesis also includes the observations of two Muslim chroniclers, ‘Imad ad-Din and Ibn al-Athir. Both were active during the twelfth century, and gave vivid insights into what must have seemed the most scandalous activities of their Latin neighbours, such as the third marriage of the pregnant and widowed Queen Isabella in 1192.\textsuperscript{43}

The most controversial source used in this thesis is the 1690 edition of the \textit{Assises et bons usages de Royaume de Jerusalem}, edited by Gaspard Thaumas de la Thaumassiere. As Edbury notes, this edition was taken from too old a manuscript to

\textsuperscript{40} Helen Nicholson, “Following the Path of the Lionheart: The \textit{De Ortu Walwanii} and the \textit{Internarium Peregrinorum et Getsa Regis Ricardi},” Medium Aevum 69, no. 1 (2000): 22.
provide good insight into the actual functioning of the court of Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{44} However, as the event being cited from this source took place in latter half of the thirteenth century and therefore quite late, it was contemporary enough to the time of this particular manuscript being written for its account of this particular event to be trusted.

\textbf{1.4 The Gender of Power}

The discussion of queenship, and of women’s power more broadly, is made complicated by modern and medieval conceptions of power. In a world where activities and roles associated with femininity, such as being a queen, are understood as inherently inferior or lacking in power, it is difficult to see power in women who are acting in compliance with feminine gender roles rather than in opposition to them. And yet, medieval queens were able to access, wield, and display power while still participating in activities that are historically feminized. Medieval power is generally thought of in masculine terms, with the ability to wield military or political sway being understood as active and powerful roles, and traditionally feminine activities understood as passive and weak. The association between queenship and weakness, and specifically between royal femininity and weakness, seems to be linked to the frequency of queens being consorts rather than regnant. As noted above (pp. 1-2), one has to struggle through the historiography to find an analysis of queens’ roles that does not assume that queens were intended for any purpose other than bearing the king’s heirs. This conflation of bloodline and queenship has muddied modern understandings of the positions of medieval queens, making it difficult to study either queens regnant or kings consort without casting them as

figures occupying liminal spaces between femininity and masculinity rather than as figures occupying relatively unexplored, but still valid, gendered spaces.

Given this restrictive understanding of rulership and gender and the fact that medieval marriages are traditionally thought of as arrangements in which men exercise power over their wives, the notion of a queen regnant seems almost unnatural in this medieval context. Charles Beem and Miles Taylor write that, “While kingship is a public role inherently gendered male, it was the exact opposite for the male consort, who struggled to inhabit a female gendered position while maintaining a public role commensurate with the status as the husband of a reigning monarch.” This suggests that rulership must have been gendered male and consort-ship was inherently female, and it is an assumption that has shaped the field of medieval studies to this day.

Duby’s assertion that power was synonymous with the sword and that noble women were “incapable of exercising [power]” has rightfully been challenged in more recent writing. The idea that women could not wield power at all has been proven false on numerous occasions. Still, Duby’s underlying assumptions – that power and military influence were one and the same and that women in power were anomalies – remain. Joanna Drell suggests that medieval aristocratic women were crucial to the success of the aristocratic economy because of their ability to preserve wealth by marrying into other

families. David Herlihy posits that a woman’s influence could only be felt in the absence of her husband, when she was given the opportunity to stand in for him. Charles Beem writes that for women, “power was exercised through the auspices of legitimate male authority, in their positions as elite male appendages.” These modern assertions reinforce gendered understandings of power and make it difficult to divorce rulership from constructs of power that favour aggression. They also make it difficult to divorce aggression and masculinity from gender norms that assume men must be aggressive and women passive. These norms are pervasive and entrenched, and they fail to benefit those whose lives they aim to illuminate, both men and women. These norms are also glaringly present in the study of sovereignty, as kingship and queenship are bound by gender norms. By reaffirming these norms and generalizations modern historians have made it difficult to understand modes of power that are not masculinized. This has made it difficult to understand medieval queens regnant and to locate them in a medieval context where these norms, reaffirmed by modern historians, would have made the existence and empowerment of such queens impossible.

While women such as Queen Melisende sometimes had access to masculinized forms of power, specifically through military exploits and political engagement, this is not the only way in which queens were able to exercise power. The lives of the queens regnant of Jerusalem suggest that the nature of power for medieval queens regnant was flexible and could be expressed not only through traditionally masculine forms of power

49 Charles Beem, The Lioness Roared, 5.
but also through the harnessing and manipulation of traditionally feminine and feminized roles and activities. The goal of this research is to disrupt and debunk the restrictive conclusions that have been made about queens and queenship over the years, and that have been discussed above, by demonstrating the complexity of regnant queenship and the relationships between these queens and their methods of exercising power.

Over the years that these queens reigned, the circumstances of their kingdom changed. They gained and lost children and husbands, and they navigated their particular reigns in response to the specific sets of political and personal circumstances that influenced their sovereignty. Rather than attempt to find a unifying experience of queenship among these women, this thesis aims to explore the diversity of their queenships and the ways in which they exercised power. This project also challenges the prevailing notion that queens were simply the wives of powerful men, and that their power was limited by this role. The lives of queen regnants existed on a spectrum that included both experiences of empowerment and experiences of disempowerment. The queens explored in this thesis all had different relationships to power and were situated in different places on that spectrum. What they had in common was that their power did not necessarily exist in a masculinized form and might not be obvious if their lives are read through an androcentric lens. However, when the concept of power is broadened to include more diverse forms, these queens’ sources of power become obvious and their impacts on the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem can be appreciated.

1.5 Queen Melisende, r. 1131-1153

The first queen regnant to rule of Jerusalem was Queen Melisende. She was born in 1105 and was the eldest of Baldwin II’s (r. 1118-1131) four daughters. The court in
which she was raised was modeled on Latin courts, particularly those in France, but with Byzantine and Eastern influences in food and dress.\textsuperscript{50} Similarly, the laws she was accustomed to, including regarding marriage, would have been primarily based on the laws of the French fiefdoms.\textsuperscript{51}

This Frankish influence may very well have benefitted Melisende’s political career. While Byzantium was known for its powerful empresses in the past, the Byzantine Empire had not had a reigning empress since Theodora (r. 1042-1056), almost a full century before Melisende came to power. Meanwhile, there were many powerful contemporary female rulers in the Latin West, including Eleanor of Aquitaine, the Empress Matilda, and Queen Urraca of Léon. Perhaps because of this Frankish influence, and certainly because Baldwin had no sons, Melisende was raised as the heir presumptive of the Kingdom of Jerusalem. She often worked alongside her father, and when she married Fulk of Anjou (r. 1131-1143) Baldwin began preparing them both to succeed him as sovereigns.\textsuperscript{52} This meant that Melisende was engaged in diplomacy, military affairs, and politics, as well as witnessing grants and other formal documents.\textsuperscript{53} Melisende’s son, the future king Baldwin III, was born in 1130.\textsuperscript{54} While lying on his deathbed, Baldwin II summoned Fulk, Melisende, and the young Baldwin to a gathering with the patriarch and

\textsuperscript{51} John L. La Monte, \textit{Feudal Monarchy in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem}, 100.
\textsuperscript{52} William of Tyre, \textit{A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea}, vol. 2, 38.
\textsuperscript{54} Baldwin was said to be aged thirteen in 1143, which would make 1130 his year of birth. See William of Tyre, \textit{A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea}, vol. 2, 135.
prelates of the church to confirm that they would jointly succeed him.\textsuperscript{55} When Baldwin II died on 21 August 1131, Melisende and Fulk succeeded him jointly and were crowned in the Church of the Sepulchre on 14 September 1131.\textsuperscript{56}

The relationship between Melisende and Fulk was tense, with the High Court not approving of his leadership style and Fulk accusing Melisende of being “on too familiar terms” with Hugh II of Le Puiset, Count of Jaffa.\textsuperscript{57} The accusations resulted in Hugh being exiled and Melisende making the kingdom hostile to those who had supported Fulk’s accusations to the extent that they were “forced to take diligent measures for their safety.”\textsuperscript{58} Furthermore, Fulk’s own power was so decreased that he no longer made any decisions without Melisende’s consent, a practice about which he had not previously been diligent.\textsuperscript{59} Ultimately the two were reconciled and their second son Amalric was born in 1136.\textsuperscript{60} Fulk died in 1143, and Melisende took over control of the kingdom by herself as queen regnant.\textsuperscript{61} It is evident that her taking control of the throne was met with approval, as William of Tyre wrote of the event that “the royal power passed to the Lady Melisende, a queen beloved of God, to whom it belonged by hereditary right.”\textsuperscript{62}

Baldwin was only thirteen at the time and therefore still a minor. Although he was crowned in 1143, Melisende maintained her military and political presence and did not

\textsuperscript{55} William of Tyre, \textit{A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea}, vol. 2, 46.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 51.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 71.
\textsuperscript{58} William of Tyre, \textit{A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea}, vol. 2, 76.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{60} Amalric was said to be aged seven in 1143, which would make 1136 his year of birth. See William of Tyre, \textit{A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea}, vol. 2, 135.
\textsuperscript{61} William of Tyre, \textit{A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea}, vol. 2, 135.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
cede control to her son. Helen Gaudette has calculated that of twelve royal charters issued between 1144 and 1152, four were issued by Baldwin and Melisende jointly, two were issued by Melisende with Baldwin’s consent, two were issued by Baldwin alone, and four were issued by Melisende alone. Clearly, she was more actively involved in the kingdom’s politics than her son, and her political deftness did not go unnoticed.

William of Tyre commented on her approach to her rule, writing that,

Melisende, the king’s mother, was a woman of great wisdom who had much experience in all kinds of secular matters. She had risen so far above the normal status of women that she dared to undertake important measures. It was her ambition to emulate the magnificence of the greatest and noblest princes and to show herself in no wise inferior to them.

William clearly respected Melisende a great deal and disliked those who opposed her influence of the kingdom, calling them “frivolous elements in the kingdom.” However, those “frivolous elements” were to become more powerful in the future when Baldwin sought to extend his power over the kingdom.

Despite having come of age in 1145, Baldwin had been denied his rule while his mother maintained her reign over the kingdom. By 1152 Baldwin insisted that the patriarch Fulcher crown him without Melisende being present, something that would have been a great insult to his mother. The coronation was ultimately deferred, and Baldwin was not appeased. The matter was then put before the High Court, which decided to divide the kingdom between the two. Baldwin was given control over the

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66 Ibid., 140.
67 Ibid., 205.
north and Melisende ruled the south, including the city of Jerusalem itself. Unhappy with this result, Baldwin waged war on his mother’s territories, essentially causing a civil war within the kingdom. Church mediation resulted in Melisende being given sole control over the city of Nablus and the adjacent territories, and Baldwin was given control over the Latin Kingdom as its sovereign. Following this the two were reconciled and Melisende maintained her strong influence at court until 1161, when her health took a turn for the worse and she died on September 11.

Melisende has been remembered in the historiography as a very important and perhaps even unusually powerful queen. She wielded political power directly rather than exerting her influence from the margins as a wife and mother. Hans Eberhard Mayer wrote that as a woman Melisende could not have fulfilled the functions of a king and therefore must have known that she would have to share her power with Baldwin at some point, however, William of Tyre’s *Historia* indicates that she received very little opposition during her reign. She expressed her power in a way that would have been recognizable to her nobility by asserting herself politically during her reign and militarily against her son. Melisende is an ideal example of a woman who asserted power in compliance with the masculinized forms of power that dominated medieval politics and diplomacy. The queens that followed her expressed their power in different forms, but all owed a debt to Melisende for establishing a tradition of regnant queenship in the Latin Kingdom.

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68 William of Tyre, *A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, vol. 2, 205
69 Ibid., 206.
70 Ibid., 207.
71 Ibid., 291.
Chapter 2

Queen Sibylla, r. 1186-1190

Queen Sibylla of Jerusalem had the misfortune of becoming the queen right as the Kingdom of Jerusalem suffered extensive territorial losses to Muslim forces under the powerful Salah ad-Din, who had united Egypt and Syria and posed a major military threat to the Kingdom of Jerusalem. Following the Battle of Hattin in 1187 the Kingdom of Jerusalem lost several key cities to him including the symbolically crucial capital and sacred city of Jerusalem. These losses occurred under the military leadership of Sibylla’s husband Guy de Lusignan (r. 1186-1190), whose relationship with Sibylla coloured the contemporary reception of her queenship.

At first glance, Sibylla does not appear to have wielded much power during her thirty years of life. Subject to her father, brother, and husband, she embodied the crown but never seemed to enjoy its benefits. Still, Sibylla had a habit of making her authority felt when it was most necessary. In selecting her king, accepting pledges from her subjects, overseeing military matters, and engaging in diplomacy, Sibylla often stepped out of the shadows of the men surrounding her just long enough to shape or drastically alter the future of her kingdom. As her kingdom crumbled around her, Sibylla rose to the challenge by performing masculinized forms of rulership in concert with her femininity rather than in conflict with it, and therefore challenges modern preconceptions of the limitations placed on women’s power discussed above.
Sibylla was born around 1160, the daughter and first child of King Amalric of Jerusalem and his first wife, Agnes of Courtenay. Her great-aunt Yvetta raised her in the convent of St. Lazarus at Bethany, presumably with the understanding that her older brother Baldwin (r. 1174-1185) would become king and that she was to be married to a noble of a high rank. It may well have seemed that she would always be adjacent to power but never hold it herself. Asbridge suggests that this upbringing meant that she was unprepared to ever be a successful queen. However, Synek’s opinion on the role of abbesses taking on the role of “fathers” adds an interesting dimension to this debate. While it is possible Sibylla’s upbringing resulted in her being less equipped to rule, it is equally possible that being raised in an environment where a woman was at the head of the community provided an important example of female leadership on which to model herself. Sibylla’s penchant for traditionally active rulership, which is to say rulership that is associated with diplomatic engagement, warfare, and other forms of power associated with men and with masculinity, may well have found its roots in the convent that Asbridge suggests hindered her development as a ruler.

Beyond her living arrangements, little is known of her early life. Sibylla was hardly mentioned in the chronicles until she was named Countess of Jaffa and Ascalon, and her subsequent marriage to William of Montferrat in the autumn of 1176, which was

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74 Ibid., 399.
very brief.\textsuperscript{77} By June of 1177, Sibylla was a widow and pregnant with a son.\textsuperscript{78} The future King Baldwin V was born later that year.\textsuperscript{79}

Baldwin IV had been diagnosed with leprosy when he was a young child and was very ill throughout his life, and by 1180 his symptoms had become very severe. Negotiations took place for a marriage between Sibylla and Hugh of Burgundy but did not come to fruition as he ultimately refused to marry her.\textsuperscript{80} Shortly after this Bohemond of Antioch and Raymond of Tripoli travelled to Jerusalem with a cavalry escort, which provoked fear of an uprising.\textsuperscript{81} At this time Baldwin’s nephew and heir was only four years old and therefore vulnerable if the king should have died. If Baldwin’s claim to the throne was not being threatened, perhaps the king would not have been so interested in finding a spouse for Sibylla, and the history of the Latin Kingdom would have turned out very differently. However, as an unmarried widow, Sibylla was not in a position to defend her son’s claim to the throne against Bohemond and Raymond in the event of her brother’s death, especially considering that her son would need a regent and either Bohemond or Raymond would surely have jumped at that opportunity. The actions of Bohemond and Raymond caused Baldwin to accelerate his search for a spouse for Sibylla, and in 1180 Sibylla married the relatively lowly-ranked French knight Guy de Lusignan during Easter.\textsuperscript{82}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[77] William of Tyre, \textit{A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea}, 415-16.
\item[78] Ibid., 416.
\item[80] William of Tyre, \textit{A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea}, 445.
\item[81] Ibid., 446.
\item[82] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
Sibylla and Guy had two daughters, Alice and Maria, whose dates of birth are unknown. Guy seems to have been disliked by the nobility of Jerusalem and at the very least by the Ibelins, a powerful family in the Latin Levant. Sibylla’s brother had become the King of Jerusalem six years prior, in 1174. In 1182 Baldwin’s health declined rapidly and he made Guy his regent. Shortly after this Salah ad-Din waged war on Kerak, where according to William of Tyre, Guy “[showed] himself far from wise or valiant.” In order to prevent Guy from succeeding him on the throne Baldwin IV then established a co-reign with the younger Baldwin in 1183 with Raymond of Tripoli as regent. Additionally, Baldwin IV seems unsuccessfully to have attempted to annul their marriage as Guy’s only claim to the throne was by virtue of his marriage to Sibylla. As Riley-Smith points out, Baldwin must have hated Guy a great deal to cast doubts on Sibylla’s claim to the throne, because in doing so he cast those same doubts on his own.

Baldwin IV succumbed to leprosy in 1185, leaving Baldwin V to reign under the regency of Raymond of Tripoli. Guy was not even invited to pay homage to the young king at his coronation, and it was determined that should the king die his successor would

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84 “Estoires d’Outremer et de la naissance de Salehadin,” 96.
86 Ibid., 501.
87 “The Old French Continuation of William of Tyre, 1184-97 [1],” 55.
88 “The Old French Continuation of William of Tyre, 1184-97 [1],” 11.
90 Ibn al-Athir, “Discord between the Franks in Syria; the Count of Tripoli joins Saladin,” 114.
be determined by the High Court and the Kings of France and England. Sadly, his reign was not long; he died in August of 1186, at the age of nine. With no heirs of his own, the crown passed to Sibylla, though she faced opposition from Raymond, who contested her claim.

Debate broke out over whether or not Sibylla, and by extension Guy, were the rightful heirs to the throne of Jerusalem. The allies of the powerful Ibelin family believed that the crown should pass directly to Isabella, Sibylla’s half-sister by her father King Amalric, and her husband, Humphrey of Toron. Raymond of Tripoli took Isabella’s claim so seriously, and hated Guy so vehemently, that he almost started a civil war. Humphrey, however, took it upon himself to pledge his allegiance to Sibylla as Queen, and denied all interest in the throne. With this alternate candidate quashed, and the High Court of Jerusalem firmly in Sibylla’s corner, Sibylla was crowned in 1186 as the sole ruler.

By no means was Sibylla’s ascension indicative of an appreciation or respect for Guy, or any serious consideration of him as king. The High Court made Sibylla annul her marriage to Guy prior to her coronation, and according to the sources this was done with the agreement that she would be allowed to select her own husband after being crowned.

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94 “The Old French Continuation of William of Tyre, 1184-97 [1],” 26-27.
96 Chronique d’Ernoul, 136.
with no intervention by the High Court. The result was a particularly humourous situation, outlined in a few different sources, and described here in *The Annals of Roger of Hoveden*:

She [Sibylla], however, by a wonderful piece of cunning, deceived them, saying: “If a divorce takes place between me and my husband, I wish you to make me sure, by your promises and oaths, that whomsoever I shall make choice of you will choose for your head and lord.”

Accordingly, after they had done so, they led her into the Temple, and the before-named Patriarch [Heraclius] crowned her; shortly after which, when all were offering up their prayers that God the Lord Almighty would provide a fitting king for that land, the before-named queen took the royal crown in her hands, and placed it on the head of [Guy] de Lusignan her husband, saying, “I make choice of thee as king, and as my lord, and as lord of the land of Jerusalem, for those whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.”

At these words all stood in amazement, but on account of the oath which they had made, no one dared oppose her, and the Patriarch, approaching, anointed him king.

Whether or not Guy’s coronation was as dramatic as this is debated, but there seems to be no question about the fact that Sibylla selected Guy to reign alongside her as her king, contrary to the wishes of the High Court and other nobles in the Latin East. Equally relevant is the fact that despite being the King of Jerusalem and wielding the power of the throne, Guy was never made king regnant. Guy’s power as the King of Jerusalem came directly from Sibylla’s power as the queen regnant of Jerusalem. Guy was a king consort, and despite being king, never had the trust of his subjects that monarchs native to the kingdom enjoyed.

Guy was made the leader of the kingdom’s army, which he mobilized against Salah ad-Din, who was a very powerful opponent of the Christian crusaders and nobility.

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Salah ad-Din had gained a reputation throughout the Kingdom of Jerusalem for his intelligence and his skill in warfare. William of Tyre describes him as “a man of keen and vigorous mind, valiant in war, and of an extremely generous disposition.” He was understood to be shrewd and dangerous. Salah ad-Din defeated Guy’s forces on 4 July 1187 at the legendary Battle of Hattin, where the brutally hot sun exhausted Guy’s forces and made them easy targets for the Muslim forces. Guy ordered his exhausted troops to set up camp, around which Salah ad-Din’s men set fires, shooting arrows at the Christian troops through the smoke. This was followed by a military confrontation that lasted only six hours, in which Salad ad-Din “won the entire field.” Between Guy’s decision to set up camp in a strategically ill-chosen place and Salah ad-Din’s plan to literally smoke out the opposition, the Latins did not stand a chance. The majority of the army was slain, and Guy was subsequently taken prison by Salah ad-Din and held hostage in Damascus.

In the wake of Guy’s failure, Sibylla travelled from Jerusalem to Ascalon with her daughters and household in order to defend the city in 1187. She then personally wrote to Salah ad-Din asking for Guy’s release, which was granted in 1189 on the condition that he not attempt to wage war against Salah ad-Din’s forces and in exchange for Ascalon. This was a move that Capi-Reisfeld sees as a clear example of the ability of women to wield power during the crusades, and compares it with Melisende’s diplomacy.

with Damascus. In any case, Guy’s release speaks to the power Sibylla was able to exert in war despite not being present on the battlefield. Roger of Howden used very active language to describe these events, writing that Sibylla “betook herself… to the city of Ascalon,” “fortified [Ascalon] with provisions and soldiers,” and “liberated [Guy] from the custody of Salah ad-Din.” These verb choices indicate that Roger believed that Sibylla was the primary actor and decision-maker in these events, which suggests Sibylla’s medieval contemporaries saw her as a capable and active diplomat.

Sibylla and Guy sought refuge together at Tyre, which had been successfully defended by Conrad of Montferrat (r. 1190-1192), Sibylla’s first husband’s younger brother. Conrad denied them entry because he denied Guy’s rule of the kingdom, and the two camped outside the walls of Tyre for months. Finally, Guy took matters into his own hands, beginning a siege on Acre and breaking an oath not to attack any Muslim strongholds. Leading the vanguard of the Third Crusade, Guy marched on Acre with Sibylla and their daughters following. His army purportedly consisted of “700 knights and many more of other ranks, gathered from every Christian nation… its strength in numbers amounted to not quite 9000.” It was in 1190, in the crusader camp this force established outside Acre that Sibylla, Alice, and Maria died in an epidemic that took the lives of many in the camp.

108 Ibid., 126.
110 “The Old French Continuation of William of Tyre, 1184-97 [1],” 95.
Despite inheriting the throne, Sibylla was never given the opportunity to achieve total sovereign power in the way that kings regnant often were, though it is not easy to establish exactly how and why her authority was restricted. It cannot be said that the nobility of Jerusalem were unprepared for a woman in power. After all, the reign of Sibylla’s grandmother, the famous and powerful Queen Melisende, would have been fresh in their collective memory. Even with differences in personality taken into account, the discrepancy in the autonomy enjoyed by these two women is vast. This disparity can be explained, at least in part, by the personal situations of these two women. As the legitimacy of Sibylla’s reign was challenged and her power largely conducted via Guy rather than herself, Sibylla’s position as the kingdom’s leader was never particularly stable. The sheer quantity of claimants to her throne made her easily replaceable, and while it is evident that the nobility of Jerusalem had no particular problem with Sibylla, their reservations about Guy were unmistakable. Melisende, meanwhile, was the only possible heir to the throne of Jerusalem in her time and had been raised to be the heir. She chose never to remarry following the death of her husband and co-sovereign, King Fulk. Sibylla had a husband and a brother-in-law both eager to rule and both with claims to the throne of varying legitimacy, and was in a position to be increasingly marginalized by both her husband and her subjects as the kingdom fell into war with Salah ad-Din and was affected by the Third Crusade. And yet, despite being so frequently written out of history and made an accessory to her brother and her husbands, she exploited her position as a queen in certain key ways to shape the history of the Kingdom of Jerusalem,

111 While Isabella’s first husband Humphrey of Toron did not seem interested in ruling, her second husband Conrad of Montferrat was. See chapter two, “Queen Isabella, r. 1190-1205.”
demonstrating an ability to wield power in the political spheres that the historiography
demonstrates modern historians do not expect women to be able to directly and actively
influence.

Sibylla seems to have enjoyed more power prior to the Battle of Hattin than after. After all, she was able to choose her own husband in Guy after her coronation, and it was with her that Humphrey of Toron spoke to pledge his allegiance when her succession to the throne was questioned. As Hodgson writes, “It is a testament to the strength of Sibylla’s claim and the authority gained by consecration that she managed to retain Guy as her husband despite opposition.” Even following the events at Hattin, however, Sibylla acted to protect her kingdom from Salah ad-Din, and it was Sibylla who secured her husband’s release by interceding directly with Salah ad-Din on Guy’s behalf.

Guy de Lusignan was perhaps not an obvious candidate for Sibylla to marry in the first place, let alone twice. He was a middling knight with no particular political or military sway and yet Baldwin IV swiftly married Guy and Sibylla in 1180, potentially in order to prevent the Ibelins from strengthening their hold on the kingdom. King Amalric’s second wife Maria was affiliated with the Ibelins by her second marriage, and so the threat of them usurping the throne must have weighed on Baldwin. While her brother the king orchestrated her first marriage to Guy, their remarriage was unquestionably Sibylla’s own decision. Schein suggests that women in the Kingdom of Jerusalem enjoyed a great deal more freedom than women in the Latin West due to the military instability of the kingdom, which she believes resulted in greater flexibility of

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113 William of Tyre, *A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, vol. 2, 446.
social norms. As such, Sibylla experienced a great deal of power in her second marriage, symbolized by her being invested with the authority to confer the crown of Jerusalem upon Guy. This freedom was reinforced by Sibylla selecting her own husband in accordance with a law put in place by Sibylla’s father which gave heiresses the freedom to choose their own husbands from a pool of three suitable candidates presented to them by their guardians. This indicates that Sibylla would have enjoyed a certain amount of input into the choice of her husband, and the fact that her choice of Guy was unchallenged speaks to Sibylla’s authority as both queen and heir.

Broadly speaking, women did not always have a great deal of authority over their own marriages during this epoch. While Sibylla may not have had a great deal of autonomy or sway in the selection of either William of Montferrat or Guy de Lusignan (the first time), in both cases she was in a position of less power at court and in her family as the king’s sister, ultimately subject to his wishes. With the development of Sibylla’s authority as heir, and subsequently as queen regnant, her social and political status as a woman greatly improved. Her situation prior to this was that of most noble women: subject to the whims of the men around her. In selecting Guy as her husband after her coronation despite the objections of some of her advisors, Sibylla asserted her authority not as a queen or a woman, but as a ruler. Her womanhood here was therefore made secondary to her position as queen regnant. In this instance Sibylla’s womanhood may be understood as occupying a liminal space, where her actions were understood as

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115 Ibid., 146.
116 Ibid., 141.
being not quite those of a woman as women were understood to perform passivity in and as part of society, but also not that of a man.

This liminal space is best explored by applying what will be called here the “tripartite gender system,” by which there exist men, women, and those whose actions fall in between. The tripartite gender system is a helpful method by which modern academics can easily understand the way in which medieval gender outliers were treated. This method is meant to encompass the complexity of gender by creating a category for those who fall into a gender grey-area: men, women, and a third category of people who are gendered but act in ways their gender was not expected to act. The merits of this perspective, to which Mistry, for example, subscribes, are that it aims to be more sensitive to the realities of gender heterogeneity than a simplistic gender dichotomy.\textsuperscript{117}

The tripartite gender system is of course incongruous with the way in which gender was thought of during the medieval period. There is nothing to suggest that medieval Latin notions of gender consciously included non-binary genders; even intersex individuals in medieval Europe were expected to select a gender by which to live their lives, as Metzel demonstrates.\textsuperscript{118} However, this is a particularly helpful method of organizing medieval gender for modern scholars, as it both creates liminal space in which to explore the lives and experiences of those who acted beyond the gender norms of their society and acknowledges the binary system of gender to which the medieval Latin world subscribed.

The tripartite gender system allows the modern reader to understand how the relationship

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between medieval masculinity and femininity functioned, and also to identify the ways in which attempts were made to protect masculinity through the balancing of the two in spaces where the hegemony of the masculine is being threatened by the introduction of a strong feminine agent.

In the context of Sibylla’s reign, this function of the tripartite gender system may be observed in her coronation itself, in which it was Sibylla who was crowned ruler of Jerusalem but with the expectation that her coronation would be followed by her selecting a husband. Men who were crowned in the Kingdom of Jerusalem were not necessarily expected immediately to marry, as illustrated by the reigns of Godfrey of Bouillon and Baldwin IV. Meanwhile, Sibylla was able to be crowned as queen and entrusted with the kingdom as an individual, but was required to supplement her rule with a masculine presence in the form of a spouse. Indeed, the Patriarch Heraclius instructed her to “take [the crown], and give it to the man who will reign with [her]”, indicating a masculine prerequisite for rulership rather than a desire to exclude the feminine.\(^{119}\)

Therefore, it may be understood that any concern regarding Sibylla’s rule was not to do with her being a woman, but rather to do with her lacking the masculine nature that was understood at this time to be necessary for expressing masculinized forms of power. According to the tripartite gender system, this is an example of a feminine agent occupying a male-gendered space, whose femininity is not a problem providing that a masculine agent is introduced into that space to counterbalance the feminine. The lack of necessary feminine agent required to counterbalance the masculine ruling space of Godfrey of Bouillon and Baldwin IV demonstrates that in the Kingdom of Jerusalem, the

\(^{119}\) *Chronique d’Ernoul*, 134.
presence of the masculine in rulership was expected, whereas the presence of the feminine was not.

This suggests an interesting relationship between Sibylla’s identities as a woman and as a ruler. Because the roles of men and of kings aligned, with both being inherently powerful positions, men could be rulers without there being any conflict between their gender and their title. Sovereignty, while not necessarily gendered male by an official statement or law in the medieval Latin world, was often performed in masculinized ways, such as through warfare. The difficulty for female sovereigns was finding a way to simultaneously perform sovereignty and femininity, two practices which were expected to clash. By choosing Guy as her husband despite the objections of the High Court and nobility Sibylla both actively selected her own partner and undid a decision made for her by the High Court, an institution that ostensibly had total control over the sovereign. She therefore took that opportunity to assert herself as an active ruler who did not conform to the passivity expected of her as a woman. She therefore exemplified agency and self-determination while still choosing to be a wife, a role associated with femininity and with passivity. These social expectations have been illuminated by research concerning the inheritance rights of medieval women. Earenfight has commented on the development of primogeniture between 1100 and 1350, and the resulting status of queens as “little more than a vehicle for transferring valuable landed estates via marriage.”120 This role was inherently dehumanizing, and is reflected in Fößel’s findings concerning the diminished political competence of queens in the German Empire that had taken place as early as the

120 Theresa Earenfight, Queenship in Medieval Europe, 126, 129.
twelfth century. These circumstances do not necessarily mean that all women were passive, however, it is clear that it was not the norm for women to act with the same level of agency as Sibylla did by choosing to marry Guy.

This struggle between womanhood and rulership was also a matter of concern for Sibylla’s subjects, and was exemplified by the concern that her role as a wife would overshadow her role as queen if she were to achieve that status. This would leave Guy as her husband, and therefore the dominant partner in the marriage structure, to rule in her place. This concern was illustrated in Baldwin of Ibelin’s reaction to Guy’s coronation, as recorded in the *Chronique d’Ernoul*. His concern was not with Sibylla being queen, but rather with Guy being king. The chronicler wrote that, “When Baldwin of Ramla [of Ibelin] learned that the count of Jaffa had been crowned and that he had worn the crown in Jerusalem, he said, ‘Guy de Lusignan is King of Jerusalem! … He will not be king in one year.’” Despite the fact that Sibylla was the queen regent, Baldwin’s primary concern seems to have been Guy’s perceived lack of leadership abilities, which suggests that any strengths of Sibylla’s were understood as secondary to Guy’s weaknesses. Later, when Baldwin made his pledge to Guy, he did so directly to the king and with no mention of Sibylla. It is clear that the king took primacy over the queen for Baldwin of Ibelin and his supporters, despite Sibylla being the regnant sovereign.

An interesting counter-example is the instance of Humphrey of Toron meeting with Sibylla instead of Guy following their coronation to pledge his allegiance. In the Lyons *Eracles*, Humphrey is described as having “fled to Jerusalem and, begging

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121 Amalie Fössel, “Gender and Rulership,” 60.
122 *Chronique d’Ernoul*, 134-35.
123 *Chronique d’Ernoul*, 138.
forgiveness, [did] homage to Queen Sibylla, telling her that they [certain barons at Nablus] had wanted to make him king against his wishes.” However, in the *Chronique d’Ernoul* Humphrey is documented appearing before Sibylla and pledging allegiance specifically to Guy, despite Guy not being present. It is therefore unclear to whom exactly Humphrey was making his pledge. In either case, it was Sibylla who accepted Humphrey’s homage. Guy’s absence was so irrelevant to the chroniclers that it was not mentioned in the chronicles, which constitutes a literary dismissal of his role as king. This indicates that both Humphrey and the chroniclers were comfortable with Sibylla playing an active role in the politics of the Latin Kingdom.

In making his declaration of allegiance to Sibylla rather than to Guy, or at the very least in the presence of Sibylla rather than Guy, Humphrey was validating Sibylla as the queen and ruler rather than Guy as the king. This indicates that perhaps Humphrey regarded Sibylla as genuinely superseding her husband in legitimacy and power. This is emblematic of a larger pattern of nobility being loyal to Sibylla as a queen rather than to Guy as a king. Indeed, Baldwin IV’s supporters had championed Sibylla as the successor to her son, rather than any of the other available candidates. They nevertheless pressured Sibylla into annulling her marriage with Guy prior to her coronation and therefore attempted to preclude him from the throne. Guy of Bazoches explained his unsuitability grounds that he was “unequal to the heights and title of royalty.”

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124 “The Old French Continuation of William of Tyre, 1184-97 [1],” 95-96.
125 “Quant Hainfrois vint en Jherusalem et il vint devant le roine…” “Mais, puis que vous avés ensi fait, je vous pardoins mon maltalent; or venés avant et si faites votre hommage au roil.” *Chronique d’Ernoul*, 136. (Emphasis my own.)
126 Ibid.
matter their personal concerns regarding Guy’s adequacy, the nobles of Outremer demonstrated a faith in Sibylla as a sovereign that they seem to have lacked entirely in her husband.

In the medieval Latin world, the activities and actions of noblewomen were strictly controlled and scrutinized, and as queen regnant Sibylla was not able to entirely escape these constraints. However, it is clear that her contemporaries did not subject her to the same level of marginalization as other noblewomen. Most notably, unlike most of her female contemporaries, Sibylla is mentioned frequently in the chronicles, which indicates that she was recognized as a figure of political importance and social prominence in the patriarchal world of the twelfth-century Latin Kingdom. Like her grandmother before her, Sibylla’s subjects acknowledged her as a legitimate sovereign and a powerful force in the region.

Furthermore, like Melisende, Sibylla exercised forms of military leadership. Following her husband’s defeat at the disastrous Battle of Hattin, Sibylla left for Ascalon to defend and fortify her holdings there. Roger of Howden recorded Sibylla’s participation in the defense of Ascalon, writing that,

On [Salah ad-Din’s capture of Latin kingdoms], the queen, the wife of Guy, betook herself, with her two daughters and her household, to the city of Ascalon, and fortified it with provisions and soldiers…

This is beyond the realm of what one might normally consider standard activity for medieval queens, however, Sibylla was not alone in wielding this kind of power. She stands alongside many others in taking an active role in the rule of her kingdom, from her grandmother to Queens Johanna I of Naples and Urraca of Léon and the Empress

129 Sarah Rees Jones, “Public and Private Space,” 249.
Matilda, all of whom played active political roles in their kingdoms. Like Sibylla, they played dynamic roles in the activities of their kingdoms, performing a kind of queenship that rose to meet challenges and threats by engaging in war and other traditionally male-gendered activities. Rather than concerning themselves primarily with matters of the family and court instead of the external political world, which would have aligned better with the expectations of them as women “as household and estate administrators,” these queens engaged in masculinized forms of rulership and wielded a great deal of influence over their kingdoms.131 The reigns of these queens suggest that although it was not considered ideal for a queen to be an active ruler, if the circumstances demanded it a queen could overcome these prejudices and be celebrated for her rule.

Although Guy was responsible for the military activities of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, Sibylla clearly felt that she had the right to be involved in defense. It was not particularly common for women in Latin Europe, even queens, to become involved in warfare and defense, but it certainly happened. Of Queen Urraca’s involvement in warfare, Therese Martin writes, “It is not necessary to imagine Urraca swinging a sword to recognize her role as a military leader… She commanded on the battlefield, as she did in her court, and she also protected those left behind when the men went off to fight.”132 The same may be said of Sibylla. While Sibylla was never present on the battlefield, this did not stop her from becoming invested in the defense of Ascalon once Salah ad-Din had taken Jerusalem after the defeat at Hattin. This speaks to at least a theoretical, if not practical, understanding of how to orchestrate the defense of a city. Sibylla clearly had a

certain level of knowledge of military activities, due perhaps to her experience as the sister and mother to a king, and as a queen herself. However, this subversion of gender norms was not a symptom of female empowerment, but rather of the perpetual instability that had plagued the Kingdom of Jerusalem since its creation. Sibylla’s contemporaries could not object to her military participation due to the fragility of the Kingdom of Jerusalem’s chain of command and the precariousness of the kingdom’s situation as it teetered perpetually on the brink of war.

A similar situation played out in Sibylla’s interceding on Guy’s behalf once he was captured, contacting Salah ad-Din to have Guy released. Although Sibylla does not seem to have signed many official court documents during her reign, it was Sibylla who negotiated with the powerful Salah ad-Din in the crucial matter of the king’s release. It is clear from this event that Salah ad-Din understood Sibylla as being in a position of great authority within her kingdom. His political engagement with her validates her as an active and political sovereign of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, despite the norm being for men to be responsible for matters of diplomacy and negotiation due to their clearly-defined legal and political status. Although it took two years for Guy to be released, the fact that Salah ad-Din released him at all and that it was within Sibylla’s ability to promise him Jerusalem in exchange speaks to the authority she wielded. Engaging in diplomacy, and having that engagement taken seriously, speaks to the seriousness with which Sibylla’s rule was taken. Women were not frequently involved in negotiating hostages or peace, a fact attested to by the rareness of women engaging in diplomatic

133 “The Old French Continuation of William of Tyre, 1184-97 [2],” 102.
negotiations in the medieval sources and the historiography.\textsuperscript{135} That Sibylla’s involvement in this negotiation is not questioned in the chronicles in which it is mentioned, which indicates a respect for her authority as equal to that of the men who generally engaged in hostage negotiation.

Queens acting as military leaders and engaging in diplomatic negotiations provides an interesting commentary on the relationship between gender and power. The lack of male resistance in these cases does not necessarily mean that the medieval aristocracy at large thought women were capable of military leadership. What it does suggest is that legitimate dynastic sovereignty could be more powerful than gender norms. Powerful queens such as Sibylla challenge the notion that queens in power must have been weaker than their male counterparts. As Earenfight argues in the case of Maria of Castile, these queens challenge the boundaries of kingly monarchy and forms of power that are associated with kings.\textsuperscript{136} Although Maria was a queen consort as opposed to a queen regnant, these considerations are still relevant when investigating Sibylla. While many modern historians have written about Sibylla and other queens with the assumption that the identities of rulers and women must have conflicted, this seems to be a case of historians projecting later developments in queenship onto the lives of Sibylla, her contemporaries and her predecessors. Both Martin and Fößel have spoken to the late medieval changes and developments in queenship, with Martin writing of the

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{135} Yvonne Friedman, for example, takes an explicitly gendered approach to describe peacemaking in the Latin East as “the prerogative of the king of local prince and thus, an aspect of his power, just as war making was.” In “How to End Holy War: Negotiations and Peace Treaties between Muslims and Crusaders in the Latin East,” \textit{Common Knowledge} 21, no. 1 (2015): 84.

\textsuperscript{136} Theresa Earenfight, \textit{The King’s Other Body: María of Castile and the Crown of Aragon} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 4.
\end{footnotesize}
development of “the concept of queen as chaste wife and pure mother,” and Fössel’s research charting women sovereigns’ progressive loss of power throughout the medieval period, when she argues the pattern of “queenly intercession [became] exceptional.”

Perhaps Sibylla is not thought of as being naturally powerful because “she did not conform to the later medieval definition of a queen,” as Martin writes about Queen Urraca. The notion that there was discord between womanhood and rulership seems to be a reality constructed by later generations who then projected contemporary notions of rulership and queenliness onto the past rather than a reality of the High Middle Ages. Casteen identifies a similar case of the acceptance of female sovereignty with Johanna I of Naples, who was born nearly 200 years after Sibylla. “Her success suggests that her contemporaries were not as intransigently opposed to female rule as one might expect,” Casteen writes, “and that there were conditions under which it was accepted and even celebrated. Johanna and her supporters identified those conditions and worked to shape her identity as a sovereign queen accordingly.”

Indeed, modern expectations of medieval queens have been so thoroughly shaped by one thousand years of patriarchal chronicles and historiography that the existence of any queen who expresses agency strikes the reader as the exception to the rule of medieval sovereignty, rather than as an example of the diversity of medieval rulership. Rather than justifying queens like Sibylla as the exceptions to the rule, it makes more sense to accept that the norms governing medieval power are in fact much more complex than we have previously thought. Perhaps, rather than power being only gendered, it was

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137 Therese Martin, *Queen as King*, 18.; Amalie Fössel, “Gender and Rulership,” 60.
138 Therese Martin, *Queen as King*, 18.
139 Elizabeth Casteen, “Sex and Politics in Naples,” 209.
also a matter of relationships informed by status, titles, wealth, and political savvy. A queen regnant may not have been any less legitimate than a king regnant at this time providing that she, like him, was the heir to her kingdom, was conferred the correct titles, had enough land, and knew how to engage shrewdly in politics. Here, in this definition, Sibylla’s reign and the reigns of other queens of this period who had supposedly unusual influence make sense. As Earenfight puts it, “To state the obvious – that monarchy is gendered – reveals that common analytical categories for queenship rely on an outmoded institutional typology that considers monarchy to be synonymous with kingship.”

Trying to understand queenship as kingship is futile, but so is trying to understand sovereignty as being inherently masculine or male in nature. It is this mistake that Hamilton makes in suggesting that Sibylla lacked political drive and preferred to defer power to her husband. The folly here is not in acknowledging that Guy wielded power, particularly of a military nature. The folly is in the notion that military power and rulership were one and the same.

Sibylla’s agency and power were expressed in choosing to stand by her husband’s side, and engage in diplomacy when she saw fit, as she did when receiving the pledge from Humphrey of Toron or in negotiating with Salah ad-Din. Her autonomy and her power became most evident whenever the Kingdom of Jerusalem was facing a political or military challenge, such as the question of succession upon the death of her son and the loss of the Battle of Hattin. She wielded her power sparingly but with great impact.

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Sibylla was perhaps not a hands-on queen in the same way that documentary evidence and chronicle accounts suggest about her grandmother Queen Melisende, but this does not mean she was weak or shrank from engaging with the political realm. Her lack of apparently consistent engagement in affairs of state just made the occasions when she did intervene that much more effective. One might wonder how often men underestimated her in her restraint, interpreting her femininity and passivity as weakness, and therefore created no barriers when she did feel compelled to act. Had Sibylla been a man her competitors surely would have taken advantage of any perceived weaknesses. This tendency is well-illustrated by the way the men surrounding her rule vied for position, trying to take advantage of Guy or trying to play Humphrey against him. While the men surrounding her struggled for power, Sibylla remained out of the line of fire, able to act without hindrance when she needed to, most notably in choosing Guy for her husband and in negotiating with Salah ad-Din.

For better or for worse, the chroniclers did not write a great deal about Sibylla. This may mean that they did not see her as worth mentioning, but it also means that they did not see much criticize. As a wife, queen, and ruler, she apparently was acceptable enough to her contemporaries that their concerns about her were minimal enough not to be recorded in great detail or at length. Elena Woodacre points out that oftentimes in cases of kings consort being disliked, criticism of him would be directed toward the queen instead. This is interesting because in Sibylla’s case she avoided this sort of criticism. While Guy is often criticized vociferously in the chronicles, Sibylla does not

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suffer similar chastisement. Clearly, Sibylla was understood as a distinct entity from her husband and undeserving of the same criticism. In a world where women were often understood as extensions of their families and husbands rather than as independent actors, this tendency speaks to an attitude that promoted a woman’s ability to rule alongside her husband as king consort without him commanding complete control of the reign. Although Guy was active as a military commander and apparently very interested in his title of King of Jerusalem, he was not able to embody rulership and the authority it commanded in the way his wife was.

Was Sibylla’s approach to queenship out of keeping with other approaches to sovereignty? Being raised to perform masculinity, it is unsurprising that kings regnant tended to rule more aggressively than their female counterparts. This does not mean, however, that rulership itself was inherently aggressive and that in taking a less hands-on approach Sibylla was subverting leadership roles per se. Rather, her performance is consistent with gendered expectations of womanly behaviour, transplanted to a leadership role. Women were expected to be more demure than men and to be loyal wives. This is not incompatible with the role of a sovereign, who would ideally act in the best interests of their kingdom and be loyal to their subjects, though this relationship was perhaps more complex for queens regnant. As Elena Woodacre points out, a queen regnant was subject to her husband as a wife, yet he was subordinate to her as her subject.\(^{143}\) Sibylla’s ability to accept pledges for Guy, as discussed above, is an excellent example of this. Although Guy was the dominant figure in their marriage as the husband, and therefore technically

the dominant sovereign, Sibylla still possessed the power to play an active role in the creation of Guy’s military and political network. Despite being his wife and therefore his inferior in the domestic sphere, she was able to enter into these relationships on behalf of Guy as his queen. This is also demonstrated by the events following Sibylla’s death, when although Guy was interested in retaining the kingship, he was deemed illegitimate as a ruler and the crown passed to Isabella. Only Sibylla was inherently legitimate as a sovereign – Guy’s legitimacy was tied to her and could not survive without her. Despite his having exercised military and political power during their marriage, Sibylla was the source of Guy’s legitimacy and therefore of his power.

The position of Jerusalem as it altered over the course of Sibylla’s reign seems to have influenced the amount of power she was able to wield. Earlier in her life, she was able to select her own husband and receive pledges from her nobles, but this trend did not continue further into her life. As the kingdom became less stable, her opportunities to influence the state and to be acknowledged as powerful were fewer and farther between. This can be contrasted with her grandmother, who was regularly named in official documents and was known to issue them in her own name without the involvement of any of the men in her life. Of course, Melisende was ruling at a time where her primary political adversary was her own son, and not a group of barons who wanted to challenge the family in power and to disrupt the political landscape of the kingdom. While Melisende was perhaps more visibly active as a ruler, Sibylla ruled in such a tumultuous time that anybody might have struggled to exert total control or to manage intra-kingdom disputes. Her lack of influence in the chronicles may well be the result of the chaotic

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times in which she ruled, rather than the fact that she was a woman. While the Jerusalem of Melisende’s day was also engaged in constant warfare, she was not queen during a period of sustained territorial losses. Sibylla was in fact the first Latin ruler of Jerusalem to experience losses on such a scale, including the city of Jerusalem.

Sibylla ruled in politically and militarily unstable times, but she exercised her power and influence in key and decisive ways. Her selection of Guy as her king and husband, the legitimization of her rule by both her subjects and opponents, and her military know-how demonstrate that the relationship between gender and power at this time may not have been as simple as historians have traditionally believed. She serves as an example that medieval rulership was not gendered in the way it has been thought to be, and provides modern historians with new models by which to understand medieval queenship and the many ways in which it was made manifest. Even though Sibylla may have appeared passive, she demonstrated that passivity did not always mean weakness or incapacity and that agency did not always correlate with displays of brute force. The way Sibylla expressed her agency, the way her subjects related to her, and the way in which she handled her relationship with her second husband all speak to how Sibylla’s power was understood by way of and filtered through the lenses of womanhood and gender. While Sibylla’s experiences cannot be separated from her gender, they can be used to demonstrate that women were able to occupy masculine spaces and perform masculine activities such as political engagement despite gender norms that in theory curtailed this kind of engagement. Although Sibylla was required to have a husband in order to access those masculinized forms of power, the presence of her husband did not mean that she was precluded from political engagement and power. Sibylla exercised power in a way
that is more masculinized than her successors, which is to say that she participated in diplomacy and politics in a way that male rulers were also expected to while her successors did not. While Sibylla’s power may appear to fit traditional expectations of power in the Middle Ages, her example serves to illustrate only one of the many ways that queenship manifested in the Kingdom of Jerusalem.
Chapter 3

Queen Isabella, r. 1190-1205

Queen Isabella (I) of Jerusalem has been largely neglected by historians. While a good deal was written about her life by the chroniclers, very few academic analyses of her life have been conducted since then. She appears mostly in footnotes and in narratives, with little done to acknowledge her importance as anything but a minor player in a small chapter in the history of the Levant. It is true that according to traditional conceptualizations of power as aggressive and militaristic she was not a particularly active or important queen. She did not command an army or negotiate for hostages. However, she did make certain lasting impacts on the Kingdom of Jerusalem that speak to the great influence she exerted as a queen, and set some new precedents for queenship in the Latin East. It was thus with her that the hereditary nature of the crown of Jerusalem became permanent and the shift from High Middle Ages to late medieval forms of queenship became a feature of the politics of the Latin East. Additionally, Isabella made the similarities between queens regnant and consort apparent, particularly with regard to the maternal role of both, while also demonstrating the power inherent in performing domestic roles. These changes had a profound impact on the two queens who followed her as they set a standard of queenship and femininity than can be observed in the receptions of their reigns. While modern historians may dismiss her as being an inactive and uninterested queen, her impact goes well beyond herself and her rule. To ignore Isabella is to ignore a formative force in the development of queenship in the Kingdom of Jerusalem.

145 See the discussion of Martin and Fößel above.
Queen Isabella of Jerusalem was born in 1172. She was Queen Sibylla’s half-sister, and the only child resulting from King Amalric’s marriage to Maria Comnena, his second wife. After King Amalric’s death in 1174 her mother married Balian of Ibelin, creating an Ibelin influence in Isabella’s life that would persist well into adulthood and into her reign. When she was only eight her half-brother King Baldwin IV betrothed her in marriage to Humphrey IV of Toron. In order to overcome Ibelin opposition to Guy de Lusignan’s proximity to the crown of Jerusalem, Baldwin had purposefully selected a husband for Isabella who supported Guy. She was then sent to Kerak Castle, Humphrey’s home, where she was educated by Humphrey’s mother.

The two were married at Kerak in November 1183, when Isabella was eleven and therefore unusually young for marriage. Their marital peace was short-lived. After Baldwin IV died in 1185 and the succession conflict broke out Humphrey became a rallying point for the Ibelins, Raymond of Tripoli, and their allies, none of whom wanted to see Guy de Lusignan on the throne. Humphrey chose instead to swear allegiance to Sibylla and Guy, however, and the barons fell into line. Following Sibylla’s death in 1189 it became clear that Isabella was the only possible heir to the Kingdom of Jerusalem, which put Humphrey, as her husband, in line for the throne. Although Guy apparently wanted to remain the King of Jerusalem, he was not given this opportunity. The Marquis Conrad of Montferrat apparently argued that Guy had no claim to the throne.

146 “Estoires d’Outremer et de la naissance de Salehadin,” 55.
148 Ibid., 161.
149 Ibid.
150 Chronique d’Ernoul, 81-82.
151 Ibid., 136.
following the death of his wife, the queen regnant, and the crown was passed to
Isabella.\(^{152}\) Guy was later made King of Cyprus by King Richard I after paying homage
to him, and left the Kingdom of Jerusalem.\(^{153}\)

Conrad of Montferrat, who was the brother of Sibylla’s first husband, was
apparently determined to become king himself. To this end he married Isabella, despite
the fact that her marriage to Humphrey was still possibly valid and despite her own
personal objections.\(^{154}\) It was a scandalous move to marry another man’s wife and one
that the author of the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum* seems to interpret as an evil scheme.
Conrad was, nonetheless, elected king on 14 April 1192.\(^{155}\) “What a crime,” the
chronicler writes,

> a worthy subject for satirical attack and tragic declamation! It was more
disgraceful and a greater injury than the rape of Helen, which is generally
condemned. For Helen was stolen secretly, when her husband was away,
but this wife was violently abducted in her husband’s presence.\(^{156}\)

The notion that this was an abduction and that Isabella was spirited away against her will
was a pervasive one. Guy had been disliked for many reasons, primarily his ineptitude.
Conrad, on the other hand, was disliked for his effectiveness. He acted primarily in self-
interest and succeeded. As a result, Conrad was not popular with many of the chroniclers,
but he was not assigned the sole blame for this audacious marriage. In “The Old French
continuation of William of Tyre” and elsewhere, Isabella’s mother is portrayed as the
originator of her separation from Humphrey. The Old French continuation describes

\(^{152}\) *Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi*, trans. Helen J. Nicholson
(Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1997), 121.
\(^{153}\) “The Old French Continuation of William of Tyre, 1184-97 [1],” 113.
\(^{154}\) *Chronique d’Ernoul*, 267.
\(^{155}\) *Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi*, 102.
\(^{156}\) Ibid., 123.
Maria Comnena as explaining to Isabella that she cannot remain married to Humphrey due to his prior lack of interest in rule and the fact that they had been married when Isabella was still underage.\textsuperscript{157} Still, it is clear that although the chronicler believed Maria had played an important role in Isabella’s and Humphrey’s separation, there was no love lost between the chronicler and Conrad. In recording the marriage between Conrad and Isabella, the chronicler wrote, “One might yet question whether the kingdom of Jerusalem was not put on a dangerous and dwindling course because of this deed.”\textsuperscript{158} Conrad was certainly disliked by many people. The \textit{Itinerarium Peregrinorum} indicates that Conrad had multiple wives at once, despite this not being definitively proven in any of the sources, and that his marriage to Isabella was protested by the clergy and resulted in the excommunication of “everyone who arranged and consented to the marriage.”\textsuperscript{159} This is reminiscent of William of Tyre’s explanation for the military defeats Christian forces suffered at the hands of Muslim forces during the reign of Baldwin IV. William blamed these losses on the “wicked generation” that had replaced the holy Christian warriors of the past and whose sins were being punished through military humiliation.\textsuperscript{160} It seems Conrad was part of that same “wicked generation” and that this chronicler believed that his sins were a reason for the future defeats the Latin Kingdom would undergo.

Clearly the concern with Conrad was of a moral nature rather than a political one. After all, he had hardly any time to make any real changes to the status of the kingdom. The chroniclers could not comment on his effectiveness as a king as he was never given

\textsuperscript{157} “The Old French Continuation of William of Tyre, 1184-97 [1],” 95-96.
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 97.
\textsuperscript{159} \textit{Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi}, 124-25.
\textsuperscript{160} William of Tyre, \textit{A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea}, vol. 2, 406.
the chance to rule and thus also could not reasonably blame him for anything that followed. Conrad was assassinated shortly after his marriage to Isabella in 1192. The suggestion that Conrad put the kingdom on track for disaster almost certainly speaks to questions of morality and the need for upright moral leadership. Once again Isabella was left widowed and ruling alone, this time pregnant, and in need of an appropriately upright, moral husband.

Isabella was nor left to remain in this situation for long. Her betrothal to Henry II Count of Champagne (r. 1192-1197), King Richard I’s nephew and a very powerful man, was announced only two days later. Their marriage was celebrated only ten days after that, a union that shocked and disgusted the contemporary Muslim chroniclers. ‘Imad ad-Din wrote that, “When the Marquis (Conrad) was dead and hung head downward in Hell, the King of England assumed control of Tyre and conferred it upon Count Henry, arranging it all with him. Henry married the Marquis’ wife on the same night.” While ‘Imad ad-Din went on to condemn Henry for marrying another man’s wife, Ibn al-Athir was decidedly kinder. “He was a capable man,” he wrote of Henry, “pleasant and tolerant.” It seems that both Isabella and her nobles liked Henry, as evidenced by the speed with which Isabella was married to him. Indeed, in one version of events the nobles of the Latin Kingdom begged Henry to marry Isabella, “to whom the kingdom belonged by hereditary right,” in order to become their king.

161 “The Old French Continuation of William of Tyre, 1184-97 [1],” 115.
164 Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi, 309.
In addition to her daughter by Conrad, Isabella went on to have three children with Henry; Marguerite, Alice, and Philippa. None of these girls were to grow up knowing their father particularly well, as Henry died in 1197. Once again Isabella found herself in the market for a member of the nobility to make her next husband and king.\footnote{Mary Nickerson Hardwicke, “The Crusader States, 1192-1243,” in \textit{A History of the Crusades}, vol. 3, ed. Robert Lee Wolff and Harry W. Hazard (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1962), 529.}

Isabella remarried one last time, sharing her crown with Amalric II/I of Jerusalem and of Cyprus (r. 1197-1205), Guy de Lusignan’s younger brother, whom she married in 1198.\footnote{Peter Edbury, \textit{Kingdom of Cyprus and the Crusades} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 33.} The pair had three children; Sybilla, Melisende, and a son who died very young. Between them they ruled two kingdoms, however, none of their shared children were to inherit these thrones. Amalric died on April 1 1205, only four days before Isabella herself.\footnote{Steven Runciman, \textit{A History of the Crusades}, vol. 3 (London: Penguin Books, 2016), 103.} His son Hugh from his first marriage succeeded him as ruler of Cyprus, and Isabella’s daughter by Conrad, Maria, succeeded her as Queen of Jerusalem.

At first glance Isabella’s life does not appear particularly empowered. Ostensibly, she was passed from husband to husband, sought after for her title and the power her husbands could wield by having it. Still, this does not necessarily mean that she was excluded from power or unable to assert herself and her will as queen. Isabella may never have wielded the same overt influence as Sibylla, but she did have a lasting and important impact on the nature of queenship in the Kingdom of Jerusalem.

Officially speaking, the throne of Jerusalem was not meant to be hereditary. Rulers were elected by the High Court, and although those rulers were generally from the
same family line, there was no guarantee that this would be the case. Even though one individual might be the heir to the previous ruler this did not mean that this person would by default inherit the throne; the panic when Sibylla became queen and the scramble to nominate Humphrey as king was a perfect example of this. When Isabella became queen, however, there was no question at all about her succession. More interestingly, there was no such crisis surrounding the queens that followed her. Isabella’s rise to the throne set a precedent by which the High Court and the barons never again challenged a queen regnant’s hereditary right to the throne, even if the role of ruler remained technically an elected position.

There was no particular reason for Isabella to be queen – no political or military acumen on record – save her bloodline. Steven Runciman argues that it was Sibylla who secured the precedent of hereditary inheritance of the crown, however, his argument is based on the fact that the High Court did not like Guy de Lusignan and therefore were not initially supportive of the notion of Sibylla becoming the queen. However, as Runciman himself points out, Sibylla still had other important local powers supporting her. Indeed, even the High Court supported Sibylla’s claim once she agreed to end her marriage with Guy. To use Sibylla’s election to the throne as evidence that the High Court felt compelled by tradition to elect her would require there to be evidence that the High Court disliked Sibylla personally. However, the High Court clearly took issue with Guy rather than with Sibylla herself, and, once Sibylla agreed to annul her marriage, their opposition disappeared. Therefore, the argument that the throne of Jerusalem became a


hereditary position with Sibylla is based on the notion that Sibylla herself was objectionable as a candidate. In reality, it was Guy to whom the High Court objected, and once his marriage to Sibylla was annulled the High Court appears to have had no objections to having her crowned.\(^{170}\)

Isabella, on the other hand, represented a greater series of challenges to the High Court, ones that could easily have been avoided had they not felt that it was required of them to elect Sibylla’s nearest blood relative as sovereign. While Humphrey of Toron was apparently well-liked by certain members of the elite, he had made his reluctance to rule clear when he pledged fealty to Sibylla and Guy. There was no reason to believe that Humphrey, while capable, would have wanted to be king at all. This would make giving his wife the crown that much more complicated, because while Sibylla’s reign had demonstrated that a woman ruler could be respected, it would have been very unusual for a queen regnant with a living husband not to share any power with him. Isabella’s separation from Humphrey, unlike Sibylla’s from Guy, was very contentious and could well have caused a great deal of turmoil and frustration for the High Court. Her subsequent marriage to Conrad was followed quickly by his death and yet another marriage for Isabella. There were other possible candidates who, if the throne had not been understood as hereditary, the High Court might have preferred to elect to the throne. For example, they could have elected Isabella’s second husband Conrad of Montferrat to the throne in lieu of her, rather than electing him because he was her husband, which was

what happened shortly before his death.\textsuperscript{171} Failing him, a candidate from the west might have been considered as Sibylla’s replacement on the throne. In any case, the complications of Isabella’s queenship might have been avoided if the High Court had felt themselves at liberty to elect a king to the throne from any family and if Isabella’s presence on the throne was not believed to be required. It seems that Isabella’s hereditary right overrode the marital complications she brought with her to the throne, and this set the precedent for the queens that succeeded her.

Of course, it is possible that the High Court saw Isabella as a more stable option for the kingdom. Certainly, placing the natural heir on the throne made for an easier dynastic transition than allowing the barons to quarrel amongst themselves to find a king. With Salah ad-Din’s recent victories, the last thing the Kingdom of Jerusalem needed was internal division and power struggles. Opening the nominations up to other individuals might only have complicated matters. As Runciman suggests, the monarchy was never able to recover from Guy losing Jerusalem to Salah ad-Din, and the result was a cash-heavy but land-poor kingdom in which the nobility wielded more wealth and power than the monarchy.\textsuperscript{172} Runciman has compellingly argued that in these circumstances the High Court became the only effective arm of government in the Latin Kingdom due to its monarchs over the previous fifty years being either women or absent.\textsuperscript{173} In this situation, where the crown was so weak as to render whoever held it essentially irrelevant, it is not surprising that at this point the High Court chose to elect the next in line to the throne based on lineage rather than proven effectiveness.

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\item \textsuperscript{171} Chronique d’Ernoul, 268.
\item \textsuperscript{172} Steven Runciman, The Families of Outremer, 17.
\item \textsuperscript{173} Steven Runciman, The Families of Outremer, 17.
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Isabella also redefined queenship for the queens who followed her, straying away from the more recognizably and politically active approach of Melisende and Sibylla. Perhaps Isabella’s more passive approach to queenship was reflective of the development of a less aggressive model of queenship that was became popular during the thirteenth century. This is a trend that Sibylla was able to avoid but Isabella could not. In many respects she acted more as a queen consort than a queen regnant, providing her husbands with children and remaining out of the political fray. Still, her position and the positions of queens consort elsewhere were irreconcilably distinct. Queens consort generally did not have a great deal of security in their positions. They could be sent away from court, have their marriages annulled, and gain or lose power on the whims of their husbands. Rather than being in this position herself, Isabella put her husbands in this position. Although she apparently wished to remain married to him, it was Humphrey’s position as Isabella’s husband that was clearly insecure, and both Conrad and Henry were quickly replaced after their respective deaths. Despite wielding power as Isabella’s husbands, the power enjoyed by these men was fleeting and insecure. For all her passivity, Isabella remained at the centre of her court and the centre of power. This introduced new expectations of regnant queenship in the Kingdom of Jerusalem. The diplomatically engaged, army-commanding queens of the past were gone. In their place, a queen with a subtler form of power, rooted in feminine expectations and norms, came to the throne; embodying but not necessarily acting upon the power of her title.

While Isabella’s less aggressive approach to queenship meant that she stood in contrast to her half-sister, it was still a recognized form of leadership and clearly was not understood to be problematic by her contemporaries. There are no chronicles that
document any concern about her fitness for queenship or any instances of her inserting herself into the political or military events of her reign. If anything, the High Court may have resented a king and queen who tried to influence matters of the kingdom too much. By not being too active and in maintaining peace at the sovereign level Isabella maintained a lower profile. The result was a situation in which Isabella was able to maintain her lineage’s claim to the throne, essentially by being the least of the High Court’s worries.

The distinction between activity and agency is an important one here. Although Isabella was not particularly active in terms of influencing the kingdom, this does not mean that she was powerless or unable to make decisions for herself. Earenfight’s consideration of the nature and gender of agency is particularly relevant here. If agency is understood as demonstrating a strong political presence, or a capacity for warfare and diplomacy, then women in a situation or time when these arenas for activity were largely inaccessible to them were barred from having any agency. The historian must therefore decide how to interpret agency, and how to apply that interpretation to women. In Isabella’s case it is unfair to say that she had no agency, especially considering that what would appear to be a lack of activity was actually beneficial to the High Court and to the kingdom at large as it came to terms with its recent losses. Indeed, considering the freedom that widows had to choose their second husbands, Isabella’s marriages to both Henry of Champagne and Amalric of Cyprus demonstrate her agency, even if neither were explicitly her choice. Quite simply, if Isabella had not wanted to remarry, she

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would not have. Marrying her third and fourth husbands demonstrated that Isabella had agency despite her not being a traditionally active ruler. Therefore, agency and action cannot be considered the same, and Isabella’s agency cannot be judged based on the actions she took or did not take during her reign.

This confusion about agency and action is a gendered issue – the agency of men is rarely questioned in either the sources or the historiography. It falls to women and the historians who write about them to justify medieval women’s ability to act in their own interests or for their own reasons. As Mary Cullen put it,

…the reality is that most history books do treat the masculine role as the human norm, presenting a past of male agency and leadership, and female passivity and dependency. When women as a group, or feminist activity, are discussed at all, it is almost invariably in terms of comparison with a taken-for-granted male norm, to which women can or, depending on the point of view, cannot hope to aspire.  

It is for this reason that it is so complicated to express how Isabella’s actions or non-actions could be expressions of agency. When agency is so closely aligned with the expectations associated with male behaviour and success, defining women’s agency and the ways in which it is manifested – specifically during times of anxiety and instability in the kingdom – becomes difficult. When men and women are socialized to respond to difficult situations differently, and the vast majority of rulers who are recorded as being in similar situations to Isabella are men, to whom can her activity be compared and how? This is the crux of the problem of studying Isabella as a ruler.

There is no way to tell what kind of queen Isabella might have been had she had the opportunity to reign over her kingdom in less trying times. Sibylla had the benefit of

enjoying a short period of peace as she came to the throne, giving her an opportunity to establish some kind of rapport as queen. Isabella was never given such an opportunity. With the kingdom in an insecure position, Isabella had no opportunity to influence its politics beyond being the conduit through which the crown was passed. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo speaks to this issue in writing about the ways in which women are excluded from the construction of society due to their role as child-bearers, however, the opposite is true when in fulfilling that duty a woman is providing the heir to a kingdom. If anything, as Guy Perry points out, in the situations where there was a queen regnant and a king consort it was the man who was forced to fight to establish his relevance while being perceived as “less a king than an eminent regent-cum-sperm-donor.” As Charles Beem and Miles Taylor write, kings consort “struggled to inhabit a female gendered position while maintaining a public role commensurate with their status as the husband of a reigning monarch.” Isabella struggled to handle the opposite problem. Although Isabella was never put in a position where she was able to wield recognizably masculinized forms of power in the way Sibylla or Melisende did through their military and diplomatic engagement, the way that her reign highlighted the changes being made to the relationship between women and society and between childbearing and masculinity makes her an important queen to study nonetheless.

Isabella’s influence can be seen in the trends she embodied and established rather than in any great acts of diplomacy. It has been demonstrated by many, not least Amelie

178 Guy Perry, John of Brienne, 44.
Fössel, that, by the late Middle Ages, a queen’s power was much more likely to be harnessed by her husbands and her voice silenced than had been the case for the queens that preceded her.\textsuperscript{180} Schein has written on the disparity between female agency in Jerusalem versus the rest of Europe, and has argued quite convincingly that the perceived extra freedoms these women enjoyed were largely rooted in the concern that internal power struggles in the Kingdom of Jerusalem would make external threats more viable and that it was necessary to tolerate female rule to maintain peace.\textsuperscript{181} This tolerance is reflected in Isabella’s importance as the conduit of power and as the heir to the throne, but her inability to wield any military or political power herself. The decision to allow a woman to be the queen regnant was not ideal, however, it was safer to allow this to happen as long as it was ensured that she acted in compliance with the standards set for queens consort. Isabella was expected to provide an heir and to comply with the wishes of her court in order to maintain what stability could be preserved in the kingdom. This is not to say that she could not have been more active – after all, she had the support of the Ibelins, despite the control the High Court had over the kingdom. Had she truly wanted to act she might not have had much difficulty doing so. However, this is not an option she chose to exercise, and therefore in her inaction she gave the ability to rule to the High Court. Her lack of resistance can be interpreted as opting to give up her own power. What was important in her role as the queen was to ensure that there was someone sitting on the throne and an heir to follow her.

Isabella’s experience as a pregnant widow queen who remarried provides yet another interesting dimension to her reign. It was not unusual in medieval Europe for a

\begin{footnotes}
\item[180] Amelie Fössel, “Gender and Rulership,” 60.
\end{footnotes}
widow to remarry, nor for her to do so quickly or when she had small children. It was, however, unusual for a widow to remarry while pregnant, not to mention when pregnant with the heir to a throne. This circumvention of standard practices speaks to a need to find a new king not because the king-elect had died, but because the queen heir could not be seen to rule alone. The Muslim chronicler ‘Imad ad-Din’s disgust with this is particularly interesting. He wrote, “She was pregnant, but this did not prevent his [Henry II of Champagne] uniting himself with her, something even more disgusting than the coupling of the flesh. I asked one of their courtiers to whom paternity would be awarded and he said: ‘It will be the Queen’s child.’”\footnote{‘Imad ad-Din, “The Assassination of Conrad of Montferrat,” 240.} While this was written in the context of Muslim laws regarding divorce and marriage, it is the courtier’s quote that is most relevant here as an expression of the Latin perspective on the bloodline of the Queen’s unborn child. This child, Maria, was not relevant to ‘Imad ad-Din’s source as the child of the then-dead king-elect. This quote demonstrates that no matter her paternity, Maria was important to the nobility of the Latin Kingdom as a child who maintained her mother’s bloodline and was therefore the rightful heir to the throne.

Isabella’s role in her marriage and as the Queen of Jerusalem was to provide this heir. This seems to fit neatly with the standard expectations of women at Isabella’s time; to provide an heir and to be a wife and nothing more. Still, Isabella’s approach to wifehood is not necessarily in keeping with notions of ideal wifehood at her time. In the space of only a few months she left her legitimate husband and married two more. While medieval wives were not expected to be eternally devoted to their husbands, and widows often remarried, this was still an unusually fast rate of remarriage. The sources also
suggest that Isabella showed little interest in the selection process for the men she married. While many seem to believe that Isabella and Humphrey genuinely cared for one another, she married him at her half-brother’s behest. She married Conrad apparently at her mother’s urging. She married Henry at the insistence of her court. Her final marriage, to Amalric I of Cyprus, established a stronger political bond between her kingdom and his, and strengthened the crown’s bond with the powerful Lusignan clan. Nothing was recorded to suggest that she grieved very much for any of her husbands after their passing (or in Humphrey’s case, their annulment). Save the stories of her resistance to being stolen away from Humphrey in the middle of the night, there is nothing to suggest that she felt particularly strongly about any of her husbands. There is little to suggest that any of her marriages were her idea at all or of any interest to her.

The question this begs is why she remarried so many times at all. As a widow Isabella had more freedom over her life than she had as a young girl. As Hodgson points out, widows were often given freedom over whom they married, if they chose to marry at all.\textsuperscript{183} Meanwhile, Schein observes that widows in the Kingdom of Jerusalem under sixty years of age could not be forced to remarry until a year and a day had passed since the deaths of their husbands, but Isabella chose not to take advantage of this opportunity.\textsuperscript{184} One might assume that had Isabella felt the need for a year of mourning at least one chronicler might have made note of this. Perhaps her marriage to Conrad was seen as necessary, as she had yet conceived with Humphrey. However, after one had been provided, what could the impetus have been for Isabella to continue to wed these men?

\textsuperscript{183} Natasha Hodgson, \textit{Women, Crusading and the Holy Land}, 227.
\textsuperscript{184} Sylvia Schein, “Women in Medieval Colonial Society,” 142.
Perhaps, although Isabella was not the ideal, devoted wife to her husbands that one might have wanted, she was a devoted queen to her kingdom instead. As Elizabeth I once proudly proclaimed to be wed to her kingdom, perhaps Isabella performed this role by using the men bound to her by law to provide adequate heirs for her kingdom and adequate military leaders for her barons, so the kingdom would not go wanting for leadership or legitimacy. After all, she bore seven children to three husbands, and while her husbands were not able to profit from her crown, her kingdom certainly was not wanting for potential heirs. This symbolic interpretation of queenship and marriage also makes the difficulty of understanding the relationship between a queen regnant wife and a king consort husband even more complex. Not only is there a complicated relationship between a man who within the family structure should be his wife’s superior being put into the position of being his wife’s political inferior as her subject, his marriage must also compete with his wife-queen’s symbolic marriage to her kingdom. While there was no formal ceremony to wed a queen to her kingdom – though exploring coronation ceremonies through this lens may provide an interesting perspective on sovereignty – the interests of a queen and a wife were similar enough to stimulate competition between her two roles. While men as kings were not expected to sacrifice one of their roles for the other, given that sovereignty was so deeply masculinized that the two operated in concert, this was not so for women. Queens regnant often had to decide between these two roles, and the struggle to perform them both punctuates the biographies of such queens regnant.

Understood this way, Isabella was not a meek or uninterested queen at all. Rather, she eschewed wifely expectations of devotion and love for her husbands, instead quickly moving through them and bearing children for her kingdom. Isabella was thus not
necessarily a bad wife. The more important question is which entity she directed her wifely duty toward and how she combined sovereignty and wifehood. For Isabella, it seems that her wifely duty, whether or not she framed it that way herself, was felt primarily toward her kingdom. Her heirs, therefore, were not the heirs of her husbands, but of her kingdom. After all, as ‘Imad ad-Din’s Latin courtier attested, Isabella’s children were not of any man, but of the Queen of Jerusalem: how apt a summary of an otherwise very complicated relationship between Isabella, her kingdom, her children, and their fathers.

Of course, this all seems contradictory. In all her agency, Isabella chose to not act; as a powerful queen, she allowed herself to be powerless against the High Court; in embracing the traditionally female role of motherhood, she rejected feminine expectations and served as an effective queen for her kingdom. However, these aspects of Isabella’s story are only polarizing if sovereignty, and particularly sovereign power, are read though a male-gendered and militarily informed lens. Such a lens would suggest that not acting is the same as doing nothing, that power is the same as total rule, and that familial preoccupation stands in opposition to and in conflict with an interest in and understanding of society and politics. Isabella did not rule by the point of her sword, but rather by the legitimacy of her blood. While power and rule, when gendered male, may be understood as being quantified in money, land, and military aggression, Isabella is an excellent example of how power and rule, when gendered female, may look different but is just as complicated and valid.

As men in medieval society navigated a world where their values were determined by material gain, women navigated a world where their values were tied to
their family. This is often simplified through an internal/external worldview, whereby women were able to exert influence and to act within the home, and men were able to exert influence and to act outside of the home. This is a view that concerns itself with domains, and the genders of the primary actors within those domains. This may be a helpful starting point for understanding medieval gender, but it is far too simplistic to account for anything but the most superficial aspects of medieval society. While this framework lays the groundwork for understanding the dynamics of visibility, gender, and power, it does not account for the ways in which class and office interact with visibility to complicate matters. Sarah Rees Jones writes that, “female control of wealth was often restricted primarily to the home,” and in her examination and defense of the outdoor male/indoor female dichotomy Máirín Ni Dhonnchadha writes that, “gendered space is socially produced… by the lived experience of space.” This makes a good deal of sense, but does not apply to the women who helped to rule kingdoms despite rulership being understood as a masculine role. While the ideal medieval society may have been imagined as one where women’s sphere of influence was limited to familial spaces, the reality was that many women were active outside the physical familial domain. While this may have applied to certain queens, its application was of a vastly different nature than a simple dichotomy whereby the home was the source of women’s power, and society was a source of disempowerment. It is clear that a queen’s power extended beyond her home. This explains how it is that, although it was perhaps easier for Isabella to harness domestic power, that power extended far beyond the borders of the domestic

space, and her approach to marriage and children had strong ramifications for her kingdom. The boundaries between domestic and social spaces are liminal at the best of times, and even more so when navigated by queens. Therefore, any understanding of the gendering of space as understood in the context of queenship cannot be approached with the notion that this domestic/social template for power designates or is able to identify where authority is exercised.

Perhaps a more realistic approach is to understand these domains not as those in which autonomy or personhood can be exercised or understood, but rather as frameworks by which women could understand the limits and reaches of their autonomy and personhood. Isabella was not tied to the home – how could she be, being so public a figure and holding so high and public an office? Rather, Isabella used the tools of the gendered expectations of women in order to develop her influence and power in her kingdom. The need to bear children did not hinder her rule, but instead provided her with a way to approach rulership that looked different from the way in which men generally approached it. While it has been suggested that women were channels for the development of kinship networks that empowered their families, it is also true that women could harness that ability to empower themselves. Isabella was not limited by domesticity, but by her contemporaries (and indeed, by her historians) who suggested that domesticity was limiting. This family-based but not family-exclusive tactic ensured the kingdom as much stability as could be guaranteed during this tumultuous time, with plenty of heirs and a good deal of powerful families tied to the monarchy by kinship. Isabella provided heirs to and from the Ibelins, the French nobility, and the Lusignans. Her surviving children went on to marry into powerful families. Besides Maria, she left
the Kingdom of Jerusalem with five other surviving heirs from which to select a sovereign. Isabella maintained the strength of the Kingdom of Jerusalem not by waging war but by ensuring the longevity of its monarchy. She therefore provided future rulers with the opportunity and allies to win back what had been lost over the previous decades.

The impact of Isabella’s upbringing on her approach to rule cannot be ignored. As was discussed above, having been sent to live with her abbess aunt, Sibylla was raised in a community where women were empowered and a woman ruled. This subversion of the traditionally gendered hierarchy may well account for Sibylla’s engagement in and with the political realm. In contrast, Isabella spent the latter years of her childhood at Kerak, being raised and educated by the family into which she was going to marry. Her understanding of what power was available to her, and the kind of forces she could influence in order to establish power, would have been established during this time and influenced by the fact that the people surrounding her expected her to be a faithful wife to Humphrey of Toron. With this kind of pressure being applied in any measure in her formative years, it is not a stretch to imagine this impacting her understanding of her own power and influence once she became queen. This was a vastly different approach to queenship than Sibylla took. Whereas Sibylla was very hands-on in her queenship but provided few heirs, Isabella appears politically inactive but was in fact ruling through a feminized lens and with reference to feminine norms, harnessing the traditional tools of womanhood in order to serve her kingdom. This was a trend that would continue through to the following two generations, as the position of the kingdom remained unstable enough that the same forces that prevented Isabella from taking a more traditionally active role in sovereignty continued to exert influence. The High Court continued to
maintain power over the political activities of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, and manipulating the expectations placed upon women remained a key way for queens of Jerusalem to wield power and exert influence.

The dichotomy between the domestic and political spheres in the medieval world is a false one, and this fact is at the root of the transformative nature of Isabella’s queenship. Isabella’s queenship illustrates that domestic did not mean disenfranchised. While the avenues of power for medieval women are often reduced to producing heirs, the active nature of this task is rarely examined. In her devotion to children and marriage, Isabella was not a passive participant in her rulership or bound to the home. Her domestic actions had ramifications well beyond the literal and figurative walls of her court. Among other things, Isabella’s queenship teaches that no matter where agency is expressed and activity undertaken, it is still action and it still has an impact in multiple spheres. To limit the influence of women to the home or to suggest that it was only in the home that they could act as individuals disenfranchises medieval women retroactively by denying their existence in spaces that writers either medieval or modern assumed women should not have been occupying. Isabella, as with other queens and women of her time, occupied both domestic and social spaces, apparently with little objection from her contemporary writers. While there is a distinction to be made between these two spaces, they were not dichotomous. Isabella was able to occupy both without transcending gender or gender roles, and to harness the tools from one to influence the other.

Isabella became Queen of Jerusalem when it was in a very different situation than either her half-sister or grandmother had reigned in. When she was crowned the Kingdom of Jerusalem did not actually include Jerusalem and she was the only potential heir, and
so the burden of rectifying this lack of heirs fell to Isabella and Isabella alone. She rose to this challenge by embracing power and expressing her agency in a way that made sense for her as a queen, as a woman, and as a sovereign reigning in a time of instability and when the power of the crown was at an all-time low. Through analyzing Isabella’s reign, the complicated connection between gender and power gains new dimensions. Isabella provides us with a case in which the hallmarks of medieval expectations of women – details of their lives that are usually and often not incorrectly understood as tools of oppression – were harnessed by a woman to challenge and stretch the limits placed upon them. Here, queenship does not have to be loud to be powerful, or violent to be effective. Isabella did not have to engage in the diplomatic game to demonstrate her agency as a queen. Different from her half-sister and grandmother, Isabella introduces us to a version of queenship where power is quiet and reserved and gender can be manipulated from inside out to allow a queen to gain power.
Queen Maria of Jerusalem did not reign for very long. She lived long enough to give birth to one daughter and reign for two years, before dying at the age of only twenty. Her queenship was one of absence and inaction, which allowed her husband John of Brienne (r. 1210-1225) to stretch the limits of consort kingship and exploit the powers of regent kingship. John of Brienne was the first king consort of Jerusalem to maintain his title after his wife died and was an active player in the politics of both the Levant and Europe. Although he was technically constrained by his position as consort and then regent, his rule raises questions and observations about the changing nature of kingship and about contemporary attitudes toward its nature. This is, of course, amplified by the dynamic and synergetic natures of queenship and kingship, which, as discussed already, inform and engage one another to develop and practice endless combinations and models of rulership and sovereignty. John’s kingship could never have existed without the queenship – or rather, the empty space left by the absence of the queenship – of Maria. Despite her young death, Maria affected the politics and diplomacy of her court and kingdom by having no opportunity to interfere in them. This is a counterintuitive form of power. While Maria could not make decisions or take action, the idea of her and the authority she represented posthumously kept her memory active in the politics of the Kingdom of Jerusalem. Maria’s power was therefore not a power tied to political engagement or personal agency like the queens that came before her, but rather the powerful influence of the idea of her.
Maria *La Marquise*, Queen of Jerusalem, was nicknamed for her father, the Marquis Conrad ofMontferrat. She was born in 1192, well after her father had died, and while her mother Isabella was married to Henry II, Count of Champagne. Her mother died in 1205, when Maria was thirteen and just following the end of the Fourth Crusade. Jean of Ibelin, her uncle and a powerful member of the Ibelin family, served as her regent until 1210.\(^{186}\) Maria turned seventeen in 1208, at which point it became imperative for her to find a husband. In 1210 it was announced that Maria would be married to John of Brienne, a relatively poor knight from Champagne, and a younger son.\(^{187}\) They were married in Acre in September of 1210 and crowned King and Queen of Jerusalem in Tyre on October 3.\(^{188}\) At the time John was nearly three times Maria’s age. Maria gave birth to a daughter named Isabella (also known as Yolande) in 1212 and died soon after in the same year, leaving John to serve as regent for their young daughter and therefore to rule the Kingdom of Jerusalem.\(^{189}\)

Maria’s life was quite short and not a great deal is known about it. Whether or not she was interested in ruling we cannot know, as the period of her regency ended only two years before her death. Being the eldest of her surviving sisters and with her mother’s reign having established the indisputability of hereditary succession in the Kingdom of Jerusalem, it was natural that she succeeded her. However, being only thirteen when she inherited the crown, she was not permitted to reign and this period of her life cannot tell us anything about how she would have carried herself as a ruler. The time Maria spent wearing the crown was so brief that we cannot begin to guess what her queenship would


\(^{188}\) Ibid., 113.

\(^{189}\) Guy Perry, *John of Brienne*, 68-69.
have looked like if it had had time to develop. Still, this does not mean that there is nothing to be learned from Maria’s reign. Unlike her mother and aunt, Maria knew from birth that she was the first in line to inherit the throne. She was raised to rule and was a higher-ranking noble than her husband. Perhaps this accounts for why her husband was apparently so cooperative with her, as evidenced, as Perry has shown, by the number of acta John issued that Maria assented to.\textsuperscript{190} While this brief period is tantalizingly short and lacking documentation, the role Maria played after her death is even more interesting.

To the patriarchal medieval mind and therefore to the majority of medieval writers whose work remains with us today, the ideal queen was one who provided heirs, was devoted to her husband the king, and maintained court life while avoiding distracting him from the important political and military matters that occupied the his time. These are tasks that Maria was able to perform even in her death. She provided an heir prior to her passing and could not have caused any trouble for her king and kingdom even if she had wanted to. In this way, although Maria was clearly understood to be the queen regnant and the body through which the crown passed, she also inhabited the sphere of queens consort by genuinely not having any outlets for power – not necessarily because she lacked the capacity for leadership, but because she simply died too early to harness it.

In many ways, non-presence – not necessarily a total absence or lack of existence, but a lack of engagement and involvement – defined an ideal queen for such writers.\textsuperscript{191}

\textsuperscript{190} Guy Perry, \textit{John of Brienne}, 44-45, 52.
\textsuperscript{191} Louis I of Naples restored the reputation of Queen Johanna of Naples by describing her to Clement VI and Innocent VI in terms of ideal late medieval queenship: “a silent and assenting partner in his reign,” and utilizing imagery that rendered her less significant and powerful than him in illuminated statutes. See Elizabeth Casteen, “Sex and Politics in
As evidenced by Queen Melisende, a queen did not have to be inactive or absent to be loved or lauded. However, in an ideal world for a contemporary patriarchal thinker, this was the greatest role a queen could play. In her actual absence, Maria was essentially the platonic ideal of this non-presence. Of course, there was a queen during Maria’s absence. Yolande, her daughter, succeeded her. However, she was a child and therefore was not able to act as a queen during this time. For all intents and purposes, Maria was the queen, and she was inactive and absent to the benefit of her husband.

Of course, John did not strictly have to become regent for Yolande. Any capable member of the nobility could have done it, as when Raymond of Tripoli was regent for Baldwin V despite not being a member of the immediate royal line. With the Fourth Crusade having just ended, the Kingdom of Jerusalem was not at a loss for capable Christian leaders who could have taken control of the regency rather than returning home to Europe. However, as Martha Howell points out, the shift from familial to individual power and inheritance structures greatly impacted the progression of power by the late medieval period, and this meant that it became increasingly important that the people who were able to exercise the power of the crown were tied to the crown by direct familial links.192 While Howell was discussing limits put on women’s access to power during the late Middle Ages, this holds true in the context of dynastic decisions such as the selection of a regent. By the thirteenth century it was important not only that a regent came from the right group or social class, but also that they came from the right family.

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Although John of Brienne was not a particularly practiced or even powerful ruler prior to being crowned king and therefore might not have been seen as an ideal regent in the past, he was Yolande’s closest living adult relative. Whereas past regents in the Kingdom of Jerusalem were often members of the aristocracy who played a part in maintaining the monarchy as part of and to the benefit of their kinship network, the decision to allow a man with not a great deal to recommend him as a ruler speaks to a shift in the understanding of the rights and roles of kings consort. The importance of a member of a ruling family taking power, and not simply of the ruling class, is a symbolic shift in the way that the nobility of the Kingdom of Jerusalem understood itself and its structures of power.\footnote{193}

This medieval shift from the familial to the individual has been well documented and thoroughly examined from many angles, however, not many scholars have devoted time to understanding what it meant for women beyond the fact that there was an increased urgency in the desire for male heirs and stricter limitations placed on the requirements for inheriting a title.\footnote{194} Nonetheless, as members of society, whatever that membership may have looked like or entailed, as mothers and individuals women were just as impacted by this organizational change as men. Sarah Rees Jones writes that the popularization of patrilineal inheritance weakened women’s claims to property, and therefore in a very real way prevented them from accessing and wielding power as

\footnote{193} This interest in lineage and the importance of being able to prove bloodline in order to be considered worthy of the throne of Jerusalem may be observed in succession crises and challenges to the family line, such as the case of Maria of Antioch. See chapters 304-06 in \textit{Assises et bons usages du Royaume de Jerusalem}, ed. Gaspard Thaumas de la Thaumassiere (Bourges: François Toubeau, 1690), 206-207.

politically engaged members of a kinship network. As women were barred from property ownership and increasingly tied to the home, the overpowering association between women and children became more developed and concrete. This prevented women from participating in the construction and conception of society in the way that men were able to engage with its development. In addition to placing the emphasis on motherhood as the crux of womanhood, this also ensured that women were unable to actively engage in society for significant periods of time. During pregnancy a woman’s status as a mother was at its most visible. By embodying this peak feminine role in a way that was visible, the passivity and fragility that was assumed of women was emphasized, and might even have eclipsed a pregnant woman’s identity as separate from her womb.

Naturally this did not bode well for queens regnant, whose primary role in this newly developed social landscape seems to have been to provide heirs and nothing else. While the shift away from women wielding masculinized and overtly political power has been discussed with relation to Isabella, it is particularly relevant in Maria’s case. Prior to this, the sovereign dying and leaving an underage heir in line for the throne would have provoked a succession crisis. However, by the time of Maria’s death the structures of inheritance and family had developed enough that the queen’s death was essentially a non-issue. It was understood that the power of the crown lay within the family and not the nobility at large, and so Yolande and John stepped quickly and seamlessly into the roles of queen and regent. Only people within Maria’s immediate family were sought to fill these roles. Maria’s living presence was no longer required because she had already provided an heir.

Just like Isabella Sibylla before her, Maria’s reign was distinct and came with distinct lessons. She was not quietly hands-on like Sibylla. She did not perform wifehood for her kingdom like Isabella. However, she did exemplify non-presence, which was a sought-after trait in queens and wives during the late medieval period even if not a reality, and therefore set an unfortunate precedent for her successor and daughter.\textsuperscript{197} The first major difference between Maria’s reign and earlier queens regnant of Jerusalem was that now kings consort clearly wielded more power than their regnant wives. Hamilton argued that kings consort were never secure or safe in their positions, however, with Maria’s death this became untrue.\textsuperscript{198} Because John was made Yolande’s regent and there were no stepchildren or ex-spouses to compete with him, his place as regent was extremely secure. After Maria’s death John was able to occupy the rulership space that had been less accessible to the kings consort that had preceded him. While he would have had access to power had she lived, it would have been tempered by her presence and her sovereignty and by the fact that no matter his military or sovereign prowess, Maria would have embodied the crown and carried the bloodline of the Latin Kingdom’s monarchy.

Her death certainly inconvenienced John, as she ideally would have borne him a son or at the very least more children in order to safeguard his line against Yolande’s potential death. However, Maria’s death removed the threat of her competing with John for power. He did not have to concern himself with split loyalties or the threat of annulment. It is only through Maria’s non-presence and her lack of any ability to interfere with his agency that John was able to exert and act upon that agency in his role as regent.

\textsuperscript{197} To observe the ways in which this non-presence was performed by living queens, see Elizabeth Casteen, “Sex and Politics in Naples,” 195., and n. 133 above.

\textsuperscript{198} Bernard Hamilton, “King Consorts of Jerusalem,” 24.
The result of this was the establishment of a regency that in many ways mimicked a regnancy. John not only raised the next sovereign, he also took it upon himself to find her a husband in order to maintain the stability of the kingdom. Further to this, he played an active role in the Fifth Crusade and foreign diplomacy. Of course, regents were not all-powerful, and to say that the monarchy of the Kingdom of Jerusalem’s power at this time was waning is something of an understatement. John’s background may not have excited the imaginations or inspired the hopes of his subjects, either. John was born the second son of a French nobleman in a time when primogeniture was in place. He had not been a strong political presence in the Latin world prior to marrying Maria, however, being the regent to the queen of Jerusalem put him in contact with the most powerful European kings via interactions with royal representatives as they accompanied wave after wave of European crusaders to the Holy Land. The outbreak of the Fifth Crusade in 1217 placed John squarely into a position of what might be considered traditional kingship as a military commander and as a diplomat to European powers. His diplomacy was indeed so effective that working in concert with the papacy he managed to arrange for the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II (r. 1225-1228) to marry Yolande, and after Frederick took the title King of Jerusalem from him, John was elected the Latin Emperor of Constantinople for life.199 While the list of queens regnant of Jerusalem only lasted for one generation longer, John did set the precedent for the king consort as regent to wield a great deal of power and to effectively act as a king regnant. Indeed, John continued to style himself as the King of Jerusalem even after his wife had died and despite the fact

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that there was an heir who inherited the throne. This was a privilege not granted to the
kings consort who preceded him.

This could not have been the case if it were not for Maria’s absence. While
Maria’s absence was of course unavoidable – she could hardly rule from beyond the
grave – it remains an apt analogy for the non-presence of other queens who were unable
or unwilling to play a traditionally masculinized active role in the government of their
kingdoms. While Maria did not choose to defer to her husband the consort, her death
made the decision to do so for her. If anybody seems to illustrate Lois Huneycutt’s
argument that queens regnant were essentially made to act as queens consort due to them
not being considered true rulers or sovereigns by nature of their gender, it is Maria’s
memory. In her absence and subsequent inability to rule, her position as sovereign was
sidelined in favour of her husband the king, who due to the standard dynamic between
kingship and queenship claimed power and took on the roles traditionally associated with
the sovereign. Primary among these roles was the defense of the kingdom, which
included the defense of his wife the queen. In her absence, the king’s responsibilities
toward the kingdom may even be understood as replacing his responsibilities toward the
regnant queen, whose identity and title was inextricably linked to the kingdom itself.
Understood through this lens, both the queen and the kingdom are passive agents over
whom the king consort has command, and they are therefore interchangeable in the event
of the death of the former.

Lois Huneycutt, “Female Succession and the Language of Power in the Writings of
Twelfth-Century Churchmen,” in *Medieval Queenship*, ed. John Carmi Parsons (New
This notion of defense was key to the navigation of medieval masculinity and femininity, which are key to understanding kingship and queenship. As a supposedly active and powerful framework of behaviour and identity, masculinity could assert its primacy by protecting femininity, its passive and weak counterpart. As such, this also means that women had the power to affirm a man’s masculinity and social status by accepting his protection or being protected by him.\(^{201}\) This relationship is key to understanding these particular circumstances of gender relations, and also as an important aspect of masculinity that makes it both distinct from and reliant upon femininity. Although John could not protect his wife in her absence, he could act as the protector of both his daughter the queen and of the kingdom his wife represented. In this way, because she was not present to challenge John’s kingship, or to provide a contender for the loyalty of their allies, or as the centre of the court, Maria’s queenship was one that upheld traditionally understood gender roles and roles of sovereignty. She provided an heir and gave no input, and he engaged in diplomacy and war.

This concept of non-present queenship may seem strange, in that even in a queenship role that is assumed to be passive it is expected that there will be a physically present queen. However, many of the expectations placed upon queens do not require a physical presence. Save producing an heir, which Maria did prior to her death, queens were generally expected by the men and patriarchal institutions that surrounded them to remain uninvolved in politics and indeed inactive.\(^{202}\) This of course was not always the reality, as Melisende and Sibylla demonstrate. However, just as not every queen has to


\(^{202}\) Theresa Earenfight, “Without the Person of the Prince,” 5.
have been passive, not every queen has to have been active. What is important is that this
does not change her status as queen, it simply reflects a different queenship governed by
different principles, whether self-imposed or as demanded by the circumstances. Due to
her circumstances, Maria’s queenship was one of non-presence manifested in total
absence.

Queen Maria provides one of the most interesting examples of queenship
examined in this thesis. Her life and death challenge us, provoking questions of how the
memory of a queen can perform queenship in her absence. Her death provided her
husband an opportunity to rule, exercising his power as a man who married the sovereign
and therefore had access to sovereign power, rather than the more traditional definition of
a king as a man who was born to occupy a throne. The lives of Maria and John speak to
the relationship between kingship and queenship, and the gendering of power as we
understand it to be political and militaristic. Kingship, being gendered as it is, cannot
exist without queenship being gendered as it is. Even in the absence of a queen,
queenship informs and defines kingship. The total inactivity and powerlessness of a
queen still has the power to validate a king, and in doing so, give that king access to
power. It is this relationship that characterizes the queenship of Queen Maria of
Jerusalem, who was therefore able to perform queenship despite her death.
Chapter 5
Queen Yolande, r. 1212-1228

Of all the queens examined in this thesis, Queen Isabella II of Jerusalem (here called by her nickname Yolande in order to avoid confusion) was given the least opportunity to assert her power. While Maria’s queenship was passive due to her untimely death, Yolande’s was passive because she was entirely barred from all positions of influence over her own life or herself. Yolande was treated as a pawn by the powerful men of her day more than any other queen discussed here. Even the papacy interfered in the selection of her husband, although it had not been involved in the marriages of the previous queens regnant of Jerusalem. While Isabella was also pressured to marry many men, and while Maria was pressured to marry one, both held power over their husbands due to the supremacy of their political positions. On the other hand, Yolande was her husband’s social and political inferior, despite being the Queen of Jerusalem, and so she had no way to exert influence over her husband in the way that these earlier queens did. She was mistreated by her husband and died the youngest of any of the queens discussed here, having done her duty by bearing a son. Yolande was powerless compared to the men in her life and was given no opportunity to express any kind of agency.

Yolande was born in the Kingdom of Jerusalem in 1212, shortly before the death of her mother Maria.203 She had no siblings, which meant that from her birth it was understood that she was heir to the crown and would be the person to maintain her family’s place on that throne. Her father John of Brienne acted as her regent and

203 Guy Perry, John of Brienne, 68.
controlled the kingdom through the failed Fifth Crusade. John clearly took a great deal of interest in his daughter, as she was his only hope for establishing a family line on the throne of Jerusalem.

As Yolande came of age it was decided that she would marry the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II. Yolande had been meant to marry Frederick in 1223, but he was delayed for two years. It was therefore in August 1225 that Yolande was married to Frederick at the Church of the Holy Cross in Acre via his proxy the archbishop of Capua. Philippe de Novare suggested that this marriage was organized at the behest of the papacy, perhaps, as Perry claims, in order to increase Frederick’s interest in aiding in the recovery of the Holy Land. Indeed, David Abulafia notes that Frederick agreed to the marriage because it was only as King of Jerusalem that he would consider going on crusade. Shortly after the marriage by proxy Isabella was crowned Queen of Jerusalem at Tyre, therefore guaranteeing her husband the title of king. On 9 November 1225, at the age of fourteen, Yolande finally met and had a marriage ceremony with her husband in Brindisi.

The relationship between Frederick and his father-in-law was apparently tense, with Frederick appropriating a good deal of the wealth John had enjoyed as King of

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204 Guy Perry, *John of Brienne*, 89.
205 Ibid., 122.
209 Guy Perry, *John of Brienne*, 133.
Jerusalem and even opposing him in battle.\textsuperscript{211} He also sent Yolande to live at Palermo very quickly after their marriage.\textsuperscript{212} In the meantime, the newly consecrated Pope Gregory IX excommunicated Frederick in September 1227 due to his lack of crusading action.\textsuperscript{213} A few months later on the 25 April 1228 in Andria, Yolande gave birth to her son Conrad. When she died six days later, she was not yet seventeen.\textsuperscript{214}

Yolande’s queenship was one of total passivity, which is not to say that this was by choice or that she was without power. Like her mother before her, there is no way for us to know today how Yolande reacted to the changes in her life or to the particulars of her marriage. We therefore cannot say who Yolande was as a queen, only what she meant and symbolized in that role. While Yolande was not able to make decrees or engage in politics in a hands-on way, as the queen of Jerusalem she still embodied power that made her an important if marginalized player in the politics of the Levant.

Primarily, although Yolande could not provide protection to her people herself, she was in a position as the conduit for the throne of Jerusalem to attract a husband who was capable of raising an effective defense. Her title, which was inseparable from her person, is what induced Frederick to marry her. In this way, through the power inherent in her title, Yolande was able to defend her kingdom. Additionally, Yolande had the power to provide Frederick with that which he desired, which was to become King of Jerusalem. As the personification of the crown, Yolande possessed the latent power of bestowing this title upon Frederick by marrying him. While she does not seem to have

\textsuperscript{211} Steven Runciman, \textit{A History of the Crusades}, vol. 3, 148.
\textsuperscript{212} Ibid., 149.
\textsuperscript{214} Steven Runciman, \textit{A History of the Crusades}, vol. 3, 149.
had any choice in her partner, Yolande still embodied power, despite not having had any agency.

Yolande’s power was never given the opportunity to manifest itself in self-determination. Her queenship was passive; even more so than one might expect a queen consort’s to be. Charles Beem and Miles Taylor identify one of the methods of influence and power available to queens consort as having the “ruler’s ear,” but even this was not the case for Yolande.215 Held at Palermo and rarely visited by her husband, she was essentially what Amalie Fößel calls “the king’s husfrouwe (housewife) and the mother of legitimate royal offspring.”216 Yolande had the poor luck to have married a man who seems to have seen her her as little more than a wealthy brood mare with a powerful title of which wanted to take advantage, and this was made clear in the circumstances of her abandonment at Palermo. While there is no reason to believe that Yolande’s life there was particularly uncomfortable, the fact remains that she had been dismissed there, likely an unexpected situation for any woman who had been raised with the expectation that she would play a role in ruling her kingdom like the illustrious queens that came before her. As an already powerful emperor, Frederick did not need to rely on his wife to legitimize his rule, unlike the kings consort of Jerusalem prior to him, and therefore did not require her to actively engage in his rulership.

Yolande fit much more neatly into the gendered outdoor/indoor template of power that her grandmother Isabella had so defied. Hanawalt’s exploration of this template engages with class and gender in order to speak to the ways in which women’s spaces in

216 Amalie Fößel, “Gender and Rulership,” 60.
medieval Europe were controlled and transgressed. Being kept at Palermo, Yolande was physically removed from the Kingdom of Jerusalem and far from its centre of power. Her husband’s penchant for spending extended periods of time without her also meant she was physically distant from the sources and exercise of regnal power, as he occupied himself with rulership in her absence. Yolande occupied a physical space that identified her as an object for procreation, a desperately marginalized position. What distinguishes her circumstances from Isabella’s is that, while Isabella could have chosen not to remarry a third or fourth time and therefore must have done so willingly, Yolande was never given the opportunity to weigh in on her marriage or her living arrangements.

While Yolande had power in the form of her inherited title and kingdom, this did not mean that she was guaranteed a life of empowerment. One might rightfully wonder to what extent Frederick understood himself as marrying Yolande, and to what extent he understood himself as purchasing the crown of Jerusalem via marriage. While all royal marriages are inherently political and innately material, this one appears to be especially so.

We cannot know if Yolande’s lack of agency was by nature or due to her circumstances. While she was a non-present queen much like Maria, at least we can say of Maria that she had a cooperative relationship with her husband while she lived, and that her husband was only able to maintain control of the Latin Kingdom due to his continued connection with her legacy as their daughter’s regent. Frederick was already powerful in his own right prior to marrying Yolande, and understood that once married to

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Yolande the title of King of Jerusalem would be rightfully his and not hers. He had no need for Yolande in the way that John of Brienne had needed Maria. For this reason he was able to marginalize her in ways that no king consort of Jerusalem had ever been able to do to earlier queens regnant. The result of this was a passive queenship, one occupied with the production of an heir and nothing else, and characterized by total erasure and marginalization within the structure of the court and the politics of the day. This stands in sharp contrast to the other forms of queenship explored in this thesis. While not all the queens preceding Yolande were military players, they all expressed and were afforded strength based on their positions in the royal family and as royal heirs. Yolande remains alone in that she was essentially stripped of that position and forced into the margins in order to make space for the ambitions and desires of her husband.

Of all the lives of these five queens, Yolande’s was the least empowered. She died young, cast aside by a husband who was interested only in her title and who was uninterested in spending time with her. Her queenship was one devoid of agency and one in which the power she did have was turned on its head and used to further depreciate her. Standing in sharp contrast to Queen Melisende’s active and influential queenship, at the far opposite end of the spectrum, Queen’s Yolande’s queenship was one of degradation and objectification.
Chapter 6

Discussion

Simply put, medieval queenship was complicated. The study of queenship as a form of leadership has been shaped by the historically more popular study of kingship, and the development of a framework that associates male patterns of behaviour with power and female patterns of behaviour with passivity, leaving holes in our understanding of the practical and theoretical significance of medieval queens. As the lives of the queens studied in this thesis have attested, there was much more to regnal queenship than the norms of queenship and womanhood would seem to have allowed, such as involvement in diplomatic negotiations and autonomy in the choice to marry. Therefore, a much more flexible approach to studying queens and queenship is necessary in order to better understand how medieval society operated. It is through using a flexible approach to gender that we can best understand regnal queenship. Gender flexibility as a construction of gender does not assume any genders at all and therefore does not inherently associate any particular behaviours or patterns with any gender. This is what makes it so useful a way of looking at queenships throughout history. Understanding gender as flexible also “forestalls reductionist interpretations that all women have shared the same history,” in the words of Cullen, and allows gender historians and queenship scholars to explore the nuances and complexity of gender and therefore of sovereignty without betraying the norms of the era that they are studying.  

The connection between gender and norm is best understood through the writing of both Judith Butler, for a more theoretical framework, and Joan Scott, who contextualizes this framework within the field of history.

A norm is not the same as a rule, and it is not the same as a law. A norm operates within social practices as the implicit standard of normalization… Norms may or may not be explicit, and when they operate as the normalizing principle in social practice, they usually remain implicit, difficult to read, discernible most clearly and dramatically in the effects they produce.219

Established as an objective set of references, concepts of gender structure perception and the concrete and symbolic organization of all social life. To the extent that these references establish distributions of power (differential control over or access to material and symbolic resources), gender becomes implicated in the conception and construction of power itself.220

It is the effects of gender norms and gender relations that we see governing the lives and forms of power exercised by or available to the queens of Jerusalem. What complicates matters is that while it may seem clear that gender norms restricted the activities of women, they also could provide – as in Isabella’s case – a source of power and influence that stretched far beyond the limits those norms placed on women’s power.

As each manifestation of queenship is unique to its situation and queen, there are also multiple patriarchies in response to which these queenships took shape. As Charles Beem explains, there was no single, monolithic patriarchy to which femininity has been forced to respond throughout history, but rather, “it was the interaction of many patriarchies, entrenched in multiple political and social processes, specific in time and space” that challenged femininity and queenship and which demanded the development

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of specific forms of queenship to contend with the specific threats these patriarchies constituted. All five queens discussed in this thesis developed their queenship in response to their circumstances and specifically in response to the male power structures around which their lives and societies were organized. This is what Theresa Earenfight means when she writes that, “kingship and queenship work in dynamic tension.” The development of both kingship and queenship constitutes a series of actions and reactions to the construction and presence of the other. While queenship has often been understood as an accessory to kingship, as the space occupied by the wife who orbits the king, it is in fact a dynamic component of the development of kingship. This is illustrated explicitly in the Latin Kingdoms, for none of the kings consort of Jerusalem would have had the opportunity to be king of Jerusalem if it were not for their wives the queens. Fulk would not have been as cowed following his accusations of infidelity if Melisende had not been so politically active and beloved by her court. Guy could not have become king if Sibylla had not made personal loyalty such an integral aspect of her queenship. Isabella’s husbands’ kingship would not have been so precarious if her own queenship had relied upon stable and long-term marriages. John of Brienne’s role as protector and provider existed as a foil to the passivity of Maria’s queenship in absence. Frederick’s domineering and aspirational kingship occupied the potential space of Yolande’s power as well as his own, which was possible only because the passivity of her queenship left that space vacant. Not only were the kings consort of Jerusalem dependent upon their queens, the character of their rule as kings dynamically reflected the queenships of their queens and the relationship each queen had with her own rule.

222 Theresa Earenfight, *The King’s Other Body*, 135.
Each of the queens examined in this thesis interacted with this relationship between gender and power in different ways. The case of Melisende is a concrete place to have started this analysis both chronologically and in that her queenship is most recognizably active within the medieval masculinized framework of rulership. She was publicly involved in the politics of the Kingdom of Jerusalem as a rule and at the centre of many of the major events of her reign. If action is to be defined through a masculine lens and as being aggressive and overt Melisende was the most active of the queens studied here, with Sibylla in many ways following in her footsteps through her political and diplomatic engagement in the Latin Kingdom. However, Isabella demonstrated a great deal of acumen by engaging with potentially restrictive gendered expectations to harness the power inherent in feminine gender norms, and her reign challenges the assumption that medieval femininity was passive by default. This, too, is a brand of power and agency. While Isabella was not engaged in diplomacy in the way her half-sister had been, she still was able to play the game of politics in the Latin Kingdom. The modern assumption that Isabella was less powerful than Sibylla betrays a belief that women were inherently weaker, if only a woman wielding masculinized forms of power can be understood as powerful.

While the dynamic between Sibylla and Isabella introduces an intriguing dialogue between the concepts of masculinized and feminized agency, the dynamic between Maria and Yolande begs questions about what it is for a queen to be present and active. Of course, Maria was not literally present for the majority of her husband’s reign. However, it was by way of his association with her that he was able to lay any claim to power. Prior to his marriage to Maria, John of Brienne had been a lesser-known knight with very little
to recommend him to positions of power. Upon his marrying her, he was given access to a royal title and royal authority and found himself not only the King of Jerusalem but also the Latin Emperor of Constantinople. It was through Maria’s influence that he had access to power and high-ranking titles, and therefore her presence remained strong in his life as the source of his power and the channel through which he was able to establish himself in Eastern Latin society as he did.

The experiences of Yolande were quite opposite. Frederick was already extremely powerful upon marrying her, and while she provided him with a title this was not a robust enough contribution to his situation to have shifted the balance of power at all in her favour. Although Yolande was physically present and alive, her presence was erased through her dismissal to Palermo, with no pretense of her being considered a political agent in her own right. The importance of a queen regnant within her marriage is therefore directly related to the extent to which her husband must rely on her for legitimacy. In the case of John and Maria, where his royal status was tied directly to theregnancy of his wife, her memory persisted in his ongoing claims to legitimacy. Meanwhile, with Frederick already the Emperor, Yolande was disenfranchised within her marriage as the less politically influential spouse.

In this case, what does it mean for a queen to be present? Is it possible for a dead queen to be more present than a live one? It would seem that presence can be best measured by influence rather than physical presence, whereby influence is measured by the importance afforded to her either actively or passively by her spouse and subjects. Although she was dead, Maria remained of vital importance to John as the root of his relationship with the throne of Jerusalem and therefore his relationships with other
political and military leaders alongside whom he fought and ruled. Meanwhile, Yolande seemed to have much less influence over her husband save as the source of his legitimate claim to the throne of Jerusalem and as the bearer of his heir. Neither of these required her ongoing and active engagement in the kingdom or with Frederick himself. Indeed, once Yolande had given birth to Conrad, there was no reason at all for Frederick to be invested in whether or not she lived or died, and there is nothing to suggest he was particularly heartbroken by her death, either.

Lois Huneycutt argues that, once crowned, medieval queens regnant were expected to participate in politics, and actively encouraged to do so.\footnote{Lois Huneycutt, “Medieval Queenship,” \textit{History Today} 39, no. 6 (1989): 18.} It is this kind of totalizing statement about regnal queenship that does not hold up when faced with the breadth of experiences of these queenships. Clearly, Yolande was not expected to actively participate in the ruling of her kingdom and was instead actively prevented from doing so. Theresa Earenfight characterizes the nature of the femaleregnancies of Jerusalem as being a period in which political instability was at such an extreme that the entire kingdom, and indeed the queens themselves, were compelled to “make it up as they went along to be able to hold together the fragile realms they inherited.”\footnote{Theresa Earenfight, \textit{Queenship in Medieval Europe}, 177.} In studying the experiences of the queens regnant of Jerusalem it is evident that they defy simplification because their queenships were dynamic responses to their circumstances. While Melisende was actively encouraged to participate in politics and Sibylla’s participation appears not to have been contested, Yolande’s participation was actively prevented. The queenships of the queens regnant of Jerusalem developed in reaction to the changing circumstances of the kingdom and their own personal circumstances.
Theresa Earenfight asks whether queenship is a national or familial institution, and it is a question that certainly has a place here. All these queens existed within the contexts of their families and were expected to fulfill certain roles as prescribed by their involvement in those families. Elena Woodacre, for example, notes that motherhood was perhaps the single most important role a sovereign woman could play, which is a recurring theme in the historiography regarding queenship. At the same time, however, these women were the sovereigns of their kingdom, and while they wielded power differently and to varying effects, they all still had a relationship with sovereign, political power. Indeed, for queens and any other members of the monarchy, familial and sovereign institutions were so closely linked as to be inextricable from one another. As John Carmi Parsons writes, “noblewomen’s unique participation in matrimonial politics did afford them opportunities to claim power and to achieve some degree of self-realization.” These queens were each able to find space to harness power through the development of their queenships and by engaging with the many roles required of a queen.

Essentially, the lesson we can learn about medieval queenship in studying these five women is that queenship was a fluid and dynamic process. Individual queens developed their queenships in response to their individual circumstances. While all queens regnant were superficially in the same position as female sovereigns, this was one

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of the few things queens regnant had in common with one another. Queenship is inherently discursive and political, and therefore every aspect of a queen’s life comes together to determine the nature of her queenship and the ways in which her power will be made manifest. She is therefore an agent in the development of her society and sphere whether or not she is able to be present or active, and a key player in the developments of her kingdom as her queenship both reacts to, and causes changes in, social and political spheres.

These queens also serve to challenge some of the difficulties queenship studies face within the greater field of medieval gender studies. As John Carmi Parsons points out, queenship studies have suffered due to a popular academic interest in the lives of truly disenfranchised and poor women over seemingly privileged queens. Who, however, could honestly argue that Yolande was not disenfranchised? By studying these five queens, stereotypes of what queenship was and what it looked like can be challenged to the benefit of both queenship studies and medieval gender studies as a whole. What is more, by studying queenship in all its forms our understanding of kingship and sovereignty will thereby improve, as all three of these concepts work in tandem to establish the ways in which power existed at these intersections and therefore how it was manifested by all these actors in the public and private spheres. Much more than simply the wives of kings, queens regnant challenge and augment our understandings of kings themselves as both consorts and regnant figures. Scholars such as Elizabeth Casteen and

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Theresa Earenfight have begun this work, but there is still more to be done and many more queens, kings, and relationships to be explored.

By exploring the nuances of the reigns of queens regnant the historiographical tendency to assume there is a single women’s story or a single women’s experience is forestalled. A discussion of queenship that describes only one variety of experience is inherently problematic in that it implicitly suggests that the state of queenship is universal, or at least inflexible. Studying the many ways in which regnant queenships took shape prevents such totalizing narratives from erasing the lived experiences of queens. This approach also respects the flexible nature of queenship and therefore prevents comparisons between queens based on an imagined shared experience that in reality was highly contextual. By studying queens as products of their immediate environments they are addressed on their own terms and in their own contexts.

This is especially true of queens regnant, whose histories are examined far less often than queens consort and whose positions at the intersection of gender and power are particularly complicated. Queens regnant built their queenships atop and by way of familial structures that insisted wives be secondary to husbands, and often in conflict with the understanding that those who inherited thrones were superior to all subjects. This is a particularly interesting dynamic, and one that has provoked a good deal of inquiry. Of course, this does not mean that queens regnant lived lives of unending tension and difficulty. Indeed, if historians are insistent on finding tension in the reigns of every queen regnant they encounter it is an indication of the modern biases being projected onto those queens rather than the reality of those queens’ circumstances. After all, had the High Court not wanted a woman to inherit the throne of Jerusalem, they simply would
have elected a man. It was the contemporaries of these Queens of Jerusalem that put four successive women on the throne, perhaps with the understanding that their queenships would not impede the kingships of their husbands, but as queens regnant nonetheless.

So, who and what is a queen? Primarily, and most simply, a queen is a woman who is recognized by a significant or powerful set of individuals as being a queen. This is the only statement one can make about queenship that applies to all queens. Beyond this, a queen may be understood as engaging in the discursive and inherently political process of developing her queenship in reaction to her circumstances both personal and political, and having the opportunity to act out that queenship in a sphere that is public by nature of her office. A queen is therefore engaged in the cooperative process of the construction of the society she occupies, even if her engagement comes in the form of the dual processes of marginalization and erasure. In short, a queen is an active force at play in the ever-shifting condition of her kingdom even when inactive, and present even when not present. We can observe this process in action, with all its complications and its revelations, by studying the lives and the queenships of Queens Melisende, Sybilla, Isabella, Maria, and Yolande of Jerusalem.
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