

AT: Welcome to the Infinite Women podcast. I'm your host, Allison Tyra, and today I'm joined by Dr. Ellie Woodacre, Reader in Renaissance History at the University of Winchester and author of *Queens and Queenship*, to discuss queens' image. So first, what do we mean by image in this context?

EW: So image crafting is a really important part of monarchy, full stop. Obviously, for monarchs, male and female, they had to kind of self-fashion and create an image that really resonated. I think a really important thing for queens is that we can see this kind of feedback loop between the ideals of queenships, the ideals that a queen should be a good wife and a good mother and a good ruler, and also to be like pretty and pious and a peacemaker and all those kind of ideas, that they were trying to create an image that resonated with those ideals, that kind of had this good, if they created an image that resonated with their subjects, the subjects felt like, "oh, yes, this is what I expect a queen to be like," then this could all be really positive, they could have a good image in their life, and then that could lead to a good legacy after death. Although, obviously the legacy after death is a whole other thing, I'm sure we're going to get into that. But the idea is that there's this feedback loop, that when you create an image that really resonates with those ideals and what your subject expects, then you have a really kind of positive image.

AT: So it's not just PR spin, because obviously generally these women did have a degree of power, and obviously that degree varied by their situation. But one of the difficulties that I imagine a lot of them faced when they were queens ruling, so we're talking about the difference here between a queen consort, who was the wife of the ruling king, versus a regent who's ruling in someone else's name, like an absent husband or a minor son, or a queen regnant who's ruling in her own right. So just to be clear, that's a very different image that you want to be putting out, I think, depending on whether you're ruling or not. And if you're ruling, it could be very complicated, because the traits that people expected in a ruler, both then and arguably today, we see this in politics, are not the same as traits that are traditionally valued in women in a lot of societies. So how do they balance that? What are the traits that they are trying to put forward to manage that?

EW: Yeah, it's a really good point. I mean, obviously there's a lot of things that do cross over. Obviously the importance of image crafting and self-fashioning is the same no matter what kind of queen you are. But you're absolutely right in that if you are a consort queen and your image is too powerful, if it's too kind of gung-ho, you could lead to a scenario where it exceeds what your subjects are expecting you to do. They feel that you might be power hungry or you might be, again, taking the place of the monarch. If you are a female monarch or a female sovereign or regnant queen, again, you're absolutely right in that you almost need to do two things. You need to, one, include all of those elements that are expected of a queen more generally and the idea of being the perfect woman, the idea of being the feminine ideal at the same time that you also need to take on board all of those ideas of power and authority and kind of pushing that forward. But it's getting that dynamic right. And again, often if women acted in the same way as men do, they were criticized for that. And yet they were expected to still be, again, pushing forward those ideas of power and authority. So they had to do that in a way that really, again, still took on board those ideas of femininity and could still kind of play the idea of a powerful ruler. I think a really good example of this is Isabella la Catolica, Isabel I of Castile, in that she kind of knew how to get these things right. She was a very powerful ruler and her power was very much vested in her. The agreements that she signed with Ferdinand of Aragon, her husband, really protected her prerogatives as the sovereign queen of Castile. But at the same time, she not only presented a powerful image and she was undoubtedly a powerful ruler, she also played the good wife. She played up this idea that she sewed things for Fernando and things like that. So she was able to be, yes, powerful ruler, but also wife, mother, a perfect woman as well. So that tension is a tricky one to get right, but some women were able to project both of those images really quite successfully.

AT: Well, I think there's a very strong connection here in using maternity to bridge that gap. So like Elizabeth I presented herself as, "I do not need children of my own because I am the mother of the country." And most women ruling in a regency are doing it as the mother of a minor son. And the funny thing about that to me is in multiple instances, it appears that politically the people who backed those women to rule as regent considered that it was safer for a woman to be regent because they didn't have to worry about a *woman* refusing to hand power back over. And that backfired in several instances. I recently talked with Carolyn Harris about the women around Peter the Great and his older sister, basically he had to oust her when he came of age and she wouldn't give back power. We saw this in China with Empress Cixi. And then back in Russia, you've got Catherine the Great claiming that she was ruling for her young son and she just never gave up power. So it is sort of funny that idea, that they kind of weaponized this idea of what femininity was against people who thought that they would be pushovers.

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EW: Yeah, you're absolutely right. A huge part of image crafting for royal women is this idea of maternity. Again, whether they are an actual mother or they're pursuing this idea of being mother of the nation. So you're absolutely right. And it's a good way of kind of using your femininity as an asset, if you like, as something that's embracing the idea of being nursing mothers. Again, that's a biblical kind of image, if you like, that's woven into the kind of coronation anthems, for example, Mary Stuart and Anne Stuart. So absolutely motherhood is a huge part of that image. Like I said, whether it's real motherhood or virtual motherhood.

AT: Well, then as we're talking about, what are the traits that they did want to portray? The flip side of that is, of course, themes that, some of which we've talked about in previous episodes, things that people, again, weaponized against women, because they were women, like slut-shaming, I have never seen used against a man, I don't think. But you also have things like, "oh, it's unnatural and unwomanly, they're violating the natural order by being in power." And that women are too weak to rule, and women are manipulative and untrustworthy. And it's just really fascinating that the more things change, the more they stay the same. And we still see echoes of this in today's politics.

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EW: Yeah, no, it is really interesting, this idea of what is appropriate for a woman in terms of power? And I think you're right. I think that was a really interesting point. We don't treat men the same way in terms of kind of slut-shaming. Men's sexuality can be questioned and it can be used to undermine male rulers if they're seen to be effeminate or whatever. But for women, I think you're absolutely right that there is this tension there, that powerful women is still something that perhaps people are uncomfortable with on a certain level. Even the regnant queens of Britain, again, there's a real tradition of ruling queenship by the time you get to the 19th, 20th century. But it's still this idea of casting that authority in a way that still resonates with what we expect of femininity. And this idea of Victoria, for example, she was very much the kind of doting wife and mother and matriarch, et cetera. So still her power, even as Empress of India and all the rest of it was still cast in a very traditional, feminine, familial kind of life.

AT: I would argue that that is most evident in her, I don't want to sound mean when I say ostentatious widowhood, but that was very much a huge part of her image, both the public portrayal of her and as far as I know, how she actually lived her life, was "now that my husband is gone," that almost became her defining characteristic.

EW: Now, see, that's what's really interesting because we often talk about this with Victoria. And what I think is really interesting when we talk about it with Victoria, we do talk about this idea that her real personal connection with Albert and her genuine personal mourning, which I'm sure she was doing, but actually when

you look at the context of other royal women, this is a really huge image crafting trope that a lot of royal women use, this ostentatious widowhood, this wearing of widows' weeds for the rest of your life, etc. And it was something that the Habsburg women did really well, Catherine de Medici did really well. And it serves two purposes. One, it gives you this kind of gravitas. It gives you this untouchable, unassailable idea of being the sympathetic widow figure. But more importantly, particularly if you're a consort queen who becomes a regent, like say Catherine de Medici, your power is tied to the fact that you are the widow of the previous king. So as long as you are the widow of the previous king, you have like a *raison d'être*. That's your rationale for power. And Catherine de Medici very, used the idea of Artemisia, the widow who ingested the ashes of her husband to carry her husband's power and her husband literally within her. I mean, don't try this at home, folks. But she used that very, very carefully as part of her image crafting, because what she was trying to say is, "I have a reason for being here. I am Henry II's widow. I am carrying his power with me. I am carrying my power with me through our children who I'm shepherding as he would have wanted me to do." So actually ostentatious widowhood is a really powerful part of image crafting. And although Victoria is not needing to use it in that way in terms of needing to define her hold on power, it does give her this gravity. It does give her this sense of being a sympathetic figure, even though she's criticizing them for how long she stays out of that sphere, in a society, which very much was obsessed with mourning, I think we could say. That actually resonated really well with societal expectations of how a righteous widow should behave. So I think if we put that in a wider context, it looks really different.

AT: I'm curious how much of this is chicken and egg, by which I mean, is Victoria's ostentatious mourning creating or enhancing that, shall we say Gothic tendency or is it the other way around? So in this way, I'm just sort of wondering how the Queen's image is shaped by society versus shaping society.

EW: No, that's a really good point. And actually there's been so much work on Victorian mourning and mourning customs and practices, etc. And I do get this idea, chicken and egg, but certainly what we can say is what Victoria is doing is resonating with what is going on in society and perhaps validating that culture of mourning and that emphasis on death, because what the Queen is doing, if the Queen does that, then it's acceptable, right? She is someone that people are holding to up as like a paragon of virtue and good behavior. Again, if she was doing something that didn't resonate with society's expectations. Again, if society's expectations are that one should be mourning and one should be treasuring the memory of your deceased husband and she suddenly moved on and wore bright colors and remarried, etc. Again, that would have been a dissonance between what society expected and what our subjects expected of her image crafting. So what she does do actually does resonate really well again with society's ideas and validates and perhaps, yeah, maybe even encourages that kind of obsession with death and mourning practices to go even further by the extent to which she kind of carries on her mourning far past kind of what's considered necessary.

AT: Well, there's a term that you often hear in relation to media and literature, which is *zeitgeist*. So that's basically the feel of a time and a place. You're capturing the essence or the vibe, if you will. And one of the things that's fascinating about branding in general, PR, public image, however, we're describing it is that when you are, as you said, resonating with that *zeitgeist*, when you are in tune with the feel of the time and place of the audience that you are reaching, you are much more effective at your branding.

EW: Absolutely, absolutely. And obviously, think about the chicken and egg thing. You think, to what extent are people creating the vibe, if you like, and what sense are they just kind of channeling it or resonating with it? And I think that's absolutely true. You can have a situation where someone is very fashionable because obviously queens were meant to get that balance right between being fashionable, but not going so far with it that they became obsessed or OTT. And I think Marie Antoinette is a really, really interesting one to look at when we think about image crafting and dissonance and fashion and all the rest of it in the *zeitgeist* of the time,

because she was that kind of fashion plate of the time, like literally. And she was very much kind of dans le vent fashion. But the problem was that there was this real dissonance because even though she was completely kind of the apogee of fashion at the time, and she was working with Rose Bertin and Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun to craft this image of herself as this kind of beautiful, fashionable queen, there was a huge dissonance because of the amount of money that she was spending on that. And again, her subjects felt she was going too far. So the display is one of the tools that royal women have to kind of project image. But she was taking that just too far. And of course, there was this real tension between this idea that she was just absolutely funneling money away into changing her gowns every season kind of thing. So she was both that period incarnate, and we still when we think of that period, right, we think of Marie Antoinette and her dresses and her outlandish hairdos and all the rest of it. She was very much kind of the it girl, fashion-wise, but there was a real tension with her subjects because they felt like she was going way too far. And she was literally the poster girl for the profligacy of the monarchy.

AT: Well, and when we're talking about being out of touch with your audience, so you are not capturing the zeitgeist, you are missing the mark. One of the things that I think puts a lot of queens at a disadvantage is the fact that they were foreigners. So there's a scene in the *Marie Antoinette* movie with Kirsten Dunst, where she's on the road, and she has to change all of her clothing. And so if I recall it correctly, they're literally just completely changing her entire outfit, like on the side of this dirt road. Don't know if that happened, I assume some equivalent of that happened because she would have been expected to reflect the fashions and everything of the society that she was moving into. But it's also behaviors and values. I'm thinking of one of the contributing factors to the Russian Revolution, which, again, going back to Carolyn Harris, because we love her, we had an episode about queens and revolution. And we were talking about the Russian Revolution and the fact that Alexandra, who was an English princess, was bringing very English ideas and sensibilities. And there's things like, during war, she, and she had her [Listen to Carolyn Harris on Queens and Revolution, or read the transcript.](#) daughters as well, acting as nurses. And to her, that is, "I am showing the people that I care for them, that I am one of them, that I care about our soldiers." But a lot of Russians saw that as "you are insulting the monarchy and you are bringing it down by putting yourself and your daughters into this kind of work and how dare you." So that difference in not just fashions, but also values and perspectives, I would think would be hampering a lot of these queens' efforts in a foreign country.

EW: Yeah. So I think you make a really good point there about foreignness and dress. And I know exactly the scene that you're referring to. In fact, I think the bit that gets me with that is they take her dog, her little dog, and she's like, "oh, my dog!" But you're right. I mean, dress is a real visual marker of identity. And certainly the issue with foreign queens is that you're either conforming by saying, "okay, now I'm a French person, now I'm going to dress and act like a French person." Or by choosing to retain your own dress, you're constantly reminding people that you're foreign. So there's some really interesting situations with that. Certainly there was pressure for queens to kind of conform to the fashion of the court they were moving on to. And certainly Isabella Clara Eugenia sends Elisabeth de Bourbon a Spanish dress when she's going to become queen of Spain to say like, "this is what you need to wear now. This is what you need to look like." But interestingly, we also have some really interesting examples of Habsburg women. There's this really great article called Power Dressing. And it's really about how some foreign queens deliberately keep the dress from where they're coming from to say, "you know what? I am a Habsburg princess first, and I don't need to conform because we are the best basically." And so there's some of these women do consciously keep those fashions. It's kind of a marker of identity to say, "no, actually I might be queen of France or whatever, but actually I'm a Habsburg first. And this is where I'm from. And this is who I am." And so, retaining that. So it's a constant tension because you're absolutely right. Something that queens are often attacked for is their foreignness. And so to visually depict yourself as foreign is opening yourself up for that criticism even further. So yeah, you're absolutely right.

It's really, really interesting. There's been some great work on this and ideas of queens as agents of cultural transfer, again, bringing with them fashions and artisans and architects and all the rest of it. So I think there's a lot going on there. Their dress and display can create the image of either someone who's conforming or refusing to conform and deliberately kind of retaining that foreign identity.

AT: I do wonder how much this perhaps overlooking of the importance of fashion and the political statements being made through fashion comes from a gendered lens, because when I was watching the *Bridgerton* prequel, because I love *Bridgerton*, I have no shame. It is not a guilty pleasure. It's just a pleasure. There was a scene where Queen Charlotte is getting married. And I'm not here to say that *Bridgerton* is the most historically accurate thing ever created. I love it anyway. That's not why we're here. But there's this scene where her mother-in-law-to-be has flat-out told her she is not wearing the dress that she brought. She is going to wear an English dress that is clearly a very different style. And her first act of rebellion against this situation that she's been sort of forced into is that she shows up at her wedding in her own dress. And I think that it is very easy for scholars who are looking at history through a male-focused lens to overlook, either deliberately or not, the power of these social actions that these women were taking, the importance of that and how evident that would have been. Because as an audience member watching *Bridgerton*, and I'm sure as anyone in that scene would have recognized, that is not an English dress. And I think it's easy to overlook that power that queens have in their image.

EW: Absolutely. And I could be wrong here, but I seem to remember I think the story with Charlotte is that she was actually given a dress to wear that didn't fit her and it was kind of falling off of her. And there was a bit more royal skin showing than there should have been because it didn't actually fit her properly. But I do love the *Bridgerton* as well. And you're absolutely right. I mean, how you dress is, it is a power move, right? And it's something that's intensely scrutinized by people of the time. There's a whole book called *Sartorial Politics in Early Modern Europe*, which is about how queens dress and how royal women dress and how they use kind of fashion as a power move. But even if you think about today, we are constantly scrutinizing poor Kate Middleton or Meghan Markle or Leonor of Spain or whatever about what they're wearing. We're constantly looking at that. So it's a huge thing. Display is one of the most important aspects of royal women's image creation, but it's something that has to be dealt with very carefully because it is something that's constantly being pulled apart and scrutinized. So you can use it powerfully and you use it well. It can be a really important tool in your arsenal for image crafting. But again, it can also be something that brings you down like Marie Antoinette.

AT: We've mostly been talking about the ways that queens craft their own image, but obviously there are other interested parties, shall we say, who will use the queen's image and how they might manipulate it, possibly completely unrelated to anything the queen herself believes or does, for their own ends. So one of the first instances that comes to mind is colonial powers did a lot to undermine native rulers. And so you've got a figure like Lakshmibai, who was the Rani of Jhansi and actively went to war to try and keep the British from stealing her country, basically. And the British press dubbed her the Jezebel of India. So I highly doubt anyone writing for the British press had ever been anywhere near Lakshmibai, but they knew what would resonate with their audiences. So I feel like you see a lot of components here. You see the over-sexualization and exoticization of women of color. You see the biblical references trying to associate her with such a famous villain who was so shameless and immoral. And there just seemed to be a lot of little factors at play in that framing.

EW: Absolutely. And I think you've picked up on two really important things there, which is the sexualization and this idea of kind of Orientalism even, the othering and also trying to use European understandings and try and apply them to global queens. And there's some really interesting research that's been done on that dissonance, if you like. And certainly Jane Hooper's work on the way that the Queens of Madagascar, for example, were portrayed - again, this very, highly sexualized kind of way. Also a lot of misunderstandings of

taking European conceptions of femininity and womanhood and also power and trying to apply them to these women, sometimes misunderstanding again the kind of power dynamics, or again, the kind of gender and social dynamics. And you're absolutely right, applying European kind of biblical tropes to global women. Again, it just, it's so inappropriate in so many ways, if you like. So there's so many things that are going on there. And certainly there, there is a lot of anti-PR work being done by colonial powers to undermine the power and authority of women that they encountered in various aspects in Southeast Asia, in Africa, even in New Zealand.

AT: Well, it's fascinating that when they were presenting her as a threat, it wasn't that she had raised an army of women that she was leading against the British, which I love, obviously. But they can't necessarily present her as a military threat. Because, first of all, "we are the British Empire, the sunset never sets on the British Empire, and no one is truly a threat to us." So they have to find other ways to describe her as a threat. And one of the easiest ways that they found to do that was by baselessly, I guess, slut-shaming her. Because that's what they found threatening in women in a socially acceptable manner, as opposed to, no, she's actively killing your soldiers.

EW: Absolutely. And I think obviously, thinking about the one of the ways in which royal women's image is denigrated, or their Achilles heel, if you like, is always sexuality. And so often, if you're trying to attack a woman, that's where you go, right? We've had this conversation before, that that is really the kind of weak spot for women, is you go for their sexuality. This idea of slut shaming, you try to denigrate them in that way, because that is the weak spot. So they're kind of going for the virtual jugular.

AT: But it's not just colonial powers, obviously. So particularly, I'm thinking of Rome, spreading their own xenophobic nonsense about Cleopatra. Because again, they have to blame a woman and especially a woman's sexuality, for the actions of their own men in charge.

EW: Cleopatra is a great example of someone who's, the legacy of negative image crafting, if you like, and that she has been remembered as this highly sexualized individual and really defined in some ways by her relationships with two Romans when she was actually a significant female sovereign and deserves to be looked at in terms of how she ruled and her political strategies, etc. But the fact that that she is often reduced down to her relationships with Mark Antony and Julius Caesar and this idea of her being this temptress, if you like, this siren who seduced these great men of Rome is a testimony to the long-term impact of that line of image crafting by others.

AT: Another situation where someone has undermined a queen for their own ends is Hatshepsut's, I believe her stepson. So Hatshepsut was another female Egyptian pharaoh. And interestingly, when we're talking about image crafting, most depictions of her have a beard. And I definitely want to hear your thoughts on that. But when we're talking about undermining her legacy, the man who followed her on the throne did his best to have every mention of her erased. So like her statues were torn down and inscriptions about her were destroyed. And so the fact that we have any record of her, particularly, obviously, given how long ago that was, and how much is just lost to the sands of time, is incredible. But he must have been doing that for political reasons.

EW: Absolutely. So I often use Hatshepsut as an example of not only effective image crafting, but also what can be done to your legacy, because you have no control over what happens when you die. And Hatshepsut, during her life, worked tirelessly to promote this image of herself as a powerful ruler. She was a female king. And so the whole beard thing was, again, part of wearing the apparatus of rule, effectively. The double crown of Egypt, the flail and the hook, but also the ceremonial beards, which was kind of a strapped-on thing, if you like. But again, she was just literally taking the apparatus of kingship. This is what kings wear. And so she wore

it. And again, she was showing that she was a sovereign, just like her father, just like the pharaohs that came before and after, etc. So she was taking on all of that apparatus of rule. But she was also a phenomenal image crafter in terms of the amazing mortuary temple complex that she built for herself. And again, this was a huge - and not just that. Again, things that she constructed up and down the length of Egypt to proclaim her rule and her power and her authority and the effectiveness of her rule to celebrate her famous trade mission to Punt, etc., all of these things. She was a master image crafter. But it also shows what happens, because once you die, you have no control over what happens to that legacy. And obviously, Thutmose III, as you noted, he literally erased her cartouches with her name. He literally tried to wipe her out of history. Now, obviously, thanks to the work of Egyptologists and historians, etc., she's been reinserted into that dynastic history and appreciated for the pharaoh that she was. But her successors did everything they could to literally try to erase her from the history books. So it doesn't matter how hard you work in your own lifetime, you have no control over what happens to that once you die.

AT: Now, just getting into more, shall we say, capitalistic reasons that people might want to shape the queen's image for their own purposes. I'm thinking of Shakespeare here, because royals were major patrons of the arts. Not all of them, but a lot of them. And so you see Shakespeare's histories reflecting the interests of Queen Elizabeth and King James. So depicting Richard III as a hunchback. You also see in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, is basically flattering Elizabeth. And you also see other, like more subtle elements in different Shakespearean plays. And so these are guys who very much knew whose good graces they wanted to be in. And so the way that impacted how they wrote literature and history.

EW: Absolutely. And I think that there's two things going on there. I mean, obviously, another big weapon for royal women to use in terms of image crafting is patronage. And some of that can be through active patronage. Again, keeping poets, playwrights, etc., on staff or funding them or supporting them, etc., so that they write things for you. They write panegyrics and odes and things to you. Some of that, obviously, is not direct patronage. But like you said, artistic creators of that period knowing what side their bread is buttered on and wanting to get in with the queen so that they might become patronized by the royal family. So there is absolutely that element of poets, playwrights, etc. kind of crafting their work in order to flatter the ruler. But it can also be used against them. It can be calls for regime change or critique, open critique or subtle, more satirical critique as well of rulers. So you're getting the artistic community on side, either by active patronage or by encouraging them to flatter you so that you might patronize them is a really good method of image-crafting as well.

AT: Well, and you also mentioned earlier visual artists. So when we're talking about portraits that are painted of these royals, I would imagine most portrait painters know that part of the job is to make them look flattering, although obviously that backfired for Hans Holbein with Anne of Cleves. Shout out to the Tudors as always. But this actually came up in the conversation that I had about the Hanoverian rise to the English throne and how the queens in particular were using visual imagery to create a throughline that associated them with past English monarchs, so that there was this sort of visual consistency that was meant to allay this idea that they are foreigners, which they are, being brought into rule England. And so they were very much trying to create this idea that "we are part of this long line that's always been here. We just happened to come from Germany, but really we're English." And they're using these visual cues in paintings to make that clear.

EW: Absolutely. So again, portrait painting is a really good example of both display and patronage crossing over in terms of that kind of image crafting. And actually, ironically enough, one of the essay questions that I have for my Renaissance court students is, explore the way in which rulers and artists work together to craft an image. And so a lot of that is displaying power and wealth and majesty and authority,

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but also again, crafting the image that you want, that you want if you're trying to craft the image of being the pious queen or the powerful queen or the fashionable queen or all these things, all these visual cues in terms of what you're wearing, how you're posed, the things that are placed around you, the backdrop, all those little visual cues, like you said, to throw in to try to create the right kind of image. Again, it can work for you and it can not, obviously - again, going back to Marie Antoinette and Vigée Le Brun. She had a very active kind of partnership with this portrait painter, or Philip IV and Velázquez. But again, many artists kind of have this kind of symbiotic relationship with their patrons, but Vigée Le Brun obviously paints that famous picture of Marie Antoinette and her children, where Marie Antoinette is trying to spin it after she's in trouble and things are not so great. And she's trying to create this image of her as the good mother and the good queen and the whole allusion of Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi and the background is, "my children are my jewels and they're all I need," etc., trying to create this sympathetic maternal image. Again, that backfires on her as well. So yeah, you can work really hard to try and create that kind of visual image, but it's thinking about how it's received and how that image is distributed, who the audience is for that image. There's so many layers of that, but portraits are an incredible way of image crafting and certainly something that generations of art historians, queenship scholars, royal studies specialists, etc., have really been pulling apart. There's a really great work that's being done by Matthieu Mensch in France, and he's creating this database queenly images, Reines en images, really analyzing the whole visual language of portraiture that's used by royal women in France. So that's just one example of so much fantastic work that's done by art historians and queenship scholars on that front.

AT: Well, something else that you teach about is when we're talking about patronage, it's not just artistic. There are a bunch of different forms of patronage, and I find the religious one interesting. So you talk about how like Wu Zetian commissioned Buddha statues, and the queens of Joseon Korea were depicted in ceremonial robes, and very much using this idea that monarchs are appointed by God or relevant deity, shall we say, depending on the culture, but this divine right of rule. And they're using religion to help legitimize and stabilize and reinforce their right to be in charge.

EW: Absolutely. So there's a lot of things going on there. One is this idea of piety is a universal expectation of queenship. It doesn't matter what culture you're in, what religion you're talking about, the idea of piety is really, really important. There's also that symbiotic relationship between monarchy and religion that goes back again to the beginnings of time and is still with us very much today. Again, this idea of having the mandate of Heaven or being divinely appointed, the many different ways of expressing it, even the idea if you go into ancient Egypt, that the pharaohs were gods themselves, right? So there's that aspect as well. But you're right, using religion to reinforce, recognizing that connection and using religion positively as a means to support your power is really important. And I have a wonderful master's student actually, who's just finishing his dissertation. And what it's actually looking at is comparing regnant queens in Asia. So he's looking at the regnant queens of Silla. He is looking at Wu Zetian, he loves Wu Zetian, he wrote his dissertation on her, but also looking at the regnant empresses of Japan in the early medieval period. And then also looking at regnant queens in Europe around the time of the 12th century and comparing the ways in which women in different places at different times use religion in order to bolster and reinforce their authority. So religious patronage is absolutely vital for doing that. You're right, Wu Zetian was really, really effective in doing that both with Taoism and Buddhism, making herself a maitreya, a reincarnation of a bodhisattva. It's used by women everywhere in every place and every time, and male monarchs as well, to reinforce their role.

AT: And we've also got political patronage. So obviously, collecting allies by promoting people into important positions or influencing the person who does have the power to promote them. And we see this in education as well, where they're founding universities that end, a lot of times naming them after themselves, because I know I would. But just to go back to the ways that other people can benefit from shaping a queen's image, often against her will, Empress Cixi was particularly interesting in this context, because this was such a, again,



capitalistic approach of media wanting to sell their publications. So first it was, I don't even want to call them newspapers, it sounds like they were just tabloid rags. But essentially, you had this guy, Edmund Backhouse, who was just making up lies left, right and center, and the Times of London just sort of printed it without fact-checking anything. And then eventually, he even published a book that was supposed to be this thoroughly researched biography, and he even did, like, self-insert. Like, his claims were just so outlandish. But for way too long, this was actually considered, like, the top English-language resource about this empress's life.

EW: You're absolutely right. And this is someone using the image of a royal figure in order to sell, basically. But that's not necessarily unusual. I think when we think of modern journalism, the idea of fact checking is such, but then we also have fake news, and God only knows who's publishing God only knows what on various corners of the internet. So it doesn't change too much, I suppose you can say. But people are, obviously basing their careers on spinning royal image, and sometimes in a way that resonates with the actual reality, and sometimes in a way that is completely dissonant with reality. It's not something that's never been done before, we'll never see again, sadly.

AT: I think he just did it to a much more extreme extent than most people are able to get away with. And I do think that is because of the periods. This is like early 1900s. And it was a lot harder to fact-check. But also, I doubt there was a lot of overlap between people who might have mentioned this to the empress and people who were reading the Times of London. Like, I don't think there was zero overlap, but I don't think that it was like, I don't think the Times of London was widely read in China at the time.

EW: Well, one of the things that we have to think about, particularly when we're working on the pre-modern period is, again, how real or unreal stuff is. We were just talking about Cleopatra, right? Does Plutarch's depictions or whatever, bear any resemblance to reality? The medieval chronicles that we're dealing with, some of the stuff that's been said about Eleanor of Aquitaine, again, there's no connection to reality. And yet that was published. So that's one of the things that we also have to kind of pick apart as historians. There's the image that people try to create in their lifetime. There's how they were received their lifetime. And then how that image is kind of taken and twisted and represented in all sorts of strange ways after their death. So all of those things are kind of going on. But like you said, it's easy with a 19th century source to kind of see that dissonance. What we don't know is if some of these things have written in the 12th century are completely that people in the 12th century would have been like, "Oh my God, what? No, no, that happened..." So yeah, that is a really good point.

AT: Well, then just to go back to the question of patronage, I think one of the top ways that any famous person uses PR, like creates good PR, is through supporting charitable causes, particularly those that are not controversial. But what was interesting about Princess Diana, as an example, was her support of things like AIDS charities. And there's an iconic image of her, touching children who have AIDS and not being afraid of that contact, which was a big problem at the time when we're talking about the HIV and AIDS epidemic. And she's holding this child that, you know from the context, has HIV. And that would have been probably controversial at the time in a lot of circles, even though this is a child, this is a sick child who needs help. But because of the nature of HIV and attitudes that were perpetuated around it, she didn't shy away from that controversy. She just showed kindness. And that was so incredibly powerful.

EW: Absolutely. And I think you've picked up on something really interesting. And this is a big part of image crafting. And obviously, the idea of charity or philanthropy, as we would talk about it in the modern context, has lost that direct connection with religion. But certainly, earlier on, that would have been an expression of piety. Again, this idea of being the good queen, the pious queen, etc. There's a lot of queens who are sainted queens or who became saints, etc. And a lot of what's held up is their exemplary saint-like behavior. It also crosses

over with what was expected of queens, that they were pious, that they gave money to the poor, that they assisted the poor, that they set up hospitals and schools and all the rest of it to benefit the poor. So that's still a key element in image crafting today. So we have this big expectation of royals today that they use their elevated position to support good causes. They're the patrons of charities, etc. You're right. Princess Diana, obviously, is really well-noted for her willingness to espouse causes like landmines and HIV. She did things that were, at the time, considered really shocking. But they really drew attention to good causes. And she was very aware of the spotlight that was shone on her and how she could use that to shine that spotlight on causes that she wanted to draw attention to. And she did that incredibly effectively. So I think, again, it's actually a continuation of something that's going on for much, much longer, but it just takes a different form, I guess you could say, in the modern era.

AT: Well, and Princess Diana is also, I would say, a very good example of the modern-day version of something else you talk about, which is death as the final image and the last chance to shape a legacy, but also one that often that person has no control over. Obviously, you can make plans and say, "this is what I want." But when it comes down to it, you are in the hands of those around you, for better or worse.

EW: Absolutely. And that's something that I've studied is the tombs of queens and this idea that if you can create a tomb in your own lifetime, you become what Diane Booton calls a shaper of memory. And that's really powerful. And actually Joan of Navarre, who I've studied, was actually able to create her own joint tomb with Henry IV in her lifetime. And that was a huge image crafting opportunity. It is the ultimate, like I said, it's the one that stays and it remains. If you can create it in your own lifetime, you've got a chance to make it what you want it to be. But you're absolutely right. Some of my other queens of Navarre that I studied left explicit instructions of where and how they wanted to be buried in the tomb and all the rest of it. And if your successor doesn't want to action that, or maybe cannot action that because of war or finances, etc., you may end up with something completely different or nothing at all. So that can be an issue. That even happens to Henry VIII, to be fair. And then like Hatshepsut, going back to that, she did create this amazing mortuary temple for herself. But again, her successors destroyed it effectively. Well, not destroyed it completely, but destroyed the connection with her there. So it is a really important opportunity to try and create a lasting image of yourself. And for women that do that, for women that are able to create their tombs or mortuary temples or mausolea, etc., in their own lifetime are able to control that narrative. As long as it's not destroyed by later successors, or one of my queen's tombs was destroyed by floods and earthquakes, etc. So there's a lot of things outside your control. Once you pass on, you got no control. And you're absolutely right about that.

AT: Well, and interestingly, funerals present another aspect that we haven't necessarily talked about as much. And that is the ceremonial, this idea of royalty as a symbol, I think is particularly strong when we're talking about these ceremonies. So funerals as mentioned, but also royal weddings that millions of people still tune in to watch. You've got coronations, these elaborate spectacles that also go back to that whole creating this image of a throughline of tradition, of history, of legitimacy through legacy, by which I mean, "we are doing these things in the same place or in the same way or wearing, perhaps not the exact same attire, but similar attire. We are carrying on these traditions." And that is the core of the legitimacy of the monarchy because any monarchy, unless you've just had a revolution or something and somebody has declared themselves to be the new ruler, most monarchies are founded on, and I would say only have the argument that, they exist because they have existed for centuries.

EW: Absolutely. And that is a huge part of monarchy, is this idea of tradition. Ceremonial is a huge aspect of that. Ceremonial reinforces the monarchy, and obviously baptisms reinforce the idea that the monarchy is going to carry on. There's new heirs, there's a new generation. The dynasty will continue. Weddings, a similar kind of way. Again, it's the creation of heirs, the idea of rebirth or regeneration of the monarchy, bringing in

someone new to the monarchy. It used to be foreign alliances, etc. Obviously it's different today. Absolutely coronations, absolutely important for regnal change, reinforcing that the king is dead, long live the king, that the monarchy continues. All of these things are really, really important. They're also key image crafting moments for queens as well. Obviously the way in which they're presented, whether they're being born or whether they're being put into the ground, again, these are all part of image crafting. Although mind you, the funeral, like we were saying with tombs, John Carmi Parsons talks about this idea of bodies of queens are like a blank canvas for the dynasty to write its memory on. And so obviously they're not image crafting opportunities so much for the women, although their image is being crafted for the long-term, right? This is an opportunity for the dynasty saying, this is how this woman should be remembered. And they're often calling up their achievements or connections or their family, dynastic connections and things as well, which they themselves benefit from. So, it is thinking about kind of how that image is crafted for them, if you like, after their death. But yes, all of these moments are really important in women's lives, really important in their own life cycle trajectory, but also for the dynasty itself to again, cement its place and position.

AT: And you can also see over time how changes in society also change perceptions and depictions of the queens. And a lot of times that's based on who's in power and the different biases at play. So last time you were here, we talked about queenly media and the sort of reclamation of feminist and queer themes in depictions of Christina of Sweden, for example. But I think Anne Boleyn is perhaps the most clear example I can think of, in the sense that how Anne was portrayed before she was queen, during her queenship, and then not just after her execution, while Henry was still on the throne. Because obviously that became a very controversial topic very quickly, is the image of Anne Boleyn. But even beyond Henry into the next generation, the way that people would have been thinking about, describing, presenting Anne Boleyn during the reign of Mary I, whose mother was set aside and essentially exiled. Ostensibly, for Anne, I think we can agree Henry was more the driving character in that situation. I don't buy the image of Anne as this amazing seductress who lured him away from Catherine. But that is one of many depictions that we see of her. But then you've got that quite radical shift from Mary to Elizabeth, obviously Anne's daughter. And so you can see how the way people are presenting her is changing depending on who's in power and what their relationship to her would have been. And that's not even getting into our modern views of her, which again, like Cleopatra, I don't think that this idea of Anne Boleyn as the seductress is fair or accurate, or at least not 100% accurate. I think it is exaggerated. But I'm not an expert on Anne Boleyn. I just don't think that most of the people writing about her were either.

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EW: Well, the thing about Anne Boleyn is I think she's a really interesting one in that her actual queenship is very brief. So she's got a very limited window in which she can craft her own image. And you're absolutely right. Most of the image of Anne Boleyn is crafted after her death. And it goes through so many waves, like you said, depending on the political context of who's on the throne and what's going on, societal values. Again, sometimes she's presented as this Protestant woman who enables the great Elizabeth to become the head of the Protestant church and whatever. And sometimes she's presented as this kind of siren. And her reputation or representation has so many twists and turns over time. And actually there's been so many longitudinal studies, Stephanie Russo's work in particular, I'm thinking of here, has done so much work. Her whole book on the afterlife of Anne Boleyn, there's so much work on that. But certainly, Susan Bordo's *The Creation of Anne Boleyn* talks about the fact that because there is so much on the actual changing image of her from her death until the present day, that actually there is this other Anne Boleyn, there is the created Anne Boleyn, and then there was the real Anne Boleyn. And actually, like I said, most of the image of Anne Boleyn is actually this afterlife, this legacy that has been manipulated by successive generations, societies, reigns, etc. And that individual bears so little resemblance to the real historical individual who had that very brief queenship and that very brief opportunity to image craft. So she's a really interesting one from that perspective, probably more

than any other queen that I can think of, certainly in British history, has the most contested representation, if you like, but a very brief queenship.

AT: Well, and again, we're getting back to that connection between queens and religion, because arguably the Anglican church would not exist were it not for Anne Boleyn.

EW: Well, again, that that became part of her image crafting, certainly during Elizabeth's reign is that she was seen as this kind of Protestant heroine, if you like, which is quite interesting. So, she's had, again, so many different incarnations and representations. And of course, in the more modern era, she's been branded as this kind of proto feminist and made into something else that that, again, bears no resemblance to the actual historical figure. So, it is really interesting how she's someone who's been used, her image has been used by different individuals with different agendas to represent her in different ways, whether that's to denigrate her or celebrate her.

AT: Well, I think the six wives of Henry VIII also present an interesting case study in how we pit queens against each other in their images, by which I mean, a lot of people want to create this narrative where it's like, "oh, Catherine was the loyal wife that he set aside and Anne was the harlot who seduced him away from this long marriage. And then Kitty Howard was the young flighty slut." I'm not saying that's how I think she was, I don't know, but that is how she was portrayed. And then you've got the sort of caretaker in Catherine Parr at the end. And I do have a bone to pick with the musical *Six*, which I love the musical *Six*, do not get me wrong. It's fabulous. The songs are great. But the Jane Seymour character, so Jane Seymour bore him a son and then died soon after. And they've cast her as, "oh, I'm the only one that he truly loved." No, you weren't. He wasn't even there for the birth. He let you die alone. He didn't love you any more than he loved the others. But again, they're trying to create six distinct characters. And of course, Anne of Cleves. I do love how they portray Anne of Cleves, though, because they really emphasize she got the best deal. She got rebranded as the king's sister and basically got financial independence, didn't have to marry, was just hanging out, having a good time. She definitely got the best deal out of all of them. But in this effort to juxtapose them, they have to try to create six distinct characters for dramatic purposes. But I feel like you also see a lot of comparing queens. So whether that's queens who are comparing themselves to their predecessors. So demonstrating like, "oh, yeah, queens have ruled this country before, just look at this predecessor," and creating those positive comparisons. But then also that can be used against them if you are compared to other queens in a negative way, whether that's your contemporaries or your predecessors.

EW: Yeah, yeah, I think it's really interesting what you're saying about the six wives. Obviously, there was the recent exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery, which was absolutely fantastic. And I interviewed Charlotte Bolland, the curator, for our podcast, actually. And one of the things we talked about is, one of the things I loved about the exposition is they brought together the image and the reality of the women from their own period with the modern image, including costumes from *Six* and clips from movies and all the rest of it. And it was really, really interesting. And like you said, I think there's always that comparison between individuals in terms of their predecessors, successors, etc. But with the six wives, because they are a unique set or group, they get compared against one another quite a lot, which is quite interesting. And like you said, over time, there has been this kind of the pious one, the promiscuous one, etc. They've become all these kind of tropes and ideas, etc., more than the reality of who they were. But I think because they are a set, they are a group, they are very tightly compared against one another because there was such a chopping and changing of queens literally, in short succession. So instead of like a huge gap where, like when Anne of Denmark becomes queen, there hasn't been a consort queen since Catherine Parr, since 1547. So it's a lot easier. She's got a lot more freedom. She's not going to be so directly compared really in the same way. But the six wives, because of the

tightness of the changes between them, they're immediately inherently compared against one another. So I think that's a really interesting one to highlight.

AT: Now, in our modern age of digital interconnectedness, do you think that women in power have more, less, or about the same amount of power to control their image?

EW: That is a really good question. Obviously, one of the big elements in the mix is modern media. And I think that is one of the things that's really, really challenging for modern royal women today in terms of image control, because there is just such a multiplicity, not only of official media outlets, like your BBC and your ABC News and whatever, but all of the blogs, all of the Twitter, all of the rest of it. So they're still doing that same work of image crafting, using the same tools that queens have used since time immemorial. But the problem is that the way in which the message goes out is very, very different. And there is so much less control. Think about if you go back to like maybe the 17th century, right? You can get Van Dyck to paint your portrait and there's a level of censorship over the press and things that are published, etc. You've got a lot more control about how that image is projected. Although still, Henrietta Maria has a lot of dissonance and difficulty, etc., with that. But today, someone like Kate Middleton or Leonor of Spain or whatever, again, they might be using those same tools to put the message out. But then how it goes out amongst all these different channels or how it's received or how it plays on Twitter or how it's reported in this country or that country, you just have no control. So it is a very challenging environment for royal women these days to create and craft an image. And yeah, it is very difficult. You've got your tabloid press, your more official press channels, and then anything and everything in between. And you have no control over how that goes.

AT: I'm just thinking of when Kate Middleton released a photo of her with her children and people almost immediately flagged, "oh, this has been edited, you can see that the Photoshop and everything here." And then she went public with her cancer diagnosis. It's like, you can't hide anything from the public, even things that arguably should be allowed to be kept private.

EW: Absolutely. And I think, too, that whole thing over the photo doctoring, again, everyone adjusts their images and their selfies and uses filters and all the rest of it. And certainly, again, going back to Van Dyke and Henrietta Maria, he was definitely editing the fact that she had horrible teeth - you never see that. That's definitely very good. So this idea of carefully crafting the image and adjusting it and tweaking it, etc. That's nothing new. And I don't think what she did was wrong in any sense or any different to what anybody else does. But this idea that we must have the genuine article and it must be unfiltered and true and etc. Again, royals have always carefully crafted and curated their image.

AT: So you have to be perfect, but you also have to be real.

EW: Absolutely, yeah. And then again, I think that's the trouble for monarchy today is that we do interact with them, we do see them and know them. And again, going back to Matthieu Mensch, he was talking about that tension that happens towards the end of the restoration of the French monarchy, etc. in that brief period in which people are actually starting to see monarchs. So you could have this painted image of yourself all beautiful, but then when they see you in person, they go, "oh, you don't look at all like that." So today, there has to be a level of, I guess we have more scrutiny, if you like, in that if you did create something that was totally unreal or untrue or far too flattering, that you would be caught out when people actually met you in person.

AT: Join us next time on the Infinite Women podcast. And remember, well behaved women rarely make history.