Mother as Leader: Gender, Family, and Power in Hagiographic Depictions of Tenth-Century
Ottonian Queens

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Many students and scholars of Central Europe during the Middle Ages recognize the relevance of hagiography as an important textual genre during this time and location. Religious authors crafted these biographical texts as part of a long tradition in the European Christian world, creating them with the intent to present, preserve, and educate broad audiences about the lives, good deeds, and exemplary religious practices of saintly figures of both sexes in the hopes that all sorts of readers would emulate their holiness.[1] Although most hagiographic texts contain certain elements, such as reference to Christian ideals and texts, episodic structure, the performance of miracles, and didactic tone, many hagiographies present unique, complex, and nuanced social ideas and literary tropes indicative of the local sociopolitical and historical context in which they were crafted, including ideas about gender, femininity, and power. This is especially true of the three hagiographic texts which will be considered in this essay: *The "Older" Life of Queen Mathilda, The "Later" Life of Queen Mathilda,* and *The Epitaph of Adelheid.*

The authors of these texts all lived and worked during the tenth and early eleventh centuries in Ottonian Germany, a period during which the Liudolfing dynasty reigned supreme after rising to power among several families of Dukes that held power in the early Ottonian world. The texts center on the holy and venerable lives of two notable Ottonian queens: Queen Mathilda, wife of King Henry I, and Queen Adelheid, wife of King Otto I and grandmother of and regent for the young King Otto III.[2] These three texts, generally following conventions of the genre of hagiography, primarily focus on the lives, good deeds, and Christian practices of Mathilda and Adelheid, praising them as exemplary leaders in sanctity who represented ideal

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[1] Sean Gilsdorf, "Introduction," in *Queenship and Sanctity: The Lives of Mathilda and the Epitaph of Adelheid* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 1.

[2] Gilsdorf, XVI; Phyllis Jestice, *Imperial Ladies of the Ottonian Dynasty: Women and Rule in Tenth-Century Germany* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 2.

Christians in the Ottonian world. *The "Older" Life of Queen Mathilda* and *The "Later" Life of Queen Mathilda* both generally tell the same story of Queen Mathilda's life, the latter representing a longer rewriting of the original. Though the authorship and exact date of creation for these texts are unknown, many scholars speculate that a nun or abbess from the Saxon convent of Nordhausen, established by Mathilda in 960, authored these texts.[3] Further, scholars estimate that *The "Older Life" of Queen Mathilda* was published around 973/4, and *The "Later Life" of Queen Mathilda* was published at the earliest around 1002/1003.[4] *The Epitaph of Adelheid,* on the other hand, was certainly written by Odilo, abbot of the famed monastery of Cluny and former student of Adelheid's religious mentor and close friend Maiolus, after the death of King Otto III in 1002.[5]

These texts, emerging from highly respected religious institutions that held close relationships to the queens which they discuss, and, in the case of the *Lives* of Queen Mathilda, written at the command of and with the approval of either King Otto I or King Henry II, are reliable sources of information regarding sacred and secular ideas about gender and power in tenth-century Ottonian society.[6] Sean Gilsdorf specifically depicts these texts as historical sites through which we can learn about ideas of gender and power because of the unique way in which these queens are textually sanctified by these religious authors. He contends that, within these texts, Mathilda and Adelheid are portrayed as possessing an idealized form of sacredness referred to as "royal sanctity," meaning the power they possessed as public figures was

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[3] Gerd Althoff, "Der Sachsenherzog Widukind als Mönch auf der Reichenau. Ein Beitrag zur Kritik des Widukind-Mythos," *FmS* 17 (1983): 251-79; Patrick Corbet, *Les saints ottoniens: Sainteté dynastique, sainteté royale et sainteté féminine autour de l'an Mil* (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1986); Gilsdorf, 16; Emily van Houts, "Women and the Writing of History in the Early Middle Ages: The Case of Abbess Mathilda of Essen and Aethelweard," *Early Medieval History* 1(1992), 53-68.

[4] Gilsdorf, 18-20.

[5] Gilsdorf, 22.

[6] Gilsdorf, 71-88.

enhanced, rather than diminished by, their secular duties as queens, wives, and mothers.[7]

Therefore, though these texts are first and foremost religious, Gilsdorf demonstrates how they

can also reveal much about common ideas about gendered expectations regarding the kinds of

power held by and roles fulfilled by Ottonian women in the family, the royal throne, and the

spaces in which they intersected in the lives of holy queens.

Other scholars have also used these texts among other historical accounts and artifacts

from the Ottonian world to analyze gendered ideas about power. Phyllis Jestice, for example,

affirms Gilsdorf's claim that the portrayals of these royal women can be read as exemplar

iterations of virtues that Ottonian society believed could and did exist naturally in many women

who held royal, sacred, and familial power. Further, Jestice argues against existing literature that

has deemed tenth-century Ottonian society a "golden age" of true equality for Ottonian women;[8]

rather, she demonstrates that while women were understood as intellectually capable and valued

as contributors to public society, they were still seen as beings who should generally be

subordinate to men and who were primarily able to access power through their relationships to

powerful men.[9] Jestice posits that royal women, in particular, were seen and portrayed as not-

quite-equal partners in royal power with their kingly husbands, capable of leading if the need

arose but still generally expected to "play a subsidiary role."[10]

Despite this overall argument, Jestice does point out several spheres in which royal

women were able to access somewhat autonomous political power, especially in their role as

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[7] Corbet; Gilsdorf, 1.

[8] Cristina La Rocca, "Pouvoirs des femmes, pouvoir de la loi dans l'Italie lombarde," in *Femmes et pouvoirs des femmes à Byzance et en Occident (VIe–XIe siècles)*, ed. Stéphanie Lébecq (Villeneuve-d'Ascq: Centre de recherche sur l'Histoire de l'Europe du Nord-Ouest, 1999), 37-50.

[9] Jestice, 1-17.

[10] Jestice, 4.

counsel to the king.[11] Jestice points out that through their familial relationships as wives and mothers of kings, these royal women were at times able to access secular and royal governing power, even sometimes serving as regents on behalf of young male heirs to the throne.[12] This idea of accessing power *through*, rather than *despite*, familial relationships to ruling men is also supported by historians Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker and Mireille Madou. In their analysis of textual and iconographic representations of medieval female saint figures, including Queen Mathilda, Mulder-Bakker and Madou discuss the existence of a societal figure called the "holy mother" in medieval Europe. They describe this group as constituted of a broad range of medieval women whose "public role in society was based on their status as spouse and mother."[13] These holy mothers were therefore able to gain public power, acclaim, and praise through and utilizing societal ideas about their proper gendered roles within the family as caretaker, doting wife, and caring mother. Like Gilsdorf, Mulder-Bakker and Madou identify Queen Mathilda as one such woman, discussing how medieval authors consistently depicted her as one whose power, sanctity, and wisdom were affirmed and exercised through her portrayed roles as a loving and dedicated mother and wife.

This historiographical context makes clear the important connections between medieval portrayals of familial power and portrayals of how royal power was exercised by holy queens like Mathilda and Adelheid. Gilsdorf, Mulder-Bakker and Madou, and Jestice alike all contend that the power portrayed in the lives of Mathilda and Adelheid existed firmly at the intersection of royal, secular duties and gendered roles and expectations within the family. They affirm that

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[11] Jestice, 31.

[12] Jestice, 235-264.

[13] Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker and Mireille Madou, "Introduction," in *Sanctity and Motherhood: Essays on Holy Mothers in the Middle Ages,* ed. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker (New York: Routledge, 1995), 4.

the family was a site and textual trope through which gendered power was articulated, conceptualized, and executed. This scholarly consensus, along with the didactic and religious institutional background of the hagiographic texts considered by these historians, further emphasizes the importance of and potential conclusions to be drawn from textual portrayals of enmeshed notions of family and power in the lives of Adelheid and Mathilda. The existing historiography therefore demonstrates that these texts are powerful sources through which historians can analyze the expectations of womanhood and power broadly understood as normal, natural, and ideal in Ottonian society.

In this essay, I will utilize hagiographic depictions of the lives of Queen Mathilda and Queen Adelheid to deepen the existing historiography of gendered power in the Ottonian world, analyzing how these textual depictions of Mathilda and Adelheid's familial roles reveal Ottonian ideas regarding the natural and ideal exercise of royal, political power by women. Building off of Gilsdorf's conceptualization of royal sanctity, I will analyze how these texts portray female power through exploring and evoking ideas related to familial roles and interactions. I will argue that these textual portrayals of motherhood and wifehood, especially those related to Mathilda and Adelheid's roles in raising and reproducing a pure lineage of kings, providing counsel to the king, and serving as mother-like figures to their subjects, serve as representational sites in which royal women are depicted without controversy as directly exercising royal power and authority that was at times greater than that of or able to directly influence the king. I will further argue that these representational sites demonstrated and contributed to the normalization and even idealization of the exercise of independent power by women within Ottonian society, especially royal women with access to political resources and wealth. Additionally, I will posit that these didactic and institutionally sanctioned texts were reflective of broad societal ideals, and therefore

constructed a broad and idealized representation of Ottonian womanhood rooted in the expression of autonomous power and authority within and through feminine roles within the family, sometimes even eclipsing the power assumed by their male family members and, in the case of Mathilda and Adelheid, royal counterparts. The royal women portrayed in these hagiographic texts, therefore, meet Mulder-Bakker and Madou's definition of holy mothers, revealing to historians that within Ottonian society, the roles of wife and mother were understood by major religious and royal stakeholders as powerful social roles through which women could, and should, assert independent power and authority sometimes equal to that of, above that of, or directly upon even the king himself.

One of the most prominent means through which the family is rendered as a space of autonomous feminine power in these texts is the portrayal of Queen Adelheid and Queen Mathilda's relationships to their husbands during their time as kings. Specifically, these holy queens are portrayed as primary counsels to the king who possessed a special power to use their emotional relationship to the king and compassionate disposition towards those who were oppressed or sentenced to harsh judgments to sway the opinions of the king and therefore enact their will directly on royal matters. This is especially emphasized in the portrayal of Queen Mathilda in *The "Later" Life of Queen Mathilda* as she receives the dying words of her beloved husband, King Henry I. As Henry speaks to Mathilda, aware that he is nearing death, he says the following regarding their overall relationship and her important role in his life: "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."[14] This reference to Mathilda tempering the wrath of ruling men, giving sound counsel informed by the values of mercy and justice, and eventually managing to convince the king to follow her advice despite his wrath paints a picture of royal life in which the queen had a direct influence on how the king dealt with conflict, crime, and punishment as part of his royal governance, therefore portraying her exercise of direct political power as profound, non-controversial, and highly desirable.

This example of direct political power within the royal marital unit, however, does not just demonstrate a neutral and nondescript mechanism of counsel-giving between husband and wife; rather, the language that portrays this counsel as oriented towards justice and "mercy upon the oppressed" makes it distinctly clear that this exercise of power and influence over the king was directly rooted in the caring, feminine, and maternal virtues attributed to holy women like Mathilda.[15] This portrayal also references distinctly feminized notions of the queen's duty as an intercessor between the king and subjects who were oppressed, accused of crimes, or in need of mercy.[16] Finally, because the speech quoted above comes from the king himself and is rendered as one of the last things he ever says, it is imbued by the anonymous author of this text with a large amount of authority and importance; the message of welcome, well-informed, and impactful female influence and power over the king with regards to his royal governing is officially endorsed by the king himself on his deathbed. This distinctly feminized and emphasized textual message regarding the importance of the exercise of political influence by Queen Mathilda on her husband's governance thus underscores the royal marital unit as a site in

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[14] Anonymous, "The "Later" Life of Queen Mathilda," in *Queenship and Sanctity: The Lives of Mathilda and the Epitaph of Adelheid*, ed. Sean Gilsdorf (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 98.

[15] Anonymous, "The "Later" Life of Queen Mathilda," 98; Jestice.

[16] Jestice, 113.

which holy women like Mathilda were able to directly claim and exert their political will *through* and utilizing their femininity and interpersonal roles as wives, queens, and consorts to the king, not *despite* their gendered roles within the royal family.

Even more explicit forms of female power rendered through marital relationships with the king are also present in these texts. The marital unit between king and queen is portrayed as a direct relationship of equal co-governing in many instances throughout these texts. In *The "Older" Life of Queen Mathilda*, for example, the ruling union between Mathilda and her husband, King Henry I, is described as follows: "The king and his most worthy wife…looked after Christ's servants…they made countless gifts to every monastery on their itinerary…they also heeded divine counsel and devoted themselves to the construction of monasteries."[17] It has been established that funding, supporting, and visiting monasteries as sites of religious authority was a primary means through which royal and religious power was expressed by rulers during the Ottonian era.[18] Therefore, we can take this passage as direct evidence that, within the eyes of the religious authors of these texts, a situation in which the king and the queen conducted these important aspects of royal governance as partners in power who both consented and contributed to such actions was not just normal or expected, but also one of many exemplary features of the most powerful and holy of royal women. In this text, Mathilda is not portrayed as dependent upon nor merely a servant of the king; rather, "they," meaning Mathilda and Henry together, took on royal power as a united, egalitarian marital unit rather than as a subservient wife blindly following the authority of a powerful husband. This passage, therefore, provides direct textual evidence of the normalization and idealization of feminine power and egalitarianism within the

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[17] Anonymous, "The "Older" Life of Queen Mathilda," in *Queenship and Sanctity: The Lives of Mathilda and the Epitaph of Adelheid*, ed. Sean Gilsdorf (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 76-77.

[18] Gilsdorf, 28.

marital unit and, for queens like Mathilda, the creation of a marital space that allowed for nearly equal expressions of autonomous royal power between husband and wife.

It is therefore clear that, whether through describing scenes in which Mathilda acted as a direct partner in royal power or used her affectionate relationship with the king to directly counsel him and exert her will on royal governance, these textual portrayals of royal women rendered the marital unit as a space in which women could, should, and did exert power over men and, in the case of royal women, the subjects they governed. This, paired with the didactic nature of these texts, suggests that the idea of the marital unit as a space that intersected with the administration of political rule and allowed for female empowerment and general egalitarianism between husband and wife was normalized, recognized, and perhaps even idealized throughout the Christian Ottonian society governed by the values endorsed by the institutions from which these texts emerged.

As previously mentioned, the position of Mathilda and Adelheid as wives to the king is not the only familial role that is relevant in these textual portrayals of female power. Rather, the ways in which these texts portray Mathilda and Adelheid as mothers to kings also reveal much about Ottonian conceptions of feminine power within the intersections between their royal and familial lives. One means through which this is often portrayed in these texts is through discussions and portrayals of Mathilda and Adelheid as stewards and literal reproducers of a pure and pious lineage of legitimate Ottonian rulers. This literary trope appears throughout all three of these texts and serves the purpose of using the exalted, exemplary, and saint-like nature of these powerful holy women to justify and legitimize the power of future male leaders produced and raised by female ancestors of such a noble disposition. This is especially true of Queen Adelheid, who is described literally by Odilo of Cluny as "this mother of emperors, who profited so many"

by producing and raising a lineage of many important rulers in the Ottonian world, including her grandson, King Otto III, for whom she served as regent for several years.[19] This depiction imbues Adelheid's role as mother of kings with a great deal of power, presenting her as a woman intellectually capable of reproducing and shaping rulers worthy of the throne.

Queen Mathilda is also venerated as a producer of a pure and therefore rightfully empowered lineage. Her motherly love for her children, alongside her special piety, is frequently evoked as a reason for which her male descendants should be admired and recognized as leaders. This is especially the case for *The "Later" Life of Queen Mathilda*, which was written around the time in which King Henry II gained power as king in a controversial transfer of power to the Henrician line of the Liudolfing royal dynasty.[20] In this context, it is important to note how Henry and his ancestors' power and purity are emphasized utilizing language that depicts them as a part of Mathilda's lineage and recipients of her motherly love. Members of the Henrician line of the Liudolfing dynasty are described as the recipients of special love from Mathilda, including but certainly not limited to the following passage: "the all-powerful God…looked kindly upon the good deeds of King Henry and the most blessed Mathilda, and greatly increased them both with a wealth of most noble offspring…Henry…was of such astonishing beauty…he was especially loved by [Mathilda]." [21] Later in this text, the anonymous author also describes how Mathilda "desired that [Henry] should receive the kingdom," despite that it is her son, Otto, who eventually receives the crown.[22] In emphasizing that Mathilda, the pious and powerful royal

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[19] Odilo of Cluny, "The Epitaph of Adelheid, 1002," in *Queenship and Sanctity: The Lives of Mathilda and the Epitaph of Adelheid*, ed. Sean Gilsdorf (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 132.

[20] Gilsdorf, 48.

[21] Anonymous, "The "Later" Life of Queen Mathilda," 96.

[22] Anonymous, "The "Later" Life of Queen Mathilda," 96-97.

Queen responsible for creating and whose greatness and saintliness justified the rule of the entire ruling family, especially loved and desired the royal power of the Henrician line emphasizes this historical context of struggles for legitimate Henrician claim to the throne in which these texts were created. Further, these depictions elucidate certain authorial desires, as these texts were written by members of religious institutions receiving support from the royal family, to justify the rule of their current royal leader and supporter, King Henry II, while simultaneously rendering Mathilda as a fully empowered royal mother and using her piety and power to prove the sanctity and legitimate rulership of all of her descendants.

These depictions, therefore, clearly must be considered in relation to the historical context in which these texts are situated. As previously discussed, prior to the rule of King Henry I, the Liudolfing dynasty was just one of several powerful families of dukes that held power in the early Ottonian world. Therefore, although they were certainly recognized as the ruling dynasty, the consolidated power of this family was still new and perhaps contentious due to the matrix of more dispersed power from which this single ruling family emerged. This, combined with the fact that, at least in the case of *The "Older" Life of Queen Mathilda* and *The "Later" Life of Queen Mathilda,"* these texts were written at the command and in honor of King Otto I and King Henry II respectively, suggests that these depictions of holy reproductive lineages likely served to justify the divine right of the Liudolfing dynasty's rule. That holy mothers were employed as the literary device through which the power of this holy lineage, sponsored by a pious, pure, and maternal reproductive figure, was justified, glorified, and legitimized, is very telling of the power associated with reproduction and motherhood in the Ottonian era. This literary strategy of endorsing royal power clearly locates power within the feminine role of, in the words of Odilo of Cluny, serving as the "mother of emperors," demonstrating that in

Ottonian society, motherhood was a means through which women were understood as able to access autonomous power as leaders and literal producers of ruling men. Thus, these texts locate the power of even the most robust kings underneath the symbolic umbrella of presumed piety and power of their female ancestors who created and sponsored the lineage to which they belonged.[23]

Additionally, one cannot discuss portrayals of Queen Mathilda and Queen Adelheid as empowered royal mothers and wives without discussing the period during which Queen Adelheid served as regent on behalf of the young King Otto III after the death of his mother, Queen Theophanu. According to Phyllis Jestice, the time during which Adelheid (and Theophanu, for that matter) served as regent progressed with "surprisingly little question or opposition"[24] and represented a historical period during which these female leaders "had the necessary capital – influence, loyal servants, and sacred charisma – to…strengthen [the *reich*] so that when Otto III came of age he could peacefully assume power."[25] As direct royal leaders, they were able to exercise a great amount of direct political power as and through their role as royal mothers. This also corresponds to the brief portrayal of this episode within *The Epitaph of Adelheid.* Within this text, Adelheid's character as a leader is described as follows: "thoroughly just, strong, prudent, and extremely modest…she lived prosperously, ruling over worldly affairs with the help of the Lord."[26] Not only is Adelheid presented as a woman who was empowered through her relationship as grandmother to the young king, but she is also presented as a particularly competent leader who used her political power to bring religious ideals to fruition

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[23] Odilo of Cluny, 132.

[24] Jestice, 11.

[25] Jestice, 257.

[26] Odilo of Cluny, 132.

lands as a woman pious enough to have a direct connection to the "help of the Lord."[27] This is, therefore, a textual depiction in which the role of motherhood and the family unit of the ruling dynasty are rendered as social spaces in which the practice of autonomous political power by ruling women over all subjects and directly on behalf of their young male descendants set to be king was not just unproblematic, but profound, desirable, and even somewhat common.

Further, the power of women like Mathilda and Adelheid is not just textually evoked within the literal practice of mothering and giving birth to young kings and pure descendants. Motherhood as a literary trope is also evoked by the authors of these hagiographic texts when describing the relationships that Queen Adelheid and Queen Mathilda had with their subjects, especially those studying, working, and practicing Christianity at the religious institutions that they and their royal counterparts founded and financially supported. This is thus one of the most explicit ways in which the royal power of these women (and therefore, their relationship with the subjects to whom they directly practiced rule and distributed royal resources) intersects with the idea of their maternal nature and the concept of motherhood. This relationship is especially evident in textual depictions of Mathilda's relationship to the Saxon convent of Nordhausen, a religious space which she founded and the place where she spent many of her final years.[28] In *The "Older" Life of Queen Mathilda*, her relationship to this convent is described using maternal terms; she is described as building the convent "from the ground up, and like a mother always [lavishing] the greatest care upon it."[29] This literary trope is also evoked frequently in *The Epitaph of Adelheid*, in which Odilo of Cluny devotes extensive space to describing Adelheid's maternal care of monastic institutions that she helped to found and materially maintain. She is

[27] Odilo of Cluny, 132.
[28] Gilsdorf, 16.
[29] Anonymous, "The "Older" Life of Queen Mathilda," 83.

described as "[striving] to provide for the needs of all," specifically devoting time and attention to monastic institutions like the monastery of Cluny "so that those serving God there would want for nothing."[30] In this textual depiction, even though the language of motherhood and maternalism is not directly evoked, Adelheid is still portrayed as a caring and mother-like figure to these servants of God, later described as eagerly providing "whatever worldly necessities happened to be needed by the brothers of serving God" for whom she cared deeply.[31]

This kind of motherly love is, therefore, not just related to the dedication that Mathilda and Adelheid possessed for providing materially for the religious institutions that they founded and supported. Rather, this was also portrayed as a loving, affectionate, and interpersonal relationship; this is especially evident in the textual depiction of the days leading up to Mathilda's death in *The "Later" Life of Queen Mathilda*. When Mathilda chooses to leave Nordhausen for the monastery Quendlinburg, "where God had preordained that her holy soul would be freed from its carnal prison," all of the nuns remaining in Nordhausen, "whom [Mathilda] always had loved with motherly affection," are described as "filled with great sorrow" to see her depart for the last time.[32] In drawing these connections between Mathilda and Adelheid's motherly affection and the support and patronage of the convent of Nordhausen and, in the case of Queen Adelheid, numerous religious institutions and monasteries, the authors of these texts (who, as previously discussed, were either likely or directly confirmed to have been constituents of the religious institutions described as receiving the motherly love of Mathilda and Adelheid) consciously tether the exercise of royal power through the construction and support of such religious institutions to the realm of motherly love and affection. This textual strategy

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[30] Odilo of Cluny, 136.

[31] Odilo of Cluny, 137.

[32] Anonymous, "The "Later" Life of Queen Mathilda," 122.

therefore simultaneously encourages the descendants of Mathilda and Adelheid to whom these texts are addressed to continue supporting these beloved institutions of their holy ancestors, while also rendering motherhood as a symbolic and literal space through which this independent exercise of both royal and religious power by royal women was not only normalized but also valorized and praised as a holy and ideal manifestation of Ottonian womanhood.

This motherly description of the relationship between Mathilda and Adelheid and their subjects also extends beyond religious institutions, reflecting as well on Mathilda and Adelheid's relationship to all of their subjects as a broad class. This is emphasized in *The "Later" Life of Queen Mathilda*, in which the anonymous author portrays Queen Mathilda as one who provides "motherly love" to her subjects,[33] "[supervising] pilgrims, widows, and orphans like a mother with her children."[34] In *The Epitaph of Adelheid*, Odilo of Cluny also portrays Queen Adelheid as a mother-like figure responsible for providing for all of her royal subjects. He uses the language of motherhood when describing at length Adelheid's daily devotion to caring for the poor and providing alms to all of her subjects, stating that "she displayed…untiring devotion to the poor…the mother of all virtues."[35] In evoking the language of motherhood to depict the ways in which Adelheid and Mathilda utilized their royal power and resources to provide for their subjects, Odilo of Cluny and the anonymous author of the *Lives* of Queen Mathilda once again tethered the function and practice of motherhood and maternal care both symbolically and literally to the practice of royal power and, specifically, the autonomous and independent female exercise of this power through their direct distribution of royal wealth to those lacking resources. This is yet another means through which one can conceptualize these texts as rendering

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[33] Anonymous, "The "Later" Life of Queen Mathilda," 95.
[34] Anonymous, "The "Later" Life of Queen Mathilda," 111.
[35] Odilo of Cluny, 142.

motherhood and the royal family as a space in which women could and were even encouraged to, due to the didactic nature of these hagiographic texts, exercise autonomous and direct powers as women imbued with the feminine virtues of piety and compassion, rather than *despite* their sex. Motherhood and wifehood, then, can once again be seen as positions of empowerment and heightened potential for the expression of female power within these texts.

In summary, the textual analysis within this essay has demonstrated that, through their descriptions of the intersections of royal power and the familial roles of wifehood and motherhood occupied by royal women like Queen Mathilda and Queen Adelheid, the authors of these praising and didactic texts rendered motherhood and wifehood as distinctly feminine and interpersonal social spaces through which the power of women could and should be heightened, rather than diminished. I have argued that through portraying the ways in which Adelheid and Mathilda exercised political power through their counsel-like, influential, and even directly co-governing relationships with their husbands, their maternal establishment of a pure and legitimized line of ruling descendants, their ability to serve as regent on behalf of young male descendants made king in their youth, and their maternal relationship with the subjects to whom they relegated both motherly love and royal resources, these authors actively tethered the exercise of royal power by women to notions of power within gendered notions of family roles. These authors thus crafted a familial and interpersonal notion of motherhood and wifehood that served as a representational, textual site in which the royal, political, and social power of these royal women could be equal to that of or even above the royal men in their lives, and, for a moment, complete, despite that scholars like Phyllis Jestice have characterized Ottonian society overall as one in which the doctrine of male dominance was still generally accepted.[36]

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[36] Jestice, 1-17.

Therefore, despite that one may be reticent to declare the tenth-century Ottonian world as a "golden era" of true gender equality across all spheres of society, these texts demonstrate a general understanding of the family and a woman's idealized role within it as a space in which power could and should be seized and exercised by women, even over the men in their lives.[37] These revelations about the intersections of political and interpersonal power from these texts invite historians and students alike to read in between the lines of official understandings of historical power, asking us to consider not just who was sitting on the highest throne at a certain point in time, but also how the decisions they made came about and how gendered power exercised in other spheres of their lives (for example, within their family unit) impacted these highest expressions of power. Further, although within the texts examined here, female empowerment is discussed specifically concerning royal women and their exercise of broad, great power, we must also remember that these texts were created with didactic intent, designed to be examples of piety to be emulated by all of those who could see themselves in Adelheid in Mathilda; in fact, Mathilda is directly described as having lived a life that "ought rightly to be imitated,"[38] by all members of Ottonian society. Therefore, these representations of the family as a space in which the exercise of power by women was not only normalized but idealized, welcomed, and even necessary can be assumed to reflect not just the idealized expression of power by royal women, but also the idealized expression of interpersonal power by everyday Ottonian women who likely read about and sought to imitate the kinds of relationships portrayed in these texts. These textual revelations, then, inform not just our understandings of the exercise of royal power by queens like Mathilda and Adelheid, but also our understandings of how

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[37] Jestice, 4.

[38] Anonymous, "The "Later" Life of Queen Mathilda," 88.

Ottonian values of gender and power impacted common women as well as the rhythm and

expression of interpersonal power present in their everyday lives.

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