

Medieval Queens as Holy Mothers: Sanctity in the Image of Mary, Queen of Heaven

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The history of medieval women is, at times, patchy for the contemporary historian even though, as discussed later, this field has progressed by leaps and bounds in revealing the women of the past, discovering the societies and cultures of which they were a part, and from there, drawing connections between the sources that do survive in an effort to create a coherent illustration of the past. For this reason, it is essential that the historian utilize what sources that do survive concerning medieval women, in order to construct a valid argument about an aspect of their lives or the world in which they lived. The *vitae*¹ are, as discussed below, a prolific source concerning women, which promotes their status in the history of medieval women. Furthermore, through the lives of exceptional women, those chosen to be deemed "saints" by their contemporaries, aid the historian in understanding the ideals medieval people had concerning women, for the Church was at the center of European life in the Middle Ages, and its perceptions of women would have been, to a great deal, those of the masses.

In this study, the sanctity of queens is the focus, more specifically, queens of the tenth and eleventh centuries. Their sanctification is particularly interesting due to their status as laypersons, living in the state of conjugal matrimony and fulfilling roles as mothers, when most female saints of this period were nuns or other religious, who lived their lives in cloisters and were either virgins or chaste widows. Even earlier sainted queens, had renounced their married lives and children to live out their lives as abbesses due to their high value of chastity as a qualification for piety and holiness. What made queens such as Mathilda² and Adelheid³ saintly if they did not obey the long-accepted and idolized virtue of virginity, or at the very least chastity? As powerful queens and as regents for their sons or grandsons, these women made themselves an active part of the monarchy. Do they represent a new type of both queenship and female sanctity? Perhaps, it is their role as queen that provides them with an opportunity that common women would not have been able to aspire to; they were the wives and mothers of kings, a position believed to be ordained by God himself. Their elevated status, the dependence on an heir to the throne, as well as their ruling status as intercessors with the king begin to serve to link the queen's status with that of the Mary, mother of God. Furthermore, the elevation of Mary herself, to the throne as the Queen of Heaven, a phenomenon that evolved beginning in fifth century Rome due to Byzantine influence and culminated in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, provides a further link to the sanctity of earthly queens such as Mathilda and Adelheid in the tenth century, and even more closely to the aspired sanctity of Queen Emma of England in the eleventh century. Does their holiness and or power stem

from their motherhood.² It is their status as queens that allows them to emulate the Mary as mothers and intermediaries, whereas other saintly women were still restricted by the ideal of virginity and could seek to emulate Mary and Christ through that avenue alone.

It is evident, in a study of sanctity in general, that the characteristics that qualify individuals for elevation to sanctity stem from emulation of Christ and/or the Virgin Mary. For medieval women, the path to sanctity in the image of Christ and Mary focused almost exclusively on the preservation of chastity, for in living a chaste life they could eliminate their sexualized nature, the source of their oppression within the eyes of the Church. In the image of Mary, the woman whose virginity broke the curse of Eve and the Fall, women were able to find a positive female role model.⁴ Nuns became brides of Christ, virgins, as Mary was at the Annunciation, dedicated to a spiritual marriage. This specifically introduces the emulation that religious women undertook, not of Christ, but more specifically, Mary, the mother of God. This connection is further promoted as Mary's status within the Catholic Church solidified and is present in much Mariological religious literature. In such works, there is "a consistent parallel between the Virgin Mary and nuns as brides of Christ... The text gives us a Virgin Mary who functions as a model for the pious soul; nuns are exhorted to seek to become like her, daughters of God, mothers of Christ, and brides of the Holy Spirit."⁵ However, although Mary's importance does stem from her virginity in regards to the Immaculate Conception, more importantly is her motherhood of Christ, who is known as the King of Kings. The icon of Mary, as an image which women could emulate was quite contradictory for the average woman because she is praised for her motherhood and her virginity, while at the same time there is the emphasis of the virgin ideal in medieval women's religious imagery. Most women of the middle ages could not aspire to sainthood in direct emulation of Mary because of the necessity of marriage and sexual relations to become mothers, so instead they chose the virginal aspect of Mary as their role model, attempting to find motherhood qualities through charity and a mystical marriage to Christ.

Furthermore, because virginity or celibacy later in life was, for the most part, a requirement for sanctity, virtually all laywomen, living within and concerned with the secular world, were excluded from sainthood, as is discussed later in examination of the ideal of virginity versus the married life. However, the queen was an exceptional person, for she could not remain a virgin, yet as is quite evident in medieval hagiography, a good number of saints were queens. As will be discussed throughout this study, the sainted queen was exceptional because as the mother and wife of God-ordained kings, her participation in conjugal relations with her husband and her sexuality, which was virtually eliminated from the records, were no hindrance to her achievement of sanctity, rather her motherhood and partnership with her husband become an emphasis in the lives of Queen Mathilda and Queen Adelheid. The queen's avenue to sanctity lay in the idea that she could better emulate Mary than any other woman because not only could she be praised for her role as intercessor for the Church and poor, as well as her private devotion through modesty and humility, she could be praised, as Mary was, for her motherhood of the king. It is this connection between female sanctity, more specifically that of tenth and eleventh century queens, and Mary which is the focus of this study. To examine this fully, it is first essential

that the reader understand the ideal of virginity in medieval women's sanctity and how this conflicted with marriage and the typical secular lives that women were expected to live, and after this basis has been established on female sanctity the evolving images of queenly sanctity can be further examined in their relationship to Mary and her evolving iconization as the Queen of Heaven.

It was the ideal of virginity that dominated western medieval conceptions of female sanctity. It spawned from the dichotomy between Eve and Mary, the two most important women in the Christian ideology. Eve, although she was the mother of the human race, was the evil temptress who, in her carnal knowledge, caused her and Adam to fall from grace, whereas Mary, the virgin mother, is idolized for giving birth to Christ, the world's salvation. Both were mothers, yet Eve's very fault lies in her sexuality, something of which Mary remains pure due to her virginity. This is the idea, along with the assumed virginity of Christ, that promoted Catholic ideals of virginity and celibacy in the Middle Ages. Furthermore, because of the sin of the Fall was seen to be on Eve's shoulders, women were especially demeaned for their sexuality, which in turn, increased the desirability of preserving their virginity as a requirement for living a religious life.⁶ From here, it was the Church's belief that because celibacy and virginity were superior to conjugal relations between a man and a woman, those persons who could retain their virginity, or at least live celibate lives, were on an higher plane of spirituality than the rest of the world; thus, they were closer to God and therefore able to aspire to sainthood. Heffernan explains, "The argument was made that sexual intercourse, even within the bounds of a legally contracted Christian marriage for the purpose of procreation, was an impediment to spiritual growth and, as Aquinas had argued, to greater rationality."⁷ However, the contradiction lay in the fact that marriage and procreation were essential as well. Nevertheless, those who lived the married life could not, for the most part, aspire to sainthood. It is stated in the Bible that, "I [Paul the Apostle] say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I [with chastity]. But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn. There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband."⁸ It is at this juncture that the elevation of the queen, above all other laywomen, allows her to aspire to sanctity even within the bonds of marriage and earthly motherhood, while nearly all other female saints of the time were either virgins or consecrated widows who had renounced their secular lives as mothers and wives, due to her status as the wife and mother the King, who was the highest earthly "Lord."

Andre Vauchez states, in regards to sanctification of the laity in the Middle Ages, that the fact that the only laypersons to achieve sanctity prior to the Beguines of the thirteenth century were kings and queens lies in their extremely superior status in the secular world; "...the king was an exceptional person, a kind of mediator between the spheres of the profane and the holy. Thus the historian is entitled to set apart those who exercised kingly power, since the holy kings of the eleventh and twelfth centuries are not typical representatives of the laity."⁹ This concept also applies to the person of the queen. However, perhaps royalty was not simply a "mediator" between the religious sphere and the secular sphere; rather, one's royal status, believed to be

ordained by God, enabled kings, and even more so, queens to emulate Christ and Mary, respectively, through other means than virginity and charity alone. Furthermore, as the very existence of dynasties depended on sexual relations between the persons of the king and queen to produce a royal heir, the married state could not feasibly prove to be a barrier to sanctity for royalty. It is also interesting to examine the icon of Mary herself in this discussion of queenly sanctity because, as Heffernan explains, "The celebration of Mary's virginity, her espousal to Christ, her maternity, and her figure as the emblem of the church presents us with an enormously complicated icon."¹⁰ It is this combination of roles that are ascribed to Mary which both allow queens to emulate her as well as encompassing the ambiguity of the holiness of such queens. As the focus here revolves around the person and sanctity of tenth and eleventh century queens, it is essential that the relationship between the earthly queens and Mary be examined closely.

Of primary importance in queenly sanctity in the image of Mary is the development of images depicting Mary as a queen herself, the Queen of Heaven. Though this is most often attributed to later images and descriptions of Mary in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries when the image flourished, the introduction of this idea and the development of a relationship between Mary Regina and earthly queens occur much earlier.¹¹ In fact, the first images that place imperial and royal status upon Mary occur under Byzantine influence¹² in the area surrounding Rome in the early fifth century.¹³ This phenomenon is further promoted in the first images that name her Maria Regina, the earliest one being a fresco from Santa Maria Antiqua that was created between 772 and 775 in which she is enthroned with the infant Christ.¹⁴ However, as the Frankish influence during the Carolingian period replaced that of Byzantium in Rome and thus Western Christianity, the image of Mary Regina lost significance. Many historians are of the belief that this image of Mary as queen then did not reemerge until the twelfth century, when a great deal of imagery of Mary in this role was created. Although her imagery in many areas may have receded, it is evident that the strong Ottonian queens Mathilda and Adelheid used Mary as a queenly role model two centuries earlier, and Mary's importance in late tenth- and early eleventh-century Saxon and English culture, which establishes her, as will be discussed later, as a strong iconographic model for Queen Emma of England, also occurs before the commonly assumed resurgence of Marian imagery portraying Mary as Queen of Heaven.¹⁵ It is at this time that Mary is even presented in a unique English image, which transforms the traditional Trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit into a Quintity, which included Mary and the infant Christ in her arms (fig. 3).¹⁶ Here, before the most often proposed resurgence of queenly imagery associated with Mary, she is crowned, and her ties to the heavenly body of the king (God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and Infant Christ), which, in their various stages that are depicted, emphasize Mary's connection as mother, wife, and daughter of God. If Christ had two natures, a belief growing in popularity at the time, that of the infant son of Mary and of her later husband and king of Heaven, Mary's role is emphasized in relation to both natures, the human and divine. This provides a heavenly parallel to the increasingly popular idea of the two bodies of the king.¹⁷ As Ernst Kantorowicz argues, this began to occur around the year 1000 or earlier in England and Europe in general.¹⁸ The king was seen to have a "magisterial, undying body of kingship, and the body of a human male."¹⁹

Therefore, Mary's relationship as both wife and mother of Christ can be emulated by earthly queens in that they were the wives and mothers of both the human and divine bodies of the king. John Carmi Parsons takes Kantorowicz's concept of the two bodies of kingship even further and argues that the same phenomenon existed for the body of the queen. He supports his argument with examples of royal burials and the preservation of the official bodies of royalty through a study on their tombs. Parsons states, "Her [the queen's] 'official' body was exalted by unction and coronation; to become a model of proper female regal behaviour, however, that body, like that of any woman, was impugned as a site of sin and pollution and, in the queen's case, feared especially as a means whereby she might sway her husband. Her reproductive function was of crucial importance to the realm, but that aspect of her maternity was secreted and its nurturing side emphasized by association with her intercession."²⁰ In respect to the idea that marriage and sexual relations were an impediment to female sanctity, they could not only be downplayed in the reasons for sanctity among queens, they could be seen as non-existent as long as it was the queen in her relationship as wife and mother to the undying and holy body of kingship, and not the human male, which was lauded in her vita. However, it is important to note that Mary and earthly queens are also alike in the fact that they were nothing without their close relationship to Christ and the king, respectively, which is why most images of Mary and queens depict them with their sons or husbands. Therefore Mary as Regina is a model for secular queens, whereas Mary as the Virgin is the only image that women of lower status could attempt to emulate in their religious aspirations.

However, what qualities made sanctity an option for the Ottonian queens of the tenth-century? Though there is no strong emphasis of Mary as Queen of Heaven here yet, Mathilda and Adelheid achieve sanctity very much in the image of Mary through the ideas presented above. Perhaps they provide an early source for the later emphasis on Mary as regina; this would not be unlikely due to the saintly qualities which are praised in Mathilda's vitae and Adelheid's epitaph. The vitae of both Mathilda and Adelheid focus on two possible avenues to sanctity; their charity toward the church and poor is highly praised, in conformity to the Lives of earlier holy queens, yet then their Lives diverge from earlier models of queenly sanctity in that their motherhood and marriage are at the center of the praise they receive as well. Mathilda is praised for her marriage and influence on King Henry in a passage from the "Later Life" that states, "O blessed ones [Mathilda and Henry], not only joined together in the flesh but of one soul and one spirit, always ready to perform every good work! In them lived on love for Christ, a shared sense of goodness, one will pleasing to God, and a singular capacity for righteousness; they were the same in their love for their neighbors and their compassion for their subjects."²¹ Additionally, her motherhood is praised in the "Older Life"; "...the esteemed mother and queen, Mathilda, pleased with the great leaders she had borne, was received in honor first by the emperor [Otto I], then by all of her offspring. She joyfully embraced and looked upon each of her grandchildren, rejoicing and offering special thanks to God..."²² While these passages praise Mathilda, there are likewise many of the same referring to Adelheid, such as a section of verse in her Epitaph which praises her, deeming that "No one before her / So helped the republic; / Obstinate Germany / And fruitful Italy—/ These and their princes/ She put under Rome's power./ She set noble King Otto / Over Rome as its Caesar; / And bore

him a son / Fit for rule supreme."²³ Or another passage states, "Her children have risen up and called her blessed, and her husband has praised her."²⁴ It seems, then, that it is the combination of their charity and mercy, more common ways in which saintly and religious women emulated Mary and Christ, along with their motherhood, something that to most women was a hindrance to sanctity, which together elevated them to sainthood.

Mathilda and Adelheid, represent the beginnings of a transformation of queenly sanctity that would embrace the motherhood of the queen as one of her most valuable and holy qualities. Terms such as *sancta mater*²⁵ (holy mother) and "mother of the dynasty"²⁶ are ascribed to Mathilda; likewise, Adelheid is known as the "mother of all kingdoms."²⁷ Similar epithets attached to Mary such as *regina mundi* and *regina coeli et terrae* present her as the queen of the world; there is a strong connection between the praise that Mathilda and Adelheid receive in these references as mothers of the kingdoms and the image of Mary as both a mother of the king and the queen of the world.²⁸ It is at this point where a new and vital connection to Mary is established through which the sanctity of queens like Mathilda and Adelheid rests on the idea that they lived more in the image of Mary than earlier female saints, who prided themselves in their virginity, because they were both wives and mothers of kings, just as Mary was both the bride and mother of Christ, the heavenly king.

That Mathilda and Adelheid are some of the first western medieval queens to achieve a sanctity that praised their roles as wives and mothers is not simply a transformation that appeared out of thin air; rather church reformers of the Carolingian ninth century including the Cluniacs, of which Adeheid's biographer, Odilo of Cluny was a member, and the Gregorians sought to alter the concept of female sanctity towards a model that emphasized domesticity and motherhood, something which the queen could especially embody on a saintly level.²⁹ Furthermore, in Germanic areas at this time, due to pagan influence, there was a high value placed upon motherhood and family ties.³⁰ This is quite evident in a passage from Mathilda's "Later Life" which paints a very motherly and domestic picture of the queen. "As the venerable Mathilda seated herself at the royal banquet table next to Queen Adelheid, the young ones ran about nearby, absorbed in their childish games. Then Henry, who was particularly beloved by God's holy one, approached the royal table, and gazing lovingly at his illustrious grandmother crawled into her lap in hopes of a kiss from her. The venerable queen happily picked him up and hugged him close..."³¹ This illustrates the value of motherly domesticity in a Mathilda's vita, which is not present in earlier Lives that lauded the ascetic, virginal, and manly woman. Furthermore, few queens were sanctified in the Carolingian ninth century; instead, the ideal queen was "consors regni, the consort, the queen who shared the power of the emperor to whom she was bound."³² While the growing emphasis on the secular qualities of the queen during the Carolingian period is important, it is the Saxon revival of saintly queenship in the tenth century that transforms the concept of queenly sanctity.³³ The Ottonian empresses Mathilda and Adelheid are unique in that they emerge from the two changes concerning female sanctity and queenship that occurred in the Carolingian period, one representing an increased focus on more feminine attributes to sanctity, and the other explaining what new form of queenship was beginning to be valued. Both culminate in the transformation of queenly sanctity that is evident in the Lives of Mathilda

and Adelheid, sainted queens who were both valued for their motherhood and their secular roles as consors regni. Thus, the virtuous life was adapted to the public and secular roles that queens played, making possible their elevation to sainthood, while also dictating that the proper role for the queen would be in emulation of Mary and this new type of sanctity that Mathilda and Adelheid represented. To better understand this phenomenon of queenly sanctity one must understand the secular and religious roles that the queen played, and from there examine how those actions proved saintly and in the image of Mary.

Most common in the sanctity of all medieval queens is the roles they played as intercessors between their husbands and the Church. With the Christianization of Europe through the early Middle Ages, the queen came to represent an intercessor between the Church and the King; it became their queenly and often saintly duty, to bestow generous charity upon the poor and the Church in order to act as a sort of alter ego to the militant and conquering king.³⁴ McNamara explains, "Secular lords of the sixth and seventh centuries could not risk compromising their warlike qualities. Women, on the other side, used the saintly role to participate in the dialectic of taking and giving. In this way, they became innovators of a new brand of lay sanctity..."³⁵ This new brand of sanctity that she discusses, while dealing with saintly queens, still relies on the rejection of wifely and motherly roles for a religious life, often that of an abbess, to achieve sanctity. It is for this reason that these earlier saintly queens are not the focus of this study due to their renunciation of motherhood and conjugal love, which they chose in conformity to the saintly ideal of chastity. Nevertheless, the role the queen played as an intercessor is one that remained at the very center of her power, evolving to fit the needs of the kingdom. The queen's role as intercessor on behalf of the Church was sanctioned through her role as the wife or mother of the king influencing them to either convert to Christianity, in which lay the reasons for the sanctity of earlier Merovingian queens, or to become patrons of the Church, a focus that developed in the tenth century.³⁶ As an intercessor, the queen was also an important advisor to the king due to the strong influence the Church had over even the most secular aspects of medieval government and life. An example of the queen playing the role of advisor is present in the vitae of Mathilda. Mathilda's husband King Henry, on his deathbed, praised her for her guidance saying, "We give thanks to Christ that you, who always have been most faithful and with good reason most beloved to us, will survive after us....We are grateful that you diligently tempered our wrath, gave us sound counsel in every situation, frequently drew us away from iniquity and towards justice, and diligently urged us to have mercy upon the oppressed."³⁷ In his complements to his wife and queen, Henry depicts Mathilda as not only an intercessor, but as something more; rather, she, as queen, was important to the governance and order of the realm.

In addition to her power as an intercessor the queen's status and power within the kingdom was rooted in her role as both wife and mother of kings; which was further solidified by the increasingly accepted and practice of anointing the king's wife as queen, rather than relegating her relationship to the king for her fertility alone, which created a formalized role of the queen. Pauline Stafford states, "The more formal role of a West Saxon/English queen developed in the tenth century and in the late tenth century especially. By the end of that century, an English queen was

anointed and not merely anointed to be the occupant of the royal bed...³⁸ Especially in Ottonian and Saxon kingdoms, there was a balance of power between the queen and the king, one which helped the queen to attain the status of *regina* (queen) rather than simply "wife of the king." The term *consors regni*, which placed her as "fellow of the lordship" with the king, elevated her status even higher.³⁹ "In the Christianized Germany of the tenth century, the dynamics of the couple had clearly changed from the confrontational quality of Merovingian marriage...the royal Saxon and Salian couples formed a tight consortium."⁴⁰ Therefore, a further link is established between the tenth-century Ottonian queens and the later increase in Mary's importance as she is elevated to the title of Queen of Heaven. Perhaps as Mathilda and Adelheid, along with several Saxon queens, established more formal and regal roles for the queen, as well as their saintly qualities, this title became something that should be ascribed to the most virtuous woman in the medieval point of view, Mary herself. Furthermore, "A queen was accepted as commander in circumstances of crisis if she could gain the trust of the military commanders. She also was accepted as regent following the capture or death of her husband if her child had been named as his successor."⁴¹ In this case the queen assumed the role of *domina dux*, or queen-regent for her minor son.⁴²

It is essential to note here that the queen's power, even if she ruled as regent, was strongly rooted in her connection to the king as either wife or mother. Stafford emphasizes the fact that, "With these early queens we are dealing not with female kingship, but with queenship. Queen or empress in their case is not a female king; she is the wife or mother of one. Her position derives from an intimate relationship with the king's body, a body which itself can be twofold, a physical and an official body, king and kingship."⁴³ This is further exemplified in her title as *domina*, which though it placed her above everyone else in the palace, she was still subordinate to the *dominus*, her husband the king.⁴⁴ This idea also coincides with the status of Mary as the mother of God, yet never a deity on her own. Furthermore, is the contradiction between the powers that the queen had, while still subject to subordination to her husband that further propelled queens to use their saintly qualities to solidify an alternate avenue through which they could exercise power and influence. However, because at this time it was common for the queen to outlive the king by many years, as did both Mathilda and Adelheid, queens then played another important role in the governance of the kingdom; they ruled as regents for their young sons.

Because succession to the throne was such a central concern for the monarchy, the queen's role as mother of the future king placed her at the very nucleus of the royal dynasty, for it was she who raised and protected the heir and stability of the kingdom; in this, the very existence of the kingdom depended upon her in this way, affording her a great deal of power as a mother. Her motherhood is even accredited to be the sole entity on which the destiny of the dynasty, kingdom, and people depended.⁴⁵ In this status as mother and nurturer of the king, sainted queens are further existing in the image of Mary, who was the protector and nurturer of Christ until he reached maturity. Additionally, it can even be said that the queen exercised more power and received greater praise for her role as the queen dowager rather than her role as queen while her husband lived, for though her motherhood was still praise highly as it was during the King's life, the Church and hagiographers alike could further elevate her to sanctity as a widow/mother because she was now a desexualized mother as

was Mary. Andre Poulet touches on this idea of the emphasis on motherhood and de-emphasis of what one did to become a mother. He states, "Trust in the mother, distrust of the wife—an ideal close to the contradictory theological image of femininity that opposed Mary to Eve..."⁴⁶ Furthermore, it was the queen's role to shelter and protect the young king from the dangers of the world, which she was trusted with because she was the closest to her son in both blood-ties and rank; it was the queen who educated her son and nurtured him to be a just king.⁴⁷

Mathilda and Adelheid's roles as regents for their sons, later their influence over their mature sons, and even later as regents for their grandsons, are lauded in their biographies. Much of their praise is received during their time as regent for their minor sons or as queen dowager, along with praise specifically to their motherly qualities, while specific passages are also dedicated to their desexualization after their husband's death. Several passages from the *Lives of Mathilda* illustrate this quite well. In the "Later Life": "Her every word and deed was marked by praiseworthy seriousness and admirable dignity, and she behaved with such complete modesty that many people would have thought she was a maiden, had they not seen the great multitude of her offspring."⁴⁸ Furthermore, "After the death of the venerable King Henry, when his eldest son Otto occupied the royal throne, the queen proved to be such a virtuous widow that few members of either sex could hope to imitate her. She was wise in her counsel, exceedingly gentle to the good and harsh to the arrogant, generous in her almsgiving, single-minded in her prayers, pious to all the needy, and 'mild in her speech; her love of for God and neighbor as well as her chastity remained unsullied.'⁴⁹ Though in most cases the queen's power as regent ended with the maturity of her son, Mathilda is called back to the palace after a falling out with her sons because of her holiness and God's wrath on Otto I, taking the form of the depressed condition of the kingdom, for exiling her for her overzealous charity to the church and poor. As Otto's first wife Edith tells him, "you have been scourged by God for driving your esteemed mother from the kingdom as if she were a stranger. Therefore, this most holy woman must be asked back and, as is only fitting, she must occupy the first place in the kingdom."⁵⁰ At this point Mathilda, though her son is mature and married to Queen Edith (and later to Adelheid), reassumes an important role in the royal family, again guiding her son to be a just and pious king.⁵¹ In Adelheid's Epitaph it is noted that "After the most august Otto went the way of all flesh, the empress together with her son long and auspiciously oversaw the rule of the Roman empire."⁵² Thus, the queen's role as both regent and queen dowager provide her with yet another form of power and, as will be examined further, another path to sanctity in the image of Mary.

The transformation of queenly sanctity in the *vitae* of Mathilda and Adelheid set a model for future queens; it promoted their status as virtuous wives, pious and modest women, advocates of the Church, generous to the poor, and above all, as holy mothers of kings. Vauchez, in his study of the sanctity of the laity, identifies an aspect of the reasoning behind this transformation in that many of the religious writers of the Carolingian and Ottonian periods elevated the royal laity to sainthood to provide tangible images of sanctity and more closely related personages for future kings and queens to model themselves after.⁵³ Specifically, the *vitae* of Mathilda and Adelheid, commissioned by their descendants, target their posterity in that their aim is to remind future generations of their piety and just rule. Imitation of Mathilda is directly

advocated in a passage that refers to her as, "...Mathilda, the renowned queen, whose splendid life ought rightly to be imitated and whose virtue is all the more praiseworthy in light of the fragility of her sex."⁵⁴ It is also later stated that she lived a noble life and left a good example for her descendants.⁵⁵ The emphasis in Adelheid's Epitaph places even greater importance on establishing her as a model for future queens. Odilo of Cluny specifically explains that he recorded her life "so that eminent deeds expressed in even more eminent words might resound in the ears of empresses and queens. In turn, when they have heard great accounts of great things, eagerly following her of whom we speak on the path of integrity, then domestic administration shall flourish through them, just as the republic prospered far and wide through her."⁵⁶ From this purpose behind the hagiography that records the Lives of Mathilda and Adelheid, one can surmise that their Lives, as well as those of other similarly sainted queens of their time, did in fact become models that later queens actively attempted to emulate. In particular, Queen Emma of England, an early eleventh-century queen, makes direct and conscious attempts to both place herself in the company of other sainted queens and link herself, as queen of England, closely to Mary, Queen of Heaven. She even goes so far as to commission a work now known as the *Encomium Emmae Reginae* as a secular biography that praised her and her accomplishments as queen in such a way that they seem to imitate the hagiography of the times.⁵⁷ It is this source, as well as two very interesting surviving images of Emma, which further expound upon the argument that queens of the tenth and eleventh aspired to sanctity in the image of Mary as she was a natural role model for the queen.

Though Emma, as far as the historian can determine from surviving sources, never achieved sainthood or an established cult, she is still essential to this study in light of her attempts to do so, as well as the direct visual links between her and Mary that exist. Emma's queenship very much follows that of Adelheid and Mathilda. Emma, a queen in both of her two marriages (first to Aethelred, then to Cnut), was very much so a *consors regni*. Furthermore, she ruled for a time as a co-regent with her sons Harthacnut and Edward (The Confessor).⁵⁸ The *Encomium Emmae Reginae* exists as both a biography and a justification for her political power in the secular world, which exists largely in the succession dispute that occurred after Cnut's death.⁵⁹ At this point it is interesting to analyze her commissioning of the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, a source that closely emulates aspects of the traditional saints' *vita*, as an endeavor to justify her attempt to further elevate the power of the queen. At times it appears that she does so through the likeness of the *Encomium* to a saint's *Life*, which would link her reign to those of earlier sainted queens. In correlation with this idea, the prologues of *vitae* and that of the *Encomium*, both open with praise of the subject. The *Encomium* states, "May our Lord Jesus Christ preserve you, O Queen, who excel all those of your sex in the admirability of your way of life."⁶⁰ The prologue also falls in the pattern of a saints' *Life* in that the author demeans his work, avows its accuracy, and further praises the status of the queen.⁶¹ This parallels earlier queens' disguise of real power in their advocacy of the Church and in their saintly attributes and actions. Emma seeks to establish her motherly role of the king to enable her to partake actively in rulership of the kingdom with her sons, something that is explicitly stated in the final section of the *Encomium*. In a passage describing the joint rulership between Harthacnut and Edward and herself the author writes, "Here there is loyalty

among sharers of rule, here the bond of motherly and brotherly love if of strength indestructible.⁶³ It is important then to further consider Emma in her ties to queenly sanctity through the role of *mater Regis*, or king's mother, because even though she never attained sainthood, she is still eligible, as a queen, to draw tangible connections between Mary and herself, and these strongly documented attempts are vividly present in the two images of her that survive.

The first image of Emma that survives depicts her alongside her second husband, King Cnut, on the frontispiece to the *Liber Vitae* of New Minster Abbey in Winchester (fig. 4). Here she is identified by the name *AElfgifu* which she took when she married her first husband, King *AElthered*, who Cnut had conquered.⁶⁴ Emma is depicted as a married woman and is just as prominent in the illustration as is King Cnut. Size was significant in emphasizing the more important people in medieval art; because Emma is of the same proportion as her husband and no less prominent, the image leads one to believe that there was a relatively equal partnership between her and the king. Stafford, in her analysis of this image of Emma and Cnut, also focuses on the title of *regina* bestowed upon Emma. She links this title to the emphasis of Emma's queenly, and thus sacred, position in the kingdom.⁶⁵ Furthermore, above Emma and Cnut are Mary and St. Peter, respectively.⁶⁶ Emma and Mary are depicted gesturing in similar ways, in addition to being directly related in their placement within the image. These characteristics of the imagery linking Emma to Mary argue strongly that she indeed sought to draw a parallel between herself and Mary. Furthermore, as Mary gestures toward Christ, Emma gestures toward the cross, a representation of the Church. Perhaps this represents both Mary's power as an intercessor with Christ and Emma's role as an intercessor for the Church, the worldly representation of Christ. This is additionally reinforced in the placement of Mary and Emma on the right-hand side of Christ and the cross, respectively.⁶⁷ The idea of the queen as an intercessor in the image of Mary further solidifies the relationships discussed earlier between Mathilda and Adelheid and their qualities for queenly sanctity. Whereas this image does draw strong ties between Mary and Emma and establishes the role of the queen as important in the reign of Cnut, in it there are no discernable links to imagery of Mary as Queen of Heaven; Emma is a queen likening herself to Mary, but Mary is not necessarily a queen herself to begin with. Further emphasis of Emma as a queen, which is depicted in the second image, brings up an interesting concept concerning the evolution of Mary as Queen of Heaven in later years.

The second image of Emma is, in fact, the frontispiece of the *Encomium*, which depicts the importance of Emma in the co-regency between herself and her two sons (fig. 5). At this time her son Harthacnut is king, yet, his size, along with that of his half-brother Edward, and placement are minor when compared to the emphasis on Emma. Emma herself commissioned the *Encomium*, which could be a primary reason for her importance in this image. While her sons, smaller in proportion to Emma, peek in from the side, Emma is crowned and enthroned. These two factors are extremely important because, as Stafford explains, the laity were rarely enthroned in visual images from eleventh-century England, this honor being reserved for Christ or other important heavenly personages.⁶⁸ Furthermore, that a queen assumes the importance of enthronement at a time when the king is just beginning to be depicted thusly, speaks volumes for the importance that Emma is claiming for herself. Although

her queenship and individual power are emphasized here, Emma's power is still in relationship to her status as the mother of the king. Her sons may be depicted with minor importance, but they are still there; Emma's attempt at power would have had no chance without her role as mother. This is congruent with the imagery of Mary discussed earlier, due to the visual relationship that is nearly always present between herself and Christ (fig. 1 and 3). Therefore this image, as Stafford explains, "is an image of power, of a patroness, of a mother, powerful in crowned and enthroned maternity...Mother and sons, bound by family affection, rule together in a trinity of power which comes close to being compared with that of the Trinity itself. Here, then, is Emma as a crowned queen, but powerful especially as a mother, and as a mother of the king, *mater Regis*."²⁸ This image is especially important because Emma is depicted enthroned and crowned before many of the images of Mary enthroned as the Queen of Heaven were created. As the ties that Emma sought to place between herself and Mary in the earlier image, the historian must infer at this impasse that the same relationship is emphasized here, yet here Emma enthrones herself, as is only common in images of Christ. Perhaps, in her assertion of the throne and in her emulation of Mary, Emma provides a secular precursor to the resurgence in Mary's importance and her own enthronement as the Queen of Heaven, which began to occur in the twelfth century.

This study has, in part, examined the evolution of queenship in the tenth and eleventh centuries, in that it was closely tied to the evolving ideals of sanctity that were ascribed to the queen. As discussed earlier, it was her saintly characteristics that allowed the queen an acceptable avenue of power, through her combined roles as pious intercessor, *consors regni*, and as a holy mother of kings. Furthermore, the complex combination of roles which the queen fulfilled, and were, as is described in the *vitae* of Mathilda and Adelheid, the very things that made her holy, brings into play a strong relationship between sainted queens and Mary herself. In the tenth and eleventh centuries motherhood and domesticity were emphasized as saintly qualities of the queen, not impediments to spiritual growth as they had been for earlier female saints, and even earlier sainted queens. This is evident in the *vitae* of Mathilda and Adelheid, in which the two women are consistently praised for their roles as good wives, good mothers, and as family matriarchs. This transformation of queenly sanctity parallels, and even predates slightly, the evolution of the iconography of Mary as the Queen of Heaven.

As discussed earlier, there was always a strong tie between female sanctity and emulation of Mary, present in the idealization of virginity; however, as I have argued, the elevated status of the queen as the wife and mother of kings allowed her to more completely emulate Mary through motherhood. Conjugal relations between the king and queen could not be a barrier to her sanctity because the kingdom depended on an heir, and the necessity of intercourse could even be ignored almost completely if one only recognized her desexualized relationship as mother to her son. These queens, Mathilda, Adelheid, and Emma, are important to a discussion on both the transformation of queenship and queenly sanctity; however, they also provide valuable insight on the evolution of the iconography of Mary as Queen of Heaven. They are sainted for their motherhood of kings, linking them to Mary, and Mary is later strongly reestablished as a queen perhaps because of the importance that these women ascribed

to that role. These women ruled with their husbands and sons over earthly kingdoms and they gave birth to sons who were kings. Twelfth-century writers, emphasizing Mary as a queen, provide earthly reasons for the heavenly crowning of Mary. One such author, Odo of Morimond, deemed Mary a queen because Christ, her son, was a king at birth.⁶⁹ Mary Stroll, in her examination of *Maria Regina*, explains Mary that, "The idea of a 'regni consortium' evolved in which Mary, the queen of the world, sits as the right side of her son, and reigns with him in heaven."⁷⁰ Here is yet another tie to the roles that Mathilda, Adelheid, and Emma played as regents with their sons. Whether or not these earthly queens were the models for the later emphasis of Mary as Queen of Heaven, it is evident that their sanctity, or aspired sanctity in Emma's case, was indeed in the image of Mary. They were pious women, merciful intercessors, generous philanthropists, and most importantly holy vessels in their motherhood of royal sons; these queens and the new form of sanctity they embodied provided positive feminine images of female sanctity that would become models for later queens and perhaps even the evolution of Mary's role as Queen of Heaven.



Figure 1. Madonna della Clemenza, early 8th century. (Photograph: Bibliotheca Hertziana, Rome)

Reprinted from Mary Stroll, "Maria Regina: Papal Symbol," in *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe*, ed. Anne J. Duggan (Woodbridge, Suffolk, Great Britain: The Boydell Press, 1997), 193.



Figure 2. Chapel of John VII, St Peter's Rome: Vatican Library, MS Vat. Lat. 6439, fols 260-1.

Reprinted from Mary Stroll, "Maria Regina: Papal Symbol," in *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe*, ed. Anne J. Duggan (Woodbridge, Suffolk, Great Britain: The Boydell Press, 1997), 194.



Figure 3. The so-called Quintity, from the prayer book of Aelfwine, abbot of the New Minster, London, British Library, Cotton Titus D xxvii, fol. 75v.

Reprinted from Pauline Stafford, "Emma: The Powers of the Queen in the Eleventh Century," in *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe*, ed. Anne J. Duggan (Woodbridge, Suffolk, Great Britain: The Boydell Press,



Figure 4. *Emma (Ælfgifu) and Cnut, from the Liber Vitae of New Minster Abbey, Winchester, British Library, Stowe MS 944, fol. 6*

Reprinted from Pauline Stafford, "Emma: The Powers of the Queen in the Eleventh Century," in *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe*, ed. Anne J. Duggan (Woodbridge, Suffolk, Great Britain: The Boydell Press, 1997), 24.



ditional MS 33244, fol. 1v

Reprinted from Pauline Stafford, "Emma: The Powers of the Queen in the Eleventh Century," in *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe*, ed. Anne J. Duggan (Woodbridge, Suffolk, Great Britain: The Boydell Press, 1997), 25.

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Endnotes

- ¹ *Vita* (plural form: *vitae*) is Latin for life. The term pertains to a saints' Life, which is synonymous with the term saints' *vita*.
- ² Queen Mathilda (c. 895-968) was the wife of King Henry and the mother of King Otto I, Holy Roman Emperor. Her Life survives in two versions known as The "Older Life" and the "Later Life" of Queen Mathilda, both Lives are anonymous.
- ³ Queen Adelheid (c. 930-999) was the wife of Otto I. She was crowned Holy Roman Empress and was the mother of King Otto II. She was one of the first canonized saints, canonized in 1097 by Pope Urban II, and her Life survives in Odilo of Cluny's Epitaph and in other versions that reflect strong reference to the Epitaph.
- ⁴ Franca Ela Consolino, "Female Asceticism and Monasticism in Italy from the Fourth to the Eighth Centuries," in *Women and Faith: Catholic Religious Life in Italy from Late Antiquity to the Present*, eds. Lucetta Scaraffia and Gabriella Zarri (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), 20.
- ⁵ E. Ann Matter, "Mystical Marriage," in *Women and Faith: Catholic Religious Life in Italy from Late Antiquity to the Present*, eds. Lucetta Scaraffia and Gabriella Zarri (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), 35.
- ⁶ "By the latter half of the fourth century, a proliferation of writings, in both East and West, exhorted virgins and widows to take vows of chastity....Because sexual attraction was a consequence of the Fall, a virginal life, which imitated that of the angels, offered those who practiced it a privileged position, an earthly anticipation of the joys of paradise. The woman who chose to dedicate herself to God overcame the weakness of her own sex and became a *mulier virilis*, capable of competing in virtue with men. Marriage, by contrast, established to populate the world, was no longer necessary now that the goal had been achieved. Refusing a physical maternity, therefore, not only freed virgins from the risks of pregnancy but also offered them a rich spiritual maternity with a view to the afterlife." (Consolino, 11.)
- ⁷ Heffernan, 250.
- ⁸ 1 Cor. 7:8-9, 34 KJB (King James Bible).
- ⁹ Vauchez, *Lay People's Sanctity in Western Europe*, 25.
- ¹⁰ Heffernan, 260.
- ¹¹ Giulia Barone, "Society and Women's Religiosity, 750-1450," in *Women and Faith: Catholic Religious Life in Italy from Late Antiquity to the Present*, eds. Lucetta Scaraffia and Gabriella Zarri (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), 55.
- ¹² Mary as a queen was emphasized in Byzantium through the cult of Theotokos. Mosaics that survive from that period depict Mary enthroned and crowned with the Christ child due to this Eastern influence. Figure 1 depicts the Madonna della Clemenza enthroned and crowned with the infant Christ. A further early illustration of Mary as queen was created under the papacy of John VII between 705 and 707; a mosaic in the oratory of St. Peter's, represented here (fig. 2) in a watercolor reproduction by Giacomo Grimaldi, depicts Mary crowned, an inscription that names her the genetrix of God, and Pope John VII as her servant. (Mary Stroll, "Maria Regina: Papal Symbol," in *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe*, ed. Anne J. Duggan [Woodbridge, Suffolk, Great Britain: The Boydell Press, 1997], 176-177.)
- ¹³ Ibid., 175.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., 177.

- ¹⁵ Pauline Stafford, "Emma: The Powers of the Queen in the Eleventh Century," in *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe*, eds. Anne J. Duggan (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 1997), 13.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., 17.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., 22.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ John Carmi Parsons, "'Never was a body buried in England with such solemnity and honour': The Burials and Posthumous Commemorations of English Queens to 1500," in *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe*, ed. Anne J. Duggan (Woodbridge, Suffolk, Great Britain: The Boydell Press, 1997), 333.
- ²¹ Sean Gilsdorf, trans., "The 'Later Life' of Queen Mathilda," in *Queenship and Sanctity: The Lives of Mathilda and the Epitaph of Adelheid*, trans. and intro. Sean Gilsdorf (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 96-97.
- ²² Sean Gilsdorf, trans., "The 'Older Life' of Queen Mathilda," in *Queenship and Sanctity: The Lives of Mathilda and the Epitaph of Adelheid*, trans. and intro. Sean Gilsdorf (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 83.
- ²³ Odilo of Cluny, "The Epitaph of Adelheid," in *Queenship and Sanctity: The Lives of Mathilda and the Epitaph of Adelheid*, trans. and intro. Sean Gilsdorf (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 131.
- ²⁴ Ibid., 132.
- ²⁵ Heinrich Fichtenau, *Living in the Tenth Century: Mentalities and Social Orders*, trans. Patrick J. Geary (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 92.
- ²⁶ Pauline Stafford, "The Portrayal of Royal Women in England, Mid-Tenth to Mid-Twelfth Centuries," in *Medieval Queenship*, ed. John Carmi Parsons (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 152.
- ²⁷ Fichtenau, 180.
- ²⁸ Stroll, *Maria Regina*, 177-178.
- ²⁹ Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, "Female Sanctity: Public and Private Roles," in *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, eds. Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Athens, Georgia: The University Press of Georgia, 1988), 117.
- ³⁰ Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, "'Golden Wombs': Motherhood and Sanctity," in *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society, ca. 500-1100* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 218.
- ³¹ Gilsdorf, trans., *The "Later Life" of Queen Mathilda*, 115.
- ³² Barone, 48.
- ³³ McNamara, *Imitatio Helenae*, 69.
- ³⁴ McNamara, *The Need to Give*, 200.
- ³⁵ Ibid., 201.

- ³⁶ Stafford, *The Portrayal of Royal Women in England*, 146-147.
- ³⁷ Gilsdorf, trans., *The "Later Life" of Queen Mathilda*, 98.
- ³⁸ Stafford, *Emma*, 13.
- ³⁹ Fichtenau, 176.
- ⁴⁰ McNamara, *Imitatio Helenae*, 70.
- ⁴¹ Fichtenau, 179.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 175.
- ⁴³ Stafford, *Emma*, 10.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.
- ⁴⁵ Andre Poulet, "Capetian Women and the Regency: The Genesis of a Vocation," in *Medieval Queenship*, ed. John Carmi Parsons (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 106.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 111.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 106.
- ⁴⁸ Gilsdorf, trans., *The "Later Life" of Queen Mathilda*, 101.
- ⁴⁹ Gilsdorf, trans., *The "Older Life" of Queen Mathilda*, 77.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 78.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 79.
- ⁵² Odilo of Cluny, 132.
- ⁵³ Vauchez, *Lay Peoples' Sanctity in Western Europe*, 22.
- ⁵⁴ Gilsdorf, trans., *The "Later Life" of Queen Mathilda*, 88.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.
- ⁵⁶ Odilo of Cluny, 128.
- ⁵⁷ McNamara, *Imitatio Helenae*, 73.
- ⁵⁸ Stafford, *Emma*, 7.
- ⁵⁹ Stafford, *The Portrayal of Royal Women in England*, 163.
- ⁶⁰ Alistair Campbell, Alistair, ed., *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, intro. Simon Keynes (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 5.
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, 53.
- ⁶³ Stafford, *Emma*, 4.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Anne J. Duggan, ed., *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, Great Britain: The Boydell Press, 1997), xvi.

⁶⁶ Stafford, *Emma*, 4.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Stroll, 178.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*