

*Empress Adelheid and Countess Matilda: Medieval Female Rulership and the Foundations of European Society*, by Penelope Nash. Queenship and Power. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. Pp. xxxii+292. ISBN: 9781137590886.

This is a much-needed book and a topic that is so very attractive. Who has not wanted to read a good biography of Matilda of Tuscany? Or to know more about how Adelheid, Queen of Italy, managed to take her huge Italian inheritance to Otto I and become Empress Adelheid? One emerges from its reading to at last understand (or at least know where to turn for) the formal relationships among the three *dominae imperiales*: Empresses Adelheid and Theophanu and Abbess Matilda of Quedlinburg, who were joint regents for Otto III, and to be assured that the life of Matilda of Tuscany extended well beyond an encounter with Henry IV and Gregory VII at Canossa.

Penelope Nash compares each woman's accomplishments in roles once too easily assigned only to men. We see her mapping the diplomata for Empress and Countess alike to show the reach of their respective authorities. She consults the various lives and chronicles for evidence of their rule, of their military accomplishments, of their reorientation of itineraries, and for their participation in the rule of minors. She shows the battles won against political opponents. Overall, she concentrates on an enumeration of all such things that are associated with male rule.

But that is a very old-fashioned way to approach the question of women ruling. A more balanced account might look as well at how these women rulers exercised the rule so often associated with males along with more commonly accepted female roles—for instance, the concerns about religion and memory evoked so well by Elisabeth van Houts. She might have looked at how religious bequests could be used strategically to enhance power, as Erin Jordan has done for the countesses of Flanders. Indeed, to describe the Empress Adelheid sharing a regency with her daughter Matilda, abbess of Quedlinburg, and with Theophanu, should lead to some discussion of the relationship of two Empresses with important houses of nuns, like Quedlinburg, Gandersheim, and Essen, which were important centers of learning, book production, and scholarly activities as well as impressive artistic production. The difficulties of Hrotsvita of Gandersheim in writing a history of Otto I are referred to, but not the question of whether the *Annales* of Quedlinburg was indeed (as is now thought) written by a nun, or why the history of Edith, Adelheid's predecessor as wife of Otto I, should be sought out by an abbess of Essen.

In fact Nash's examination of such formal remains of power as coins or diplomata has not pushed the boundaries very far. She points to pennies that bear Adelheid's name on one side and Otto's on the other, but does not ask how many of these coins survive. Did they circulate widely, as published hoards might tell us? What is their relationship (in terms of such things as weight and fineness) to earlier Carolingian issues? Where were they minted, and was there a crisis or a celebration that occasioned their issue, or simply new silver finds?

Similarly, in counting diplomata, their dates, and place of issue, Nash does an excellent job of tracing variations in how these two women are referenced in the charters but does not describe who was writing the charters making these references. Did these women have their own scribes, separate from those of their consorts? Did they always use the same formulae for dating, sealing, and composition of text, or did these vary from those of her husband in Adelheid's case, or according to place and date in Matilda's? What was the quality and size of parchments when they survive, and did they vary from those issued by kings? A much more detailed analysis of the diplomata could have considered religious aspects of these acts, whether bequests at the moment of their own or some loved one's death, stays at religious houses and the consequent gifts, or support for or commissioning of reliquaries and textiles (that might survive) for the churches they patronized. To show that women ruled does not require effacing all other aspects of their lives, even if those other aspects have too often been seen as separate women's work.

The framing of the study itself is more problematic and will give pause to many of the readers of this journal. It opens by presenting a paradigm that appears to spring from a time-warp where the opinions of Georges Duby, David Herlihy, and R. W. Southern still hold sway. That so-called paradigm has now been overturned and has been so for a long time. The author should have been cognizant of that because many of the authors cited in the bibliography have participated in that revolution. It is an insult to feminist readers to present "the paradigm" as if still alive and to waffle about what its conclusions tell us about a long-dead paradigm. Indeed, this journal has recently published a series of conference papers from sessions called "Beyond Women and Power," organized with the hope that we did not have to fight or even present that paradigm any longer. There is indeed so much out there, including in the pages of this journal, suggesting that such a battle is over.

Nevertheless, this is a wonderful book to have on your shelf, if for no other reason than the carefully outlined family trees that connect the stories of two famous women, the detailed chronologies for each, and a note on names: "The

following table lists those people whose names are apt to be confused.” This last can be a lifesaver when attempting to write about Quedlinburg or Gandersheim or any other Ottonian topic. What a clever thing to provide right at the outset! I wish I’d had it several months ago when I was writing about Ottonian nuns, whose powerful female patrons cannot be left out of the study.

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