François Chausson/Sylvain Destephen (eds.): *Augusta, Regina, Basilissa.* La souveraine de l'Empire romain au Moyen Âge. Entre héritages et métamorphoses. Paris: Éditions de Boccard 2018 (De l'archéologie à l'histoire 71). 300 p., 15 ill. € 49.00. ISBN: 978-2-7018-0554-2.

For several years now, scholars of ancient and medieval history have endeavoured to close the gap between the study of male and female rulers. By considering new approaches to the history of gender, such undertakings seek to go beyond an antiquarian discussion of pre-modern female rulers.[1] When questioning traditional periodisations, it appears extremely useful to approach pre-modern female rulers and wives of male rulers from an epoch-spanning perspective. In 2016, Francesca Cenerini and Ida Gilda Mastrorosa tried to close this gap with the anthology "Donne, istituzioni e società fra tardo antico e alto medioevo", which regrettably relied on a rather traditional approach to the topic.[2]

The two Parisian historians of antiquity François Chausson and Sylvain Destephen also witnessed this desideratum in scholarship with the volume "*Augusta, Regina, Basilissa*: La souveraine de l'Empire romain au Moyen Âge – Entre héritages et métamorphoses". The volume aims to reconstruct the legacy of ancient notions of ruling women in the multiple and transformative local contexts of the medieval world. Counting the Byzantine empire to the ancient world, their overall goal is achieved throughout the individual contributions. The volume is divided into three parts: the introduction is followed by a reconstruction of the 'ancient heritage' ("héritage antique", 23–80) and two sections dedicated to the female rulers of the medieval West ("Moyen Âge occidental", 81–140) and East ("Moyen Âge oriental", 141–284) respectively. It is precisely the inclusion of the latter section, which integrates contributions on too often neglected areas of the Eastern world,

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1    Exemplarily for an antiquarian and 'classically male' treatment of this subject: E. Kornemann: Große Frauen des Altertums. Im Rahmen zweitausendjährigen Weltgeschehens. Leipzig 1942 (Sammlung Dieterich 86). For a social and gender-historical engagement with female rulers in ancient history: A. Kolb (ed.): *Augustae*. Machtbewusste Frauen am römischen Kaiserhof? Herrschaftsstrukturen und Herrschaftspraxis II. Akten der Tagung in Zürich 18.–20. 9. 2008. Berlin 2010; for a study of female rulers in the early Middle Ages: M. Hartmann: Die Königin im frühen Mittelalter. Stuttgart 2009.

2    F. Cenerini/I. G. Mastrorosa (eds.): Donne, istituzioni e società fra tardo antico e alto medioevo. Lecce 2016 (La botte di Diogene 8).

that makes the volume all the more comprehensive and exciting. Published by two classicists, it is rather surprising that three quarters of the book are dedicated to the Middle Ages.

François Chausson opens the volume with a problematisation of the modern terms used to indicate female rulers ("La souveraine en titres et en actes: Une résille de mots et de pouvoirs; un éventail de périodes et de lieux", 7–19). Our notions of 'queen' and 'princess' are embedded in the idea of early modern absolutism and cannot be used to refer to an *augusta*, *regina*, or *basilissa*. These were more often sisters and mothers to the ruler. After reconstructing the history of how these ancient titles came to be, Chausson calls for the use of the more neutral term of "souveraine" which can refer to all forms of pre-modern queenship. He then offers a short historiographical review but omits the opportunity to discuss the above-mentioned anthology by Cenerini and Mastrorosa.

In the following contribution, David Zakarian introduces the "héritage antique" with a fascinating chapter on the queens of Arsacid Armenia ("L'autorité et le pouvoir de la reine en Arménie arsacide", 23–36). Like Chausson, the author puts an emphasis on the historical terms used to describe the Armenian queens (*tiknaykʿ*, singular *tikin*) and proceeds by characterising their social role. In an environment characterised by clan structures, the social role of the *tikin* possessed a (sometimes more, sometimes less pronounced) religious legitimation and was linked with the concept of the *mater familias*. A woman could only acquire such role through a legitimate marriage, so concubines were socially excluded. The *tikin* was conceived as an extension of the highest female member within a patriarchal clan. An insult directed to the *tikin* was automatically directed to all Armenian people. Furthermore, the *tikin*'s power was visible on a symbolic and ceremonial level: in the absence of a male ruler, Queen Zarmanduxt actively took part in negotiations with the Persian king because the then-ruling general Manuel did not possess the authority necessary to negotiate with the Sasanid ruler.

Sylvain Destephen contributes with an outstanding chapter on the mobility of the Late Roman *augustae* ("En réprésentation et par délégation: La souveraine chrétienne sur les routes au Bas-Empire", 37–58). After summarising the symbolic role of the *augustae*, he characterises these female rulers as 'agents on special missions in the service of the emperors' ("des 'agentes' en mission extraordinaire au service des empereurs", 40). This is convincingly exemplified by three case studies on Constantine's ominous mother-in-law,

his mother Helena, and Aelia Eudocia. The reader might disagree with Destephen who claims that Constantine's mother-in-law was not Eutropia (the mother of his wife Fausta) but the anonymous mother of his alleged second wife. The author bases this conjecture upon a polemic by Julian (!) in which the apostate emperor attacked Constantine's alleged promiscuity.[3] This controversial interpretation does not invalidate Destephen's main argument. The author succeeds in showing that the *augustae* successfully secured the future of their respective dynasties through pilgrimages, be it by finding and acquiring relics, through their physical presence, or euergetic activities. Helena was able to embody a certain 'imperial presence' in the Eastern provinces which had been previously hostile to her son. In Jerusalem, Eudocia prayed for the survival of her newly born (only) daughter Licinia Eudoxia, thereby securing the preservation of the Theodosian dynasty. In the Holy Land, Eudocia also acted according to the ancient ideal of imperial euergetism (now reimagined as Christian *caritas*); a task her husband Theodosius II could not perform, being bound to the so-called 'Palastkaisertum'.[4] This euergetic behaviour enabled the *augusta* to establish a personal political network which she would use when going into voluntary exile after her separation from Theodosius.

Valérie Fauvinet-Ranson dedicates her contribution to the Ostrogothic ruler wives of sixth-century Italy ("Reines et princesses du royaume ostrogothique d'Italie au VIe siècle", 59–78). From scarce sources (except for Amalasvintha), she manages to reconstruct some structural peculiarities linked to their social and political role: these royal wives would always accompany their husbands on their campaigns. The chapter also rejects the common reading of Theodoric's marriage policy as a clever political strategy.[5] His strategy of marrying off his female family members to other Germanic rulers was moreover a normalised practice across the Germanic principalities that appeared as rather unusual in the Roman context. However, Theodoric also acted like a typical sonless Roman emperor when he married off his daughter to a nobleman elected to become his successor. By doing so, he tied the dynastic

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3    Iul. or. 7,227d.

4    For the so-called 'Palastkaisertum' see the fundamental study: R. Pfeilschifter: Der Kaiser und Konstantinopel. Kommunikation und Konfliktaustrag in einer spätantiken Metropole. Berlin/Boston 2013 (Millennium-Studien 44).

5    Exemplarily for this inexact view: H. Wiemer: Theoderich der Große. König der Goten, Herrscher der Römer. Eine Biographie. München 2018, 330–361.

succession to the Amal dynasty. Unsurprisingly, Fauvinet-Ranson pays particular attention to Amalasvintha (the only real female 'regent' of the Ostrogothic principality) and her characterisation by Cassiodorus. Initially, the Roman author only vaguely described her as a *domina* and addressed her with the official title of a *regina* only after the death of her son. Required to act as both a woman and a man in a male environment, she is described according to the female (Roman) canon of virtue and invested with male character traits. Since she could not rule alone as a woman, she accepted Theodahad as *consors regni*. Fauvinet-Ranson correctly recalls that Amalasvintha never married Theodohad, but instead described him as her sibling and compared their dual power to the moon and sun. Lastly, the author discusses the imperial equation of *augustae* with the Gothic *reginae* based on the ideal of *paideia*, their representation in public art, and the use of the same titles.

Régine Le Jan introduces the section on the medieval West with a contribution that looks at the Frankish queens in the *longue durée* ("Les reines franques du VIe au Xe siècle", 81–101). After a few introductory remarks, she turns to the social status and public presence ("visibilité") of these ruling women. She rightly – despite the scarcity of sources – emphasises that there was no official status of a queen among the Merovingians and that the term *regina* only referred to the wife of a *rex*. While the early Merovingians would form marriage connections with foreign princesses,[6] in later times, they went over to marrying local aristocrats. This can perhaps be interpreted beyond the author's remarks as a sign of the Merovingian dynasty's loss of importance. With the transition to the Pippinids and the formation of the Empire, the political importance and public role of female rulers increased. In 816, Ermengarde was even crowned by the Pope and proclaimed *augusta*. Le Jan interprets this as a sign of "ritualisation et liturgisation" (84); a process reflected in public rituals that led to the "développement d'un queenship" (87). However, she immediately relativises the importance of this development during the Pippinid era as both the Merovingian *reginae* and the Carolingian *augustae* had fulfilled a variety of political functions which attest to an equal degree of queenship. The Merovingian case remains far less documented. Finally, Le Jan highlights the developments of the tenth century, recording that Carolingian women were primarily traded as wives to young princes but

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6     See also Fauvinet-Ranson's related remarks in her contribution on the marriage policy of Theodoric the Great.

occasionally acted as army leaders (in the absence of men) and diplomats in various conflicts.

Geneviève Bührer-Thierry takes up this development with her contribution on Ottonian women ("Reines et impératrices à l'époque ottonienne", 103–120). She poses the central question about whether and to what extent we can speak of 'female power' ("pouvoir féminin", 103) during the Ottonian era. The author wants to answer this question by looking at forms of literary representation, as well as the networks and backgrounds of the Ottonian women. She points to the titles used by contemporary documents to refer to these women such as (most commonly) *consors regni* or *coimperatrix* and the 'masculinised' form of *Theophanius, gratia divina imperator augustus* that exclusively referred to Theophanu. Still, it remains highly uncertain to which extent these titles reflected the actual 'power relations' of the Ottonian women. I agree with Bührer-Thierry's fundamental conclusion that titles can shed light on the personal charisma of Theophanu and the 'import' of Byzantine traditions, without having to necessarily indicate an institutionalisation of queenship in the Ottonian period.

Murielle Gaude-Ferragu dedicates her excellent contribution to the queens of France between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries ("La reine de France au XIVe–XVe siècles", 121–137). In doing so, she investigates the exercise and representation of their authority and convincingly proves that the disappearance of the French queens from official records coincided with a 'clerical misogyny' ("misogynie cléricale", 123) arisen through a contemporary reception of Aristotle. In the Frankish empire and the kingdom of France, there was no strong tradition of displaying and depicting female power as was common to Byzantium and the Holy Roman Empire. This meant that the power of the French queen was essentially limited to indirect influence over her husband and sons. Nevertheless, the exercise of power over the (sometimes still underage) royal sons could be justified and legitimised as 'maternal love' ("amour maternel", 125). In late-medieval French representations, queens were increasingly assimilated to the figure of Mary, the Mother of God, and associated with her virtues; a process that Gaude-Ferragu defines as the female answer to the fourteenth-century 'over-sacralisation of the monarch' ("[sur]sacralisation du monarque", 130). In this respect, the recorded increase of public representations of the political body of the French queen appears unsurprising. Her public body served as a symbol and guarantor of dynastic continuity and to enhance the prestige of the

royal family. At the same time, the Marian assimilation to an 'allegorical body' ("corps allégorique", 133) served the "sursacralisation" of the ruling couple. The late-antique and Carolingian roots of these ideals are fundamental to understanding the representation of late-medieval French queens.[7] But for contemporary authors, the political remained bound to the male ruler. A politically active queen necessarily possessed a 'male heart in a female body'.

Jean-Claude Cheynet's fascinating contribution on Byzantine empresses between the eleventh and early thirteenth century ["Les impératrices Byzantines et leurs réseaux (1028–1203)", 141–158] introduces the third and final section of the volume. This appears as a sensible choice since all other medieval states of the Christian East can be situated within the Byzantine tradition of female rulers. The author describes how the role of the Byzantine *basilissa* had always been particularly prominent and found expression in phases of female autocracy (797– 802, 1042, 1055–1056). He exclusively concentrates on the *augoustai*; the twelve empresses who were also imperial wives rather than daughters, sisters, or mothers. The author differentiates between four types of structurally differing empresses: empresses who were rulers on their own right (Zoe, Theodora), wives of the heirs to the Byzantine throne (these were often foreigners), wives of successful usurpers, and empresses who acted as co-regents with male rulers. Zoe and Theodora III drew their authority and popularity from their image as embodiments of the long-established Macedonian dynasty. When exercising their power, they were excluded from the political networks around the male ruler and would therefore rely on the only group they could trust: the eunuchs. This is also the reason why foreign *augoustai* possessed no political connections and lacked a decisive power base. Their position would only improve with the birth of an heir, since the personal and political interests of the *augousta* and the *porphyrogennetos* would now coincide. On the other hand, the wives of successful usurpers, most of whom came from influential Byzantine aristocratic families, were able to use their well-established networks to ensure a successful usurpation. As an example of a female co-emperor, Cheynet chose Euphrosyne Doukaina Kamaterina whom the sources described as a

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7    Also, Le Jan's contribution on the ceremonial role of the female ruler. For the late-antique roots of the identification of female rulers with Mary: C. Angelidi: Pulcheria. La castità al potere (c. 399–c. 455). Milan 1998 (Donne d'Oriente e d'Occidente 5).

male co-emperor instead of a female *augousta*. Contrary to the scholarly consensus,[8] Cheynet convincingly shows that Euphrosyne played a major role in securing her husband's rule: when he was absent from the capital, she maintained order and suppressed usurpations. Since Alexios had no sons, it was up to Euphrosyne to choose a successor when he fell ill. The prominent political role of Euphrosyne was reflected by the author Niketas Choniates who described her as a quasi-'male' regent.

Next, Smilja Marjanović-Dušanić investigates the power of female rulers in medieval Serbia ("Le pouvoir féminin dans la Serbie médiévale", 159–188). She highlights the challenge of determining whether these figures possessed power at all, since the only available sources are explicitly hagiographic and mainly interested in the piety and holiness of these women. In these sources, the female rulers of Serbia distinguish themselves through their extraordinary Christian virtues, caritative work, the promotion of relic translations, and monastery foundations ("le canon du pouvoir idéal de la Serbie médiévale, reposant sur la formule tripartite souverain-moine-saint", 161). It should also be noted that Byzantine traditions gradually influenced understandings of Serbian queenship and its public display. The author refers to alternative sources and monarchical portraits but ultimately admits that (beyond recurrent Christian *topoi*) the actual political role of Serbian queens remains in the dark. Hence, the contribution presents itself as a listing of every mentioning of the Serbian queens. Only in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries did Serbian ruler mothers play a role in trying to secure the remaining autonomy of their sons' principalities against their powerful neighbours (Byzantium, Ottomans, Hungarians), even if that meant becoming vassals of adjacent empires. Serbian queens also played a prominent role in protecting the Orthodox faith, the quintessential scope of female rulers in medieval Serbia.

Lilyana Yordanova investigates how foreign ruler wives were integrated into the political structures of medieval Bulgaria ("Devenir tsaritsa de l'Empire bulgare au XIIIe–XIVe siècles", 189–214) and how and when these were perceived as 'foreign'. By looking at thirteenth-century female rulers who came from Cumania, Byzantium, or Serbia, she convincingly shows that

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8     L. Garland: Byzantine Empresses. Women and Power in Byzantium, AD 527–1204. London/New York 1999, 210–225.

these marriages secured political alliances and created legitimacy for the Bulgarian monarchy. After the Ottomans had become the dominant power in the Balkans, this system collapsed as no political marriages would take place with Muslim women. Through public rituals, these foreign princesses were invested with their new identity as *tsaritsa* and bearer of divine grace. The *tsaritsa* would often introduce traditions from her homeland to the Bulgarian court, especially if she was a Byzantine princess. As a *tsaritsa*, the female ruler of Bulgaria functioned as a mirror for the ideals of sanctity held by her subjects. However, no *tsaritsa* was ever directly addressed and venerated as a saint. Beginning with Michael II Assen and Irene Komnena, the complementarity of the ruling couple in public displays, art, and coinage was modelled after the Byzantine example. The public presence of the *tsaritsa* was legitimised through the display of 'genuinely feminine' virtues such as the love for her husband. Some *tsaritsi* promoted the translation of relics to the capital which strengthened their public image as 'friends' of the saints and contributed to developing a Bulgarian imperial ideology ("développement de l'idéologie impériale bulgare", 207). The *tsaritsi* would ask the saints for intercession to secure the reign and the salvation of the tsarist family. The foreign *tsaritsa* became fully integrated into the political life of the Bulgarian court which was reflected in her public image and the remembrance practices of the Bulgarian people.

Ioanna Rapti's subsequent contribution focuses on the queens of Cilicia ("Reines de Cilicie", 215–237). The contribution concentrates on visual sources since the literary documentation does not provide any relevant information. In the case of Cilician queens, it was precisely the right of being visually portrayed ("droit à l'image", 220) that distinguished them from other contemporary aristocratic women. The author of the contribution investigates the background, public image, and Armenian, Byzantine, and Levantine roots of the political status of these ruling women. The contribution focuses on three case studies around the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century queens Zabel, Keran, and Mariun. By looking at illuminations, Rapti convincingly shows that the political importance of the Cilician queens was extraordinary, as they appeared alongside their husbands in recurring *Deisis* and *Maiestas Domini* motifs. Following the Byzantine example, coins were forged which depicted king Het'um I and his wife Zabel as a ruling couple holding the cross. Zabel's extraordinary political status can be explained by the fact that she was the actual Cilician royal princess which meant that her husband owed his position to her alone. In addition, both Zabel and Keran were part

of typical Armenian clan structures and their mechanisms aimed at reaching compromises.[9] They gained their public significance as the bringers of harmony through their marriages into hostile families. Mariun was a rather extraordinary figure: through donations, she achieved the "sacralisation de la reine par son rôle presque sacerdotal" (233). In the 'Gospel of Queen Mariun', she played an active role in the salvation of humankind, which underlined her importance to the executive clergy of the country. In Rapti's plausible argument, this represented an additional sphere in which the queen possessed agency and that was situated outside of clan politics.

Marie Guérin investigates the princesses of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Morea and Athens ("Princesses de Morée et duchesses d'Athènes", 239–257) and, by doing so, she inaugurates a completely new field of research. After explaining that these principalities were more closely related to the 'imported' Latin feudal tradition ("féodalité d'importation", 252) than the Byzantine one, she explains that the title of the female ruler must be rather regarded as a 'symbolic gift' ("cadeau symbolique", 240) given to the woman by her royal husband. Still (or perhaps precisely because of this), the female rulers of Morea and Athens were able to develop political agency and acquire positions of power like no others in the Christian East. As in the Latin tradition, women could inherit the monarchical dignity which put Isabelle de Villehardouin and her daughter Matilda of Hainaut in the exceptional position of becoming the heirs to the Morean principality. These female rulers could even pass on their titles, acquire vassals, and take legislative initiatives which they would enforce side-by-side with their husbands. This extraordinary political agency was expressed in visual representations since they had the right to coinage and use of seals. Furthermore, they likely practiced a kind of 'itinerant queenhood', were present on the battlefield, and conducted diplomatic negotiations. Guérin's study of female rulers who – entangled between the Latin feudal ideal and Byzantine traditions – would gain greater political agency than their Latin or Byzantine counterparts, is highly impressive and gives us hope for further original interventions in this new area of study.

In his contribution, Benoît Joudiou studies the princesses of the Romanian lands ["Les princesses des pays roumains (Valachie, Moldavie, XIVe–XVIe

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9       See the contribution of David Zakarian.

siècle)", 259–283]. He explains that the structures of these principalities (understood as more or less clearly defined territories ruled by powerful 'gang leaders') made it almost impossible for the wife of a ruler to play a political role. In this context, the line of succession was exclusively male. However, Joudiou does not rule out the possibility of these wives exercising indirect power over their sons and husbands – a commonality to every monarchical system. The Romanian princes increasingly tried to marry daughters of the royal houses of the Balkans to enhance their prestige and legitimise their rule within the patchwork of late-medieval Eastern Christian principalities. In doing so, they tried to position themselves within the old Byzantine and Serbian imperial traditions. Since leadership was constantly contested, this could help to strengthen the claims of a prince's son over the monarchical succession. After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the marriages of Eudocia of Kiev and Maria of Mangup brought the imperial title and imperial-orthodox ideology to Moldova. As a result, the attire of the late-Byzantine rulers now appeared in Romanian monarchical representations. Still, the institutional role of the female ruler remained marginal; just a few of them could become political agents by relying on their personalities and exercising influence over the male members of their families. Only in the sixteenth century would some of these female rulers (amongst others Helena Branković) be able to become active regents to their underaged sons. Also in this case, female rulers did not possess any titles or insignia, nor were they ascribed with divine grace. In Christian territories, they mainly acted as promoters of relic translations. The extent to which the political role of the female ruler remained limited is reflected by the sources: when the typical Romanian ruler wife took up political action, she was seen doing so exclusively out of love for her son or husband. Nonetheless, all political interventions by women were viewed negatively. Joudiou's conclusion is, therefore, rather ambivalent: women were useful for legitimising Romanian rule, while their political action remained in the shadow.

The concluding contribution by Marie-Karine Schaub (285–298) summarises the results of the individual chapters and formulates new questions for future scholarship. She recognises a development from the rather influential female rulers of the tenth century to the marginal women of the late Middle Ages. From the sixteenth century onwards, female rulers regained a certain degree of influence and political power. Implicitly borrowing from Ernst Kantorowicz and focusing on Maria Theresa, she conceives a distinction between the 'public' ("personne publique") and the 'private person' ("personne

privée") of the premodern female ruler (287). However, she rather incorrectly states that the power of a female ruler was solely based on her 'private person'. She convincingly pleads for the use of the concept of queenship (used throughout the volume) as this facilitates comparisons between different times and forms of female monarchical rule.

What all contributions to this volume (and beyond) have in common is the focus on female rule within patriarchal societies, which conceived female political power as derived from the ruling husband or son. For various reasons, these husbands and sons decided (or were forced) to make their rule complementary to that of a woman. Thus, the power of a female ruler was essentially based on her personal authority and only rarely on an institutionalised role. This is reflected in female titles which were exclusively 'feminisations' of male titles rather than institutionalised terms comparable to the male counterpart. For nearly every century and cultural context, the biggest challenge is presented by the surviving sources, which were written by men for a male audience who were rather uninterested in female rulers. Female rulers are hardly featured in sources and rarely make an appearance in aversive polemical texts whose informative value is again low.

The volume by Chausson and Destephen brings together fascinating contributions that enrich current research on ancient and medieval female rulers. It is precisely in its comparative perspective across temporal, geographical, and even religious boundaries that lies the attractivity of the term queenship. By including the Islamic world and bridging the divide between East and West, it becomes possible to shed new light on what connected female rule across Eurasia. The volume by Chausson and Destephen introduces us to a new and unexplored field of research.

Alexander Thies, Universität Bern
Historisches Institut
Abteilung für Alte Geschichte und Rezeptionsgeschichte der Antike
alexander.thies@hist.unibe.ch

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