

Melisende: A True Queen

By Jennifer Edie

The idea of a dynasty was the backbone of medieval politics. A period of royalty and lordship, the middle ages' political integrity hinged on the idea that the blue blood of leadership flowed through a monarch to the child. However, in this patriarchal society what would happen if no male heir was produced? How can one continue a dynasty when only daughters are born? These questions had no definite answer, and throughout the middle ages the necessity to produce a male heir was one of the largest problems faced by rulers. Louis VII of France clearly stated the view of rulers concerning the need for a male heir in 1165 when his first male son was born:

"An ardent desire that God would give us progeny of the better sex inflamed us, for we had been terrified by a multitude of daughters."<1> King Louis VII fully expressed the need for a member of the "better sex" in this one simple line. For without a male heir a simple line is exactly what the royal family would lack. There would be no heir apparent that would demand respect and be capable of ruling a great nation, or would there? Must gender play a role in the choosing of an heir or is it possible that when there are only a "multitude of daughters" that a woman can inherit rulership?

Although Louis VII managed to avoid the problems that would come with only female offspring, not all of his contemporaries did. Baldwin II of Jerusalem was given the terrifying multitude that Louis and his wife had prayed to God to keep away. The Kingdom of Jerusalem would be faced with the problem of female succession five times during the reign of Baldwin's dynasty from 1099 to 1228. However, the dynasty founded by Baldwin II managed to thrive under these less than ideal conditions by reinventing the role of a queen.<2>

Before diving into the roles that the Queens of Jerusalem played in the Latin Kingdom, let us first view the over all history and culture of the area leading up to the multitude of daughters. Jerusalem was the center of the world for many religious groups, and as the place of the death and resurrection of Christ to the Christian world it held this place of honor as well. For years Jerusalem had been the goal of pilgrimage, but now the pilgrims traveled to Jerusalem carrying weapons and dreaming of a kingdom. The crusade began on November 27, 1095 when Pope Urban first preached the Crusade. With the cry that it was the will of God, the crusaders set forth to free the holy city of Jerusalem from the infidel. After much pillaging, sieging, and plundering the crusaders arrived before Jerusalem on June 7, 1099. On July 15, 1099, the crusaders stormed the city of Jerusalem, and with much bloodshed and slaughter it was taken.<3> The first ruler of Jerusalem was Godfrey de Bouillon, however, he was not a king. Elected by the crusaders, Godfrey would not wear a crown where the son of God had worn a crown of thorns. However, his successor had no such qualms about the title of king. Baldwin of Edessa, the brother of Godfrey, was hastily chosen as king in order to avoid a theocratic rule. On Christmas Day of 1100, Baldwin was crowned in the Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem.<4> Baldwin

accepted this position despite the superior wealth of his previous holding, Antioch. He seemed to have recognized the possibilities and prestige as ruler of Jerusalem. The king had many successes. He was brave and had an energy that demanded respect. Baldwin died on April 2, 1118 and was succeeded by his able nephew, Baldwin of Bourges. King Baldwin II is the very same king who will be faced with daughters only. Under Baldwin II the Kingdom of Jerusalem reached its greatest zenith of power. A Muslim author of the time, Ibn-al-Athir, wrote this of King Baldwin II success:

The Franks were everywhere feared, only Aleppo, Hims, Hamah, and Damascus remained in the hands of the true believers; Aleppo had to pay one-half of its income; Damascus had to submit to visits from Christian agents who released all Christian slaves who desire their liberty; the other cities were in still worse state.<5>

And so with his great power Baldwin the II ruled the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem wisely until his death in 1131.

With the death of Baldwin II we find ourselves on the brink of our study of the queens of Jerusalem. The first and I will propose only true Queen of Jerusalem was Queen Melisende. The question of who would succeed King Baldwin II to the throne was raised three years prior to the king's death. Baldwin arranged for his daughter to marry Count Fulk of Anjou. William of Tyre, the principal historian for the Latin kingdom, offers little insight into the mind of Melisende at this time. However, in the history he wrote from 1167 to 1187 he does show that like most noble marriages of the time this was a political alliance and not a marriage made out of love. It would seem that Melisende was little more than a political pawn at this point, but in the very same paragraph William shows that Melisende was given an equal share of the power. He wrote:

Then, on August 21, in the year 1131 of the Incarnation of the Lord, the king died. On September 14, the day of the exaltation of the Holy Cross, Count Fulk and his wife Melisende was solemnly crowned and consecrated, according to custom, in the church of the Sepulcher of the Lord, by William, patriarch of Jerusalem, of happy memory.<6>

So, it is shown that not only did the power of King Baldwin II flow from him to Melisende, but Melisende was also crowned on an equal basis with her husband.

This leads us to our primary question: did Melisende rule as a political entity during this time? It would appear that the answer was yes. William of Tyre repeatedly speaks of the period in which Melisende and Fulk ruled as one of joint rule. Hans Eberhard Mayer, a twentieth century historian of the Latin kingdom, puts forth the theory that quarrels in the beginning of the joint reign resulted from parties of Nobles protesting Fulk's heavy-handed rule and instead supported Melisende and her closer involvement in the government of the Latin Kingdom.<7> William of Tyre offers a different explanation as

to why there was often turmoil between the king and queen during the beginning of their rule. He writes this of the situation:

There arose from causes unknown a serious enmity between the king and Count Hugh. Some said that the king cherished a deep distrust of the count, who was rumored to be on too familiar terms with the queen, and of this there seemed to be many proofs. Hence, spurred on by a husband's jealousy, the king is said to have conceived an inexorable hatred against the man.<8>

Whether it was a political power struggle or a matter of adultery, the conclusion to this battle is agreed upon by both authors. Following this fight, Melisende was in a terrible state. No one could approach her without feeling her wrath. It would appear that King Fulk was not excused from this wrath. William stated that after this Fulk did not make a move without first seeking Melisende's knowledge or assistance.<9> In fact the six surviving acts issued during the joint reign of Fulk and Melisende bear the consent of both reigning rulers. The singular power of Queen Melisende is shown through the reports of this time. In the following two reports Queen Melisende uses political authority independently. It was reported in court documents that, "In 1149 Queen Melisende confirmed that John, Lord of Bethsan, had previously sold castle Assera to the Hospitallers<10>." Another report stated, "A charter shows that it was Queen Melisende who had originally given the trans-Jordanian lands to Viscount Hulric, thus confirming that these were part of the Roman domain<11>." In both of these reports Queen Melisende is the single confirming voice to a matter of political nature. These two reports go a long way to proving the theory that Queen Melisende was an active, reigning queen during her joint rule with her husband Fulk.

One can also say that Melisende herself believed that a woman was capable of strong leadership through her creation of the convent at Bethany for her sister Yvetta. William of Tyre wrote that Melisende felt that it was unfitting for a king's daughter to be subject to anybody. So she surveyed her lands, and took upon the enterprise of founding a convent in which her sister could be placed as the mother superior of the convent. This was no small undertaking. Melisende took in many surveys before choosing Bethany. She chose Bethany because it was the biblical home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus the great friends of Jesus Christ. However, the lands of Bethany were not under royal ownership. They were held by the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. In order to receive Bethany from the Church, Melisende gave to them Tekoah, the city of prophets. This real estate venture was not the end of Melisende's work in regards to the convent at Bethany. The city of Bethany was exposed to possible enemy attack because of its position on the edge of the desert. In order to safeguard the convent Melisende commissioned the building of a "strongly fortified tower of hewn and polished stone." When this was done, Melisende then granted the convent enough temporal possessions so that they would not be inferior to any other monastery of men or women. One of the numerous possessions that Melisende bestowed upon the convent was the walled city of Jericho and its dependencies. Still Melisende's role as benefactor to the convent did not end at this point.

Throughout her lifetime Melisende would continually bestow gifts upon the convent at Bethany and her most loved sister.<12> The creation of the convent at Bethany was a large and continuous undertaking. By taking on this project Melisende was showing her own power as a royal woman. Her own activity plus the view of the ability and strength of noble women shown by Melisende harkens back to her perception of her own power.

It appears that she never viewed herself as a merely a transmitter of the blood of her father, but as a queen or *Regina* in her own right. Prior to her father's death Melisende signed charters with the title "*filia regis et regni Hierosolimitani haeres*" ("daughter of the King and heir to the kingdom of Jerusalem")<13> These strong words show a strength and belief in her own power that would be necessary to rule her kingdom throughout her lifetime.

Melisende had her chance to reign without a king by her side upon the death of her husband in autumn of 1143. William of Tyre says that upon the death of King Fulk, "the royal power passed to the Lady Melisende, a queen beloved of God, to whom it belonged by hereditary right."<14> With the king's death a great and powerful event took place in the reign of Queen Melisende, she was anointed alongside her son. William of Tyre writes, "Baldwin was anointed, consecrated and crowned, together with his mother, in the church of the Sepulcher of the Lord."<15> The ritual of anointing is a powerful one. With roots that go back to biblical time the process of anointing changed a man or women into the anointed ruler under God. Once Melisende was anointed, she gained the authority of a divinely chosen ruler. Her son Baldwin III was only thirteen at the time, and although he was anointed alongside his mother following his father's death, he would not yet have an active role in government. So, it would seem that at this time Jerusalem truly had its first period under the rule of a female. William of Tyre gives a glorious review of Melisende at this time in this point of his history:

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. Since her son was as yet under age, she ruled the kingdom and administered the government with such skillful care that she may be said to truly to have equaled her ancestors in that respect. As long as her son was willing to be governed by her counsel, the people enjoyed a highly desirable state of tranquillity, and the affairs of the realm moved on prosperously.<16>

From this glowing review one can easily extrapolate that Melisende not only ruled at this time, but she ruled wisely. However, this is not to say that Queen Melisende did not rely on advice from friends and fellow bureaucrats. Bernard of Clairvaux, a contemporary of the queen offered these words upon her taking up the ruling of the kingdom single-handedly:

Receive a brief but useful word of advice from a distant land, as a small seed that will bear a great harvest in time. Receive advice from a friend who is seeking your honor and not his own ends. No one can give you more loyal advice than one who loves you and not your possessions. Now that your husband and king is dead, and the young king as yet unfit to discharge the affairs of state and fulfill the duty of a king, the eyes of all will be on you and the entire burden of the kingdom will fall on you alone. You must set your hand to great things and, although a woman you must act as a man by doing everything you have to do "in a spirit prudent and strong." You must arrange all things prudently and discreetly so that all may judge you from your actions to be a king rather than a queen and so the Gentiles may have no occasion for saying, "Where is the king of Jerusalem?" But you will reply, "Such things are beyond my power: they are great matters which far exceed my strength and my knowledge; they are the duties of a man, and I am only a woman, weak in body, changeable of heart, not far-seeing in counsel nor accustomed to business . . .<17>

In another letter Bernard praised the queen for, "providently and wisely meeting the dangers which threaten the Holy Land according to wisdom God gave you, with sound counsel and help. These actions which become a strong woman, a humble widow, a great queen<18>." In that same letter Bernard asks Melisende to follow the teachings of Jesus in her rule, and continually makes references to her great power and authority as queen. Taken together these three writings about Queen Melisende's solitary reign can provide a great insight into the perception of the queen and her role by her contemporaries. It seems to go without question that Melisende was a wise and good leader for her kingdom. There is no evidence that there was any dissatisfaction with her abilities in this regard. However, it also seems that many view this ability not as a woman ruling with distinction, but instead as a woman overcoming the great accident of her birth, her gender. Melisende was said to have risen above her female traits. She overcame feminine weakness, and became a great king rather than a queen. The queen did face the tragic loss of the kingdom of Edessa as well as the continual assault of the Arabs upon the area known as Antioch during this period. However, despite this the period of Melisende's singular rule, from her husband's death in 1142 to her son's twenty-first year in 1151, was one of relative tranquility.

In the writings of William of Tyre he makes it known that no outside force was capable of destroying the relative peace that Queen Melisende had created. He writes: "Presently, Satan, the enemy of man, who is ready to sow the seeds of tares, began to look with envy upon our prosperity and sought to disturb the peace by exciting civil dissension. . . .<19>

So, it is at this time that the true question of power comes to the forefront. With the maturity of Queen Melisende's son the question of who has power over the kingdom will be decided in a battle between mother and son. However, in the description of the events

leading up to this inevitable battle, William of Tyre shows a true sense of the respect and dislike that Melisende gained from her position of power. William writes:

... The origin and cause of the troubles were as follows. As has been related, Queen Melisende, of glorious and pious memory in the Lord, was left, on the death of her husband, with two children still under age. Acting as their legal guardian, she assumed by hereditary right the care and administration of the realm, strenuously and faithfully, beyond the strength and courage of women, she had ruled as regent up to that time. Her eldest son, Baldwin, of whose acts we are now writing, lived in harmony with her and wisely complied with her dictates, even after he ascended to the throne.

In this passage William shows us his own uncertainty in regards to Melisende's current position. For he says that she was both a legal guardian and the hereditary heir. He repeats this uncertainty in the description of her as a ruling regent. So it would seem that although she was the heir and did rule, many still saw her simply as a regent. However, that particular question was soon to be the next problem faced by the kingdom, for the queen did not view herself as a regent for her son. William continues his history:

Among others on whose assistance and counsel she relied was her kinsman, Manasses, a man of high rank and her intimate friend. As soon as she undertook the government, she made him constable and put him in supreme command of the army. He, taking advantage of the queen's favor, is said to have conducted himself very haughtily . . . This roused intense hatred toward him on the part of the nobles, and, if the authority of the queen had not been exerted, they would have carried their animosity into action . . . The king was foremost, both in feeling and act, among those who hated Manasses and claimed that the man was alienating his mother's good will from him and thwarting her munificence.

... They continually fanned the flame of the king's dislike toward him and constantly urged that he remove his mother from the control of the kingdom. Now that he had reached years of maturity, they say, it was not fitting that he should be ruled by the will of a woman. He ought to assume some of the responsibility of governing the realm himself.

Influenced by the counsels of these advisors and others like them, the king determined to be crowned at Jerusalem on Easter day. The patriarch and other wise men who desired peace for the kingdom begged him earnestly to allow his mother to participate in his glory. By the advice of the counselors just mentioned, however, he deferred the time which had been set for the ceremony in order that his mother should not be crowned with him. Then, unexpectedly, on the following day without summoning his mother, he appeared in public, crowned with the laure.<20>

In the last part of this chapter of the history William shows King Baldwin III as a pliable young man. One also gets the distinct impression that William believes that the young king made a wrong choice by not following the advice of the "patriarch and other wise men." By taking this tone with his work it would seem that many people saw and appreciated the great ability that Queen Melisende had in ruling, and that a truly joint rule would have been the most acceptable road to take. That was not to be the case. Following the King's coronation, young Baldwin III demanded that the kingdom be split between the two of them. The queen retained control over the cities of Jerusalem and Nablus with their dependencies, and the king gained control over Tyre and Acre with their dependencies. This created a short-lived peace; however, at the urging of the same men who earlier spoke against the queen mother King Baldwin III went to seize the lands belonging to the queen. Faced with an attack Melisende hurried to Jerusalem surrounded by her loyal supporters. Among these supporters was, her son- Amaury count of Jaffa, Philip of Nabalus and, Rohard the Elder. King Baldwin III first took Nabalus then advanced on Jerusalem. At Jerusalem the king assaulted the citadel in which his mother had retired. The battle was fought as if they were mortal enemies and it went on for days. Little progress was made, but eventually mediators convinced the king and queen to make peace. When all was settled, the queen retained control over Nabalus, but the gem that is Jerusalem now was in the control of King Baldwin III.<21> Despite her withdrawal to Nabalus it would appear that queen Melisende still held a great amount of political power. She is shown by William of Tyre as an emissary of the court sent to reconcile the count of Tripoli and his wife<22>. She was also the force behind the retaking of the stronghold in the land of Gilead.<23> Finally, William also gives evidence that she had an influential role in the election of Amalrich to the position of patriarch of the church at Jerusalem.<24>

The fact that Melisende fought her own son for the leadership of the Kingdom of Jerusalem and was backed by numerous supporters has a great significance. This is strong evidence that Melisende saw herself as a ruler and not regent. She did not believe that she was simply acting in absence of a male ruler, and neither did her contemporaries. The nobles that backed her as queen truly believed that she was their ruler, but what of those who backed her son. They too must have felt that Melisende could rule as a queen for life or they would not have staged a revolt. Had Melisende simply been a regent there would have been no need to revolt. When the king turned fifteen, he simply would have taken over the rule. Yet, this was not the case. Melisende ruled six years into her son's majority, and would have continued to rule if not faced with war in her kingdom. Those who stood against Melisende saw her not as a regent, but as a disliked queen who would not be manipulated by their whims. One therefore can argue that the revolt against Melisende is in fact simply one more piece of evidence in favor of the view that she was a true queen.

The role of Melisende throughout her rule with her son can also be viewed through the official documents of the kingdom that survive. Through these documents one can see that Melisende was a queen in her own right and that her rule with her son was a joint rule and not a regency. The reign of Baldwin III falls into two distinct periods, the time before 1152 and the time after the 1152 rebellion against his mother and her chief advisor

Manasses. Between the years of 1144 and 1152 there are 12 charters. Of these preserved charters four of them bear the signature of Melisende alone. They were issued between the years of 1150 and 1152. In these charters she confirmed a charter granted by Baldwin, reconfirmed a grant made by Fulk and herself, granted a mill to St. Lazare, and made a grant to the Holy Sepulcher. In these documents it is clear that Melisende held significant if not sole political authority over the Kingdom of Jerusalem. There are also four charters issued by the power of both Baldwin III and Melisende. These were made in the years 1144, 1146, and 1147. Besides the jointly issued documents there are two charters in which Melisende acts with the consent of Baldwin. These were issued in 1149 and 1150. The remaining two charters were issued by Baldwin III alone. These two documents were issued in 1149 and in 1150. Melisende, however, did confirm the second charter in the same year. One should note that all of the charters on which Melisende and Baldwin confirmed together were issued prior to those issued on Melisende's sole authority. This shows that just prior to the revolt Melisende made all charter decisions, and can be seen as proof that Melisende was in complete control of her kingdom before the barons advised Baldwin to rebel. However, after the rebellion of Baldwin III against his mother in 1152 there are only four charters by Melisende. One of these was issued in 1155 at the request of her son, the king. The other three were issued with his consent between the years of 1129-1160. Although it is visible that Melisende's power did decrease, one cannot overlook the fact that she did still have ruling authority. This is also shown in the charters issued by her son after 1152. Five of the twenty charters were granted with Melisende's consent, and in 1159 Baldwin III granted a charter at her request.<25> So, it seems that Queen Melisende did hold political authority of some level throughout her son's reign as king.

In the year of 1161 Queen Melisende fell ill and died. Although this ends her reign, it is at this time that William of Tyre gives us true insight into the power that she held during her life. Of her illness and subsequent death William writes:

During this time Queen Melisende, a woman of unusual wisdom and discretion, fell ill of an incurable disease for which there was no help except death. Her two sisters, the countess of Tripoli and the abbess of St. Lazarus of Bethany, watched over her with unremitting care; the most skillful physicians to be found were summoned, and such remedies as were judged best assiduously applied. For thirty years or more during the lifetime of her husband and the reign of her son, Melisende had governed the kingdoms with strength surpassing that of most women. Her rule had been wise and judicious.<26>

It is clear in this statement that William was choosing his words carefully. It seems that William is proposing that Melisende governed from her father's death in 1131 until her death in 1161. It also shows that she was a joint ruler both with her husband and her son. Despite the fact that Melisende is still defined by her role as wife, mother, and daughter, she is also shown as a wise and competent ruler. William believed that she had transcended her constraints as a woman and became a strong governing force during her

lifetime.<27> Melisende was a true ruler and not simply a figure-head used to keep the blood line blue.

Although such noted historians as William of Tyre and Mayer give Melisende true power as a royal political entity, it is also important to show that not all histories of this time do so. An often-overlooked source of history in regards to the twelfth century is the work of Mas Latrie. The piece entitled *La Chronique d'Ernoul et de Bernard le Tresorier* has a small section that deals with the early history of the kingdom. The piece was collected and published in Paris in 1871. The significance of the work in regards to the power of the queen lies not in the extra materials included, but instead in what is most notably left out. Queen Melisende as we have come to know her is not in this version of the history of the kingdom. She is not named or given political significance in regards to her marriage or her ascent to the throne along with her husband. Nor is she shown as succeeding to the throne along with her son upon the death of King Fulk. There is also no mention of the subsequent disputes that resulted from the power struggle between the queen and her son. Mas Latrie completely takes the creation of the monastery at Bethany out of her hands as well and places it firmly in the hands of her father King Baldwin II. This particular point is of great interest because not only does William of Tyre and other leading historians show this to be Melisende's personal project, but there is documental proof of this fact. Charter evidence shows that Melisende was the force behind the creation of the royal monastery at Bethany.<28> In fact, it is this disregard of document evidence that must lead one to question Mas Latrie's view of the early history of the kingdom. It has been shown that Melisende did sign charters both as an individual and as a joint monarch throughout her lifetime. It has also been shown that Melisende did take on a military struggle to maintain her role as ruler of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem. These events and facts were ignored by Mas Latrie, and one must wonder why. William of Tyre placed Melisende in high regard during his history and Mas Latrie does not. Knowing the view of monarchy held by William one can see why he shone a favorable light on the queen in his history. William was pulled by that most traditional of monarchical rules, the idea that power flows through the blood. In this sense Melisende was the key to providing the link between the first crusaders and his own monarch King Baldwin IV, the leper king. By making this connection William was not only showing the legitimate line of inheritance, but also that the heroism of those first crusaders flowed through the line as well<29>. Is it possible that Mas Latrie's history was shaped by an equally well regarded notion of the time that men ruled the world, and women did other things of less importance.

The Arab historians of this period also had little to say in regards to the strong rule of Queen Melisende. The only mention of her in the writings of Usama, a Syrian Arab that lived during the early 12th century, reads as follows:

I had sought to visit the King of the Franks to sue for peace between him and Jamal ad-Din Muhammad ibu Taj al-Muluk -God have mercy on him!- basing my hopes of success on a service that my father had once preformed for King Baldwin, the father of King Fulk's wife.<30>

This shows that the Arabs were aware of the royal line that passed through Melisende; however, they did not regard her as anything other than a consort to the King. This telling of the history in many ways mirrors Mas Latrie, and backs the idea of a patriarchal view of society disregarding the power of a woman. Yet, this does bring up an interesting question. Can authority exist in the absence of the perception and acceptance of others of that authority? In regards to the Muslim world, one must wonder if Melisende had any true power apart from her husband and son. One might infer that Melisende was capable of making tactical as well as policy decisions in regards to the Arab world, yet she would need to place a male figurehead before the Arabs in order to have any true power. Therefore in regards to relations with the Arabs, Melisende must have allowed her husband, advisors, and son to take the front role while she worked from behind the scenes.

However, what of her own world? Yes, Melisende did hold significant power, and she wielded it with grace and strength, but did people know and accept this? Did she have authority? It seems unlikely. Even William of Tyre who writes about Melisende in a most favorable light only mentions her sparingly in comparison to her husband and son. It would seem that although the kingdom of Jerusalem needed the queen they were not ready for her. Or at least they were not ready to acknowledge her contributions. This is given further strength when one views the women that followed Melisende.

The first woman to follow Melisende was Sibylla. The sister of the leper king, Baldwin IV, Sibylla's status was not truly defined when she was attempting to find a husband. The uncertainty of her succession made it difficult for Sibylla to capture some promising candidates. So, despite her good position Sibylla was married to Guy of Lusignan, an average man who was greatly disliked throughout the kingdom. Because of this, Sibylla's infant son was crowned king, and Raymond of Tripoli, a cousin, was made regent. Although Sibylla was passed up for her son because of the hatred of her husband, it is significant that she was never considered as a possible ruler in her own right. Unlike Melisende, Sibylla was never granted the opportunity to be a queen.

Sibylla's sister Isabella was also not given the opportunity to rise to the occasion and rule the kingdom of Jerusalem. In fact she was not even considered to be queen-regent. In the following years the position of queen would no longer depend solely on one's status as heir to the throne, but instead would depend on the marriage of the heiress to an appropriate king. The *Chronicle of Ernoul* shows that women are now seen to transmit the royal blood and no more. The women have no active role in the historical accounts of the time. They were only judged by their genetics and even then they were not crowned until a suitable husband was found. Yet, with the marriage and queenship of Isabella to King Aimery an important piece of legislation regarding queenship in Jerusalem was commissioned. The *Livre au Roi*, was a treatise on the succession and obligations of king, queen, and barons. It attempted to legalize the accession of queen's regent, and confirm their inheritance. It also provided that the queen's husband needed formal consent of the queen in regards to the ruling of the kingdom. A provision that a husband would be chosen with the advice of a high court was included in the treatise as well^{<31>}. Although it would seem that the *Livre au Roi* legally created the situation that queen Melisende had

ruled in, this was not the case. It did legalize the position of the queen; however, this action did little to restore any true power to the title.

After the death of Isabella, Maria de Montferrat found herself in a similar position. She was placed under a regent until the time would come for her to marry. Under Maria the role of queen was further diminished; for in some histories, it would appear that she was never crowned. Upon her marriage to John of Brienne he was crowned king, but there is no mention of Maria being crowned as well. Although it is possible that the source has simply left out the coronation of the queen alongside her king it does amply show the gradual weakening of the queen and strengthening of the baron's position as electors of the king. With the death of Maria, John of Brienne technically was no longer king, but now was regent for his daughter, Isabella. Upon coming of age the questions regarding whether or not Isabella was ever crowned arise. This situation was similar to her mother's position before her. This question remains unanswered and upon her death Isabella did the only thing that could end the questions regarding the power of the queen, she left a son behind.<[32](#)>

The Queens that follow Melisende are in no way her equal. They lack any true authority and wield little power. Instead, they are mere pawns of those who surround them. What does this say of Melisende? Even if one acknowledges Melisende as a true queen, they must also acknowledge the fact that she did not have the authority to create a precedent that would be followed for generations to come. In the end there was no confirmation of women's role in politics, nor was there a universal acceptance of a woman's ability to overcome her gender. Yes, Melisende was a great queen, but she would not change the path of history. She appeared and was gone without leaving any lasting impressions, and it seemed that some did not even see her in the first place. So, in the end she is still surrounded in mystery. Was she less or more than the historians and storytellers say? We may never know, but one thing is certain she will forever remain "one thing in theory, another in legal position, and yet another in everyday life."<[33](#)> Melisende was a woman who rose above the expectations of her society to rule a kingdom, but although she was given respect she was considered an exception instead of an image of what a woman could be. Melisende was not simply a daughter, wife, and mother. She was a queen, but even a queen could not change the hearts of men.

Notes

1 Sarah, Lambert. Anne J. Duggan ed, *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe: Proceedings of a Conference Held at King's College London*. "Queen or Consort", Rochaester, NY: Boydell Press, 1997, 153.

2 Lambert, 153-154.

3 Dana Munro, *The Kingdom of the Crusaders*, NY, NY: D. Appleton Century, 1936, 30-56.

4 Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades: Volume II, The Kingdom of Jerusalem and the Frankish East*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952, 18-31.

5 Munro, 95-96.

6 William of Tyre, *A History of Deeds Done by the Sea*, Morningside Heights, NY: Columbia University Press, 1943, 50-51.

7 Lambert, 156.

8 William, 71.

9 William, 76.

10 Steven Tibble, *Monarchy and Lordship in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, 1099-1291*, NY, NY: Oxford University Press, 1989, 73.

11 Tibble, 83.

12 William, 132-134.

13 Honeycutt, Louis. John C. Parsons ed. *Medieval Queenship*, "Female Succession and the Language of Power in the Writings of Twelfth-Century Churchman," NY, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1993, 198-199.

14 William, 135.

15 William, 139.

16 William, 139-140.

17 James, Bruno Scott trans. *The Letters of St. Bernard of Clairvaux*, Chicago, Illinois: Henery Regnery Co, 1953, 346.

18 James, 347-8..

19 William, 204.

20 William, 204-205.

21 William, 205-207.

22 William, 214.

23 William, 269.

24 William, 271.

25 John La Monte, *Feudal Monarchy in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem 1100 to 1291*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Medieval Academy of America, 1932, 15-7.

26 William, 283.

27 Lambert, 156-157.

28 Lambert, 158-159.

29 Peter Edbury & John G. Rowe, *William of Tyre: Historian and Legend of the Latin East*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, 82-83.

30 Francesco Gabrieli, *Arab Historians of the Crusades*, Berkeley & Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1984, 80-81.

31 Lambert, 159-166.

32 Lambert, 166-169.

33 Parsons, 201.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)