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Power and Authority of Royal Queen Mothers: Juxtaposing the French Queen Regent and the Ottoman Validé Sultan During the Early Modern Period

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POWER AND AUTHORITY OF ROYAL QUEEN MOTHERS: JUXTAPOSING THE
FRENCH QUEEN REGENT AND THE OTTOMAN *VALIDÉ* SULTAN DURING THE
EARLY MODERN PERIOD

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
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Abstract

Women and their relationship to sovereignty, during the early modern era has become a rapidly growing topic, given that during this period an unprecedented number of women rose to high positions of power. This paper aims to compare the lives of the queen regents in France with their counterparts, the *validé* sultans in the Ottoman Empire, over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when both groups of royal women acquired substantial power. Although these women were prohibited from ruling in their own right, the paper explores the ways in which queen regents and *validé* sultans used both official and unofficial channels of their authority to shape female sovereignty within their respective realms.

Although these women were bounded by diverse cultural constraints, these women constructed their power similarly. Therefore, I will illustrate how these royal women manipulated power behind the scenes through a variety of ways as mother, matchmaker, and patron, which ultimately increased their authority over the course of the period. Furthermore, we will explore how these women used elaborate displays of power and household networking to build up political capital, which reinforced the legitimacy of their sons, themselves, and that of their dynasty.

By closely examining the French queen regent and the Ottoman *validé* sultan, this project will shed new light on the parallel experiences of female sovereignty, and therefore can allow historians to further theorize how these women legitimized and navigated their positions once they came into power.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The early modern period, from roughly 1500 until 1800, witnessed a surge of female rule throughout the world, and this phenomenon of women's rise to power was especially pronounced in two seemingly unrelated and different regions of Europe: France and the Ottoman Empire. The French queen regent and the Ottoman *validé* both assumed a role as queen mother of their respective empires and for well over a century became the highest-ranking personages in the social order with the sole exception of their sons, who were either the reigning king or sultan.¹ Nevertheless, influence was limited for the queen regent and *validé* sultan because women were never officially allowed to rule in either of the two realms, where formal authority rested solely with the male sovereign and his advisors. Furthermore, war was a constant presence in the geopolitics of both realms in the early modern era, and understandings of proper conduct in warfare imposed fundamental restrictions on a woman's capability to command men.²

There is a widely held perception that women's legal inability to rule restricted them to their own space. However, because political deals and machinations predominantly happened within the household in both France and the Ottoman Empire, it was precisely within this very space that women did seize the opportunity to garner power and influence. Royal women manipulated power behind the scenes in a variety of ways through their domestic duties and political dealings as mother, matchmaker, and patron, which ultimately increased their authority over the course of the period. The ways in which queen regents and *validé* sultans used both official and unofficial channels to legitimize their authority and shape female sovereignty within their respective realms was quite remarkable. Examining the parallel experiences of female sovereignty in both contexts can help identify major themes, factors, and characteristics that may

¹ *Validé* sultan was the title given to the mother of the current reigning sultan in the Ottoman Empire.

² William Monter, *The Rise of Female Kings in Europe, 1300-1800* (London: Yale University Press, 2012), 102.

allow historians to further consider and theorize how these women shaped and navigated their positions. To this end, we will compare case studies of three queen regents with three *validé* sultans between 1559 and 1683, a period when both groups of royal women acquired substantial power that lasted well over a century.

The movement toward comparative analysis in the study of queenship is a growing one and allows for an interesting space where women across diverse cultures, time periods, and locations can be thoughtfully examined. This is the space where my scholarship will contribute to the overall field. My study will unpack the growing political power of royal women in France and the Ottoman Empire during the crucial time period of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The examination of these exceptional women is important because they all pushed the boundaries of their position and shattered conventions about their sex by balancing piety and prestige and dominance as well as obedience to effectively wield power. Not only will I show the arresting similarities and pronounced differences to the way these women legitimized their position, but I will also illustrate that both the Ottoman *validé* sultan's and the French queen regent's power became supported by the acceptance of "the institutional legitimacy and necessity" of the political position.³ In doing so, I will add to the swelling field of royal women's studies.

According to Joan Scott, "[w]omen's history has a dual goal: to restore women to history and to restore our history to women."⁴ For decades, history was written by men and usually about men occupying the public realm. In the 1960s, women's studies began to emerge as a fledgling academic discipline, and as women historians became increasingly interested in the roles their foremothers played, feminist historians attempted to validate the experiences of

³ Leslie Pierce, *The Imperial Harem Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 112.

⁴ Joan Kelly, *Women, History, and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1984), 1.

women through the ages through the production of new studies. Early on, women's histories were observed through a narrow lens, focusing strictly on the female story and leaving out the attendant male actors. This can be seen in the early feminist histories of queenship in the 1960s and 1970s, where queens tended to be written about only in biographies while being disconnected from political history.

During the 1980s, Joan Scott sought to address this problem when she wrote an article titled "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," wherein she argued the significance of gender as a theoretical framework to analyze history and posited that instead of studying women separately from men, it was important to understand the relationship between the two sexes.⁵ The ways in which masculinity and femininity have been culturally constructed is essential to understanding and reconstructing a society's past. Scott's article had a powerful impact upon the approach by which women's history was subsequently written.

By the early 1990s there was an emerging curiosity of the institution of queenship as many historians continued to build on what Joan Scott pioneered and have sought to apply her theories to the subjects of queenship and women with political power, Louise Olga Fradenburg, writing in 1992, claims that "sovereignty, simply, does not exist without gender," and that "the practice of sovereignty depends on the use of both the 'masculine' and the 'feminine.'"⁶ As an example of this, Charles Beem, in his book *The Lioness Roared* (2006), posits that by the 1500s female queens in England were far more accepted because they imitated kingly power through a "gender bending process," by absorbing notions of both kingship and queenship gendered roles.⁷ Beem claims that gender should be used as a method of historical investigation, because

⁵ Joan Scott, "Gender : A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review*. Vol. 91, No. 5 (Dec., 1986): 1054.

⁶ Louise Olga Fradenburg, ed. *Women and Sovereignty* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 1.

⁷ *Ibid*, 7.

historians can no longer lean solely on political studies, but need to take a more interdisciplinary approach for a more comprehensive study to uncover the ways queens pursued their attainment of power.⁸

As the field has evolved, historians studying queenship have also used social theories introduced by Marx, Foucault, and Weber to structure their works. In the article “The Politics of Self-Representation in Jeanne d’Albret’s Ample Declaration,” Mary Ekman explores Weber’s three rules of legitimation of authority and compares them to Jeanne d’Albret’s (a French Huguenot) autobiographical *Ample Declaration*. Ekman argues that d’Albret’s writing reflects the legitimate authority d’Albret herself held in the politics of Reformation France as sovereign in Bearn and Navarre.⁹ In *Fairy Tale Queens* (2012), a cultural history based on the reciprocal relationship between queens and queen-centered fairytales, Jo Carney cites Foucault’s claim that “the ideal punishment would be transparent to the crime that it punishes.”¹⁰ In fairy tales where a queen fails in her primary role to provide the kingdom with an heir, she is punished through demotion.¹¹

The concept of power is useful in gender studies, moreover, to explore the ways in which power and gender are linked. However, while they are unmistakably intertwined, academics also argue that there is no “universal theory.”¹² The difference between power and authority has also been explored and subsequently applied to queenship. According to Helen Mauer, authority is the right to give orders and expect obedience, while power is the ability to make people do things

⁸ Charles Beem, *The Lioness Roared: The Problems of Female Rule in English History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 3-4.

⁹ Mary C. Ekman, “Satisfaitte de soy mesme: The Politics of Self-Representation in Jeanne d’Albret’s Ample déclaration,” in *The Rule of Women in Early Modern Europe*, eds., Anne J. Cruz and Mihoko Suzuki (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 41.

¹⁰ Michael Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1995), 104.

¹¹ Jo Eldridge Carney, *Fairy Tale Queens: Representations of Early Modern Queenship* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 45.

¹² Lisa Benz St. John, *Three Medieval Queens: Queenship and the Crown in Fourteenth-Century England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 8.

using influence or leverage.¹³ We will come to find that the women in my study had both: power by means of their position and authority through their many concerted efforts at legitimizing and expanding their stature.

The breadth of sources historians use is critical to the history they are attempting to illuminate. In the late medieval period there is a lack of sources that discuss the subject of queens and queenship, which has impaired our modern-day understanding. Because the extant records about women are not as substantial to that of men, historians have necessarily expanded their survey of source materials to include letters, household accounts, sermons, pastoral manuals, speeches, memoirs, pamphlets, political acts, petitions, and literature. The advent of gender studies as a discipline has also expanded the sources historians use and has improved the way in which sources are examined. Jacqueline Murray's article, "Thinking about Gender: The Diversity of Medieval Perspectives," is a prime example of this. Murray analyzes two pastoral manuals to put forth an argument that these manuals had a far less harsh and misogynistic view of women than canon law and other theological discourses that many historians typically study.¹⁴

The expansion of source materials is vital in helping historians piece together the full range of cultural attitudes that shaped a society and the ways in which people interacted within them. The new materials will encourage historians to have a more thoughtful understanding of how gender was perceived and how it may have fluctuated in different time periods throughout history.

In addition, the deconstruction of the separate-spheres concept by historians has helped women come alive as active members of society throughout history. Most historians agree that in the medieval and early modern periods the public and private spheres were not completely

¹³ Lisa Benz St. John, *Three Medieval Queens*, 9.

¹⁴ Jacqueline Murray, "Thinking about Gender: The Diversity of Medieval Perspectives," in *Power of the Weak*, eds. Jennifer Carpenter and Sally-Beth MacLean (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 7-8.

separated from each other, but instead overlapped.¹⁵ In fact, it has been argued that queens were able to exercise their greatest power in this blurred space between the public and private realms.¹⁶ Lois Huneycutt recognizes that the king and queen's residence could play the role of both a private dwelling and the public edifice where decisions about the realm were executed.¹⁷ Furthermore, because trade and policy were implemented in the monarch's household, the queen automatically had access to the business of the realm because of her closeness to the king. This notion that the separate spheres coincided helps scholars to examine the fluid position of the queen, which has advanced our understanding of queenship over the ages.

Using a multidisciplinary approach, scholars have become greatly invested in the ways queens were able to access and increase their power. Over recent decades, the volume of research has allowed historians to better understand the queen's place in the medieval and early modern societies, and by comparing the information we have, scholars can interpret what is considered typical conduct of queens.

Women in these periods ordinarily did not participate in public office and were generally limited in their activities due to the patriarchal society in which they lived. During the twelfth century more centralized governments emerged, which tended to limit the queen's participation; the queen's power became dependent upon her ability to interact with the king.¹⁸ In European history an ongoing debate developed among historians in the early 1980s as to whether queens

¹⁵ Lois L. Huneycutt, "Female Succession and the Language of Power in the Writings of Twelfth-Century Churchman," in *Medieval Queenship*, ed., John Carmi Parsons (New York: St Martin's Press, 1993), 190. Lisa Benz St. John. *Three Medieval Queens*, 9, and Carla Freccero, "Marguerite de Navarre and the Politics of Maternal Sovereignty," in *Women and Sovereignty* ed., Louise Olga Fradenburg, 132.

¹⁶ Charles Beem, *The Lioness Roared: The Problems of Female Rule in English History*, 7.

¹⁷ Lois L. Huneycutt, "Intercession and the High-Medieval Queen: The Esther Topos," in *Power of the Weak*, eds. Jennifer Carpenter and Sally-Beth MacLean, 126.

¹⁸ Lisa Benz St. John, *Three Medieval Queens: Queenship and the Crown in Fourteenth-Century England*, 12.

(and women as a whole) were marginalized after the twelfth century compared to the early Middle Ages, or whether their power continued, or even increased.¹⁹

Theresa Earenfight, whose work focuses mostly on the Spanish monarchy, maintains that that there was a status of co-rulership between king and queen in the Middle Ages and that queens were never separated from the crown.²⁰ Pauline Sanford, who initially agreed that women had lost power during this time, has reexamined her initial understanding due to the expanding scholarship in the 1990s and claimed “that the whole question of women and power throughout the Middle Ages is ripe for...reassessment.”²¹ Lisa St. Benz’s study on queenship, published in 2012, posits that the queen’s power expanded in fourteenth century England.²²

The actual power of the queen rested upon society’s perception of her influence rather than on any formally recognized authority, so it was important that the queen be perceived as having authority or her role could become unstable.²³ In the medieval West, the success of a female ruler depended in part on how she fulfilled gender expectations. For example, Pauline Stafford discusses how imagery was used to illustrate maternal devotion between mother and son, and thus legitimize the queen regent’s image. Because there were no laws or proclamations to define the queen’s authority, she had the fluidity to manipulate power. Stafford argues that “a mother’s right to act as guardian, a prerogative grounded in private law” allowed Queen Louise of Savoy to rule when necessary for her son in France even though Salic law disallowed females

¹⁹ Lois L. Huneycutt, “Female Succession and the Language of Power in the Writings of Twelfth-Century Churchman,” 189-191.

²⁰ Theresa Earenfight, “Without the Persona of the Prince: Kings, Queens and the Idea of the Monarchy in the Late Medieval Europe,” *Gender and History* 19 (2007), 1-4, 10.

²¹ Pauline Stafford, *Queens, Concubines, Dowagers: The King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages* (London: Leicester University Press, 1998), xvii

²² Lisa Benz St. John, *Three Medieval Queens: Queenship and the Crown in Fourteenth-Century England*, 1.

²³ Jennifer Carpenter and Sally-Beth MacLean, ed. *Power of the Weak*, 138.

to rule.²⁴ In studying Capetian queen regents over several centuries in France, André Poulet shows the “gradual emancipation” of the queen and argues that, through regency, queens emerged from obscurity and showed that femininity was not frailty.²⁵ As regency continued to evolve, the queen’s opportunity for power increased in direct correlation.

Charles Beem has combined political and gender methodologies to survey the history of female rule in England from the twelfth to the twentieth centuries. Beem uses a gender lens to analyze the reigns of the queens in his study, and he specifically examines women previously thought to have made little impact upon English queenship. For example, Matilda fails at kingship in part due to circumstance and in part because of her perceived un-womanliness and her ineffective effort to exercise authority as a king.²⁶ A new look at Mary Tudor, however, discovers that she displayed an acceptable balance of “regal yet gentle” qualities and exhibited submissiveness to her advisors when necessary.²⁷ Even though these queens had the legal right to rule, they still needed to embrace feminine expectations to be accepted by society and the court administration. The historiographical trend in investigating gender roles and how they limited or aided a queen’s authority continues to interest historians.

As for historians of Islamic civilization, scholars such as Fatima Mernissi and Leila Ahmed have pioneered the scholarship on women in Arab and Islamic history, Muslim attitudes toward gender issues, and the roles women, royal and commoner, played in Islamic societies. Broadly speaking, early Ottoman historiography, as Leslie Peirce points out, viewed the Imperial harem as either a pleasure palace for royal men that expressed the decadence of the Oriental (the

²⁴ Elizabeth McCartney, “The King’s Mother and Royal Prerogative in Early-Sixteenth Century France,” in *Medieval Queenship*, ed., John Carmi Parsons, 125.

²⁵ André Poulet, “Capetian Women and the Regency: The Genesis of a Vocation,” in *Medieval Queenship*, ed., John Carmi Parsons, 111-116.

²⁶ Charles Beem, *The Lioness Roared*, 54.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 80.

Western view) or an institution that meddled in Ottoman politics and led to the decline of the empire (the Turkish view). Fortunately, a number of current historians, such as Lucienne Thy-Senocak, who focuses on architectural patronage of imperial Ottoman women, are making important contributions to rewriting that narrative. Furthermore, Leslie Peirce, whose work is indispensable for the insight she has provided on imperial politics and gender in the Ottoman Empire, has paved the way for several other historians to further examine the activities of the Imperial harem. Past Ottoman historiography has focused on using Ottoman historical works to extrapolate facts, but new scholarship is more focused on looking at each source individually to better understand its audience, along with the “contexts of writings and on literary and stylistic dimensions.”²⁸ As historian Kaya Şahin argues, “Ottoman cultural or political motives and interests are being reassigned to the motivations of individuals, social groups, or political factions reacting to very specific combinations of events.”²⁹ The context in which these women acted can therefore be reinterpreted with a better understanding of the many variables in play.

Examining queenship from a regional or even global perspective has also been a novel development in the field, and continues to provide increasing insight on the development, behavior, and experiences of different female rulers and queens across epochs. While the study of queenship had largely, though not solely, centered on Europe, expanding the scope has proven useful. *Queenship in the Mediterranean*, an edited volume by Elena Woodacre, is a collection of papers focused upon the role of queens in and around the Mediterranean from Morocco to Sicily, and spanning both the medieval and early modern eras. In another comparative study, Anne Walhall writes in her introduction to *Servants of the Dynasty, Palace Women in World History*,

²⁸ H. Erdem Cipa, and Emine Fetvaci, eds., *Writing History at the Ottoman Court: Editing the Past, Fashioning the Future*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), viii.

²⁹ H. Erdem Cipa, and Emine Fetvaci, eds., *Writing History at the Ottoman Court*, viii.

“[j]uxtaposing palace women across different settings can defamiliarize generally accepted assumptions about the structure of palaces and women’s place within them.”³⁰

As women and power continue to be investigated, more scholars are studying specific queens, and particularly lesser-known queens or rulers, and are applying gender methodologies to understand how the women managed and navigated their roles. This has helped us to interpret the development of the queen’s office. With each new study, queens who were once just an unfamiliar wife or partner to a familiar king or ruler in history are now becoming noteworthy examples of queenship in their own right. Thus, as the scholarship continues to expand, so too does our knowledge of women in power.

This study will analyze six significant queen mothers, three French and three Ottoman; in so doing, we will determine the ways in which these royal queen mothers carried out acts of patronage and charity along with explicitly public displays of ceremony and spectacle in their respective courts and governments to fulfill their quest for authority and power. In addition, we will also explore how the regent and *validé* enhanced and extended their agency by engaging in matrimonial politics, networking, and through the fashioning of loyalties.

The first of these is Catherine de’Medici (d. 1589), who arrived in France in 1533 at the age of fourteen to marry the second son of reigning King François I. Coming from Italy, where her uncle was Pope Clement VII, she symbolized a renewed connection between France and the Papal States. In 1547 she became queen of France with the accession of her husband, Henry II, though after Henry II died prematurely from a jousting accident Catherine was left in a precarious position. Her primary role at that moment immediately transformed to mother to the next three future kings of France. Catherine subsequently ruled as an unofficial queen regent in

³⁰ Anne Walthall, introduction to *Servants of the Dynasty, Palace Women in World History*, ed. Anne Walthall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 3.

France from 1559 to 1589, and her reign is of interest to historians because of the methods she used to exploit this role for more than thirty years.

Marie de' Medici (d. 1642) is the next of our French queen mothers, and she became the second wife of King Henry IV of Navarre after his unhappy marriage to Margaret of Valois ended without heirs. Marie came to France from the House of Medici in 1600 and ruled as an official regent from 1610 to 1614 but also maintained her power even after her son had come of age. Past historians have disregarded Marie's reign, giving her a poor reputation for political intrigues and ineptness.³¹ However, her reputation is being restored and the French historian Jean-François Dubost has spearheaded that movement in his book, *Marie de' Medici, Le reine dévoilée*. Marie's reign is of interest for her keen ability to use visual arts to promote her interests.

Anne of Austria (d.1666), the third of our French queen mothers, was a Spanish-born princess of the Hapsburgs and was queen of France from 1615 until 1643 alongside her husband, Louis XIII. She was also the daughter-in-law to Marie de' Medici, which afforded her firsthand observation of Marie's participation in politics as queen mother. Anne is set apart from her two predecessors because she was of higher-born status at the time of her appointment and she was highly esteemed by her subjects, which allowed her to begin her regency with more legitimacy than the prior two queen mothers. She ruled as regent for her son Louis XIV officially from 1643 to 1651 during a time of intense internal dissent in France and she continued to exert her authority even after her son ruled in his own right. All of our French queen regents first served as queens of France before becoming widows and then ruled as regents for their sons after their husbands died.

³¹ J. Russell Major and Victor-Louis Tapié are two early modern French political historians who wrote in the early 1980's.

In the Ottoman Empire, there were several queen mothers who reached the position of *validé*, but there are three that stand out during this period that are best suited for comparison to the French. The first one of note is Nurbanu Sultan (d.1583), who reigned as *validé* sultan from 1574, when her son Murad III procured the sultanate, and remained extremely influential up until her death. Descending from two noble Venetian families, Nurbanu came to the Ottoman Empire around the age of twelve as a captured slave.³² By 1542 she had started her political career after quickly becoming the favorite concubine to Selim II and bearing him five children, four daughters and one son.

Although Selim II fathered sons with other concubines during his time as sultan, he honored his son with Nurbanu by naming him the heir apparent.³³ Her royal seal read, “she who carried in the belly Sultan Murad for nine months,” highlighting her maternal status rather than her role as legal wife to Selim.³⁴ Nurbanu’s reign stands out because she was paramount to developing the prestigious image of the Ottoman dynasty both to its subjects and also abroad, thus starting a movement for the other *validés* to follow.

Moving to the seventeenth century, the second Ottoman case study leads us to Kösem Sultan (d.1651), who had the longest reign as *validé* sultan from 1623 to 1651, spanning the reigns of two of her sons, Murad IV and Ibrahim, and one of her grandsons, Mehmed IV. Kösem was of Greek origin and was brought to Istanbul at the age of fifteen and entered the harem of Sultan Ahmed I. She rapidly excelled inside the harem and came to be one of Ahmed’s favorites before ultimately becoming his second legal wife. Kösem makes for an interesting case study because she became an official regent for her son Murad IV, who was only eleven upon his

³² Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 92.

³³ Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 93.

³⁴ Pinar Kayaalp-Aktan, “The Atik Validé Mosque Complex: A Testament of Nurbanu’s Prestige, Power and Piety.” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2005), 45.

accession to the sultanate. As regent, Kösem was able to act in an official capacity and attended all meetings of the *Divan*, the highest governmental council of the Ottoman Empire. While previous *validé* sultans had helped to rule the empire alongside their sons, the formality of the position was not recognized prior to Kösem's rule in the seventeenth century. Thus, her role resembles much more closely those of her French counterparts, who also ruled without an adult male sovereign in place.

Our final Ottoman case study, Turhan Hatice Sultan (d.1683), came to the Ottoman Empire as a slave at twelve years of age and was trained by an Ottoman princess prior to being placed in the reigning *validé*'s (Kösem's) household. This queen mother is credited with the murder of her rival, Kösem, which allowed her to move into her rightful role as mother of the reigning sultan. She became the youngest *validé* when she took office at twenty-three years of age as regent for her son, (Kösem's grandson) Mehmed IV, when he was only nine years old, dynamically ruling beside him throughout his entire sultanate. From her power struggle with Kösem to her grand building projects, Turhan made a name for herself and was able to exercise significant power throughout her sovereignty.

How these six females accessed power is important, because it allows historians to examine the development of women's growing strength in the early modern political arena. Through a variety of means, these women emerged as visible participants in society and strategically exercised their influence through political matchmaking, household networking, and patronage. As a result, both the queen regent and the *validé* sultan were fundamental to the well-being of their lands and functioned to hold their realms together in the face of challenges stemming from the ever-changing complexities of the early modern world.

This thesis is divided into seven chapters, with the first chapter being the introduction, which lays out the historiography on the study of queenship and provides the groundwork to how I will add to this area of interest.

Chapter Two will tease out the historical context that is useful for understanding the nuances in the lawful position of the French queen regent and Ottoman *validé* sultan and the grounding in motherhood that helped promote their station. Secondly, it will explore a world in crisis and lay out the environmental backdrop of the period.

The third chapter will survey my initial research into the gynecocracy debate, which was fiercely argued in sixteenth-century Europe over whether or not women had the ability to rule (which has clarified the French case against female rule). My aim is to seek out the parallels or contrasts to this ideological stance against female rule within the Ottoman context. Understanding the views and debates over royal women's participation in politics in both patriarchal societies as they were articulated by male elites will allow us to understand how these women confronted the misogynistic thinking common to both realms.

Chapter Four will examine the reproductive and dynastic politics that demonstrate royal women's responsibilities for the continuation of the dynasty. The chapter will also elaborate on how these royal mothers safeguarded the dynasty for themselves and for their sons, which will show some remarkable similarities between our two sets of women.

Chapter Five will look at matrimonial politics as experienced in both realms throughout the early modern era. Since the participation of female royals in politics was vital to fruitful diplomatic relations to both the French and Ottoman realms, both the French queen and the *validé* sultan built highly connected networks within their courts to elevate their positions in their dynasty and realm.

The sixth chapter will detail the ways that the French queen regent and the Ottoman *validé* sultan legitimized themselves and their respective dynasty through patronage and prominent displays of power. Displays of power included rituals, festivals, several forms of art, and building projects. Both the French and Ottoman royal women were active patronesses who used their position and wealth to promote a vision of French and Ottoman sovereignty to their realm and subjects.

The final chapter which will draw clear conclusions about the royal women that we have explored throughout the study. It will provide a concise clarity on how these women are relatable and the things that set them apart.

Chapter 2: Setting the Stage: The Historical Context for the Emergence of Queen Mothers as Powerful Forces During the Early Modern Period

Before proceeding, it is important to understand the background and career paths of the French queen regents and Ottoman *validé* sultans. Because motherhood was the critical power base that the *validé* sultan and the French queen regent used to enhance their place in politics these two sets of female sovereigns are ripe for comparison. While both royal women first gained power through marriage to their husband, the king or sultan, for the *validé* and the queen regent female power was based on motherhood, which was distinct from wifehood.³⁵ French widowed queens leveraged their role as a mother to assume the position as queen regent, while the *validé* sultan became the most powerful figure through her connection to her son.

In France, the idea of a queen regnant- meaning a queen who could rule in her own right- was not legal due to the constraints of Salic Law, which legally prohibited women of royal lineage from ruling a kingdom in their own right. The role of regent was the sole possible exception, invoked only when the king was away from his kingdom, unable to rule, or succession circumstances thrust an underage king into power. In the case of the women covered here, we will focus primarily on the latter possibility, as it was the most common reason for a regent to be appointed.

A regent was considered a surrogate ruler who had been selected as the young boy's guardian, but over time the role evolved to include overseeing the central bureaucracy as well. Craig Taylor believes that France formally adopted Salic Law in the fifteenth century in response to the gynococracy debate (i.e., disagreement over whether a female had the ability to govern) but also to avoid the precedent that developed in England where women were allowed to rule in their own right, and thereby set France apart from other kingdoms. The implementation of the

³⁵ Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire*, 275.

new law came at a time when France was defending the Valois monarchs against the Plantagenet claim to the French throne. Therefore, the reason for the French hostility to women's rule most likely sought to preserve the existing dynasty from falling into the hands of foreign rule.³⁶

Because there was no risk of a woman inheriting the kingdom once Salic Law was implemented, it became increasingly accepted to entrust the mother of the young French king with the role of regent until the male heir had reached the age of majority, which in this period was fifteen years old, since she was the natural guardian of her children. Once this role came to be grounded in historical precedent, the official office of queen regent persisted and undoubtedly grew in influence during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Throughout her regency, a queen was granted much of the authority the king himself possessed and was allowed to sign charters, enforce legislation, and name people to offices. A process that historians have called "maternal opportunism"³⁷ allowed the queen mother's authority to continually expand, because each act she carried out as regent provided additional more precedent and sources of authority and legitimacy for the next.

In the Ottoman realm, the *validé* sultan became a powerful figure as her position progressively formalized during the so-called "Sultanate of Women." This institution became especially influential during a 130-year period between 1530 and 1660, when harem women were able to assume great authority and influence throughout the realm. As in the French kingdom, women could not officially rule at the head of the central government, but once the male heir became the reigning sultan, the mother would advance to the position of *validé* sultan, also known as queen mother. As long as her son remained sultan she would hold this title and

³⁶ Craig Taylor, "The Salic Law, French Queenship, and the Defense of Women in the Late Middle Ages," *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 29, No 4 (2006): 375-377.

³⁷ Sharon L. Jansen, *The Monstrous Regiment of Women: Female Rulers in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 193.

have access to the power that came with it. Leslie Peirce states that the “greatest source of authority and status for dynastic women continued to be the role of mother of a male dynast.”³⁸ Their role enabled them legitimate authority in the harem and, through what historian Michael Rank would call “political jockeying,” allowed them to extend this control outside the harem walls.³⁹ It can be argued that the *validés* assumed more power than the sultans themselves, at a time when power was otherwise understood as an inevitably male sphere.

Both French and Ottoman culture valued mothers. The French word for motherhood is *maternité*, and according to the Encyclopedia of Motherhood, “the French hold the idea of motherhood in the highest regard.”⁴⁰

Writing in 1610, Jean Savaron stated:

The love mothers have for their children is natural and nothing can alter it... [they have no pretense] to the crown: consequently [no] care to do something prejudicial to the state and against their children, [toward] whom, being mothers, they can only be chastised for excess, and not for lack of, love.⁴¹

European historian Teresa Earenfight concurs with this observation by stating that motherhood combined a queen’s practical role and political importance.⁴²

As for the Ottomans, the status of motherhood in Islam was extremely revered, and remains so right up to the present, which can easily be discerned in several verses of the Qur’an.⁴³ A verse from *the Qur’anic chapter al-Ahqaf* illustrates this point by stating gratefulness for one’s parents while emphasizing the suffering a mother bears:

And we have enjoined upon man, to his parents, good treatment. His mother

³⁸ Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 230.

³⁹ Melissa and Michael Rank, *The Most Powerful Women in the Middle Ages: Queens, Saints, and Viking Slayers, From Empress Theodora to Elizabeth of Tudor* (Five Minute Books, 2013).

⁴⁰ Andrea O’Reilly, ed., *Encyclopedia of Motherhood Volume 1* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2010), 425.

⁴¹ Harriet Lightman, “Queens and Minor Kings in French Constitutional Law,” *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History*, Vol 9 (1981): 26-36, 4.

⁴² Teresa Earenfight, *Queenship in Medieval Europe* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 7.

⁴³ *Al-Qur’an*, 46:15.

carried him with hardship and gave birth to him with hardship, and his gestation and weaning [period] is thirty months. [He grows] until, when he reaches maturity and reaches [the age of] forty years, he says, “My Lord, enable me to be grateful for Your favor which You have bestowed upon me and upon my parents and to work righteousness of which You will approve and make righteous for me my offspring. Indeed, I have repented to You, and indeed, I am of the Muslims (46:15).

This Qur’anic ethos can also be seen in the growth and elaboration of *hadiths*, or oral traditions given by the Prophet Muhammad, that were compiled in the centuries after his death, which also esteem the role of the mother. For example, a verse in the *Sahih al-Bukhari* states, “God has forbidden for you to be undutiful to your mothers.” Another tradition from the *Sahih* of Muslim b. Hajjaj (d. 875) enjoins the following sentiment:

A man came to the Prophet and said: O Messenger of Allah! Who from amongst mankind warrants the best companionship from me? He replied: “Your mother.” The man asked: Then who? So he replied: “Your mother.” The man then asked: Then who? So the Prophet replied again: “Your mother.” The man then asked: Then who? So he replied: “Then your father.”⁴⁴

These texts are just a few that boldly illustrate that mothers hold a prominent position in Islam. According to its tenets, neither fathers nor wives were as revered as the role of a mother. In understanding this cultural framework in the context of the Imperial harem, we can then see the ways in which the *validé* sultan could establish a space for power and authority and win esteem from the reigning sultan, grand viziers, Ottoman subjects, and others throughout the empire.

Foreigners also commented on their observation on motherhood within the Ottoman Empire. Eighteenth century sources such as `La Baronne Durand de Fontmagne, a French ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, reported that, “[T]he respect toward their mothers is

⁴⁴ Sahîh Bukhârî, Volume 8, Book 73, Number 2; www.sunnah.com

infinite.”⁴⁵ Another reference from a source written on “domestic manners” in the Ottoman Empire states:

An equally beautiful feature in the character of the Turks is their reverence and respect for the author of their being. . . .the mother is an oracle; she is consulted, confided in, listened to with respect and deference, honored to her latest hour, and remembered with affection and regret beyond the grave.⁴⁶

Although this reference dates from a subsequent period, they reveal the veneration mothers received in Ottoman society.

Ruling sons naturally trusted their mothers as a close advisor, and the regent’s and *validé*’s close access to the male sovereign helped to elevate her position in politics. Asli Sancar, a well-respected writer on women’s issues and Ottoman women, argues that “the queen mother was the only person in the whole Empire to whom the sultan showed public deference.”⁴⁷

French historian Katherine Crawford argues that in France a regent’s “political career rested on being considered a good mother.”⁴⁸ These women were by and large the senior members of the household and of the ruling dynasty. Additionally, both the queen regent and the *validé* sultan symbolized a direct link and a sense of security from one sovereign to the next, and since the ties were based on a familial mother-son relationship, this ideology helped to support a more stable social order of the realm.⁴⁹ In understanding the cultural framework as being rooted in motherhood, we can then see the base from which the French queen regent and the *validé* sultan could establish their powers and be held in esteem by their subjects.

⁴⁵ Le Baronne Durand de Fontmagne, *Kirim Harbi Sonrasinda Istanbul* (Istanbul: Kervan Kitapçılık Basım Sanayii ve Ticaret A.Ş., 1977), 243.

⁴⁶ Julia Pardoe, *City of the Sultan and Domestic Manners of the Turks in 1836*. 3 vols. 2nd Ed (London: Henry Colburn, 1838), vol. I, 93; Asli Sancar, *Ottoman Women: Myth and Reality* (Somerset: Light, Inc. 2007), 61.

⁴⁷ Asli Sancar, *Ottoman Women: Myth and Reality*, 168.

⁴⁸ Katherine Crawford, *Perilous Performances: Gender and Regency in Early Modern France* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 29, 205.

⁴⁹ Teresa Earenfight, *Queenship in Medieval Europe*, 10.

Now that we have a better viewpoint of the legality of their position and how they transmitted their identity as mother of the king or sultan, it is also important to grasp the narrative of crisis as a background to their rule. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries presented certain challenges to each of the royal houses that differentiate this epoch from any other. Geoffrey Parker's *Global Crisis: War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century* examines and merges the severe climate effects of the Little Ice Age to the political, economic, and social instability of this period, defined by Hugh Trevor-Roper as the "General Crisis," to create a new dimension to the messy and complex seventeenth century. In both realms, this crisis began to emerge in the late sixteenth century, with its peak materializing in the mid seventeenth century.

What seems to set this century apart from any other is the correlation between climate change and conflict, not just in France and the Ottoman Empire but throughout the world. During the 1600s Europe only experienced three years of peace; the Ottoman Empire only ten.⁵⁰ According to Parker, "Global Crisis" factors included: climate change, famine, migration, crop failure, disease pandemics, inflation, economic strain, overpopulation in cities, heightened religious conflict, and instability in hierarchical systems. All these elements can be identified in both the French and Ottoman case studies, and all caused a severe amount of pressure to each realm that produced hardship, trauma, and chaos.

To explore this a bit further, environmental conditions were brutal in France, with cold and extended winters, hail storms, floods, and rainy summers ruining crops and triggering unrest, starvation, and death among the populace.⁵¹ Famine caused urban revolts over the price of bread; which had increased more than fifty percent at times. In dire circumstances people

⁵⁰ Geoffrey Parker, *Global Crisis: War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), xvii.

⁵¹ Geoffrey Parker, *Global Crisis*, 294; Parker particularly cites the winters between 1625-1631.

resorted to eating grass while thousands died of starvation. In one extant account a nun writes, “...we have fear if this weather continues we will die of hunger just like you, because if they [the soldiers] take everything from us, as they do with others, we have no idea where to find food, since nothing remains in the countryside....The famine is at least as great here as in Paris, and in addition we are burdened with soldiers.”⁵² Likewise, Parisian subjects actively shouted in the streets, “give us bread or give us peace,”⁵³ and were more vocal against the crown than we see in Istanbul. Disease also disrupted populations, with France losing more than one million people to the Black Death between 1628 and 1631 alone.⁵⁴ In addition, the “witch craze” peaked in the seventeenth century and triggered a massive social upset in France and across Europe, which encouraged intense violence against women.

Militarily, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries France was overwhelmed with external and internal conflict. The Thirty Years War caused extreme financial deficits and overextended French credit. Religious tensions were high as France backed Protestant efforts alarmed by the balance of power in Europe should the Hapsburg Empire prevail. The Franco-Spanish War (1635-1659) also caused excessive taxation that exhausted the populace.

The female sovereigns we will examine also governed amidst a backdrop of fervent religious tensions. The French Wars of Religion (1562-1598) and the Huguenot rebellions (1620-1628) both upset the balance of power and weakened the monarchy’s power under the Valois. During the Thirty Years War, religious elites from both Protestant and Catholic camps were forced to flee when conquered by the other, and cities were constantly changing hands and religions. Violence issued by soldiers from both sides created mass destruction. In France, both

⁵² Geoffrey Parker, *Global Crisis*, 311.

⁵³ Geoffrey Parker, *Global Crisis*, 313.

⁵⁴ Geoffrey Parker, *Global Crisis*, 7.

chief ministers Richelieu and Mazarin instigated internal tensions with their unremitting decision to continue a war with another Catholic monarch.

Taking place under Anne's reign, the *Fronde* (meaning "sling") was a two-part civil war against the nobility and the parliaments, consisting of the Resistance of Parliament from 1648 to 1649 and the Revolt of the Princes (1649-1653). Participants were rebelling against new taxation measures to fund the war and their inability to pass on governmental positions to their person of choice. Parker argues that around one million French subjects died as a result of the *Fronde*.⁵⁵

An exclusive element to the French case study was that the country had the biggest press industry. The invention of the printing press caused wide circulation of information and ideas during this era, as there were more than three hundred and fifty printing houses in Paris, leading to the peak of political pamphlets that were being produced during the *Fronde*, causing excess pressures that Anne of Austria was forced to navigate.⁵⁶

In total, France faced great hardship during the "Global Crisis" since, most often, governments were focused more on foreign issues than on domestic emergencies. Catherine, Marie, and Anne aimed to give strength to France and confidence to French society through their policies and strategies.

The intersection of the "Little Ice Age" and the "General Crisis" has been identified as a critical juncture in the history of the Ottoman Empire. Climate change and natural disasters caused a vicious cycle of demographic and agricultural contraction. The mere size of the Ottoman Empire, which realized "20 million subjects and 1 million square miles," sets its case

⁵⁵ Geoffrey Parker, *Global Crisis*, 291.

⁵⁶ Geoffrey Parker, *Global Crisis*, 31.

study apart.⁵⁷ Climate change and natural disasters caused crop failures, famine, and severe water shortages.

Environmental historian Sam White in his work *Climate of Rebellion* argues that the drought of the 1590s in the Ottoman Empire was acutely harsh and motivated a mass migration to cities, termed “The Great Flight,” which consequently hurt income revenues from agricultural lands and caused overpopulation in cities.⁵⁸ Furthermore, cold weather patterns stunted Ottoman sheep populations, which paralyzed the provisioning of Ottoman troops.⁵⁹ Due to harsh environmental conditions, Parker cites that half of all villages vanished in Anatolia between 1576 and 1642, while in other parts of the empire, including central Greece– Bulgaria, and Macedonia– household numbers dropped significantly by half during the mid1600s as well.⁶⁰ This left Ottoman society wracked with a shortage in labor supply and the inability to raise adequate taxes from agricultural production to fund its wartime economy. Food shortages caused food prices to skyrocket in the capital and created severe unrest among Ottoman subjects.

Parker also emphasizes that the seventeenth century was a century of war, and at one point the Ottoman Empire was spending seventy-five percent of its annual budget on prolonged, unprofitable wars.⁶¹ During this time the authority of the sultan began to wane as the role of the *validé* sultan and the grand vizier became more powerful. During the seventeenth century, ten different sultans and more than sixty different grand viziers came to power, and the empire experienced its first regicide (of Osman II in 1622) and its second with Sultan Ibrahim in

⁵⁷ Geoffrey Parker, *Global Crisis*, 185.

⁵⁸ Sam White, *The Climate of Rebellion in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 140-141.

⁵⁹ Sam White, *The Climate of Rebellion in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire*, 140-162.

⁶⁰ Geoffrey Parker, *Global Crisis*, 188.

⁶¹ Geoffrey Parker, *Global Crisis*, 33.

1648. These numbers were significant increases over the five sultans and thirty-eight grand viziers that came to office during the sixteenth century. This instability in the hierarchy left the capital vulnerable to power struggles from competing factions.

The Kadizadeli religious movement was another element that disrupted Ottoman society. During this era, religious elites placed blame on diminishing religious purity for what they viewed as Ottoman societal decay.⁶² There was much debate about what being a Muslim entailed, and there was a big push for Islamizing the empire. We can see this with the expelling of the Jews, who were once welcomed, and also in sizable mosque building projects in neighborhoods scattered throughout Istanbul.

Translated writings from contemporary sources illustrate a society dealing with political, economic, and social struggles. These writings, used in earlier Ottoman historiography to explain Ottoman decline, should not be mined for facts, as they mostly reflect people's political agendas, though they are still useful for the historian. Advisor to Sultan Murad IV, Kochu Bey, attributed decay to the withdrawal of the sultan, Imperial favoritism, and palace intrigue.⁶³ Katib Celebi also cited excess taxation, the sale of offices, and the barren treasury as causing Ottoman decline.⁶⁴ Additionally, translations of Katib Celebi's *Balance of Truth*, a compilation of treatises on social topics that had become contentious among Ottoman Muslims (including tobacco use, dancing, drinking coffee, etc.), aimed to satirize these issues that the religious community saw as corrupting Islam.

Sultan Murad IV shut down coffee shops for fear they were a place of rebellious plotting. Katib Celebi reasoned that "the best course is not to interfere with anyone in this

⁶² Madeline C. Zilfi, "The Kadizadeli: Discordant Revivalism in Seventeenth-Century Istanbul," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (October, 1986): 251-252, 254.

⁶³ Bernard Lewis, "Ottoman Observers of Ottoman Decline," *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (March 1962): 75-78.

⁶⁴ Bernard Lewis, "Ottoman Observers of Ottoman Decline," *Islamic Studies*, 78-81.

respect, and that is all there is to it,” and ultimately he held that society should stay out of religious fanatical debate so that the empire could focus on the military and fiscal crisis strangling the empire.⁶⁵ Although these writings are contemporaneously unaware of the stresses of climate change, they do illuminate some of the factors straining the Ottoman capital. Nurbanu, Kösem, and Turhan definitely felt the pressures the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries presented, and we will examine their measures to aid the capital and the dynasty as it traversed the conditions that weakened Ottoman society.

Royal queen mothers faced an almost insurmountable civil and environmental landscape in both realms during this period, but they did successfully navigate it through concentrated efforts to legitimize themselves, to balance conflicting interests, and to preserve the dynasty for their sons. The ability of these royal women to step onto the political stage with such force during this time clearly intersected with the crisis unleashed by climate change. However, additional research will be required in order to determine to what extent the conditions brought on by the crisis were a leading catalyst for the emergence of strong and visible female agency during this epoch. The next chapter will examine the ways in which both sets of women maneuvered among different structures of reproductive practices within dynastic politics to set their political careers in motion.

⁶⁵ Kātib Chelebi, *The Balance of Truth*, trans., G.L. Lewis (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1957), 56-57, 64.

Chapter 3: Women, Politics, and Power Debate

Female rulers in Europe and the Near East enjoyed a long history before the idea of the so-called abnormality of female rule took hold in the sixteenth century. However, the abundant number of female queens ruling in Europe during this period led to increasing apprehension about the suitable role of women in society. In response, the gynecocracy debate about a women's ability to rule was being aggressively argued in Europe by the middle of the sixteenth century, and if we look at the extant sources that we have from the Islamic world combined with those within the Ottoman Empire we can find some parallels to this talk against female rule also within the Ottoman context. The ideas underlying acceptable female roles were formed throughout history and heavily informed by religion. Both the "Monstrous Regiment of Women," and the "Sultanate of Women," express the phenomenon of women rising to power that was especially pronounced in these two seemingly unrelated contexts in Europe: France and the Ottoman Empire; by understanding how world cultures thought about these roles, we can discern how the royal women in both France and the Ottoman Empire were perceived and accepted in their societies.

Joan Scott holds that "gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power."⁶⁶ Women in power were at the center of their society and, therefore, at the forefront of political discourse. Gynecocracy and the controversy these royal women created when they stepped into a political role – and, thus, outside the normal, expected behavior of women – is vital to understanding women's position in politics during this epoch. The historical underpinnings to the debate that emerged are equally important to examine.

⁶⁶ Joan Scott. "Gender : A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review*. Vol. 91, No. 5 (Dec., 1986): 1075.

Inherited ideas from the classical period of Greek philosophy reemerged during the early modern era, with Aristotelian thought playing a key role. Aristotle's assertion that women were imperfect men and intellectually inferior was hugely influential in women being viewed as foolish, inconstant, cruel, and impatient.⁶⁷ Furthermore, scientific views of the sexual body during this period reinforced these notions, with women depicted as cold, wet, and frail, with imperfect bodies and beings.

Aristotle's teachings baldly stated that "[t]he male principle in nature is associated with active, formative and perfected characteristics while the female is passive, material and deprived, desiring the male in order to become complete."⁶⁸ These teachings were widely read, and the belief that women were inferior to men both biologically and socially was largely held in Christian European and Islam Near East societies.

Representative of much of Christian religious discourse, a sixteenth century homily says, "[f]or the woman is a weak creature, not endured with like strength and constancy of mind, therefore they be the sooner disquieted, and they be more prone to all weak affection and dispositions of mind, more than men be, and lighter they be, and more vain in their fantasies and opinions."⁶⁹ Likewise, in records of the hadiths recounted by Abu Said Al-Khudri, the Prophet is to have said, "[i]sn't the witness of a woman equal to half of that of a man? The woman said, 'Yes.' He said, 'This is because of the deficiency of a woman's mind.'"⁷⁰

These beliefs were deeply rooted in both societies, and early modern culture in France and the Ottoman Empire vastly supported ideas that women, as a group, were inferior to men.

⁶⁷ Mary Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 22.

⁶⁸ Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, rev. Oxford translation, 2 vols. Princeton, 1984, 1:328.

⁶⁹ Laura Gowing, ed., *Gender Relations in Early Modern England*, (Harlow: Pearson, 2012), 120.

⁷⁰ Sahîh Bukhârî -Volume 3, Book 48, Number 826; www.sunnah.com.

Furthermore, patriarchy held that women had no identity apart from a male elder, defined as either her father or her husband.

Gerda Lerner argues that systemic patriarchy became embedded in society as a learned behavior through historical development and not as a natural experience.⁷¹ Similarly, Islamic historian Leila Ahmed notes that Aristotelean influence was extensive in both Arab and European civilizations and that “his themes systematized the social values and practices of that society.”⁷² Gender historians Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks and Laura Gowing have examined how gender shaped European society during the early modern era at a time when gender hierarchies became progressively enclosed, which was in direct contrast to the greater autonomy that women held during the medieval era.

Views supporting the subordination of women were readily adopted in medieval societies, and religion has long been used by males as a way to enforce and emphasize females’ lower status. Citing the story of Genesis, religious elites during this time stressed Eve’s punishment as submission to her husband and therefore argued that women belonged under the protection or supervision of male authority. Learned men also used scriptural passages to highlight women’s submissive status, often citing the following New Testament passages:

“Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.”⁷³

“Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.”⁷⁴

⁷¹ Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 212-219.

⁷² Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 28-29.

⁷³ 1 Peter 3:7 (NIV).

⁷⁴ Ephesians 5:22-23 (NIV).

“A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet.”⁷⁵

Islamic religious discourse similarly stated that women were to obey men because males were the superior sex. A passage from the Quran was frequently cited, though often misinterpreted, to justify male dominance over women: “[m]en are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property [for the support of women]. So good women are the obedient, guarding in secret that which Allah hath guarded.”⁷⁶

Gender expectations placed on women during these centuries and perceptions of the concepts of masculine and feminine are important to the way men, writers, and scholars of the day shaped and positioned women in society, especially in the case of queens or *validés*. Christian European sources emphasized that women were expected to be “chaste, obedient, and silent.” Similarly, the highest virtues for women in Muslim societies were obedience to God and one’s husband, purity, modesty and motherly love.⁷⁷ Across all realms, in contrast, expected male traits included intelligence, courage, and steadfastness, as well as military prowess for kings or sultans.

Female obedience was especially emphasized in both societies, because there was a prevalent fear held by learned men that if women were not taught social disciplines, grounded in virtues such as modesty and submissiveness, then they could and would disrupt the order of society. As for men of royal background, they could simply openly assert their desire for power, whereas women, when they were in a position to wield power were required to navigate a

⁷⁵ 1 Timothy 2:11-12 (NIV).

⁷⁶ *Al-Qur’an*, 4:34.

⁷⁷ Barbara Freyer Stowasser, *Women in the Qur’an, Traditions, and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 21.

complex web of stereotypes and limitations. Accordingly, women's intersection with power was increasingly identified with disorganization and blamed for much of the chaos that society might experience. Peirce argues that the "debate over women was a metaphor for order." Likewise, Weisner-Hanks would agree this was also the case in the European context.⁷⁸ The following section will begin to survey writings and arguments in French and Ottoman societies to help form a conclusion about how royal women came to contravene societal expectations of female rule.

Questions of female capability, faculty, equality, and opportunity were raised throughout the early modern era. Humanism became a leading intellectual movement that had begun in Italy and spread across Europe, and its curriculum encompassed poetry, rhetoric, philosophy, and history. The revival of ancient Greek and Roman literature, and the growing value placed on a humanist education, spurred a re-examination of the nature and role that women played in society.

This humanist exploration of women fomented a growing public debate and also began a counter narrative to the one that had dominated society for centuries. In France, this debate came to be known as the *querelle des femmes* which began in the 1500s, particularly sparked by the work of Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim. Agrippa authored the work *On The Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex*, which was written in 1509 but not published until two decades later. Agrippa's work was swiftly translated into vernacular languages and achieved wide circulation across Europe.⁷⁹ In the work he states, "Woman has been allotted the same

⁷⁸ Leslie Peirce, *Imperial Harem*, 276.

⁷⁹ Agrippa served in the courts of two powerful women, Louise of Savoy and Margaret of Austria, who both were politically active in their respective territories.

intelligence, reason, and power of speech as man and tends to the same end he does.”⁸⁰ He also argued that women had been held at a lesser status than men not because they were a weaker or deformed sex but because of the “excessive tyranny of men.”⁸¹

Despite Agrippa’s contrary opinions, French political tradition held that women were not fit to rule. As already addressed, Salic law, which restricted a regnant queen from taking the throne in her own right, was formed and adopted in France during the medieval period. In the article “Salic Law, French Queenship, and the Defense of Women in the Late Middle Ages,” Craig Taylor argues that one of the several reasons the French adopted Salic Law was fears of gynecocracy.⁸² Xenophobia, or keeping the French throne safe from foreign influence, was another. Allegiance toward the French way of governance further fueled the sentiment against female rule.⁸³

French writer and lawyer Charles Loyseau states that one of the rationalizations for believing France to be “a perfect sovereignty” was that it could not be ruled by women.⁸⁴ Catherine de’Medici decisively disagreed and, as recorded by Brantôme, she regarded Salic law as “an abuse” and “not just.”⁸⁵ In a discussion of her daughter ever inheriting the crown if Salic law were to be eliminated, Catherine stated:

...and I think her reign would be a fine one, equal to that of a king her grandfather and that of the king her father for she has a great mind and great virtues for doing that thing.⁸⁶

⁸⁰ Henricus Cornelius Agrippa, *Declamation of the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex*, trans. and ed. Albert Rabil Jr., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 43.

⁸¹ Henricus Cornelius Agrippa, *Declamation of the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex*, 94.

⁸² Craig Taylor, “Salic Law, French Queenship, and the Defense of Women in the Late Middle Ages,” *French Historical Studies*, Vol 29, No 4 (Fall 2006), 366-367.

⁸³ Derval Conroy, *Ruling Women Volume 2: Configuring the Female Prince in Seventeenth-Century French Drama* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 11.

⁸⁴ Charles Loyseau, *Traité des Seigneurs*, (Paris: Abel L’Angelier, 1608), 43.

⁸⁵ R.J. Knecht, *Catherine De’ Medici* (London: Longman, 1998), 173.

⁸⁶ R.J. Knecht, *Catherine De’ Medici*, 168.

It was not to be, however, as Salic law was never abolished in the French kingdom and, thus, the country had no female rulers in their own right like England, Sweden, Spain and Scotland did during the 1500s and 1600s.⁸⁷ Nevertheless, this legal restriction ultimately did not prevent royal mothers from wielding political power in France.

The gynococracy debate spread throughout Europe during the sixteenth century, fueled largely by the publication of John Knox's *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558), which brazenly remarked that women rulers were unnatural and in direct opposition to God's intentions for them.⁸⁸ In his introduction to the work Knox wrote, "[a] woman promoted to sit in the seat of God, that is, to teach, to judge or to reign above man, is a monster in nature, contumely to God, and a thing most repugnant to his will and ordinance."⁸⁹ Several other writers in France joined the debate and added to Knox's claim that women were unfit to rule. Derval Conroy argues that the principal argument of these elite men was that women did not have royal virtues of "steadfastness, prudence, and magnanimity"⁹⁰ that would give them the ability to rule, since sovereignty during this period "was constructed as male" and centered on "constancy, strength, and stability."⁹¹

The increasing technology of the printing press led to a "virulent pamphlet war" spreading rapidly across Europe.⁹² There were thousands of treatises, books, poems, and articles that circulated throughout Europe during this period, which illustrates how heated the topic was during this period when women were in the political foreground across Europe. In France, the

⁸⁷ Queen regnant included: Queen Elizabeth I, Queen Christina of Sweden, Elenora of Toledo, Mary Queen of Scots

⁸⁸ The gynococracy debate was the debate over women's ability to rule or to lead a government.

⁸⁹ John Knox, *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (Geneva, 1558), fol.16r. John Knox is writing when Mary Tudor, Mary Stuart, and Mary Guise all held positions of authority in England.

⁹⁰ Louis Turquet de Mayerne, *La Monarchie Aristodemocratique* (Paris: J. Berjon, 1611), 62.

⁹¹ Derval Conroy, *Ruling Women Volume I: Government, Virtue, and the Female Prince in Seventeenth Century France*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 25-26.

⁹² Sharon L. Jansen, *Debating Women, Politics, and Power in Early Modern Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 35.

subject of virtue was at the forefront of the *querelle des femmes*. Accordingly, the identified virtues of government were inherently male virtues: integrity, justice, and reason. Women were believed not to possess these traits and, therefore, could not rule effectively. A survey of writings published in France at this time serves to inform the political and cultural milieu during the early modern period, at the time when queen regents were coming to power.

One of the most significant figures of this period and debate was Jean Bodin, a French lawyer and philosopher who published *Six Livres de la République* in 1576. He determined that:

...a Monarchy ought to descend unto the heires male, considering that the rule and gouernment of women, is directy against the law of nature...women should be subject unto the man, and that not onely in gouernment of kingdoms and empires, but also in every particular mans house and familie.⁹³

Bodin also published *De la démonomanie des sorciers* (1580), a book on sorcery and witchcraft that was frequently referenced during the witch-hunts that occurred during the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries throughout Europe. Bodin, and other demonologists like Heinrich Kramer, who wrote the *Malleus Maleficarum*, claimed that women were acutely susceptible to witchcraft and demon worship.⁹⁴ There was an undeniable gender element to the witch-hunt phenomenon that clearly developed from patriarchal ideas. Witch manuals written by learned men asserted that women were vulnerable to evil acts and clouded with an insatiable lust. Moreover, their weak minds made them more vulnerable to a relationship with the devil.

Other writers made similar arguments, Jacques Le Fons argued that it was the weakness of their gender that prohibited women from ruling, stating that women are “fragile, inconstant, and fickle.”⁹⁵ Turquet de Mayerne also believed women to be weak, which made them

⁹³ Jean Bodin, *The six books of a Commonweale*, trans. Richard Knolles (London: Impensis G. Bishop, 1606), 746.

⁹⁴ Brian P. Levak, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2006), 144-145.

⁹⁵ Jacques Le Fons, *Le Dauphin* (Paris: Claude Morel, 1609), 30-32.

incompetent to perform proficiently in political affairs.⁹⁶ There was also a strong belief that women were biologically predisposed to an insatiable lust, “passions generated by the womb,” which constantly drove their sexual desire.⁹⁷ De Mayerne thus made the argument that these overpowering desires made women incapable of rule.⁹⁸

It is important to note that, as this debate developed, there were also men throughout Europe, and specifically in France, who wrote in the defense of women. David Chambers, a Scottish judge and historian who came to French court after fleeing from Scotland, argued that “No state has been governed by princesses more often than in France, nor with greater profit to the public; and it seems a counterweight to foreclosing them from reigning officially over that kingdom.”⁹⁹ Chambers also countered Bodin’s and Knox’s political theory, proposing that since women governed families they were therefore also able to govern countries.¹⁰⁰

François Du Soucy, sieur de Gerzan, a French writer at the forefront of the *querelle des femmes*, authored *Le Triomphe des Dames*. Gerzan believed that women were not evil but created in God’s image as a blessing to man. In his work Gerzan states, “Eve qui signifie la vie...L’homme n’a reçu la benediction de Dieu qu’après la creation de la femme [Eve signifies life...man received the benediction of God after the creation of the woman].”¹⁰¹ Gerzan also believed that to govern the virtue of prudence was essential. In the passage “[l]es hommes s’enseruent par estude; [&] les femmes l’ont naturelle,” he asserts that women have prudence naturally, whereas for men it is an acquired virtue they must learn.¹⁰²

⁹⁶ Louis Turquet de Mayerne, *La Monarchie Aristodemocratique*, 59.

⁹⁷ Madeline Roches and Catherine Roches, *From Mother and Daughter: Poems, Dialogues, and Letter of Les Dames de Roches*, ed. and trans. Anne R. Larsen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), xiii.

⁹⁸ Turquet de Mayerne, *La Monarchie Aristodemocratique*, 495-496.

⁹⁹ William Monter, *Rise of Female Kings in Europe, 1300-1800*, 115.

¹⁰⁰ David Chambers, *Discours de la Légitime Succession des Femmes aux Possessions de leurs parents & du gouvernement des princesses aux Empires & Royaumes* (Paris, 1579), 16.

¹⁰¹ François Du Soucy, sieur de Gerzan, *Le Triomphe des Dames* (Paris, 1646), 202.

¹⁰² François Du Soucy, sieur de Gerzan, *Le Triomphe des Dames*, 169.

The lawyer Saint Gabriel, in his work *Mérite des dames* (1655), stated that since men and women live under the same laws, women therefore had the authority to execute the law.¹⁰³ Henri d’Audiguier, author of *Le Censeur censure* (1652) published under Anne of Austria’s regency, defended female government. The passage below illustrates his argument that patriarchal societal norms were what prevented women from ruling, or caused them to rule with difficulty and not necessarily due to lack of ability:

There is therefore no convincing reason to justify that the reign of women is less advantageous than that of men; the only argument is that men, especially Frenchmen, tolerate government by women with difficulty, and that the nobles encroach more readily on their authority, as is evident in the history of the regency of Queen Blanche. In light of this, neither women nor their government should be blamed but rather our intolerance and the ambition of the nobles.¹⁰⁴

Outside of France, Henry Howard’s “A Dutiful Defense of the Lawful Regiment of Women” makes the case that it is not sex that determines the civil law of inheritance but blood, and that God purposely created both men and women equally in his image and, therefore, “the sex of women by the sacred law of God was not created incapable of regiment.”¹⁰⁵

Furthermore, we see the debate of these ideas in more than just treatises and published works but also on the stage. During Anne of Austria’s regency there were several plays — including *Sigismond duc de Varsau* (1646), *Jeanne de Naples* (1656), *Fédéric* (1660), and *La Mort du Grand Cyrus* (1662) — that addressed the debate of female rule.¹⁰⁶ In a passage of *Sigismond* we see a defense for the equality of the sexes:

So we must recognize that the same light
Constitutes the minds of both men and women,
That the same God created theirs and ours

¹⁰³ Antoine de Saint Gabriel, *Mérite des dames* (Paris, 1655), 91.

¹⁰⁴ Henri d’Audiguier du Mazet, *Le Censeur censure* (Paris: n.p., 1652), 1-12; Henri D’Audiguier du Mazet was the attorney general to Anne of Austria.

¹⁰⁵ Henry Howard, “A Dutiful Defence of the Lawful Regiment of Women,” fol. 155v-157r (British Library MS Lansdowne 813, 1590) debate citation, 189.

¹⁰⁶ For more information on the aforementioned plays see *Ruling Women* Volume 2, 67-92.

Without making one weaker or better than the other;¹⁰⁷

That these ideas or notions deeply penetrated the culture of France during the height of female rule reveals just how significant this debate had become.

It was not solely men who editorialized, but women also took to their pens. One of the earliest and most influential female writers to write in the defense of women and to decry their subservient status was Christine de Pizan, who wrote *Book of the City of Ladies* in 1405. Through her writing, de Pizan was very clear in her mission to defend the true nature of women and their intellectual capabilities, and she challenged the negative attitudes about women reflected in earlier writings: “Causing any damage or harm to one party in order to help another party is not justice, and likewise, attacking all feminine conduct [in order to warn men away from individual women who are deceitful] is contrary to the truth.”¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, de Pizan stressed that it was not one’s sex that determines their goodness and wrote, “The man or the women in whom resides greater virtue is the higher; neither the loftiness nor the lowliness of a person lies in the body according to the sex but in the perfection of conduct and virtues.”¹⁰⁹ These early writings began to give women a voice and served as an example to other women writers looking to make their own contribution to the impending *querelle des femmes*.

Two French female humanist literary scholars who wrote during the sixteenth century are Madeline and Catherine Roches, a mother and daughter who ran a literary salon in Poitiers. Their writings also addressed the virtue and abilities of women and both were proponents of education for women. In her Ode I (verses 77-80), Madeline des Roches wrote:

To help us bear the misfortunes of life,
God imparts to us a mighty intellect

¹⁰⁷ Derval Conroy, *Ruling Women* Volume 2, 68.

¹⁰⁸ Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. Earl Jeffrey Richards (New York: Persea Books, 1982), 17.

¹⁰⁹ Christine de Pizan, *Book of the City of Ladies*, 24.

That we are to turn into an active force
In spite of death, fortune, and envy.¹¹⁰

Madeline also wrote in her Epistle to my Daughter (verses 14-18):

For your heart is naturally inclined to virtue.
It is not enough, however, to be wellborn;
Acquired knowledge makes us well-mannered,
And the fire burning in our soul,
When deprived of learning is soon consumed.¹¹¹

Another notable female figure writing during the gynecocracy debate is Marie le Jars de Gournay. Her treatise, published in 1622, was titled *L'Egalité des hommes et des femmes*, and dedicated to Anne of Austria. De Gournay declared that “it has served France well to develop the device of female regents as the equivalent of kings during royal minorities.”¹¹²

Although not as plentiful as male writings on this subject, these female writers illustrate a certain female agency that had begun to foster a belief in the equality of women and their ability to govern. While many historians have called this heated debate merely a humanist exploration of the role of women in society, Sharon Jansen argues that the debate reflected a period of “profound social, religious, political, and economic change” that were going on in Europe.¹¹³ In fact, the number of rhetorical writings being produced reached its height after 1650, which is commonly the peak of the global crisis in most parts of the world, including France and the Ottoman Empire. The debate engaged several notable people who each had specific viewpoints, and although there were several well-defined arguments against female rule in France, there were also several that defended women and their abilities to govern.

¹¹⁰ Madeline Roches and Catherine Roches, *From Mother and Daughter*, 55.

¹¹¹ Madeline Roches and Catherine Roches, *From Mother and Daughter*, 47-48.

¹¹² Marie la Jars de Gournay, *Apology for the Women Writing and Other Works*, trans. and ed. Richard Hillman and Colette Quesnal, *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 75.

¹¹³ Sharon L. Jansen, *Debating Women, Politics, and Power in Early Modern Europe*, 113.

Although the gynecocracy debate did not develop in the Ottoman Empire along the same lines as France and the rest of Europe, several Ottoman writings on women do exist. They can generally be found in philosophical, religious, and political writings of the medieval and early modern periods that use Islamic exegesis (interpretation of a text) as a means of discrediting women as political actors. Historian Madeline Zilfi argues that “the discourse on women as lesser beings enjoyed bedrock longevity in the culture serving the purpose of religio-political order and male supremacy.”¹¹⁴

Some scholars maintain that there was a rough equality of the sexes in early Islam. An important passage in the Quran reflects the basis of gender equality of the sexes that lay at the foundations of Islam: “I shall not lose sight of the labor of any of you who labors in My way, be it man or woman; each of you is equal to the other.”¹¹⁵ The Prophet Muhammad asserted that men and women were equals and put into practice guarantees of inheritance, and marriage, and divorce rights for women that were non-existent in France and much of Europe, although we should note that women’s share of an inheritance was always more limited than that of the male. However, these pronouncements did not fully assimilate into Islamic society as it developed after Muhammad’s death because gender equality in the political sense declined rapidly after the founding generations.

During the Abbasid period, for example, the status of women was restricted as the Abbasids became a bureaucratic-patrimonial monarchy that adopted androcentric teachings. A hadith passage often cited to speak against women’s ability to act with authority is one attributed to Abu Bakra (d. 671-2), a manumitted Abyssinian slave, who recorded that the Prophet said, “[n]ever will succeed such a nation as makes a woman their ruler.” This hadith was recorded

¹¹⁴ Madeline Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire: The Design of Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 17.

¹¹⁵ *Al-Qur’an*, 3:195.

upon learning that Suddanid Persia had appointed the daughter of the Persian ruler Khosrau their queen.¹¹⁶ However this hadith was related by Abu Bukra himself, in the context of observing Ā'ishah's failed rebellion in 656.¹¹⁷ Ā'ishah bint Abī Bakr, was one of Muhammad's wives and daughter of the first caliph who succeeded Muhammad. After the prophet's death, Ā'ishah became very active in politics, both vocally and militarily. Her dramatic loss at the Battle of the Camel was often cited by the *ulema* as a reason why women did not belong in politics.¹¹⁸ According to Nurdina Mohd Dahlan, who studies anti-women discourse in the Hadith literature, this passage has been one identified to make an argument to either disallow women to participate in the public sphere or to become a ruler.¹¹⁹ Moreover, the historian Leila Ahmed claims that "Islam adopted the scriptural misogyny" that had been rooted in the Mediterranean lands that Muslims conquered during the spread and rise of Islam.¹²⁰

Other anti-women hadith passages used men to discredit their gender includes that the Prophet said, "[i]sn't the witness of a woman equal to half of that of a man?" The women said, "Yes." He said, "[t]his is because of the deficiency of a woman's mind."¹²¹ Karen Bauer who studies the debate on Islamic women as able judges in post-formative Islamic law, asserts that "sociological arguments often work[ed] in concert with arguments about women's intellectual capacity being less than that of men to bolster the idea of a natural gender hierarchy."¹²² She points to passage 4:34 of the *Al-Qur'an* which reads, "men are in authority over women, because God made the one superior to the other, and because they spend of their property," as a passage

¹¹⁶ *Sahih al-Bukari, Volume 9, Book 88, Number 219*: www.sunnah.com/bukari

¹¹⁷ *Sahih al-Bukari, Volume 9, Book 88, Number 219*: www.sunnah.com/bukari

¹¹⁸ Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 61-62.

¹¹⁹ Nurdina Mohd Dahlan, "The Debate on Anti-Women Discourse in the Hadith Literature," *Journal of Hadith Studies*, Vol. 2 No. 1 (June 2017): 6.

¹²⁰ Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 35-36.

¹²¹ *Sahih al-Bukari, Volume 3, Book 48, Number 826*: www.sunnah.com/bukari

¹²² Karen Bauer, "Debates on Women's status as Judges and Witnesses in Post-Formative Islamic Law," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 130, No. 1 (January-March 2010): 8.

that was repeatedly used by jurists to cite women's inability to: be a judge, gain authority over men, or to govern a state.¹²³

During the Islamic Middle Ages, there were many Islamic texts produced in the "Mirrors for Princes" genre that gave instruction to kings or rulers about how to govern. Just as in France, many of these works illustrate Aristotelian thinking that was dominant in medieval Islamic cultures and reflected a negative view of the female sex. For example, the Persian vizier Nizām al-Mulk (d. 1092) wrote *Siyāsat-nāma*, otherwise known as "Book of Government." One of the chapters titled "Those Who Wear the Veil," addresses his feelings on women's ability to govern. Nizām al-Mulk also points to 'Ā'ishah bint Abī Bakr's unsuccessful uprising, as a prime example of why women should not be trusted in government. Nizām al-Mulk goes on to make assertions such as, "women do not have complete intelligence" and women's "commands are mostly the opposite of what is right."¹²⁴ In her verdict on this text, Denise Spellberg argues that his "chapter on women may be read as a succinct treatise on female inferiority."¹²⁵ Although written in the eleventh century, Nizām al-Mulk's work was widely read and referenced in the learned circles of the Ottoman Empire.

Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali (d.1111) was a well-known Muslim theologian and intellectual who was also widely read in early modern Ottoman society, especially in the context of the *madrasas* or educational institutions. According to Madeline Zilfi, "al-Ghazali was the most comprehensive pronouncement on women's potent sexual nature."¹²⁶ Al-Ghazali was also influenced by Aristotle due to his philosophical studies and believed that women were created as

¹²³ Karen Bauer, "Debates on Women's status as Judges and Witnesses in Post-Formative Islamic Law," 5-7.

¹²⁴ Nizām al-Mulk, *Siyāsat-nāma*, ed. Hubert Darke (Tehran: Persian Text Series, #8, 1962), 226.

¹²⁵ Denise Spellberg, "Nizām al-Mulk's Manipulation of Tradition Aisha and the Role of Women in the Islamic Government," *The Muslim World*, Vol. 78 Issue 2 (1988): 111.

¹²⁶ Madeline Zilfi, "Muslim Women in the Early Modern Era," *The Cambridge History of Turkey Volume III: The Later Ottoman Empire, 1603-1839*, ed. Suraiya N. Faroqhi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 232.

an inferior sex, pointing to their “mental deficiencies.”¹²⁷

An additional philosophical work in the “Mirrors for Princes” style is Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī’s (d.1274) *Akhlāq-i Nāsiri*, written in the mid-thirteenth century. His work reveals an emphasis on the proper and good virtue of a monarchical ruler, with the virtue of justice as a major theme discussed throughout. His thoughts on women are also clearly informed by Aristotle, and in the section titled “Concerning the Chastisement and Regulation of Wives,” Nasir al-Dīn Ṭūsī’ notes that:

“...for women are impelled by the jealousy rooted in their natures, together with the deficiency of their intelligence, to give way to abominations and ignominies, and to such other acts as necessarily bring about the corruption of the household, evil association, a disagreeable existence, and a want of order”¹²⁸

As he continues on in his counsel to husbands, he directs that they “should not consult the wife on affairs of universal importance.” for he believed that women’s minds were not fit for making important decisions.¹²⁹ Moreover, it was a husband’s duty to keep his wife’s mind busy with household duties so that she would not become idle and disorderly. Although Nasir al-Dīn Ṭūsī’s work was written more than three hundred years before the *querelle des femmes*, it is reasonable to believe he would have spoken definitively against a woman’s place in political affairs during the early modern period.

In addition to Islamic ethical theories and treatises, Turkish advice manuals during the medieval and early modern period also facilitated the formation of negative perceptions of women’s sexuality. The eleventh century text *Kutadgu Bilig*, written by Yusuf Khasṣ Hajib

¹²⁷ Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 269.

¹²⁸ Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī’s, *Akhlāq-i Nāsiri*, translated by G.M. Wickens (London: Allen & Unwin, 1964), 163.

¹²⁹ Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī’s, *Akhlāq-i Nāsiri*, translated by G.M. Wickens, 164.

(d.1085), alleges that pleasure with a woman was hazardous to men.¹³⁰ In one of his poems, he writes:

Pleasing it is to dally with women,
But harsh the return: a splash of cold water.
Tasty at first, but tasteless at last:
The sweet turns to bitter.¹³¹

He further instructs that women should be secluded from men and the outside world:

“[A]nd do not let women, out of the house, for once they are out they will lose the straight path....[T]here is no constancy with these creatures, and there never has been.”¹³²

Furthermore, according to Selim Kuru other stories, anecdotes, and jokes written by the poet Mehmed Gazālī (d. 1535) in the sixteenth century, which made derogatory puns about the sexually irrepressible woman, made their way into the elite literary circles of Ottoman court life. Kuru asserts that many of these texts promoted the belief that “if not suppressed by modesty, the insatiable sexual desire of woman is a threat to man.”¹³³ These negative gender perceptions reverberated throughout the Ottoman culture and reinforced patriarchal notions of female inferiority.

In contrast to these writings, there were some ethical theories in Islam that supported female equality. Sufism, a mystical sect of Islam, believed that men and women could be equal in nature and often opposed adverse and misogynistic views of women.¹³⁴ The great Sufi scholar Ibn al-Arabi (d.1240) believed that “women share with men in all levels...the words of the Prophet, ‘Women are the likes of men,’ [and] that would be enough, since it means that everything to which a man can attain...can also belong to any woman whom God wills, just as it

¹³⁰ Khāss Hājib Yusuf, *Wisdom of royal glory. A Turko-Islamic mirror for princes. Kutadu Bilig*, trans., intro., and notes R. Dankoff, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 157.

¹³¹ Khāss Hājib Yusuf, *Wisdom of royal glory*, 157.

¹³² Khāss Hājib Yusuf, *Wisdom of royal glory*, 187.

¹³³ Selim Kuru, “Representations: Poetry and Prose, Premodern: Turkish”, in: *Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures*, General Editor Suad Joseph (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 495.

¹³⁴ Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, 95.

can belong to any man whom God wills.”¹³⁵

The Andalusian philosopher Ibn Rushd (d. 1198), also known as Averröes in the West, was a follower of both Aristotle and Plato, and defended women in his writings. In his *Commentary on Plato's Republic*, Ibn Rushd wrote that “since women are formed with eminence and a praiseworthy disposition, it is not impossible that there be philosophers and rulers among them.”¹³⁶ Therefore, he reasoned that if women were rightfully trained and taught they would be uniform to men and become productive citizens.¹³⁷ According to Catarina Belo, by considering “women on a par with men in essence and intellectual ability,” Ibn Rushd was a strikingly progressive thinker in Muslim Spain during the twelfth century.¹³⁸ These writings illustrate that there were Muslim thinkers who challenged dominant androcentric beliefs.

Muslim intellectuals of the Ottoman Empire, inherited this classical legacy, and during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, began to pen their own writings against women, and more specifically, the involvement of the *validé* sultans in governance. As we have noted previously, this period of Ottoman history was marked by ecological and political crisis, and these conditions of catastrophe acted as a trigger for the production of writings criticizing royal women's influence as the culprits behind the empire's weakened status.

Many of these writings are still in manuscript and remain to be uncovered by scholars. However, I would like to highlight a few notable examples that we are aware of from contemporary intellectual writers. During this period the style of writing shifted from one based in theory to something more direct, with specific instruction. Political writings were the most

¹³⁵ Asli Sancar, *Ottoman Women: Myth and Reality*, 167.

¹³⁶ Averros, *Averroes on Plato's Republic*, trans., intro., and notes Ralph Lerner (London: Cornell University Press, 1974), 58.

¹³⁷ Averros, *Averroes on Plato's Republic*, 59.

¹³⁸ Catarina Belo, “Some Considerations on Averroes' Views Regarding Women and their Role in Society,” *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Vol. 20, Issue 1 (January 2009): 20.

dominant form, because many members of the bureaucracy were writing about possible reasons the empire was in decline from the prosperity the empire had experienced in prior years.

The first of these reform treatises to consider is Mustafa Ali's *Counsel for Sultans*, written in 1581. Mustafa Ali (d. 1601) is considered an important Ottoman historian and his writings take a vocal stance against women's negative influence in politics. He specifically singled out Hürrem Sultan and Mihrimah Sultan, the wife and daughter of Suleiman the Magnificent, whom he blamed for the murder of Mustafa, Suleiman's eldest son who was considered first in line for the Sultanate. Mustafa Ali marks this event as the catalyst for the decline of the empire.¹³⁹ Moreover, he assigned blame to the harem women for meddling in political affairs, citing their plan to murder Ahmed Paşa and restoring their preferred vizier, Rüstem Paşa, to the position.¹⁴⁰

Two other relevant political writings of the period are a poem by Veysî (d. 1561) and an essay by Köci Beg's (d. 1650) titled *Risale-i Köci Beg*. Both addressed the political, social, and economic difficulties the Ottoman Empire was facing. In the poem, Veysî portrayed a list of the problems and threats that troubled the great empire, and he specifically noted that the current period was controlled by women.¹⁴¹ The Ottoman historian Köci Beg referenced palace intrigues, which included the women in the harem, as causing the decay of the empire.¹⁴² These accounts represent important extant source material during this period of Ottoman survival. Although these writings do reveal many of the symptoms that were paralyzing the empire, Peirce

¹³⁹ Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Ali* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 258.

¹⁴⁰ Cornell H. Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire*, 259.

¹⁴¹ Bernard Lewis, "Ottoman Observers of Ottoman Decline," 71-87, 74.

¹⁴² Bernard Lewis, "Ottoman Observers of Ottoman Decline," 76.

asserts that they sprung from the motivation for the so-called “statists” to protect their own influence.¹⁴³

The negative opinion of women in politics was also apparent in the religious culture. The high-ranking religious leader, Mufti Sunullah Efendi, made a public proclamation aimed at the royal women living in the Imperial household in 1599, stating that in “matters of government and sovereignty” women should not get involved.¹⁴⁴

A telling story of a religious leader speaking against royal women can be found in *Ta'riḫ-i Na'imā* (*Naima's History*), written by Ottoman bureaucrat and official court historian Mustafa Naima. He recounts a story of a shaykh by the name of Shaykh Mahmud who came to Istanbul and boldly asserted, “[t]he reason for religion and state falling into decay and the Muslims remaining in affliction, is that Noble Law had been abandoned, and the commanders and helpers of women raise a hue and cry. Since the validé sultan and her followers are interfering with matters of progress, disorder and corruption are multiplying.”¹⁴⁵ His outburst did not let up, and the shaykh continued to plead his case by saying, “let them remove the *validé* sultan from the Imperial Palace and marry her to a man.”¹⁴⁶ This statement reflects societal insecurity about an unmarried woman not having a husband to obey and control her. The fear of unmarried women causing disorder was commonly held among early modern peoples in both France and the Ottoman Empire. Following his outbursts, the shaykh in question was placed in a mental hospital for a time, and when his opinions remained unchanged, he was exiled to an outside province by the commanding vizier.

¹⁴³ Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 262.

¹⁴⁴ Selaniki, *Tarih-I Selaniki* ed. Trans. Ispirli 826.

¹⁴⁵ Naima, *Tarih Naima*, 5:315; this was at the period of Turhan Sultan’s rule in 1653.

¹⁴⁶ Naima, *Tarih Naima*, 5:315.

It should be noted here that the Shaykh Mahmud was a participant in the Kadizideli religious movement in the Ottoman Empire. Kadizadeli agitation deeply divided Ottoman society, and a negative view of elevating women's place in the social order. The Kadizadelis were convinced that Ottoman society as a whole was becoming corrupt, and they preached fiery messages that invoked a puritan ethos aimed at containing women inside the home, and they viewed any form of female agency outside the household as a cause for concern. Although this movement was not aimed specifically at the royal women of the empire, its tenets reflected the discomfort its supporters felt about a society that was in danger of becoming immoral by adopting practices that they felt were non-Islamic, and for some, this applied to women being involved in political affairs.

Other Ottoman writers also expressed their thoughts on the royal women's increased agency. Evliya Çelebi was an Ottoman travel writer well known for his *Seyâhatnâme*, or "book of travels," which experiences he rigorously recorded as he traveled through the empire's vast lands. His personal feelings about women can be gleaned from his writing. He believed that the highest characteristics women should uphold were passivity and modesty.¹⁴⁷ An example can be seen in his description of Kaya Sultan (d. 1659), wife of his patron, Melek Ahmed Pasha (d. 1662), who was head of the military army and became vizier. He was later married to another Ottoman princess, Fatma Sultan, who he describes in highly negative fashion.¹⁴⁸ Based on his portrayal of his master's two wives, he seems to uphold the one that acted more demurely and was not politically-active within the structure of the Ottoman harem.

Foreign dignitaries also commented on the control the queen mother had in official affairs. English diplomat Henry Lello, writing in the early sixteenth century, recorded that the

¹⁴⁷ Madeline Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 66.

¹⁴⁸ Robert Dankoff, *The Intimate Life of an Ottoman Statesman, Melek Ahmed Pasha, (1588-1662: As Portrayed in Evliya Çelebi's Book of Travels)* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991), 259-268.

ruling *validé* “was ever in fauor and wholly ruled her sonne: notwithstanding the Mufti and souldiers had much compleyned of her to their king for misleading and Ruling him.”¹⁴⁹ This illustrates that even soldiers of the Ottoman Empire had observed and complained of the influence the *validé* was having on political affairs.

These writings demonstrate that the increasing power of the *validé* sultan was becoming apparent in Ottoman society, and although there were many who did not favor this amplified influence, Naima came to the defense of the queen mother. He wrote, “[t]he truth is, those who do not recognize the power and dignity of the sublime station of the most magnificent sultanate and the most exalted cradle [the *validé* sultan] are ignorant.”¹⁵⁰

Far fewer Ottoman sources have been identified on the subject of women and sovereignty, and those that remain do not sufficiently support a full writing on the subject. One reason for this, as argued by Madeline Zilfi, is that the power and politicking the *validé* harnessed seems not to have triggered a “social contagion to ordinary women or gender order in society.”¹⁵¹ Peirce would add that it was usually an individual *validé* who would be attacked and not the office of the *validé*, if there was strong discontent toward the Imperial harem.¹⁵² Furthermore, Peirce argues, “Ottoman writers were generally quite circumspect in their allusions to royal women,” which was likely due to the power their position signified throughout the empire.¹⁵³

The sources for the Muslim world are not as definitive as the French sources in terms of laying out as institution like the Salic Law, and instead tend to lay out religio-legal guidance to

¹⁴⁹ Henry Lello, *The report of Lello*, ed. O. Burian (Ankara, 1952), 2; as quoted in Peirce, *Imperial Harem*, 242; Lello is referring to Safiye Sultan.

¹⁵⁰ Naima, *Tarih Naima*, 5:315-16.

¹⁵¹ Madeline Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 69.

¹⁵² Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 275.

¹⁵³ Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 179.

articulate best practices for the Muslim community, which might or might not be followed by the political leadership depending on circumstances. Furthermore, in the Ottoman Empire we seem to be missing the female voices that are found in France and throughout Europe during this period. Zilfi determines the cause as there being “little room for female affirming counter discourse”¹⁵⁴ in Ottoman society. Nevertheless, we can see the influence of Aristotle and Plato’s teachings in medieval Islamic philosophical writings, which assisted in shaping the patriarchal society that continued into the early modern era. A more comprehensive study of gender issues and Ottoman writings in support of or against female rule would be beneficial to historians’ understanding of female politics during this period.

As we consider the comparison between the French and Ottoman context, misogynist writings against a women’s place in the household and their ability to govern were produced in both societies and, although these were not completely new debates, the increased anxiety that learned men harbored can be traced to the political and social changes that were taking place during the early modern period.¹⁵⁵ Zilfi rightfully argues that the dialogue on the imperfections of the female sex was universal.¹⁵⁶ In France, the Reformation transformed a woman’s place in society, and, observably, Protestants appeared to be the group most opposed to female governance. In comparison, the Kadizideli movement happening at the same time in the Ottoman Empire preached for the seclusion of women and believed women primarily belonged in the home.

Both France and the Ottoman Empire observed a patriarchal system where the father or husband served as the head of household and the sultan or king exemplified the head of state.

¹⁵⁴ Madeline Zilfi, “Muslim Women in the Early Modern Era,” in *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, ed. Suraiya N. Faroqhi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 232.

¹⁵⁵ Leslie Peirce, *Imperial Harem*, 272.

¹⁵⁶ Madeline Zilfi, “Muslim Women in the Early Modern Era,” 17.

Sharen Jansen and Merry Wiesner-Hanks assert that European political theory during the 1600s developed to keep women out of the political sphere “by equating a king’s rule with God’s rule and kingship with fatherhood,” consequently keeping women out of the equation altogether.¹⁵⁷ It seems apparent that there is a parallel that exists in the Ottoman East as well, for according to Zilfi, patriarchy produced a “durable image” of a father at the head of his household and the sultan likewise at the head of the state.¹⁵⁸

Misogynistic rhetoric about women in power can be found in both realms.

Although we have examples of the social discomfort that emerged out of women having increased authority during the early modern era, I would argue that it was in France that male authority as a societal value held a greater distinction, reflected in the abundant arguments that were present at that time. In France, we perceive a more significant distinction of gender to specifically discredit women’s capabilities in the political sphere. In contrast, in the Ottoman era a case can be made that class outweighed gender. Because of their royal station, the power of the *validé* came to be expected and anticipated by the Ottoman royal hierarchy and society and, therefore, less challenged unless, as we have discovered, circumstances in the realm required a scapegoat.

Women in both societies were extremely active during this period, which is why contemporaneous sources could not ignore their influence. According to Zilfi, “[a]pproval was usually withheld from royal women, whether mothers, consorts, daughters, or sisters, who ventured too energetically — and perhaps too successfully — into dynastic politics.”¹⁵⁹ It was

¹⁵⁷ Sharon L. Jansen, *Debating Women, Politics, and Power in Early Modern Europe*, 159. Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 243.

¹⁵⁸ Madeline Zilfi, “Muslim Women in the Early Modern Era,” 18.

¹⁵⁹ Madeline Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire*, 68.

these active women that commenters wrote about, giving them a negative slant that might not apply to more stable times.

There was a parallel belief in both societies that highly regarded women should speak as little as necessary and the less agency they had the more respectable they were. This attitude is an interesting facet of the paths taken by royal women. To participate in power politics, queen mothers had to carefully juggle their public persona as respectable women while also becoming increasingly active in their heightened political roles.

Royal mothers were tactically able to use the expectations placed upon them in the patrilineal society — including the expected female virtues of piety, charity, and modesty — to establish and solidify their legitimacy. Furthermore, although being a woman in a patriarchal society could be seen as an encumbrance, these royal women viewed their gender and class as an opportunity. The previous chapters illustrate that royal mothers did not wait for power to be granted to them; instead, they took and expanded their power through their role of mother and eldest female in the political hierarchy.

The evolution of French and Ottoman views on the intersection of politics and gender during the medieval and early modern period is vital to help historians piece together the cultural attitudes that shaped their respective societies and the way people interacted within them. Recently unveiled, source material in both contexts has allowed us to reexamine the parameters that governed the public perception of both the French queen regent and Ottoman *validé* sultana. Still, our source base is not comprehensive across all times and contexts and it remains to be seen how scholars will fill or interpret the silences in these gaps.

Chapter 4: Reproductive and Dynastic Practices

One of the most crucial duties for which these groups of royal women were responsible was the preservation and protection of the dynasty, as both France and the Ottoman Empire viewed the continuity of the family line as essential to the order and stability of their realms. While there were several cultural differences between the two groups of women, reproduction was an important dimension to the political power royal women gained access to.

A French queen regent was a foreign-born sovereign and entered France likely serving as a political or diplomatic tool. The majority of queens grew up with a strong humanist education and spent time with other female relatives who held power at court, thereby gaining great insight into the power politics that shaped European court life. In Europe, as with all dynasties, it was the queen's responsibility to continue the family succession with a male heir, and her position as queen would not be secure until she was successful. As an illustration, at the age of fourteen Catherine de' Medici was married to Henry II, and eleven years passed before she bore her first child, placing extreme pressure on Catherine to secure her position at French court.

Interestingly, a story has survived wherein Catherine volunteered to retire to a convent and allow Henry II to remarry.¹⁶⁰ Although François I is purported to have rejected her proposal, this shows that Catherine understood the severity of leaving the dynasty at risk of extinction without the birth of a son. Fortunately, she delivered her first male child in 1544, which secured both her position as Queen of France and the future of the Valois dynasty. After her first child, Catherine went on to bear nine additional children, with seven surviving to adulthood.

Some queens had an easier time fulfilling this expectation Marie de' Medici, for example, swiftly delivered a legitimate heir to the crown and fulfilled her royal duty with the birth of a son less than a year into her marriage. Batifol reported, "[y]et the birth of this heir- the first Dauphin

¹⁶⁰ Ivan Cloulas, *Catherine de medicis* (New York: Hachette Literature, 1991), 66-69.

born to France in a half century, caused unprecedented rejoicing throughout the realm, while after the Queen's happy delivery, Henry IV exultantly embraced the whole Court at Fontainebleau. The joy of Paris was unequivocal."¹⁶¹ French historian Jean-François Dubost asserts that it was not until the birth of her son that Marie earned general acceptance and esteem as queen in France.¹⁶²

Similarly to Catherine, Anne of Austria faced challenges producing an heir to the Bourbon dynasty that delayed her from fulfilling her obligations as queen. Her marriage to Louis XIII was an unhappy one and became further strained when she faced more than one stillbirth. Additionally, her failure to give birth to a son in her early years as queen likely prevented her from acquiring political clout. Twenty-two years into her marriage, Anne gave birth to a "miracle" son, Louis XIV, and two years later gave birth to a second son, Philippe, which then firmly secured her role as queen of France and future queen mother. According to Lisa Benz St. John, a queen's fertile body represented a gendered source of symbolic power.¹⁶³ Not only did the birth of an heir stabilize the queen's position, but it also gave her leverage with both the king and his court that she could then use to greater effect in other fields of power, such as intercession, matrimonial politics, patronage, and, most importantly, regency.¹⁶⁴

French succession practices followed primogeniture, which was the right of succession belonging to the firstborn child, and especially the feudal rule, by which the whole inheritance of an estate passed to the eldest son. Thus, once the king died it was the queen's eldest son who

¹⁶¹ Louis Batifol, *Marie de Medici*, trans., Mary King and ed., H.W. Carless Davis (London: Chatto and Windus, 1908), 140.

¹⁶² Jean-François Dubost, *Marie de Medici, Le Reine Devoilée* (Paris: Payot & Rivages, 2009), 114-115.

¹⁶³ Lisa Benz St. John, *Three Medieval Queens: Queenship and the Crown in Fourteenth-Century England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 96. Peggy McCracken, *The Romance of Adultery: Queenship and Sexual Transgression in Old French Literature*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998). 6-11; Peggy McCracken discusses that this reproductive pressure that weighed on queens began early in the Middle Ages and can be examined in medieval literature.

¹⁶⁴ Lisa Benz St. John, *Three Medieval Queens*, 100.

would inherit the throne, and if he was a child then it would fall to her to ensure the smooth accession of her son and claim her role as regent. However, this quest for the regency was not inevitably smooth. For example, Catherine never served her first son, François II, during his reign, as by French custom she was practicing her forty days of mourning during the start of his rule, which allowed for the rise of the Guise family, who aided the young king in the affairs of state.

After François II's premature death in December 1560, the queen mother swiftly stepped in and had her lawyers bring together historic examples where the mother to an underage king was named as regent for her son, with the most significant of these women having been Blanche of Castile.¹⁶⁵ Catherine is quoted as saying, “[s]ince it has please God to deprive me of my elder son, I...have decided to keep [my second son] beside me and to govern the State, as a devoted mother must do.”¹⁶⁶ Moreover, a letter from the Ambassador of France, written in 1569 by Giovanni Correro, reads:

The queen found herself in one of the most difficult moments of her life: the three Estates did not want to include a woman in the government; they did much to try and exclude her. But eventually the favor and consent of the King of Navarre and the other princes of blood overcame this obstacle.¹⁶⁷

After being named “governor of the kingdom” in 1561, Catherine wrote to her daughter: “My principal aim is to have the honour of God before my eyes in all things and to preserve my authority, not for myself, but for the conservation of this kingdom and for the good of all your brothers.”¹⁶⁸ This letter illustrates that Catherine, as queen mother, believed she was the rightful

¹⁶⁵ Blanche of Castile (d.1252) acted as regent for her son, Louis IX, who became king when he was twelve, and a second time when Louis IX was on crusade.

¹⁶⁶ Mark Strage, *Women of Power: The Life and Times of Catherine De Medici* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976), 112.

¹⁶⁷ Leah L. Chang and Katherine Kong, *Portraits of the Queen Mother: Polemics, Panegyrics, Letters* (Toronto: ACMRS Publications, 2014), 126.

¹⁶⁸ R.J Knecht, *Catherine de' Medici*, 73.

protector of the Valois dynasty and authentically wanted to preserve power for her sons, the legal heirs.

Marie had an easier time claiming her authority as regent partially because of the strong precedent that Catherine had established.¹⁶⁹ After Henry IV's assassination, the newly widowed Marie promptly secured the endorsement of the French Parliament as official regent to her minor son, Louis XIII, in a matter of hours without the consultation of the princes of the blood.¹⁷⁰ Crawford argues that Marie "framed the queen mother's authority as a matter of her position in the royal family."¹⁷¹

However, for Anne it was more difficult, as she had to strategically navigate the climate of the court to claim her position as regent. Before his death, Louis XIII took legal precautions to prevent Anne from ever gaining the power that his mother, Marie, held as regent. By royal testament, in preparation of his death, Louis XIII ordered that a regency council would be installed to guide Anne in her handling of affairs of state. In response, before her husband's death, Anne set upon procuring the localities she needed to consolidate power for her future regency.

By convincing the Parliament of Paris that royal authority was better left undivided, she actively broke from her late husband's wishes for a regency council and successfully secured power as both the main guardian and head administrator of France. Furthermore, she promised Gaston de Orleans the post of Lieutenant General as well as financial compensation to the Prince of Condé.¹⁷² The maneuvering Anne undertook to assume her role as regent illustrates her

¹⁶⁹ Katherine Crawford, *Perilous Performances*, 59.

¹⁷⁰ Harriet Lightman, "Queens and Minor Kings in French Constitutional Law," 28.

¹⁷¹ Katherine Crawford, *Perilous Performances*, 77.

¹⁷² Ruth Kleinman, *Anne of Austria: Queen of France* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1985), 140-143. Katherine Crawford, *Perilous Performances*, 10. Françoise Bertaut de Motteville, *Memoirs of Madame de Motteville on Anne of Austria and her Court* (Boston: Hardy, Pratt and Co., 1901), vol. I, 71-73. Victor Cousin, and Mary L.

determination to fulfill the role she believed was rightfully hers, as established and validated by the two powerful female regents who preceded her.

As can be seen in all three cases, once in office the queen mother would assist in the transfer of authority to her son, the new king, while also ensuring that her family line remained in power. However, competition within the French court did not make this task easy. There were countless threats to the throne, including ones by the princes of the blood and other powerful noble families. Catherine had to navigate the efforts of the Guise family to take over her power and position. In 1614, Marie had to deal with an armed uprising of the princes of the blood. This uprising included the Prince of Condé and the ducs of Mayenne, Nevers, de Bouillon, and de Longueville, all of whom claimed Marie had cast them aside when they had a right to participate in the direction and decisions of French government during a time of royal minority.¹⁷³ Much of the time it was difficult for the nobles of France to trust a foreign queen to lead the government; thus, in addition to restrictions based on their gender, the French queen regents faced xenophobia. Nevertheless, they tackled the many constraints they faced to secure their position as regent and queen mother of France.

In the Ottoman Empire, continuation of the dynasty took on a different meaning for the *validé* sultan, because the reproductive politics were relatively different. *Validés* descended from slave backgrounds, as Ottoman sultans in this period did not marry foreign queens or princesses of other lands, and it was vital for these women to be non-Muslim and non-Turkish, since they came to the empire as slaves, and Muslims, by law, could not be taken as slaves. They entered the harem as concubines and participated in a rigorous training process that taught them the arts

Booth, *Secret history of the French court under Richelieu and Mazarin; or, Life and time of Madame de Chevreuse* (New York: J. Miller, 1871), 88-91.

¹⁷³ The uprising led to Louis XIV claiming his majority in 1614 before the Estates General Session was organized, which ended up being in the young king's favor, but not before Marie undertook the money and effort to raise troops.

of music, poetry, and dance. Additionally, living in the Imperial harem afforded the future *validés* the opportunity to experience and learn harem politics firsthand.

Each concubine in the Imperial harem was allowed only one son, but she could have several daughters up until the time she bore a son. After a son was born, she would remain in the Imperial harem but would no longer have sexual access to the sultan. What is important to note is that many of the dominant *validés* during the so-called “Sultanate of Women,” particularly Kösem Sultan, broke with this one-son-per-concubine tradition and had multiple sons with the reigning sultan, securing themselves even more power in the Imperial household.

The reliance on concubinage helped to ensure the empire was never without an heir while it also was intended to protect a “unitary dynastic state.”¹⁷⁴ Although other Muslim dynasties practiced concubinage before the Ottomans, including the Abbasids, the Ottomans emphasized the importance of reproductive practices to secure the dynasty. Before the 1350s, Ottoman rulers would, in fact, legally marry, oftentimes to secure loyalty or land in their quest to build a large empire. However, after the empire was well established they no longer needed to marry princesses for their prosperity and thereafter concubinage was overtly practiced.

The absence of dynastic marriages ensured that a concubine could not be a direct heir to or have any legitimate claim to the throne, which might give a powerful local family, or even one born in a hostile kingdom, leverage for political gain. Nevertheless, some concubines kept close ties with their country of origin as leverage for healthy diplomatic relations. The practice of concubinage is one of several reasons often cited to explain the longevity of the Ottoman Empire over six centuries, for it aided in keeping the lands of the empire unified.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 276.

¹⁷⁵ Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 37-39.

Succession practices facilitated the *validé*'s rise to power after the death of the ruling sovereign; however, the Ottoman Empire organized this accession differently from the practice in many European kingdoms. Whereas a queen in France was royal by birth and would marry into her position and secure it by having a son, in the Ottoman Empire all *validé* sultans began their careers as slave concubines and then had to climb the rigid female social structure of the Imperial harem to reach royal status. A concubine could complete this process only by obtaining the opportunity to bear a son with the sultan, which then allowed her to rise to the position of *haseki*, and then *validé* if her son ultimately secured the position of sultan. From that point forward, her new identity rested exclusively in her status as mother. Her focus and motivation was to raise her son and ensure his claim to the throne, as this would be her only way to obtain authority and influence. This is what made the Ottoman royal mother-son relationship so strong.

Once queen mother, the *validé* sultan aided in the continuation of the familial line, as was the case in France. One of her duties was to present concubines to her son and encourage him to father children. She also headed her son's domestic household, which came to be an important system that allowed her to control the inner workings of the harem. For example, to protect the dynasty Nurbanu Sultan encouraged Murad III to take additional concubines to increase the number of his male heirs. At the time, he had been fostering a monogamous relationship with his favorite concubine, Safiye Sultan, and had only one young son. Likewise during Ibrahim's first years in office, Kösem introduced several concubines to her son with the intention of continuing the Osman line, as he was the sole prince remaining. With this encouragement the sultan went on to father many children. Having multiple male heirs was particularly important for each dynasty in both realms, even though this was more difficult for European kingdoms, where the king and queen practiced monogamy in accordance with Christian principles.

In the Ottoman Empire, as in France, mothers of princes helped to facilitate their son's accession to the throne. This, however, was not always peaceful since competition from inside the Imperial harem forced mothers to fight to place their son on the throne. The Ottoman Empire never followed the rule of primogeniture as France did; Ottoman cultural practices of bloody tanistry gave all heirs a legitimate claim to fight for the throne. Following the death of a reigning sultan, a prince would need to quickly return to the capital to win the loyalty of the court advisors, slay his brothers, claim the throne, and become the new sultan.

Mothers of sons in the Imperial harem would also get involved and would compete for their son to accede to the sultanate. As an illustration, upon Sultan Selim II's death, Nurbanu successfully arranged the accession of her son, Murad III, by keeping her husband secretly on ice for twelve days until the prince was able to reach the capital from his governorate at Manisa and secure his position. Nurbanu needed to hide her husband's death because Ottoman dynastic tradition legitimized any son of the previous sultan, thus any of the princes who were located in the capital were within closer reach to claim the sultanate. Nurbanu's participation in getting Murad III on the throne was crucial, largely because it helped to prevent social disruption upon a change in power, and, through her son's rule, Nurbanu guaranteed her position as the new *validé* sultan.¹⁷⁶

Kösem's accession as *validé* was slightly different in that she lost and then regained her power. Kösem rose quickly in the harem and was the *haseki* sultan and trusted advisor to Sultan Ahmed I, consolidating much influence during her time as favorite. After the death of Ahmed I, Kösem seems to have spent over five years in the *Eski*, or Old Palace, where the retired women of the Ottoman Imperial household spent their remaining days. Fortunately, her son Murad IV was named sultan after Mustafa I was deposed and Osman II's reign ended in regicide, and she

¹⁷⁶ Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 261.

returned to Topkapi Palace as *validé*. Once she procured the position, she legitimized her reign by acting as head of state and assembling a loyal household, which allowed her to stay in office for the next twenty-eight years.

The size of the Imperial harem increased significantly with the incorporation of many family members as power was consolidated to the capital during the seventeenth century. This shift began with Hürrem's reign, as she was the first wife to a sultan who did not follow her son to his governorship, in an outlying Ottoman province, but instead remained in the capital with Suleiman. Looking at female demographics alone, in 1575 the harem population was comprised of 49 women in total, but by 1633 this number had reached 433.¹⁷⁷ The numerous mothers of princes, all living in the same confined space, clashed frequently as they competed for authority through the seniority of their sons. This competition is best illustrated in the overthrow of Kösem Sultan by Turhan Sultan in 1651. Although Kösem had developed a strong grip on power, Turhan devised a murder plot to overthrow the long-reigning *validé* so that she, herself, could ascend to the *validé* of the Ottoman Empire. Thus, Ottoman dynastic politics created intense rivalries as harem women competed for power.

Just as in France, Ottoman queen mothers protected their dynasty. Ottoman *validés* were what Leslie Peirce calls "custodians of power," because their foremost duty was as protector of princes.¹⁷⁸ The practice of fratricide, where the new sultan would capture his remaining brothers (and possible alternative heirs) and have them all strangled, was another violent obstacle in Ottoman dynastic practices that created a sense of urgency for the *validé* to step in if the dynasty was at risk for extinction. Kösem, on more than one occasion, had to protect the dynasty from extinction by preserving the lives of the princes who carried the Osman line. She discouraged

¹⁷⁷ Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 122.

¹⁷⁸ Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 17.

the use of fratricide, therefore preserving Prince Mustafa to become the next reigning sultan (this act also saved her sons from being executed).¹⁷⁹ The queen mother also saved her second son, Ibrahim “the Mad,” from execution after his brother Murad IV, on his deathbed, ordered Ibrahim to be killed. Ibrahim was the only surviving prince remaining, because Murad IV did not have any surviving adult sons. In this way, Kösem was able to prevent a succession war, install Ibrahim as sultan, and extend her time as *validé*.

In another instance, Turhan Sultan is credited with protecting the life of two princes, Suleiman II and Ahmed II, who were not her direct grandsons. During his reign, Sultan Mehmed IV sought to re-introduce the practice of fratricide to ensure there would be no competition from his two younger brothers.¹⁸⁰ This did not happen, however, because by this time the practice was considered archaic and no longer accepted. Nevertheless, Turhan made sure to take the princes with her whenever she would travel and frequently had them under guard, particularly when there was no heir yet born. What stands out in the Ottoman case study is that all of the royal women were protecting the same dynastic line: the Osman line that began with the reign of Osman I.

Validés had the power to control succession in still other ways. Sultan Ibrahim suffered from a weak mental and physical state, which propelled the sultanate further into disorder. Moreover, his persistent poor behavior caused mass discontent among the elites, and so once he had produced a male heir and the dynasty’s bloodline was intact, Kösem gave consent for her son’s execution. Kösem is reported saying, “in the end he will leave neither you nor me alive.

¹⁷⁹ Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 232-233.

¹⁸⁰ Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 260.

We will lose control of the government. The whole society is in ruins. Have him removed from the throne immediately.”¹⁸¹

We see from this example that Kösem embraced her role not only as mother and protector to her sons, but also as guardian of the empire by placing the empire’s well-being first. Kösem then served as regent and *validé* for her grandson, preserving yet again her time as *validé*, ultimately through three generations of male heirs. The *validé*’s position developed to be the cornerstone of the dynastic line, and Kösem’s ability to prevent fratricide, encourage reproduction, and influence succession demonstrates how commanding her position had evolved.

While motherhood was the initial source of power for both the French and Ottoman royal women, for the Ottoman *validés* it was further modified by the practice of concubinage and polygyny, which helped to shape reproduction politics in the Ottoman Empire. In France, practices included marrying another royal, ensuring monogamy for the queen, and maintaining a pure royal blood line, all which were strictly enforced.

Similarly, both groups of women did not have the same freedom as a man to remarry or take a new partner after being widowed. Rather, their power was rooted in an obligation to remain post-sexual, and Peirce argues that there was a distinct anxiety between sexuality and ties to authority.¹⁸² Females who were past their childbearing years were viewed as more competent to rule and as having more of the characteristics desired in the female sex, including piety, virtue, and modesty.¹⁸³ Adhering to these notions of gender, which will be examined more closely later on, helped contribute to the rise in the power of the post-sexual *validé* sultan and French queen regent.

¹⁸¹ Lucienne Thys-Senocak, *Ottoman Women Builders: The Architectural Patronage of Hadice Turhan Sultan* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 26.

¹⁸² Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 280-281.

¹⁸³ Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 279.

Mutually, the French and Ottoman queen mothers had to fight to claim their power as regent or *validé* by navigating court and harem politics. Catherine, Marie, and Anne had to overcome a range of obstacles, including the power of other noble families, the Estates General, their husband's wishes, as well as their foreignness and gender to assert their role as regent. While foreignness was a requirement for the Ottoman *validés*, they too went to great lengths to thrust their son(s) to the head of the sultanate above other competing princes and mothers, all vying for supremacy. Respectively, these queen mothers became the mentor and strongest ally for their son(s), either by aiding their rise to the throne or by safeguarding it while they were too young to defend their position as king or sultan.

Correspondingly, both the regent's and the *validé*'s duty to protect the familial line demonstrates how important both groups of women were at keeping order in the realm, specifically because they recognized that a change in successional power had the potential to cause destructive instability to the kingdom or empire. So while dynastic practices were structured much differently in France and the Ottoman Empire, there were nonetheless many shared experiences these women had to navigate to assume power. Once these royal queen mothers came into their position, they then had to legitimize themselves and their dynasty in order to maintain and expand their authority, and this began with establishing and building up allegiances.

Chapter 5: Matrimonial Politics and Networking

Matrimonial politics and networking were valuable tactics for both French and Ottoman queen mothers to establish loyalty and obedience to their sovereign power. Furthermore, the brokering of marriages or appointment of court or harem household positions were crucial for prosperous international and domestic diplomatic relations in both realms, and they were important methods for both sets of women to legitimize and expand their station.

In France, the duty of political matchmaking lay with the king and queen, but once the queen was widowed this responsibility was solely her own. Being the natural guardian of her children allowed the queen regent to fashion marriage alliances that would then open up the political arena for the queen mother to actively participate in the kingdom's foreign relations. As already established, a queen mother would strive to have a close relationship with her son(s), who gave her direct access to power as regent if dynastic politics deemed it necessary. However, daughters also represented political capital. A daughter was raised in the queen's household to ensure an elite upbringing, which would prepare her with the insight and skills she would need once she married into a foreign realm. Additionally, daughters represented a critical form of political capital for a queen to advance the dynasty's foreign relations, as the matrimonial exchange of royal princesses could help to ease tensions, forge alliances, or secure a strategic need for the maternal kingdom.¹⁸⁴

Catherine de' Medici's eldest daughter, Elisabeth, for example, was married to Phillip II of Spain, which helped to strengthen the alliance between the two countries and embodied the

¹⁸⁴ John Carmi Parsons, "Mothers, Daughters, Marriage, Power: Some Plantagenet Evidence, 1150-1500," in *Medieval Queenship*, ed., John Carmi Parsons *Medieval Queenship*, 70.

Peace of Catueau-Cambrésis.¹⁸⁵ Their union was a happy one, as Phillip II was very much devoted to his wife, and it appears to have genuinely helped stabilize relations between the competing kingdoms for a time. Catherine's second daughter, Claude, was married to the Duke of Lorraine, which served to enhance strong ties on the borders of the French duchies. Catherine also brokered a marriage between her favorite granddaughter, Christina of Lorraine, to Ferdinando I, who was the Grand Duke of Tuscany and of Medici blood. This marriage was arranged to revive an Italian Medici and French alliance, and, similarly to her grandmother, Catherine de' Medici, Christina of Lorraine, the Grand Duchess of Tuscany, would go on to serve as a regent for her future grandson, Ferdinando II de' Medici in 1621.

Marie brokered a dual marriage agreement, the first with her daughter Elisabeth to the future King Phillip IV of Spain. The second matched Anne of Austria to her son Louis XIII. This arrangement echoed the political alliance between France and Spain, which Catherine had previously sealed between the two Catholic countries. Additionally, any marriage negotiation could be used as a bargaining chip to secure a strategic goal of the kingdom. Oftentimes peace was the main objective, but alternatives could also include things such as exclusive trading agreements or routes. Marie's third daughter became Queen of England as wife of Charles I, after her brother consented to the match in order to improve relations between France and England. Although the king was responsible for the marriage negotiation, Marie appears still to have maintained a part in the transaction, as, according to historian Sara J. Wolfsan, records

¹⁸⁵ The Peace of Catueau-Cambrésis was the realignment of territories of France, Spain and the city-states of Italy. With its signing it ended what is sometimes referred to as the Habsburg-Valois Wars that had been going on since the end of the fifteenth century.

show that the queen mother “chose the majority of her daughter’s officers to accompany her to England.”¹⁸⁶

Marrying into a foreign monarchy, these princesses would be considered “bases of influence,” inserted into the realm in which they married.¹⁸⁷ Queens took a vested interest in arranging marriages because they knew firsthand (having served as a political bargaining chip themselves) the benefits that a prosperous marriage could potentially produce. Not only would a well-to-do match provide for a daughter’s success and the overall fortune of the maternal kingdom, but it also increased the queen mother’s authority by expanding her network across borders. For example, Catherine’s letters to her eldest daughter Elisabeth illustrate that Catherine genuinely cared about her daughter and wanted her marriage to be a happy one, though not solely for her daughter’s benefit but for France’s as well. In this passage to Elisabeth, Catherine writes:

[...my dearest daughter, that since you love us, you should take pains to encourage the king, your husband, in the goodwill that he showed toward the late kings, your father and your brother, and also particularly to me. Assure him that, for as long as I shall live, he shall know nothing for our side but friendship and good understanding, and let him be assured that I will nourish the king my son in this goodwill and that especially as I now have the authority of the government of this kingdom

...But the greatest comfort is the hope that I have in you, who will encourage the king your husband in the peace in which your father left this kingdom. I am confident that you will undertake all the good offices possible and which the ambassador will tell you are necessary, like the present one, and that all our fortune and happiness will depend on the friendship between the king your brother and the king your husband....]¹⁸⁸

Additionally, this letter proves that Catherine depended on her daughter to potentially serve as an intercessor between the French and Spanish kingdoms, as intercession was a

¹⁸⁶ Oliver Mallick, *The Politics of Female Households: Ladies-in-Waiting Across Early Modern Europe*, eds. Nadine Akkerman and Brigid Houben (Leiden: Brill Academic Pub, 2013), 331.

¹⁸⁷ John Carmi Parsons, “Mothers, Daughters, Marriage, Power: Some Plantagenet Evidence, 1150-1500,” in *Medieval Queenship*, ed., John Carmi Parsons *Medieval Queenship*, 71.

¹⁸⁸ Leah L. Chang and Katherine Kong, *Portraits of the Queen Mother*, 72-73.

powerful medium used by queens throughout the ages to affect politics due to their close relationship with the king.

Likewise, when the French queen regent decided on a match for her son, the future king (or even second in line), the political implications were always carefully calculated. Catherine's second son, Charles IX, was married to Elisabeth of Austria in 1570 to again help cement relations with the Hapsburg dynasty, given that Catherine's daughter Elisabeth had died two years earlier. Anne of Austria, in turn, was instrumental in arranging the marriage of Louis XIV to her niece, Maria Theresa of Spain, Philip IV's eldest daughter. Prior to the brokering of this union, France and Spain had once again been engaged in a long war that dated back to the beginning of Anne's regency. She herself had been betrothed to Louis XIII as part of a peace arrangement, and thus it is no surprise that Anne aimed to implement a similar arrangement, as according to Madame de Motteville, the queen mother had frequently "expressed her great desire for peace."¹⁸⁹

Louis XIV's marriage in 1660 sealed the Treaty of Pyrenees (1659), which ended France and Spain's long conflict. With her second son, Anne seems to again have taken an active role in brokering a match. Her son Philippe I, Duke of Orleans, was married to Henrietta of England, who was also one of Anne's nieces. This strongly illustrates that both sons were intentionally partnered with high-ranking families in neighboring realms in an effort to promote good relations between the kingdoms. Peace was one of the main objectives that most of these matches sought to achieve, as securing peaceful relations could end the drain of money and resources that were increasingly needed to improve domestic conditions.

While matrimonial politics was a primary focus for the queen mothers, not all marriage arrangements bore fruit for the queen or the kingdom. A marital alliance that never came to

¹⁸⁹ Ruth Kleinman, *Anne of Austria: Queen of France*, 156.

fruition was the one between Queen Elizabeth I and Catherine's son, Henry III, who was king at the time of the attempted negotiations. The marriage negotiations continued for some time but ended with no success.

One of the most crucial marriages that Catherine brokered was between her youngest daughter, Margaret of Valois, and Henry of Navarre.¹⁹⁰ The alliance had multiple intentions: to keep France at peace with a fluid succession plan, quiet the hostility of the wars of religion, and keep the Valois dynasty at the head of the state. Unfortunately, this proved to be more hope than reality. Five days after the nuptials, there was a massacre between the Catholics and Huguenots in Paris that left many of the Huguenot leaders murdered, an event that stained Catherine's reign with intrigue and wickedness.¹⁹¹

To make matters worse, Margaret and Henry had a troubled marriage that was annulled in 1599 with no heirs, ten years after Catherine's death, permitting Henry IV to remarry, which he did to Marie de' Medici the following year. With Margaret no longer queen, the House of Valois, a royal line that had remained on the French throne since 1328, ended. Nonetheless, with many other successful marriages negotiated by Catherine, the Valois bloodline rippled throughout the numerous royal families ruling across Europe.

Not all marriage arrangements were created with ease and agreement, but queen mothers used maternal warrant as leverage to secure the alliances they sought. Marie's dual matches of her eldest son and daughter were greatly challenged by the Prince of Condé, who did not favor a Spanish Catholic alliance. Records reflect that Marie argued that these marriages were her maternal prerogative, and, according to Crawford, Marie focused "to realign the queen mother's

¹⁹⁰ Henry of Navarre was of the Bourbon royal blood line, which was the closest dynasty in line to the French throne, aside from the Valois.

¹⁹¹ Known as the St. Bartholomew's Massacre, Catherine's rumored involvement in the killing of Huguenots has since damaged her reputation and has labeled her as a villainous queen.

entitlement to authority.”¹⁹² In another instance Anne’s son, Louis XIV, had at first outright resisted the match his mother had arranged to Maria Theresa, having found himself attached to Mazarin’s niece, Marie Mancini, who lived at the French court. From Motteville’s memoirs we learn about a difficult conversation that Anne may well have had with her son to ensure his marriage was advantageous to the realm and to a princess of equal rank.¹⁹³

Regardless of preference or love, every member of the royal family contributed to the greater cause of dynastic dominance. Marriage was the political marketplace for both the state and family, and a queen regent could create opportunities to increase her personal and political power, which were inseparable during this period.¹⁹⁴

Outside of marriage alliances, political networking was another avenue a queen mother used to legitimize her position, increase her power base, and extend her authority. In fact, during the early modern era there were a rising number of female personnel in the French royal household who served to heighten the authority of the sovereign. Female office holders, or ladies in waiting, allowed the queen mother to build an extensive web of political contacts throughout the kingdom. Marie Du Bois, an attendant who served in the royal household for both King Louis XIII and King Louis XIV stated:

But the best offices are held by women, lady of honour, lady in waiting, first maid of the chamber and all the other (female offices); if you have a wife, daughters, female relatives or female friends you should therefore pay attention at an early stage in order to broker for them in this regard.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² Katherine Crawford, *Perilous Performances*, 75.

¹⁹³ Ruth Kleinman, *Anne of Austria: Queen of France*, 268.

¹⁹⁴ Teresa Earenfight, *Queenship in Medieval Europe*, 78; Peggy McCracken, *The Romance of Adultery*, 9.

¹⁹⁵ Marie du Bois and Louis de Grandmaison, *Mémoires de Marie Du Bois: sieur de Lestourmière et du Poirier: gentilhomme servant du roi, valet de chambre de Louis XIII et de Louis XIV, 1647-1676* (Vendôme: Société archéologique, scientifique et littéraire du Vendômois, 1936), 136-137.

These women would aggressively push their careers at court and easily cultivated personal relationships with other powerful people at court because of their close relationship to the queen to whom they served as confidants, patronesses, and informants to the queen mother.

According to biographer Leonie Frieda, Catherine's group of followers, from the time she became queen, increased considerably over time, as her new position encouraged people flocking to her to curry favor.¹⁹⁶ This group of followers, Italian and otherwise, included merchants, soldiers, bankers, artists, and politicians, all of whom Catherine could use to her benefit when necessary. Once she was queen mother, Catherine strategically built up her network in a process oddly similar to the Ottoman sultanas, by surrounding herself with a large household of women, far in excess of the former reigning queens of France.¹⁹⁷ Female office holders in Catherine de 'Medici's household were substantial at twenty-five percent, a retinue that intended to represent the prestige of her position.¹⁹⁸

One of these prominent French noblewomen was Isabelle de la Tour, whom Catherine knowingly paired to a member of the House of Guise and then later to a member of the Huguenot House of Condé. Both of these houses were competitors to the throne, and therefore it was crucial for Catherine to link them into her political network to her advantage. Another notable companion was Marie Catherine Gondi. Marie Catherine was well connected in the literary society of Lyon and was married to Antonio de Gondi of the powerful Gondi family of Italy,

¹⁹⁶ Leonie Frieda, *Catherine de Medici: Renaissance Queen of France* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 76.

¹⁹⁷Una McIlvenna, "A Stable of Whores?": The 'Flying Squadron' of Catherine de Medici. *The Politics of Female Households: Ladies-In-Waiting Across Early Modern Europe*, eds. Nadine Akkerman and Brigid Houben. (Leiden: Brill Academic Pub, 2013), 204.

¹⁹⁸ Jeroen Frans Jozef Duindamm, *Vienna and Versailles: The Courts of Europe's Major Dynastic Rivals, 1550-1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 59.

known not only for their finance and banking prowess but also for being well connected in the Catholic Church.¹⁹⁹

Marie Catherine came to Catherine's court early in her queenship and served officially as governess to Catherine and Henry's children; in doing so, she became an important companion to Catherine. Once queen mother, Catherine "rewarded this remarkable woman and her family by giving her responsibility for her personal finances and she was made general administrator for her projects and building works, among other matters."²⁰⁰ Catherine de' Medici's political matchmaking and networking abilities ensured that she remained well informed and connected both at court and abroad, while surrounding herself with a vast household proved beneficial, as well, because these men and women served as informants, political intermediaries, and companions.²⁰¹

Marie's network was smaller in nature, though that did not limit her ability to build an omnipotent web of personal ties. According to historical records, Marie's intimates numbered around five, and two of the most trusted were Concino Concini and his wife, Leonora Dori, who came originally to France with Marie when she wed Henri IV.²⁰² These two rose high into French court with the help of Marie and their own efforts, and were able to assert control of other royal French families which in turn expanded Marie's power.²⁰³ When her daughter in law, Anne of Austria, came to French court, once wed to Louis XIII, Marie was able to insert

¹⁹⁹ Joanna Milstein, *The Gondi: Family Strategy and Survival in Early Modern France* (New York: Ashgate, 2014), 3.

²⁰⁰ Leonie Frieda, *Catherine de Medici: Renaissance Queen of France*, 88.

²⁰¹ Una McIlvenna, "A Stable of Whores?": The 'Flying Squadron' of Catherine de Medici. 208.

²⁰² Louis Batiffol, *Marie de Medici and the French Court in the XVII Century*, trans. Mary King and ed. H.W. Carless Davis (London: Chatto and Windus, 1908), 170.

²⁰³ Oliver Mallick, "Clients and Friends: The Ladies-in-Waiting at the Court of Anne of Austria (1615-1666)," *The Politics of Female Households: Ladies-in-Waiting Across Early Modern Europe*, eds. Nadine Akkerman and Brigid Houben. (Leiden: Brill Academic Pub, 2013), 244.

informants and ladies loyal to the queen mother, into Anne's personal household with the purpose to retain her power over the new queen.

Anne had lived at French court for more than twenty years and was familiar with the inner workings of government. She knew she needed to leverage strong relationships to assist her in managing the state. To build a dominant network, she appointed people she trusted and was familiar with during her tenured career at court. She even brought back advisors she favored whom her husband had previously exiled, including Madame de Motteville and Madame de Senecey; both came from prominent families, each with powerful networks of their own.²⁰⁴ Anne's aim was to appoint those who had shown their loyalty in her early years, as well as women who had good reputations and were known for their virtue, as this would enhance the queen mother's image in return.²⁰⁵

One of Queen Anne's most noteworthy allies was Cardinal Mazarin. She appointed the Cardinal as lead minister of the royal council, largely due to his expertise and experience. According to Victor Cousin, writing on Mazarin's post in the early nineteenth century:

...in the beginning of a reign beset on every side from without and within with the greatest difficulties, had need of someone who would leave to her the honor of supreme authority while he took it upon himself the weight of affairs; and she saw no one among her friends whose capacity was sufficiently tried to inspire her with confidence.²⁰⁶

The relationship was symbiotic. Anne needed Mazarin to build her proficiency in governing, but Mazarin also knew he needed Anne, since "his only source of power lay in the queen's confidence."²⁰⁷ Ultimately, Mazarin proved to be a good ally, and together they helped to grow her authority and preserve her son's sovereignty.

²⁰⁴ Ruth Kleinman, *Anne of Austria: Queen of France*, 146-147.

²⁰⁵ Olivier Mallick, "Clients and Friends: The Ladies-in-Waiting at the Court of Anne of Austria (1615-1666)," 256.

²⁰⁶ Victor Cousin, and Mary L. Booth, *Secret history of the French court under Richelieu and Mazarin*, 90.

²⁰⁷ Ruth Kleinman, *Anne of Austria: Queen of France*, 148.

All three queen mothers took an active approach to building their own political network, although all three approaches were slightly different in nature. Catherine de' Medici aggressively participated not only in the majority of her children's marriage alliances but also in other matches among the nobility, all with the intent of reinforcing her position, gaining allies, and empowering France. Her strategy appears to have been focused on the volume of connections she could leverage. While Anne was very specific about the intimate matches she created and people she allowed into her personal circle, she intentionally invested in one political alliance with Mazarin that served her well. In contrast, Marie leaned more heavily on natal relations to build her inner circle. In all cases, the power and positions of ladies in waiting were highly valued and provided great networking capabilities for the French queen regent. Despite the differing approaches to brokering alliances, all three mothers made sure they were well connected and also ensured that their children were well matched for the advancement of the French kingdom.

Within the Ottoman Empire, matrimonial politics was also a sphere of influence over which the *validé* had personal control. As in France, sons gave the Ottoman queen mother the ability to reach the position of *validé*, but daughters also brought their own advantages that a mother could leverage for political gain. Daughters were usually raised in the Imperial mother's household to ensure an elite upbringing and loyalty to the royal family. The most significant difference was that, unlike in France, the royal women of the Imperial family served to "cement alliances" within the empire itself.²⁰⁸ For example, Nurbanu had three daughters—Ismihan (d.1585), Gevherhan (d.1580), and Sah (d.1580)—and each of them was matched with high-ranking statesmen in the empire: Ismihan to Grand Vizier Sokollu Mehmed Pasha (d.1579); Gevherhan to an Ottoman admiral, Piyale Pasha (d.1578), later to become grand vizier; and Sah

²⁰⁸ Maria Pendani, "Safiye's Household and Venetian Diplomacy," *Turcica* 32 (2000): 9-32, 28.

to Çakırcıbaşı Hasan Efendi (d.1574), who was the chief falconer.²⁰⁹ These matches were purposeful political maneuvers, as the three marriages were lavishly celebrated on the same day with grand ceremony and celebration.

The marriages of the Ottoman princesses for political purposes prior to the sixteenth century already had an established history, particularly in regions of the empire with strategic significance. However, according to Peirce, what was distinctive during this period was the increased frequency of arranged marriages.²¹⁰ Ottoman princesses during this time were betrothed at an earlier age and throughout their lifetime were often married several different times, resulting in serial marriages.²¹¹ Once betrothed to an Imperial princess, these sons-in-law were rewarded with high positions of rank and their loyalty to the Imperial family was forcefully expected.

These princess-*damad* marriages (men marrying Imperial princesses) allowed Kösem to vigorously participate in Ottoman politics, largely since Kösem had four daughters, all of whom she matched to well-connected statesmen. Gevherhan Sultan (d.1660) was married several times, and three of the statesmen she married were granted the position grand vizier, these included Öküz Mehmed Pasha (d.1619), Topal Recep Pasha (d.1632), and Abaza Siyavuş Pasha (d.1656). Grand Vizier Hafiz Ahmed was matched with another of Kösem's daughters, Ayşe Sultan.²¹² Kösem's daughter Fatma Sultan (d.1670) was married seven times, most of these marriages ended in execution, though sometimes by divorce. Her last marriage arranged when she was 61 years of age to Melek Ahmed Pasha in 1662 as a way to retain Melek's service and

²⁰⁹ Fatma, daughter of Selim II, is rumored to be another daughter of Nurbanu's but records have yet been able to confirm this.

²¹⁰ Leslie Peirce, "Beyond Harem Walls; Ottoman Royal Women and the Exercise of Power," *Gendered Domains: rethinking public and private in women's history*, (1992): 40-55, 53.

²¹¹ All three of Nurbanu's daughters were married more than once.

²¹² Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 148.

resources to the empire.²¹³ Although Melek was unhappy with the new match, it did result in land and title. Evliya Çelebi, a seventeenth century Ottoman explorer and writer, recorded that the sultan had awarded Melek with the position of “second in the *divan* [Ottoman Imperial advisory council and court], just below my grand vizier. And I have granted you the *sancak* of Afyon Karahisar [fertile lands that would produce revenue] as an Imperial grant by way of stipend.”²¹⁴

Maria Pendani argues that it was not until the latter half of the sixteenth century that “people began to think that wealth and power could be transmitted to heirs, and marriages with rich women became a means to reach this goal.”²¹⁵ This speaks to the fact that high-ranking men began to better appreciate the benefits and rewards of being matched with women of special standing in the Imperial household. Moreover, it was considered an honor to be a part of the royal family, and it represented an obligation that a royal statesman could not turn down. Rejecting the state’s offer at marrying into the royal family was tantamount to treason.

What further evolved during this epoch, however, is that political matchmaking began to expand beyond the princesses. *Validés* began to control the marriages of not just their daughters but also their granddaughters, nieces, aunts, sisters, milk nurses, and even their personal slaves. This would provide them an even greater reach within the empire to ensure their agendas extended far beyond the confinement of the Imperial harem. It is recorded that Nurbanu matched one of her granddaughters to a harem guard. Kösem also matched numerous other royal women in the Imperial household with men of significant standing that would be beneficial to her rule.²¹⁶

²¹³ Leslie Peirce, “Beyond Harem Walls; Ottoman Royal Women and the Exercise of Power,” 45.

²¹⁴ Robert Dankoff, *The Intimate Life of an Ottoman Statesman, Melek Ahmed Pasha, (1588-1662: As Portrayed in Evliya Celeb’s Book of Travels)*. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991), 261.

²¹⁵ Pendai, “Safiye’s Household and Venetian Diplomacy,” 29-30.

²¹⁶ Leslie Pierce, *The Imperial Harem*, 105.

The building of marriage networks was important to the *validé*, not only because they provided her political access to a wider public where the *validé* could affect policies and influence the realm, but also because they were fundamental to securing allegiances. These royal women were matched with higher-ranking statesmen to help guarantee their loyalty to both the sultan and to the queen mother.

Turhan and her son brokered a marriage agreement between Ayşe Sultan, the princess's sixth marriage, to Ibşir Mustafa Pasha, an Ottoman statesman, who was responsible for fierce uprisings in Anatolia. This is a prime example of using marriage alliances to encourage loyalty to the Imperial household and to safeguard the empire, since Turhan's intention with this match was to quell the rebellion and secure the loyalty of the disgruntled statesman by tying him to the Imperial family. As with the majority of princess-*damad* matches, Ibşir Mustafa Pasha was promoted to the office of grand vizier, a position he held for less than seven months before his assassination in the capital, an act that was premeditated by Turhan and the sultan.²¹⁷ As the position of *validé* grew in its scope of authority, safeguarding the prosperity of the empire became the responsibility of the queen mother.

Additionally marriage alliances were often a way to secure “considerable financial and military resources” to the empire, as many of the statesmen allied to the Imperial household brought with them men, money, and arms, which were extremely important during the endless conflict and financial pressures that gripped the empire during the sixteenth and seventeenth century.²¹⁸ Peirce argues that matrimonial politics helped to reduce the extraordinary costs of maintaining Imperial households.²¹⁹ Furthermore, by tying these governing elites to the royal family, the Ottoman ruling house helped cement their allegiance to the dynasty and reduced the

²¹⁷ Naima, *Tarih Naima*, 6:4-99.

²¹⁸ Robert Dankoff, *The Intimate Life of an Ottoman Statesman, Melek Ahmed Pasha*, 32.

²¹⁹ Leslie Pierce, *The Imperial Harem*, 146.

threat of them gaining greater power and autonomy in their own right, which could then be used to challenge the power or reign of the sultan and royal family.

Because the household of the *validé* operated independently from the reigning sultan, she had the opportunity to develop her own political structure within the larger government of the empire. This included advisors and a retinue specifically loyal to her. Royal mothers used several avenues to communicate and extend their influence outside the Imperial harem, including letters, messages, and agendas sent through palace officials and other intermediaries who were fundamental to accessing the outside world. Intermediaries included *kiras* (Jewish women who would serve as the sultana's secretary and agent on economic transactions), freed harem slaves, and the *validés'* daughters and sons-in-law. Peirce argues that "female networks sustained through formal visiting rituals provided women with information and sources of power useful to their male relatives."²²⁰ So not only could daughters solidify the link between the royal family and ruling statesmen, as previously stated, they also served as intermediaries for their mother by being able to move freely between the Imperial harem and the wider Ottoman world, serving as "informants, couriers, and political strategists," thus allowing the *validé* to build an extended network loyal to her rule.²²¹

Two *kiras* for whom we have some documentation were Jews that migrated to the Ottoman Empire from both Spain and Venice: Esther Handali, who served Nurbanu, and Esperanza Malchi, who served *validé* Safiye, who is not included in this study. As non-Muslims, *kiras* were great assets to the *validés* and facilitated their acts of correspondence, gift giving, and business transactions. Handali and Malchi were, themselves, able to assume great influence both in and out of the harem. Although beyond the scope of this project, the way in which *kiras* were

²²⁰ Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 7.

²²¹ Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 147.

able to create their own wealth and wield influence from their close access to the *validés* is fascinating in and of itself. Further examination of this topic could continue to reveal another layer of the female power dynamics within the harem during this period.

The need for political networking grew throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth century in response to the increased factionalism that created competition within different power groups in the capital. The *validé* sultan sought to secure allies inside and outside of the harem walls, including solidifying alliances with high-power elites, religious leaders, military figures, and administrators whose loyalty were critical to a successful reign. Even European observers could discern the power that royal women possessed. The Venetian resident ambassador, Paolo Contarini reported in 1583:

The empire is largely governed by the sultanas...; and in order to conserve their [vizier's] positions they seek to please the sultanas without ever opposing anything requested by them, presenting them with gifts to obtain favors, knowing that the most important posts are given to those who are favored by these women who are all-powerful.²²²

Additionally, not only did the marriages Kösem facilitated allow her to build extensive networks, but she also strategically allied herself with the Janissaries.²²³ The backing of the elite Ottoman infantry that made up a large amount of the empire's troops aided her ability to build a strong network of supporters and contributed to her enjoying the longest reign of all the queen mothers.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Turhan did not naturally elevate to the status of *validé* but had to take it by force from Kösem Sultan. In doing so, she allied herself with the chief black eunuch of the Imperial harem, Süleyman Agha, and also developed a relationship with one of Kösem's servants, Meleki Khatun, whom Turhan probably knew very well. Meleki betrayed Kösem by informing Turhan of a plan to replace Turhan's son, Mehmed IV, for a

²²² Gülru Necipoglu, *The Age of Sinan* (Islington: Reaktion Books, 2010), 281.

²²³ The Janissaries were the elite infantry troops under the sultan's control.

different Osman heir to sit on the throne.²²⁴ Learning of Kösem's scheme, Turhan anticipated the queen mother's move by striking first to have Kösem strangled to death, thereby eliminating her competition and rising to the position of *validé*. To have taken part in the murder plot, Turhan had to strategically build a loyal network within the harem walls.

Turhan, like her predecessors, allied herself with leading men in all areas of the state, including government, religion, the arts, and the military. One of these men was Koca Kasım Ağa, who became Turhan's trusted steward in architecture but who also was actively involved in politics. What is unique about Turhan's reign is that she did not have any daughters from which she could secure strong *damad* alliances, and this fact surely would have increased the difficulty of finding a strong and trustworthy figure to serve as grand vizier. Furthermore, new forms of political legitimacy were desperately needed in the empire, because instability within the hierarchy had ensued and multiple power groups vied for control. The instability in the Ottoman hierarchy steered Turhan to endorse the transfer of political and military power to Köprülü Mehmed Pasha (d.1661) in September 1656.

Köprülü came out of retirement to serve as grand vizier at the age of 81. He rose through the ranks of the sultan's service from a very young age and had a remarkable reputation for being a fair but strict leader. Köprülü helped to restore the power of the hierarchy by curbing legislative corruption and containing rebellions. For Turhan, tying Köprülü into her inner network was an act of great strength and understanding of Ottoman power politics, and not what some would mistake as "the weakness of her sex."²²⁵ This queen mother clearly recognized that power was transient if managed without favor and, when needed, brutality. Although official

²²⁴ For further information on Meleki Khatun see Naima's *Tarih* volumes 5 and 6.

²²⁵ Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 256-257.

power rested with Köprülü, Turhan did not withdraw from her Imperial role; in fact, this move allowed her to preserve the roles and privileges that the *validé* had come to enjoy.

The arrangement of marriages and network-building continued to be an informal way for the *validé* to control her power base and make powerful allies who could carry out her instructions while also protecting, preserving, and extending her position of power. Surviving records show that English and Venetian embassies kept careful record of who was being married to whom, which illustrates that marriages and marriage alliances were considered particularly important even to those outside of the empire.

Both French queen regents and the *validés* used marriage as a political tool to create connections, increase their authority, and guarantee their own political legitimacy. Growing up in close proximity to royal courts gave these women knowledge and experience to navigate the inner workings of their respective institutions. Moreover, the arrangement of marriages and the development of extended networks of royal support became a strategy by which both sets of queen mothers increased the authority of their positions. The French queen regent carefully fashioned intimate networks and then manipulated them to extend her reach and allow her to more effectively monitor and influence court, state, and international affairs. Similar forms of networking for the Ottoman *validé* sultans helped these women control their power base and make powerful allies who could support and implement their agendas, as well.

There was a key difference, however, since in France a royal princess would likely be married off to a foreign realm to serve as an intermediary between two European kingdoms, whereas the Ottomans did not marry their royal women outside of their own realm and instead matched them with wealthy elites within the Imperial court to serve as intermediaries among the Imperial harem, the capital, and the vast dominions of the empire. Another key difference was

that serial marriages were distinctive to matrimonial politics in the Ottoman realm, as royal women would often experience multiple marriages to various statesmen that were aimed at ensuring stronger loyalty to the royal family and guaranteeing a continued supply of resources to prop up the sagging finances of the state. But in both France and the Ottoman Empire, royal women married for the advancement, survival, and dominance of the dynastic line. The more sons and daughters the queen mother had, the more control and political influence she could acquire. The political networks achieved through marriage arrangements and expansion of their extended households created loyalties that helped them to manage the diverse populations of their realm as well as neighboring realms.

A queen mother's inner circle was constructed with her biggest allies and in many ways symbolized an army under her direct control. With the legitimate power of their position, both sets of royal women sought to increase the ideology of sovereign power and leveraged political networks to do so. As an example, Turhan and Köprülü Mehmed Pasha's relationship, like Anne and Mazarin's, relied on each other's confidence and dependence for the restoration of greater authority of an absolutist nature.²²⁶ All queen mothers made a conscious effort to build close ties with those who already had power but also developed their own allies to build a reliable web of allegiances, therefore insulating and heightening their authority.

²²⁶ Leslie Peirce, *Imperial Harem*, 256.

Chapter 6: Patronage, Charity, and the Illustration of Power

Patronage was a political tool used for centuries by monarchs and rulers to present their power and eternalize their sovereignty. Annette Dixon stresses that women who ruled “developed strategies for representing themselves as able, appropriate, and properly sanctioned leaders, much as male heads of state had long done.”²²⁷ The French queen regent and Ottoman *validé* became experts at asserting their sovereignty and legitimizing their power through many conduits of royal patronage, including ceremonies, art and visual culture, building projects, charitable works, and festivals and spectacles.

The French queen regents were promoters of the arts in literature, art, theatre, and music. Not only were they the artists’ patrons but frequently their subjects as well, as a way to propagate their authority and immortalize themselves and their dynasty. Portraiture at this time was a status symbol and, according to Louis Batifol, the exchange of portraits among sovereigns and courts was “the fashion of the day.”²²⁸ Catherine amassed a large collection of portraiture and paintings during her reign, of which her court painters included the famed François Clouet and Antoine Caron. Catherine was involved in ensuring her family was regularly painted to heighten the status of the Valois family line. For example, in the mid sixteenth century she wrote, “I would like to have paintings of all the children done . . . and sent to me, without delay, as soon as they are finished.”²²⁹ Likewise, records indicate that during Marie’s queenship and early regency she sent several portraits of herself and her children abroad, intensely promoting herself and her family.²³⁰

²²⁷ Annette Dixon, *Women Who Ruled: Queens, Goddesses, Amazons in Renaissance and Baroque Art* (London: Merrell, 2002), 19.

²²⁸ Louis Batifol, *Marie de Medici and the French Court in the XVII Century*, 238-240.

²²⁹ Leonie Frieda, *Catherine de Medici*, 109.

²³⁰ Louis Batifol, *Marie de Medici and the French Court in the XVII Century*, 238-240.

Catherine's elevation of the arts and culture in France was greatly influenced by the court of King François I, her father-in-law, who ruled at the height of the French Renaissance. Notably, one of the finest representations of rich patronage that came from Catherine's court was the Valois Tapestries, a set of eight exquisite tapestries that depict notable events during Catherine's reign and came to serve as a unique form of political propaganda.²³¹ In addition to her love of art, Catherine was a dedicated patron of dramas, ballets, and music. The *Ballet Comique de la Reine* was developed under Catherine's reign, and she was a patron of famous French composer Claude Le Jeune. In fact, the abundance of arts and culture produced under Catherine's reign in every field speaks to the way she utilized the arts to wield power during her reign.

Marie's expert ability to image-build was predicated on the fact that there "was a need for strong imagery to support the monarchy,"²³² and she, too, used art as an instrument to reinforce her legitimate place on the throne. Marie's most meritorious commission of her career was in 1621, when she contracted court painter Peter Paul Rubens to do a series of twenty-four life-sized paintings that would commemorate her life and be displayed in the Palais du Luxembourg. Each canvas represented an event in her life, including her wedding to Henry IV, her coronation at Saint Denis, and the politically important exchanges of her daughter Elisabeth to Spain and Anne of Austria to France.

Marie was highly involved in the project and invested in how she was presented, as there are known consultations between the queen mother and Rubens.²³³ This entire series was

²³¹ The Valois Tapestries were commissioned during the reign Charles IX, commissioned in Belgium around 1575.

²³² Deborah Marrow, *The Art Patronage of Maria de' Medici* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982), 56.

²³³ Deborah Marrow, *The Art Patronage of Maria de' Medici*, 41-48.

painted with the intent to glorify and amplify the queen mother's position.²³⁴ In *The Regent Militant: The Victory at Jülich* and *The Felicity of the Regency*, Marie is painted wearing a helmet and holding both a scepter and a scale of justice, which appears to emulate the characteristics of strong male leaders.²³⁵ These images of the queen mother as a *femme forte* broke with normal emblematic gender roles of the day and boldly illustrated the legitimacy of Marie's sovereignty and suggested her ability to lead. In addition, Marie also linked herself to former powerful women of France, including Catherine de' Medici and Blanche of Castille, to give further validation to her reign.²³⁶

Anne's depictions in portraiture were essentially different than her predecessors, as this queen mother reserved the heroic representation predominantly for her son, the king, thus breaking with the showiness of her predecessor.²³⁷ During her regency, Anne seems to have purposely chosen to project her image more simply as a pious mother wearing a religious habit and elegant mourning dress.²³⁸ In fact, all three queen mothers had themselves painted as grieving widows to highlight their devotion to their late husbands, thereby capitalizing on feminine expectations of loyalty and selflessness. A pair of portraits by Rubens on display in Museo Del Prado depict Marie and Anne, mother and daughter-in-law, in parallel elegances, both dressed in black in a similar French style, with Marie donning a widow's headdress.²³⁹

²³⁴ Thomas Tolley, "States of independence: women regents as patrons of the visual arts in Renaissance France," *Renaissance Studies*, vol. 10 no. 2, (1996): 237-258, 240.

²³⁵ Géraldine A. Johnson, "Imagining Images of Powerful Women: Maria de' Medici's Patronage of Art and Architecture." *Women and Art in Early Modern Europe: Patrons, Collectors, and Connoisseurs*. eds. Cynthia Lawrence (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997): 126-153, 149.

²³⁶ Katherine Crawford, *Perilous Performances*, 74.

²³⁷ This can be seen in art including Claude Mellan's engraving, *Le Reine regent remit son autorité à le Vierge et lui présente ses enfants* (1643) Jean Morin's After Philippe De Champaigne portrait of Anne of Austria (1643) at the onset of Anne's regency.

²³⁸ Katherine Crawford, *Perilous Performances*, 103.

²³⁹ Titled with their names and painted around 1622 and currently on display at the Museo Del Prado

Catherine also habitually had her image painted in widow's dress, which she consistently wore from the time of Henry II's death up until her own passing.

Self-representation was highly important for all the queen mothers, as it allowed them to control their image and to communicate a message of their rightful authority as ruler of France. More specifically, queen regents elected to use allegorical representations in the art they commissioned. By tradition, queen regents associated their image with the virtues of peace, wisdom, and prudence. Bettina Baumgärtel has argued that "to legitimize and solidify their legally insecure position afterward (upon the death of their husband, the king), they propagated a canon of virtues specifically suited to the situation of female reign."²⁴⁰

Given that women were naturally excluded from power (and the debate over women's ability to rule was being fiercely argued in sixteenth-century Europe), it was necessary for the French regents to identify with images that would support their position. For example, Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, and Artemisia, an ancient Greek queen well known for her bravery and intellect, were two images that were readily adopted by women in authority.²⁴¹ Catherine, Marie, and Anne each commissioned allegorical art to cast and reinforce a vision of their keen ability to reign.

Sheila ffollott shows how Catherine tied her image to that of Artemisia, who was archetypal of a prudent female leader and whose iconography strengthened Catherine's capacity to head the French monarchy.²⁴² Albert Rabil, Jr. stresses that Catherine adopted the figure of

²⁴⁰ Bettina Baumgärtel, "Is the King Genderless? The Staging of the Female Regent as Minerva Pacifera." *Women Who Ruled: Queens, Goddesses, Amazons in Renaissance and Baroque Art*. eds. Annette Dixon (London: Merrell, 2002): 97-110, 98.

²⁴¹ Sharon L. Jansen, *Debating Women, Politics, and Power in Early Modern Europe*, 108.

²⁴² Sheila ffollott, 'Catherine de' Medici as Artemisia: Figuring the Powerful Widow in Early Modern Europe,' 241.

Artemisia because she represented a combination of “a female persona with masculine powers,” helping to define her position as ruler of France.²⁴³

Rubens also used mythological figures to represent Marie de' Medici, which he often found in Juno and Minerva, both strong female leaders that resonated within French court. The Marie de' Medici Cycle painting titled *The Death of Henry IV and the Proclamation of the Regency* is one of the most distinctly allegorical images of the sequence for the way it legitimized and eternalized Marie's right to sovereignty. In the emblematic scene, Marie rests on a raised throne flanked by Minerva and Prudence, who are both strong representations of female wisdom and virtue. Prudence receives the symbols of royal authority, including the imperial orb, a strong symbol of royal power, on Marie's behalf while the nobles kneel and pledge their loyalty.

In another example, Simon Renard de Saint André's portrait titled *Anne of Austria as Minerva and Queen Theresa as Pax* (1660) represents the regent's “politics of peace.” In this image, Anne is being heroically personified through Minerva, highlighting specifically the triumph of a sealed peace with Spain that Anne had brokered.²⁴⁴

In addition to works of art, construction or architecture was a leading tool that the French queen regents used to promote their position in the political arena. Interestingly, they did not patronize large-scale projects during their husbands' reigns but only after assuming the position of regent and queen mother. All three regents spent a great deal of effort and money to finance building projects in and around Paris, which enhanced their image by providing tremendous

²⁴³ Henricus Cornelius Agrippa, *Declamation of the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex*, trans and ed. by Albert Rabil Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), xxv.

²⁴⁴ Bettina Baumgärtel, “Is the King Genderless?,” 108-109.

public recognition of the regent to her court and her subjects.²⁴⁵ Both religious and secular, these structures made their mark on French society and came to symbolize the power that the queen regent possessed. Of the projects that Catherine de' Medici promoted, the Tuileries Palace and gardens commissioned in 1564 and the Hôtel de la Reine commissioned in 1572 are the most significant. The Tuileries gardens provided the ideal setting for many of Catherine's *fêtes*. She also expanded the grand chateau of Chenonceaux, located in the Loire Valley in 1576.

Like her patronage of the arts, the queen mother took a great interest to the design of her building projects, as can be seen in a note to Catherine from her chief architect, Philibert de l'Orme, which stated, "as your good judgment shows itself more and more and shines as you yourself take the trouble to project and sketch out the buildings which it pleases you to commission."²⁴⁶ Moreover, Catherine commissioned a new chapel to be added to the basilica of Saint Denis a few years following Henry II's death. According to Sheila ffolliott, "[f]unerary sculpture and architecture was an approved route for female patronage."²⁴⁷ The impressive Valois Chapel, designed by Italian architect Francesco Primaticcio (d.1570), reflected an Italian influence and drew from Catherine's natal heritage. The joint tomb she commissioned for Henry II and herself symbolized Catherine honoring the late king, her legitimacy as surviving widow, and the legacy of the Valois.

Marie de' Medici is widely known for the construction of the magnificent Luxembourg Palace. She purchased the building and garden in 1612 during her regency and modeled the Luxembourg Palace after the Pitti Palace in Florence, her childhood home, in order to

²⁴⁵ William O. Goode, "Moving West: Three French Queens and the Urban History of Paris." *The French Review* vol. 73, no 6 (May 2000): 1125.

²⁴⁶ R.J. Knecht, *Catherine De' Medici*, 228.

²⁴⁷ Sheila ffolliott, "The ideal queenly patron of the Renaissance: Catherine de' Medici defining herself or defined by others?" *Women and Art in Early Modern Europe: Patrons, Collectors, and Connoisseurs*, ed. by Cynthia Lawrence (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State Press, 1996): 99-110, 107.

“reformulate her image as a legitimate regent.”²⁴⁸ William O. Goode stresses that Marie aimed to “demonstrate the glory of her Medici name” and “embellish her son’s capital.”²⁴⁹

Marie not only helped design the palace to provide better accommodations than she had at the Louvre, but she was also very much invested in the appearance of the grounds and garden. The following passage is from a letter written by Nicolas-Clide Fabri to Peter Paul Rubens and illustrates Marie’s desire to commission impressive statues of famous women to be placed over the entrance to the palace and around the gardens:

The queen mother has ordered eight figures...to be placed around the dome that is over the portal of her palace, and she wants illustrious women there....Olympia, mother of Alexander the Great; Berenice, mother of Philadelpho; Livia, wife of Augustus; Mmmaea, mother of Alexander Severo; Saint Helen, mother of Constantine; Saint Clotilde, wife of Saint Clodoveo; Bertha, mother of Charlemagne; and Blanche, mother of Saint Louis, all queens, many illustrious, wives and mothers of great princes.²⁵⁰

This iconography aimed to promote the idea of the female aptitude to rule and to support Marie’s legitimate claim to power as a strong female leader and as wife and mother to the prior and present king of France.²⁵¹ Art historian Deborah Morrow asserts that the idea to exhibit illustrious women was significant, because while there was a literary movement emphasizing famous women (as an example, Boccaccio’s *De clairs mulieribus*), “the visual tradition was scant.”²⁵² The palace still grandly stands today as a symbol of her reign. Marie, much like her ancestor Catherine, had also begun working in 1613 with one of the Metezeau brothers, who were French court architects, on designs for a majestic tomb for Henry IV. Although this project

²⁴⁸ Lucienne Thys-Şenocak, *Ottoman Women Builders*, 94.

²⁴⁹ William O Goode, “Moving West: Three French Queens and the Urban History of Paris,” 1123.

²⁵⁰ Cynthia Lawrence, *Women and Art in Early Modern Europe: Patrons, Collectors and Connoisseurs* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 142.

²⁵¹ Cynthia Lawrence, *Women and Art in Early Modern Europe*, 143. Although many of these women initially considered were changed to other less politically charged women at a time with deep rooted misogynistic ideals opposed to female leadership, female figures did dominate the grounds. These statues since have been replaced in the mid nineteenth century. The twenty marble statues today do represent the Queens of France and other famous women, including one of Marie herself.

²⁵² Deborah Marrow, *The Art Patronage of Maria de' Medici*, 66.

was never completed, the commission echoed the virtue of loyalty and honor that was important for a queen mother to project.

Like both regents before her, Anne set out to establish her legitimacy and authority with an aura of majesty and stateliness. There are four remarkable projects worth highlighting during her reign: the ornamentation of her Palais Royale apartments, both her winter and summer apartments in the Louvre, and the impressive Val-de-Grâce Abbey. The most prominent of these is the Val-de-Grâce project, which included the church, monastery, and her personal apartment. Construction began in 1645, two years after the death of her husband when Louis XIV was only seven years old, and was completed in 1667.

The construction of a religious institution is something unique to Anne's commissions and is attributed to her Spanish Hapsburg culture, since the royal monastery was the preferred monument for the Hapsburg dynasty.²⁵³ In addition, the building of religious institutions was an acceptable form of gendered patronage, employed to demonstrate the piety of its patroness. Interestingly, this royal form of patronage is quite similar to the mosque projects of the Ottoman *validés*, which we will later examine.

Anne used the interior decoration of all her apartments to reinforce her image as a virtuous queen and mother of the king. Further, she specifically used the image of the Virgin and Christ to draw parallels to herself and Louis XIV in an attempt to portray connections between a mother's role and quasi-divine rule.²⁵⁴ In an effort to illustrate her rank and to project a strong self-confidence in her royal authority, Anne spent much of her household budget lavishly decorating her apartments with the finest of furnishings.²⁵⁵ Art historian Sheila ffollott

²⁵³ Lisa Anne Rotmil, and Jonathan Brown, *The Artistic Patronage of Anne of Austria (1601--1666): Image-making at the French Court*, Dissertation Abstracts International, (2000), 238.

²⁵⁴ Lisa Anne Rotmil, and Jonathan Brown. *The Artistic Patronage of Anne of Austria (1601--1666)*, 252, 256.

²⁵⁵ Ruth Kleinman, *Anne of Austria*, 255-257.

argues that these elaborately decorated spaces, where the queen regent conducted much of her business, “provided the stage for symbolic and political action.”²⁵⁶

Even in her personal building projects, Anne was intentional in linking her patronage to her son’s preeminence and showcasing their bond, including attention to details like the ornamentation on the interior and exterior of the Val-de-Grâce, where the linked initials A and L were displayed. Anne appears to have been fully conscious of the importance of fortifying her authority in this way, especially in the spaces where she tended to state affairs. The Val-de-Grâce still stands today in the fifth arrondissement of Paris, now serving as a hospital.

The architectural patronage of Catherine, Marie, and Anne helped to develop the glamour and grandeur of the French monarchy, and their influences remain clear on the urban history of Paris.

French queen mothers also patronized charitable organizations in France to showcase their loyalty to the Catholic Church, which in exchange could potentially encourage the endorsement of their authority from the Papal state. Additionally, charity became a direct reflection of the humanist principles that had become so relevant in the early modern era. Historian Anne Scott argues that, “[r]eligion may provide the underlying ideology of medieval and early modern charity but the practice takes many forms and springs from many motivations, civic, familial, personal, and political...”²⁵⁷

In the early modern period, many conduct books or pamphlets were published to define an idealized queen and to persuade and influence queenly behavior. Nicolas Houel’s treatise, *Les Mémoires et recherches de la dévotion, piété et charité des illustres roynes de France*, posits

²⁵⁶ Sheila ffolliott, "A Queen's garden of power: Catherine de' Medici and the locus of female rule". *Papers from the Twenty-First Annual Conference / (Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies)*, ed. Mario A. Di Cesare (Tempe: MRTS, 1992): 245-255, 245.

²⁵⁷ Anne M. Scott, *Experiences of Charity, 1250-1650* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 9.

that the most important attribute of a model queen is the obligation to support charitable works, including the patronage of churches, colleges, hospitals, and monasteries. Written in 1586, the treatise was dedicated to Catherine de' Medici for her hopeful support of Houel's charitable enterprises.

Elliott asserts that charitable beneficence was becoming increasingly important during the period of religious war as a way to showcase one's religious allegiance and for the French queen to promote her devotion to Catholicism.²⁵⁸ Catherine supported the Capuchin order in its early foundations in France.²⁵⁹ Marie's patronage to Catholic orders and organizations was extremely important for the success of "the Catholic renewal" in France and can be seen in the many convents she supported, including the Carmelites and the Discalced Carmelites, among others.²⁶⁰ An extant passage reads, "[f]rom her chateau, close to the Luxembourg Gardens, Marie de' Medici could reach her Carmelite pavilion in just a few minutes. She was often accompanied by her daughters the princesses. On the eve of her departure for England, Marie-Henriette, already married to Charles I, visited the Great Convent with her mother and spent the whole day there..."²⁶¹

Many charitable enterprises or religious houses sought the support of the royal family for the benefit this endorsement would provide. As an example, Marie frequently attended the Ursuline's convent, which, according to Barbara Diefendorf, would guarantee financial support by other elite families.²⁶² Anne's patronage of the royal Val-de-Grâce Abbey and several other charitable institutions, including La Filles de Providence and the Enfants Trouvés (organizations

²⁵⁸ Lisa Keane Elliott, "In Pursuit of Charity: Nicolas Houel and his *Maison de la Charité chrétienne* in Late Sixteenth-Century Paris," in *Experiences of Charity, 1250-1650*, edited by Anne M. Scott (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 169.

²⁵⁹ Barbara B. Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity: Pious Women and the Catholic Reformation in Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 59-60.

²⁶⁰ Deborah Morrow, *The Art Patronage of Marie de' Medici*, 12-13, 18-19, 29-30.

²⁶¹ Yves Rocher, ed. *L'art de XVIIe siècle dans les Carmels de France* (Paris: Musée du Petit Palais, 1982), 101-106.

²⁶² Barbara B. Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity*, 130.

that provided care to girls and abandoned babies), also positioned Anne as a generous and caring queen mother of France.²⁶³

There is less historiography focusing on charitable works of these French queen regents, because their secular patronage has been more emphasized. However, the fact that many charitable organizations sought queenly patronage to aid in their missions illustrates that this relationship did exist and was quite valuable to the growing ideal of and need for charitable responsibility. Charity gave French queen regents another dimension in the influence they wielded that could be leveraged to expand their reach.

In France, coronation ceremonies solidified the queen's rightful place beside the king and legitimized her status in a way that carried forward to her reign as queen regent. Theresa Earenfight argues that "queenship in early modern Europe was decidedly ceremonial" and that the position had become a lot more public and lavish than the position had resembled in the medieval era.²⁶⁴ Therefore, during the early modern era, coronations of queens became increasingly more splendid affairs that reinforced the foundation of her royal status.

Catherine's coronation ceremony was organized in stately grandeur and opulence. As Ralph Roeder notes from a contemporaneous account, "[i]n public she was completely mistress of her dignity and performed her ceremonial and social functions with an authority as easy as it was unassuming."²⁶⁵ Catherine's poise during her coronation brought her added commendation as she legally became queen of France.

Likewise, Marie's official coronation on May 13, 1610, was a grand celebration that visibly amplified her status as a legitimate sovereign of France. Cardinal Richelieu is quoted as

²⁶³Barbara B. Diefendorf, *From Penitence to Charity*, 231. To the charity, La Filles de Providence, Anne provided an initial investment of 63,000 *livres* and an annual stipend of 1,500 *livres*. To the Enfants Trouvés, Anne provided 12,000 *livres* a year.

²⁶⁴ Teresa Earenfight, *Queenship in Medieval Europe*, 252.

²⁶⁵ Ralph Roeder, *Catherine De' Medici and the Lost Revolution* (London: Viking, 1937), 69.

saying, "Never was there such an gathering of nobility [...], never were the princes so splendidly turned out, never were the ladies and princesses more bedecked in jewels."²⁶⁶ Thus, the coronation performances delivered by Catherine and Marie proved to be important in establishing the acknowledgement they would subsequently receive from their court.

Lavish court festivals were another method used to illustrate the power and wealth that a queen regent exercised. Organized entertainments functioned as a political tool to distract and amuse local nobility and to impress and intimidate foreign states. Historian Roy Strong argues that "court *fêtes* were an integral part of Catherine de' Medici's political policy."²⁶⁷ Most famous are the pageants of Fontainebleau of 1564 and the Water Festival of Bayonne in 1565. While exorbitant in cost, Catherine viewed these multi-day festivals as an investment aimed at increasing her power and placating the nobility through entertainment and exercise, all the while impressing foreign powers.²⁶⁸

In describing the Bayonne festival, the French court historian Brantome wrote, "[t]he magnificence was such in all things that the Spanish, who are very disdainful of all others, swore that they have never seen anything more beautiful."²⁶⁹ In fact, Catherine was well aware of the role her festivities played in the mood of the country, as she was recorded as saying, "...two things are necessary to live in peace with the French, and to make them love their King: to make them happy [with feasts and parties] and to occupy them in some athletic exercise."²⁷⁰

²⁶⁶ The Coronation of Marie de' Medici. Société Henri IV and the Centre de Musique Baroque de Versailles. accessed December 2, 2014, http://henriiv.culture.fr/en/uc/04_00_03?version=accessible.

²⁶⁷ Roy C. Strong, *Splendor at Court: Renaissance Spectacle and the Theater of Power* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), 121.

²⁶⁸ Frances A. Yates, *Valois Tapestries* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 52.

²⁶⁹ "la magnificence fut telle en toutes choses que les Espagnols qui sont fort desdaigneux de toutes autres, for des leurs, jurarent n'avoir rien veu de plus beau." Frances A. Yates, *Valois Tapestries*, 55. Translated by René Langlois.

²⁷⁰ Nancy Goldstone, *The Rival Queens: Catherine de' Medici, Her Daughter Marguerite de Valois, and the Betrayal That Ignited a Kingdom* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2015), 76.

Another politically astute move made by Catherine was publicly campaigning for two years across the vast kingdom of France to make connections and seal loyalties for the reign of her son, Charles IX. Involving more than eight hundred members of French court, this procession created a grandiose scene intended to promote the power of the queen and her son. Catherine's acumen for entertainment among her court and the French populace reinforced licit entitlement to her position as head of the French state.

As we have seen, the French queen regents consciously developed their image and controlled their self-representation, although they were only outwardly active in doing so after they were widowed. Crawford states that "Catherine supported pictorial representation that emphasized her locus within French iconography."²⁷¹ From the time Marie was married to Henry IV, she was quickly exposed to the importance of symbolism and ceremony at French court.²⁷² The artistic and cultural contributions the queen regent adopted were designed with a specific purpose: giving the queen influence that could be transferred into the political sphere. William Monter claims that female regents used political propaganda better than other types of female sovereigns.²⁷³ Because they had no lawful claim to the throne, they aggressively reinforced their authority through other methods. These royal women were promoters of the arts in multiple fields, including literature, art, theatre, architecture, and music, and this patronage in all its forms became a vital political tool for the French queen regents to use during their reigns. Catherine de' Medici, Marie de' Medici, and Anne of Austria's expert use of visual arts, elaborate displays, and stately architecture were successful at lauding the *puissance et élégance* of their sovereignty.

²⁷¹ Katherine Crawford, *Perilous Performances*, 32.

²⁷² Annette Dixon, *Women Who Ruled*, 32.

²⁷³ William Monter, *The Rise of Female Kings in Europe, 1300-1800*, 94.

In Islamic societies, patronage was also a dynamic way to represent one's status and to compel one's audience. Female patronage was at its height during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Istanbul, as more than one-third of endowed property was set up through foundations established by women.²⁷⁴ In contrast to France, Ottoman culture practiced female seclusion, which was firmly enforced on the royal women of the dynasty. Sixteenth century jurisprudence in the Ottoman Empire emphasized that a woman considered to be *muhaddere*, or respectable, “connoted a reputation for chaste behavior and its corollary, observation of the protocols of veiling and seclusion.”²⁷⁵ When outside the harem walls, royal women of the Imperial household were shielded from the public eye and heavily escorted by their servants. While their visage could not physically be seen, there were viewing stations set up at ceremonies that were overtly distinguishable and undoubtedly added to the *validé*'s notoriety.

Nina Ergin, who studies the acoustic dimension of the mighty presence of royal Ottoman women, suggests that “although their bodies were visually absent from public space, Ottoman royal women were present acoustically,” either from behind a curtain attending an Imperial council meeting or acting as an intercessor and accepting petitions while visibly hidden on the road in their carriage.²⁷⁶ The *validé*'s royal carriage was deliberately recognizable while in transit to and from the harem walls, and her convoy usually surpassed her son's.

Furthermore, Ottoman culture normally did not support creating artistic images of Ottoman royal women through portraiture or other art forms and, therefore, this limited the

²⁷⁴ Gabriel Baer, “Women and Waqf: An Analysis of the Istanbul Tahrir of 1546”, *Asian and African Studies* 17 (1/3) (1983): 9-27, 10.

²⁷⁵ Leslie Peirce, “Domesticating Sexuality: Harem Culture in Ottoman Imperial Law.” *Harem Histories*, ed. Marilyn Booth (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010): 104-135, 104.

²⁷⁶ Nina Ergin, “Ottoman Royal Women's Spaces: The Acoustic Dimension.” *Journal of Women's History*. 26, no 1 (2014): 89-111, 99.

means by which the *validés* could publicly present their authority.²⁷⁷ As a result, Ottoman *validés* could not have engaged in the royal exchanges of portraiture that were popular in Europe at this time. Nevertheless, they were able to impact the public sphere by supporting the construction of impressive public works, participating in ceremonies, and engaging in public acts of charity that enhanced their visibility.

The construction of public works projects, especially in the Ottoman capital of Istanbul, where it was the sole prerogative of the royal family to build, was the most powerful way *validés* legitimized their position. The benefaction of Imperial complexes, such as mosques, hospitals, soup kitchens and marketplaces, not only improved the health and prosperity of a neighborhood but also served to connect the ruling *validé* to her subjects, within her class restrictions, and thereby elevate her support base, while also communicating her commitment to public welfare.²⁷⁸

The majority of these projects were philanthropic in nature, thus illustrating the essential female characteristic of virtue in Islamic culture. Royal Ottoman women often established *waqf* foundations, which were an Islamic endowment of cash or property to be held in trust and used for a charitable or religious purpose. *Waqfs* were founded in the ninth century under Islamic doctrine and utilized by the Ottomans for charity or religious endeavors.²⁷⁹ The Ottoman Empire did not have a formal institution that was responsible for financial aid and assistance comparable to the Catholic Church in France, and so *waqf* foundations were predominantly established to fill this gap. According to Amy Singer, “[b]y combining the attainment of individual goals, elite status aims, and social and economic relief into a single mechanism, *waqfs* became extremely

²⁷⁷ Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 187. Nassim Rossi, “Italian Renaissance Depictions of the Ottoman Sultan: Nuances in the Function of Early Modern Italian Portraiture.” Published Ph.D diss. (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, Columbia University, 2013), 90.

²⁷⁸ Gabriel Baer, “Women and Waqf,” 10.

²⁷⁹ Gabriel Baer, “Women and Waqf,” 10.

powerful and popular instruments.”²⁸⁰ While establishment of royal *waqfs* that included mosques, markets, baths, religious schools, hospitals, and soup kitchens was not unique in the Ottoman period, they directly provided a socio-economic benefit that shaped the community in which they were located, and these edifices were monumental and innovative well beyond past arrays.²⁸¹

By the eighteenth century, M. de M. D’Ohsson observed, “[t]here are pious foundations in cities throughout the empire, especially in Istanbul....”²⁸² In fact, the historical registers of the Ottomans suggest that they gave more often by choice rather than by “canonical obligation to give alms,” illustrating that charity was an embedded element of the Ottoman cultural landscape, notwithstanding the queen mothers having had multiple motivations for doing so.²⁸³ Additionally, Amy Singer notes that “Ottoman Imperial beneficence was clearly gendered” in this period.²⁸⁴

The construction of large building projects connected the ruling queen mother to her subjects, thereby elevating her support base. Nurbanu was the first official *validé* to construct large-scale building projects within the capital. However, it should be briefly noted that the legendary *haseki* Hürrem Sultan, who died before ascending to the position of *validé*, ignited this movement while she was the legal wife to Süleyman I. Nurbanu, who was Hürrem’s daughter-in-law, only began building once she was mother to the heir apparent, and only embarked on larger projects once gaining increased authority as *validé*.²⁸⁵

²⁸⁰ Amy Singer, *Constructing Ottoman Beneficence: An Imperial Soup Kitchen in Jerusalem* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), 37.

²⁸¹ Amy Singer, *Constructing Ottoman Beneficence*, 72. Singer argues that the *waqf* foundations were rooted in Muslim, Byzantium, and Turco-Mongol traditions.

²⁸² Aslı Sancar, *Ottoman Women*, 27.

²⁸³ Gabor Agoston and Bruce Masters, eds., *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Facts of File, 2009), 137.

²⁸⁴ Amy Singer, *Constructing Ottoman Beneficence*, 96.

²⁸⁵ Gülru Necipoglu, *The Age of Sinan*, 284-287.

The queen mother constructed the striking Atik Validé Mosque, which was completed in 1583 and included a *külliyé*, a series of buildings placed around the mosque containing a religious school, a bath, a soup kitchen, and other public services used by the surrounding community in the heavily populated urban district of Üsküdar, on the Asian side of the Bosphorus strait. This construction project far surpassed any previous building projects of royal women, since its size extended over a 200-meter axis.²⁸⁶ The breadth of the project, and the economic benefit it provided to the neighborhood, illuminated the *validé*'s power and piety to her subjects. The inscription on display for all who entered the mosque was an imposing statement intended to give Nurbanu infinite recognition:

Nurbanu, that person full of purity,
Resolved towards doing charity,
Built this gracious house of worship.

How charming! Most beautiful and exquisite!
It is an Imperial monument, this distinguished work of charity,
Completed in the year "Excellent, Sublime Paradise" (991 [1583]).²⁸⁷

Nurbanu employed 121 people to recite the Quran twenty-four hours a day inside the mosque. Ergin asserts that, for a patroness, this was a very powerful "way of broadcasting identity and power," albeit acoustically rather than by visual means.²⁸⁸ Recitation of certain qur'anic texts could communicate political messages aimed at larger Muslim audiences, and Ergin goes on to

²⁸⁶ Pinar Kayaalp-Aktan, "The Atik Validé Mosque Complex: A Testament of Nurbanu's Prestige, Power and Piety," 196.

²⁸⁷ [as quoted and translated by] Pinar Kayaalp-Aktan, "The Atik Validé Mosque Complex," 104.

Konyali, Ibrahim Hakki. *Uskudar Tarihi*, volume I. Istanbul: Ahmet Sait Matbaasi, (1976), 145.
Crane, Howard. "The Ottoman Sultans' Mosques: Icons of Imperial Legitimacy." In Irene A. Bierman *et al.* (eds.), *The Ottoman City and its Parts: Urban Structure and Social Order*. New York: Aristide D. Caratzas Publishers (1991): 173-243.

²⁸⁸ Nina Ergin, "Ottoman Royal Women's Spaces," 99; Ergin notes that mosque recitations were utilized by both male and female patrons.

argue that Nurbanu purposely had verse 2:285–286 recited after Friday noon prayers, when attendance was the highest.²⁸⁹

(285)

The Messenger believeth
In what hath been revealed
To him from his Lord,
As do the men of faith.
Each one (of them) believeth
In Allah, His Angels,
His books, and His Messengers.
“We make no distinction (they say)
Between one and another
Of His Messengers.” And they say:
“We hear, and we obey:
(We seek) Thy forgiveness,
Our Lord, and to Thee,
Is the end of all journeys.”

(286)

On no soul doth Allah
Place a burden greater
Than it can bear.
It gets every good that it earns,
And it suffers every ill that it earns.
(Pray:) “Our Lord!
Condemn us not
If we forget or fall
Into error; our Lord!
Lay not on us a burden
Like that which Thou
Didst lay on those before us;
Our Lord! Lay not on us
A burden greater than we
Have strength to bear.
Blot out our sins,
And grant us forgiveness.
Have mercy on us.
Thou art our Protector;
Help us against those
Who stand against Faith.”²⁹⁰

²⁸⁹ Nina Ergin, “Ottoman Royal Women’s Spaces, 99-101.

²⁹⁰ Nina Ergin, “Ottoman Royal Women’s Spaces, 101-102.

Ergin posits that this verse aimed to reinforce the sovereignty of Nurbanu and her son when the political tone against Murad III shifted negatively due to his lack of military successes.²⁹¹ Additionally, Nurbanu's grand mosque included a library fully supplied with books, the first library to be founded by a woman.²⁹² Peirce emphasizes that Nurbanu's "career was instrumental in transforming the paradigm of royal female patronage from favorite to queen mother."²⁹³

Once *validé* over her son Ibrahim's reign, Kösem built a mosque complex and marketplace in 1640, also in the Üsküdar region. Her involvement in the project is clearly marked at the entrance of the mosque in an inscription written by the famous Sufi poet Himmet, which reads: "[h]er exalted Majesty the *validé* sultan always performed glorious act of charity out of the sincere love of God. She built this congregational mosque and had its many estates endowed to support it. Divine guidance assisted her in her acts of charity...."²⁹⁴ This inscription advertised to anyone entering the mosque that Kösem was in authority of its patronage and served as the dominant female head of state.

Turhan Hatice Sultan was one of the most prolific architectural patrons during this period. The first commission that she undertook as *validé* was not for charitable purpose, but was essentially for military motives. She constructed two fortresses that contributed to the naval defense of Istanbul from its Venetian enemies, the Seddülbahir and Kumkale, positioned on both sides of the Dardanelles, a narrow strait that connects the Aegean Sea to the Sea of Marmara. Historian Lucienne Thys-Senocak argues that "with these two military structures the Ottoman

²⁹¹ Nina Ergin, "Ottoman Royal Women's Spaces, 102.

²⁹² Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 208.

²⁹³ D. Fairchild Ruggles, ed. *Women, Patronage, and Self-representation in Islamic Societies*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 62.

²⁹⁴ Howard Crane, ed. and trans., *The Garden of the Mosques: Hafiz Hüseyin Al-Ayvansarayî's Guide to the Muslim Monuments of Ottoman Istanbul*, (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 491.

queen mother could assume and advertise her position as the protector of the empire....”²⁹⁵ At the time of construction, the Ottomans were tangled in the long Cretan War (1645-1669) against the powerful Venetian naval force. The fortresses were imperative for the survival of Ottoman forces, which also allowed food supplies to reach the capital. Turhan was responsible for spearheading the fortification, thereby defending the heart of the empire. A poem written by Abdurrahman Abdi Pasha memorialized these strongholds:

Building two fortresses, one on either side,
She made the lands of the people of faith safe from the enemy.²⁹⁶

The Yeni Cami Mosque complex, started by Safiye Sultan during the 1580s but only completed by Turhan in 1665, incorporated a mosque, primary school, public fountains, and a bazaar, and it elevated the economic well-being of the Eminönü neighborhood, which had primarily become settled by Jews.²⁹⁷

Conversion to Islam became a larger issue during the mid-seventeenth century, due to the *Kadizadeli* religious movement that believed in a looming Ottoman societal decay. By building a large mosque complex in a Jewish neighborhood, Turhan was fashioning a more Islamic landscape. This transformation pleased the *ulema* and the more puritanical forces in the capital, and much praise was given to the new *validé* for completing the unfinished project.²⁹⁸

Turhan would later be buried adjacent to Yeni Mosque inside an imposing tomb that was also constructed under her patronage, allowing her and her son to rest alongside her grand work as a lasting memorial to her authority and achievements. This tomb was the largest in Istanbul in

²⁹⁵ Lucienne Thys-Şenocak, *Ottoman Women Builders*, 5.

²⁹⁶ Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 196.

²⁹⁷ Lucienne Thys-Şenocak, *Ottoman Women Builders*, 187.

²⁹⁸ Thys-Şenocak, *Ottoman Women Builders*, 190. Lucienne Thys-Şenocak, “The Yeni Valide Mosque Complex at Eminönü,” *Muqarnas* Vol 15 (1998): 58-70, 67-68. Vani Efendi, Kadizadeli leader was installed as preacher of the mosque. Turhan also financially supported Vani Efendi’s convent, with the likely intent to secure his loyalty. Furthermore, Evliya Çelebi writes with praise about Turhan accomplishments of building the mosque from the ruined area.

its time and houses many members of the dynastic royal family.²⁹⁹ Turhan followed and expanded on the examples of the Ottoman queen mothers who preceded her, and as Pierce argues, Turhan's grand mosque complex was the first "Imperial mosque" in Istanbul constructed by a woman, which speaks to the rank that the office of *validé* had become.³⁰⁰

Soup kitchens, or *imarets*, became an essential element of the Ottoman landscape during this period, and the benefactions of these complexes were extremely important during a time when the realm was struggling with food shortages. Evliya Celebi praised the *imarets*, saying that "there is nothing like our enviable institutions. May the beneficence of the House of Osman endure until the end of days."³⁰¹ Singer asserts that these soup kitchens were "employed to emphasize Ottoman hegemony,"³⁰² since "[t]he power to feed fed power."³⁰³ Therefore, *imarets* contained in mosque complexes constructed by the *validés* demonstrate that patronage reconfirmed the power of the dynasty, while charity helped to reinforce the loyalty of its subjects by providing for their basic needs. Moreover, patronage and philanthropy in this period were not apolitical; in fact, the two were intentionally coupled to promote the power of the benefactress, and thus there was reciprocation of allegiance that was expected in the patronage of good works.

Other acts of charity also aided in amassing support for the *validé*'s legitimacy. In her last act of goodwill before her death, Nurbanu freed all one hundred and fifty slaves in her employment. Although not an unusual practice in Islamic doctrine, each slave was granted a lavish sum of one thousand gold coins, an act of generosity that certainly added to Nurbanu's celebrity.³⁰⁴ Gülru Necipoglu asserts that Nurbanu had a "special concern for women," which

²⁹⁹ Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 191.

³⁰⁰ Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 206.

³⁰¹ Amy Singer, *Constructing Ottoman Beneficence*, 131.

³⁰² Amy Singer, *Constructing Ottoman Beneficence*, 11.

³⁰³ Amy Singer, *Constructing Ottoman Beneficence*, 142.

³⁰⁴ Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 210.

can be gleaned in her legal *waqf* documents that also provided for less fortunate widows.³⁰⁵ At the time of her death, Nurbanu also bequeathed one third of her wealth to fund the several pious foundations she had established.

As a keen politician, Kösem embraced a pious image through acts of giving clothes and water to pilgrims undertaking the Muslim pilgrimage (*hajj*), allocating dowries from her own funds for poor women, paying the debts of prisoners, and freeing her slaves after only three years of work. Mustafa Naima, an Ottoman bureaucrat and historian, asserts that Kösem was a generous benefactress who used a familial “amassing of wealth” to benefit the dynasty.³⁰⁶

Turhan purchased camels for travelers to use while on pilgrimage and provided them access to water through the patronage of wells, following the lead of earlier *validés*. Furthermore, the young *validé* supplied oil and candles to mosques for use during holy days. These former concubines, who in all likelihood came from Christian backgrounds, were presumably familiar with the ideals and appeals of Christian charity. While these acts were certainly more discreet than constructing grand buildings, they served to increase reverence toward the benefactress and, in turn, increased her prominence in the capital and throughout the empire.

Other ways the Ottoman queen mother could display her sovereign power was by actively taking part in royal processions, surrounding herself with a large retinue and participating in extravagant non-religious public ceremonies. The *validé* and her large entourage elaborately moved from location to location both inside and outside the harem walls in a royal procession whenever they moved about. The number of her entourage was substantial and aimed to keep the *validé* hidden from view, which served to display her high status. These impressive

³⁰⁵ Gülru Necipoglu, *The Age of Sinan*, 287.

³⁰⁶ Lewis V. Thomas, *A Study of Naima*. (New York: New York University Press. 1972), 101.

processions would take place when the *validé* was traveling outside the capital, perhaps on her way to a summer residence or returning for a celebration in the capital. Furthermore, her participation in ceremonies, weddings, and circumcisions in the capital became an important way for the *validé* to be publicly regarded. These displays of sovereignty were indispensable to the dynasty and its hold on power, as military victories were fewer and demonstrations of military strength on the part of the sultans themselves ended with the reigns of Selim II and Murad III.

Nurbanu is most recognized for filling “the dynasty’s need for sumptuous displays of might, splendor and staying power” during this period.³⁰⁷ Neither her husband nor son headed up elaborate military campaigns to affirm the opulence of the dynasty, as had previous sultans. Furthermore, the growing absence of the sultan from day-to-day politics began to take place during Murad’s reign, which allowed the *validé* sultan to become more active by moving into spheres of influence that the sultan had vacated.³⁰⁸ One of Nurbanu’s methods to fill this void was to hold extravagant ceremonies and processions, strategies she implemented to purposely exhibit the power and prestige of the royal family.

A new tradition known as “the procession of the *validé* sultan” began with Nurbanu’s reign. In this ceremony, as illustrated by Leslie Peirce, all the governing elite would cross the capital in elaborate demonstration, after which the *validé* would receive obeisance from the leader of the Janissaries before entering the palace, where her son welcomed her and offered his obeisance as well.³⁰⁹ The circumcision of Nurbanu’s grandson, Mehmed, was an impressive celebration feted publicly in the capital for thirty-eight days. Nurbanu is recorded to have journeyed to the event in a procession that numbered fifty-three wagons and chariots, and she

³⁰⁷ Pinar Kayaalp-Aktan, “The Atik Validé Mosque Complex,” 194.

³⁰⁸ Thys-Şenocak, Lucienne, *Ottoman Women Builders*, 105.

³⁰⁹ Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 188.

observed the occasion from a noticeable elevated pavilion behind a red lattice screen.³¹⁰

Nurbanu, who was awarded with the knife from the procedure, was the preeminent member representing the royal family, since her son, Sultan Murad III, stayed inside the harem walls.

Years later, Nurbanu's funerary procession was another extraordinary event. Her son, the sultan, broke with tradition by leaving the Imperial harem and escorting Nurbanu's casket through the city before placing it inside the tomb of Selim II. Public proceedings of this nature legitimized the *validé*'s position and awarded her with public affirmation during and even after her reign.

Throughout her extensive reign, Kösem became an important public figure who actively placed her sovereignty on display. Her first son, Murad IV, executed a successful campaign against Baghdad, and upon his return to Istanbul, Kösem organized a grand procession that included the highest-ranking Ottoman elite. Thirteen carriages journeyed from the capital to Izmit and then back, creating a stately spectacle. Kösem's carriage was adorned in gold cloth and blatantly recognizable.³¹¹ In matters of dramatic performance, just like in her building projects, Kösem proved a shrewd study of public presentation.

In one procession in which she took part, she was recorded entering the capital from Edirne, the former fourteenth century capital of the Ottoman Empire. Her convoy was made up of janissaries, high-ranking officers, state officials, several dozen horses, palace guards, more than two dozen carriages of servants, and the royal women of the Imperial harem. It was a spectacle lasting more than three hours, and the grandness of its scale made quite a bold impression on Ottoman subjects.³¹²

³¹⁰ Pinar Kayaalp-Aktan, "The Atik Validé Mosque Complex," 77.

³¹¹ Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 194.

³¹² Jean Baptiste Tavernier, *Nouvelle Relation de l'Intérieur du Sérail du Grand Seigneur* (Paris: G. Clouzier, 1675), 158-161.

Nurbanu Sultan, Kösem Sultan, and Turhan Sultan used patronage as a political tool by rechanneling part of their wealth to charity and the needy. Islamic law recognized the property rights of women, including their right to inherit and dispose of their property to their liking, conceivably making the founding and supporting of endowments straightforward for royal Ottoman women. The benefaction of Imperial complexes not only raised the visibility of the queen mothers, but the breadth of these projects, and the economic and defensive benefits they provided to the areas in which they were placed, also demonstrated the *validé*'s power, influence, and personal piety to her subjects in the capital. Historian Ülkü Bates asserts that dedication inscriptions on mosque's built by *validé* sultans emphasized their position as queen mother to the reigning sultan as opposed to the wife of the previous sultan.³¹³ Large public buildings became a powerful public relations statement for the dynasty and commanded respect for the *validé* herself, while public spectacles created recognition of her rank. As a result, Leslie Peirce notes that "the increasing visibility of royal women in the public display of sovereignty was inextricable for the increasing power they exercised."³¹⁴

This comparison of six female sovereigns has shown that image-building through ceremonies, art and culture, building projects, charitable works, festivals, and spectacles were among the many conduits of royal patronage these women used to endorse their position and were fundamental to how both the queen regent and the *validé* shaped their authority in each realm. The political posturing was important during the early modern era when the appearance of superiority and stature was needed to keep a firm grip on power itself, especially to combat increasing factionalism and a lack of military success that afflicted both France and the Ottoman Empire throughout the period.

³¹³ Ülkü U. Bates, "Women as Patrons of Architecture in Turkey," in *Women in the Muslim World*, ed. Lois Beck and Nikki Keddie (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 258.

³¹⁴ Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 186.

Moreover, providing extravagant spectacles and showcasing a lavish lifestyle was easier and less costly than financing a military campaign. As a result, these acts not only provided a sense of security but also restored public confidence in their respective realms. Debra Barrett Graves asserts that “visual displays participated dynamically in the politics, religion, and culture of the early modern period.”³¹⁵ The dramatic extension of a tradition of patronage and benevolence that had commonly been practiced by royal women in previous centuries helped the queen regents and the *validé* sultans to consolidate and increase their power.

As noted, women in both realms were anxious to promote their interests through impressive projects, and over time these works steadily became grander in nature. However, in France the image and actions of the queen could be much more open and evident, whereas in the Ottoman Empire the *validé* had to navigate the cultural limitations placed on royal Muslim women. The allegorical representations in painting and portraiture, dramatically used by all three French queen mothers, were radically different than the visible patronage of the *validé* sultans. This was indispensable for the French queen regents, because although misogynistic rhetoric about women in power can be found in both realms, a more significant distinction of gender was advanced in France to specifically discredit women’s capabilities in the political sphere, reflected in the abundant public arguments of the period. Therefore, the ability of female regents to develop dynastic propaganda centered directly on their own image allowed them to visually communicate a strong message affirming their right to leadership roles.

The Ottoman queen mothers were more culturally (and literally) “veiled” and had to communicate their presence to their subjects in more discreet ways, fitting for their ethos. However, we should not assume that the greater seclusion of royal Ottoman women somehow

³¹⁵ Debra Barrett-Graves, introduction to *The Emblematic Queen: Extra-Literary Representations of Early Modern Queenship*, ed. Debra Barrett-Graves (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 6.

lessened the *validés*' ability to express their power and influence during their reigns. Charity seems much more accentuated in the Ottoman case, as *validés*' patronage and propaganda were more strongly rooted in philanthropic acts aimed at benefitting the entirety of the realm and its subjects. Moreover, in both empires extravagant ceremonies and special occasions served to heighten the public image of these royal women. Symbols can at times be more potent than armies, and, therefore, the resulting image of power these women created eclipsed the requirement of official power in its own right.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The preceding study has uncovered some fascinating points of comparison when viewing the rise in power among female sovereigns in the early modern era through the lens of the distinct cultural case studies we have examined. In France we have looked at three influential queen regents, Catherine de' Medici, Marie de' Medici, and Anne of Austria, whose participation in court and society was noteworthy. Likewise, within the Ottoman Empire, Nurbanu Sultan, Kösem Sultan, and Turhan Sultan all amassed significant power and influence during their time as *validé*. Although there are some fundamental cultural differences that set these women apart, the way they accessed, legitimized, and wielded power has some striking similarities.

For starters, all of these female sovereigns entered their kingdom or empire as a foreigner, after which they spent a good amount of time as resident at either the French royal court or in the Ottoman Imperial harem, which gave them the exposure and training they needed to subsequently rule. The French queen regents did not become publicly active under their husband's rule, so it was not until their sons became king that they could firmly demonstrate their political astuteness. The *validé* sultans, too, even though their political careers started early in the harem, could only publicly assert their power after reaching the highest possible position in the Imperial harem.

The three French case studies are useful for expanding our understanding of regencies and illustrating how the personal attributes and public acts of queen mothers, acting as regents, allowed them a political base from which to shore up the monarchy's power, and often their own, with familial ties of affection and protection. The position of queen regent was not given without difficulty to any of these women; instead, they needed to manipulate French politics and

their maternal right to insert themselves as regent over their sons, and notably, royal female sovereignty under these three women remained consecutively intact.

The role of the reigning *validé* was a competitive position and yet the women we have examined illustrate resilience in adapting to the circumstances presented to them, beginning in the harem as a simple slave and rising up to the position of *validé*. The practice of concubinage, changes in succession, seclusion of the sultan, and reduced status of princes facilitated the increased, formal power the *validé* came to hold.³¹⁶ The period deemed the Sultanate of Women played a fundamental role in maintaining the stability of the Ottoman Empire during a turbulent time when other nations were dissolving under aggressive reforms, constant internal conflict, and/or fierce competition from neighboring competitors. Essentially, the empire continued for well over another two hundred years as a direct result of the leadership these *validé* sultans provided.

Reproductive and dynastic politics were both central to the roles these women would come to assume. Peirce states that the structure of Ottoman dynastic politics made the power of the *validé* inevitable.³¹⁷ The absence of an elder male heir in the royal bloodline in both realms was a significant factor that led to their initial access to power, while motherhood was the fundamental base to the authority that the regent and the *validé* held. All six also remained post-sexual and never remarried, which added to the foundation of their power. However, the emphasis on widowhood was more pronounced among the French queen regents. Catherine de'Medici, Marie de'Medici, and Anne of Austria elevated their status by emphasizing their role as a loyal and grieving widow. In contrast, because the Ottoman Empire did not naturally practice monogamy, the image of the widow was not as emphasized there; instead, motherhood

³¹⁶ Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 273.

³¹⁷ Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 273.

was already highly revered and so the expected right of the mother naturally received the most legitimacy.

Both sets of women transmitted their identity not only as mother of the king but as mother of the kingdom. As protector of their realm, the main desire of the queen regent and the *validé* was to preserve and elevate their dynasty by any means necessary. As a result, key developments in patronage and political matchmaking were formed under the influence of these women. Both the French queen regents and the Ottoman *validés* similarly employed grand acts of patronage to portray themselves as significant actors on the political stage.³¹⁸ Power was often reliant on appearances, especially for women, and these queen mothers became masters at exhibiting dominance through public displays of sovereignty. Their traces remain in the sacred sites and the cultural capital they produced aplenty. Furthermore, multiple heirs of both genders came to be a substantial source of power for all six queen mothers. Marriage alliances and network building were a fundamental activity by which female sovereigns created stability and established relationships with other kingdoms or statesmen of their own empire.

Through exceptional self-awareness and self-inclination, as well as ambition, all six women were attuned to the political complexities of their time.³¹⁹ The lack of any defined legal decrees governing the queen regent's or the *validé*'s authority in effect granted them license to manipulate power as necessary and increase their authority and both sets of women provided a constant representation of political legitimacy. They believed in their own agency and their ability to determine their own fate while influencing the future of the empire, which illustrates that personal abilities were of great importance. Middle East historian Michael Rank asserts that

³¹⁸ Thomas Tolley, "States of independence: women regents as patrons of the visual arts in Renaissance France," 239.

³¹⁹ Leslie Peirce, *The Imperial Harem*, 252.

“Kösem understood the freedoms and limitations placed on women in Ottoman society and was able to utilize and manipulate them like no one else.”³²⁰

These royal mothers remarkably navigated a male dominated system and emerged as serious political players in their own right, and their human response to the “global crisis” illustrates their distinctive role as strong guardians of the empire. They did not govern solely with a concern of their individual power, like many sovereigns did, but also with a concern of the security, stability and prosperity of their familial line. Even with the official limitations on their lawful right to rule independently, these women found shrewd ways to magnify their power base, and they provide historians with new approaches for examining royal female power in this and other epochs.

³²⁰ Melissa and Michael Rank, *The Most Powerful Women in the Middle Ages*.

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