Reflecting Roman Empresses: Ostrogothic Royal Women in Sixth-Century Italy

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Summary

This study examines royal women in the Ostrogothic monarchy which ruled over a Roman population in Italy from 493-540CE.[1] Scholars have argued that Ostrogothic kings reconstructed the Roman Imperial monarchy by adopting characteristics associated with Roman emperors, thereby legitimising their rule to their Roman audience. This study instead asks what roles the female members of the monarchy played in this reconstruction of Roman Imperial power. Previously, scholars have dismissed the importance of Ostrogothic queens altogether or focused exclusively on Amalasuntha, queen regent from 526-535, with discourse centring on the feminine and masculine aspects of her character. This research studies all Ostrogothic royal women as a collective. By adopting Feminist definitions of power, this study analyses diplomatic correspondence collected by Cassiodorus and East-Roman narrative histories penned by Procopius to ascertain the roles Ostrogothic royal women played in the politics, family and ideology of the monarchy, thereby combining political and gender frameworks. Crucially this research compares these contemporary sources with histories and political speeches written about earlier Roman Imperial women, especially the females of the Julio-Claudian dynasty (c.27BCE-59CE) which first established the Roman Imperial monarchy. The overwhelming similarities in the roles, virtues and rhetorical stereotypes of both Ostrogothic queens and Roman empresses indicate that Cassiodorus and Procopius were influenced by and learned from Roman models of female power when depicting Ostrogothic queens. This demonstrates that Ostrogothic queens based their position on the Roman concepts of female power and communicated this to their Roman audiences to strengthen the Ostrogothic monarchy.

[1] All dates are CE unless otherwise stated

Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

(Signed)_ Date: 24/10/2022

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Monarchies hinge upon a ruling family which can include wives, daughters, nieces, mothers and sisters. The subjects of this study include all the women of the Ostrogothic Amal dynasty which ruled Italy from 493-540 (fig. 1.1). I examine portrayals of these women within the ancient sources, especially *The Variae* by Cassiodorus and *Wars* and *Secret History* by Procopius, although I also draw from other sources such as Jordanes' *Getica*, the *Anonymus Valesianus* and Gregory of Tours' *History of the Franks* where required.[2] I compare the portrayals of these Ostrogothic women to how early imperial women were depicted in written sources and on coinage.[3]

Other scholars have compared Amalasuntha and Late Roman empresses such as Galla Placidia, finding similarities in their circumstances especially.[4] By examining the ancient sources in their original Greek and Latin, my comparative methodology looks for similarities and differences between these groups of women in the language used to describe them, such as adjectives, rhetoric, stereotypes, virtues and titles. I also look for similarities within the content of the sources, such as the roles and statuses of these women, as well as the expectations society had for them. This multifaceted method of comparison allows for a deeper understanding of how Cassiodorus and Procopius were influenced by depictions of Roman empresses when portraying Ostrogothic queens, as it determines both continuations of the roles and actions of the women in power, as well as the rhetoric, gender stereotypes and language techniques employed to represent them.[5]

[2] Although many of the letters in *The Variae* are written on behalf of Ostrogothic rulers, they are generally accepted to be penned by Cassiodorus, or at least had his input.
[3] This thesis defines 'early imperial women' and 'early Roman empresses' as women of the Roman Imperial family before the Constantinian dynasty.
[4] For example, Vitiello, 2017; Cooper, 2016; Fauvinet-Ranson, 1998, Becker-Piriou, 2008; Craddock, 1996. See also Chapter 2
[5] I also use the term "Ostrogothic queens" to describe Ostrogothic royal women as the vast majority of these royal women either married a king or ruled as queen regent

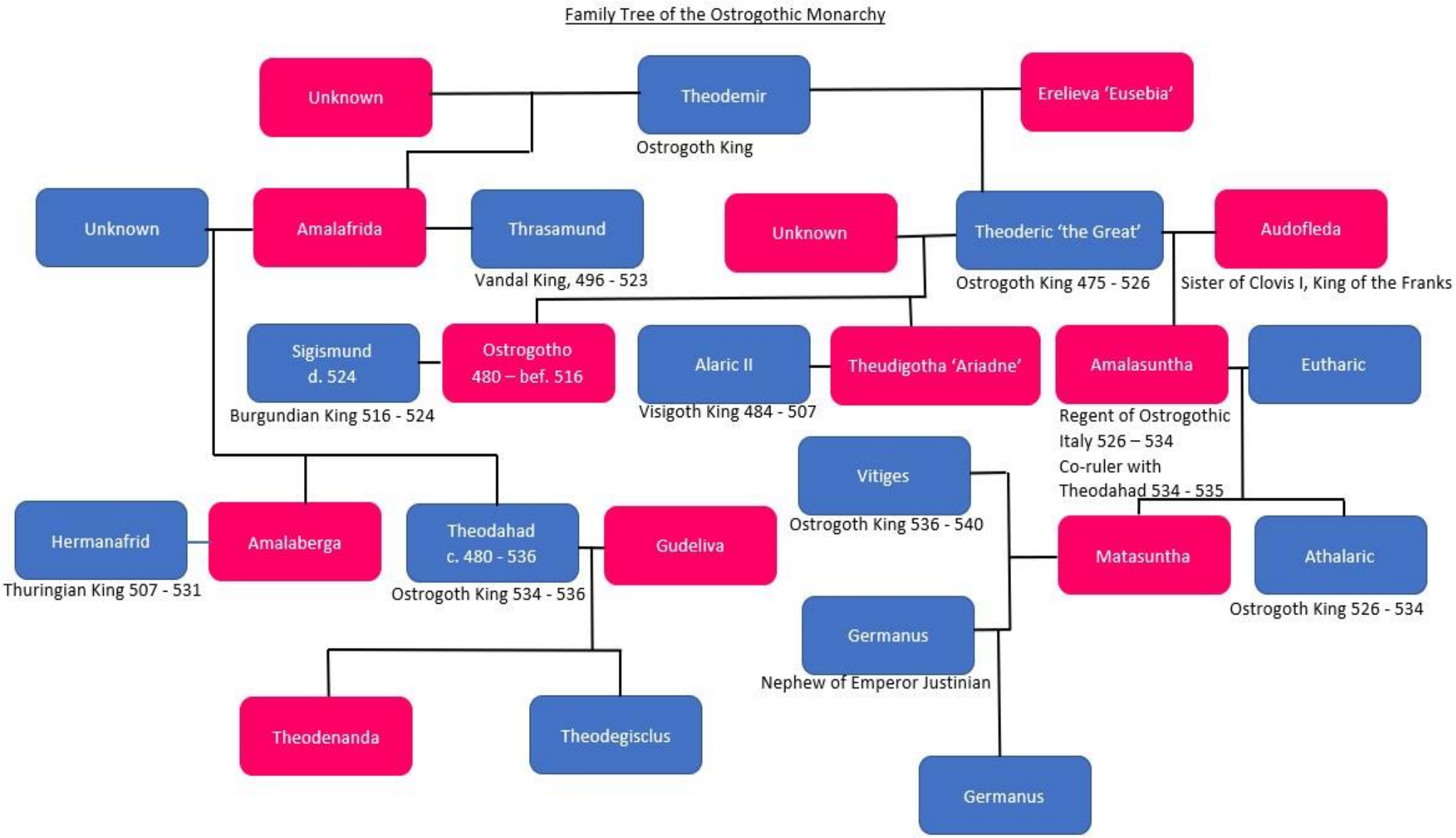

Figure 1.1. Family Tree of the Ostrogothic Monarchy in Italy

I have chosen to focus on comparing Ostrogothic queens to earlier Roman empresses for several reasons. As scholars have noted associations between Theoderic and early Roman emperors such as Trajan and Augustus within the sources, my thesis examines how the women in the family resembled more famous or revered early Roman empresses such as Livia.[6] This approach helps determine whether the sources painted the Ostrogothic regime as a reconstruction of the early imperial family, an institution heavily characterised by late republican traditions. As the Julio-Claudian dynasty pioneered and therefore significantly shaped the institution of the imperial family, I heavily focus my comparisons here, though I also make comparisons to subsequent dynasties who attempted to emulate the Julio-Claudian dynasty or continue their practices to demonstrate legitimacy and stability.

As scholars have already made substantial comparisons between Ostrogothic queens and later Roman empresses, adopting this methodology would repeat what has already been discussed. My methodology of comparing these queens to earlier Roman empresses contributes to this discussion by establishing that they also harkened back to late republican traditions which were the building blocks of ideal Roman culture and fondly remembered by Romans at the time. It also shows that these queens based their power on a precedent that had been built upon and reinforced for centuries, showing that they tailored their image to what Romans recognised. I have therefore also included some comparisons to later Roman empresses to show how these traditions continued or evolved and to analyse nuanced differences between concepts of female power in old Rome and new Rome. I therefore do not perceive earlier Roman empresses and later Roman empresses as distinct from one another, however Chapter Four acknowledges that later Roman empresses occasionally displayed more overt political power. Empresses from the Constantinian Age onwards

[6] For example, the *Anonymus Valesianus,* 60 claimed that Theoderic was hailed as a new Trajan by the Roman people in Italy

practiced Christianity which shaped how they behaved as empresses.[7] I acknowledge areas in which Ostrogothic queens supported religion, as the Ostrogoths practiced Arian Christianity, however these occurrences are rare and ancient writers did not heavily associate Ostrogothic queens with Christian archetypes or practices in the way that later Roman empresses were.[8] The nature of the sources therefore encourages me to consider how Ostrogothic queens resembled pre-Christian empresses. It is not an exhaustive comparison; the aim of this thesis is to show that Ostrogothic queens were behaving in ways expected of Roman empresses.

From these similarities in their portrayals in the sources, coupled with the knowledge that Gothic societies struggled to grasp the concepts of kingship, queenship and institutions in general, we can extrapolate that Ostrogothic queens formed their positions with the institution of the Roman empresses in mind. Whereas my thesis focuses on similarities between early Roman empresses and Ostrogothic queens in terms of their representations within the sources as it is considerably harder, if not impossible, to determine how Ostrogothic queens behaved in reality or in private. I argue that the Ostrogothic regime reconstructed the Roman monarchy by having the female members emulate the Roman empresses in their roles, actions and representation as depicted within the ancient sources. Although, due to a lack of sources, it is more unclear how these Ostrogothic queens presented themselves to their Gothic population, the sources we do have were written by Roman authors for Roman audiences. The Ostrogothic regime therefore presented its female members as ideal Roman Imperial women to gain legitimacy and support from the Roman populations over which they ruled.

[7] For example: collecting relics, building churches, declaring life-long celibacy
[8] Theoderic's mother, Erelieva, was baptised into Catholicism

As Gothic societies struggled to grasp concepts of kingship or queenship and institutions in general, 'Gothic royal women' existed mostly as wives or family members of tribal chiefs.[9] Whereas wives of chiefs were known to advise their husbands, due to a lack of sources it is unclear what other roles were expected of wives of chiefs.[10]

Studying Ostrogothic queens as part of a monarchy allows for an analysis that takes into account both broader definitions of power and queenship studies within scholarship. Instead of focusing on their individual agency and experience, I perceive these women as part of a family-governing institution where the monarchy and statesmen have a say in both their representations and their roles. The idea of the governing family allows for an exploration of different themes of power, namely the family, politics, status and images, instead of focusing on one of these elements and ignoring others.[11] It also shows how the roles and images of these women reflected back on the institution, either positively or negatively, and the impact this had on legitimising the monarchy to the Roman elites. The framework of monarchy therefore allows for an analysis of how these women acted both actively and passively within an institution, rather than ascertaining their individual agency.

The Amal government likely learned the concept of monarchy from the Romans, although a continuation of Roman power would also gain the support of the Roman elite population. This was crucial because the Roman elites were still considerable land-owners and the support of the Senatorial body added a legitimising factor to a ruler of Romans in a post-Roman world.[12] Although the Senate's constitutional powers were limited in Late Antiquity, Radtki argues its ideological power 'conferred the degree of tradition… to the state' due to

[9] Burns, 1984
[10] Vitiello, 2017: 22 claims: 'in the world of the tribes, queens were generally not rulers in their own right, and they did not display public political power.'
[11] Carney and Muller, (eds.) 2021
[12] Radtki, 2016: 124

its role in the Roman Republic.[13] This concept, as well as evidence found within the ancient sources, supports the idea that the Ostrogothic monarchy revived a glorious past earlier than Late Antiquity; they recalled the early imperial and late republican traditions upon which the Roman Imperial monarchy was founded and when the Senate was still at its political height. Augustus himself used the importance of republican tradition and reviving old values in establishing his rule.[14] Evoking the glorious past and ancient virtues fondly remembered by the Roman Senate, was clearly a mechanism designed to win their support. Ostrogothic royal women were therefore depicted as emulating earlier Roman empresses, not just later Roman empresses, in order to help revive the glorious ancient past.

Finally, women's history has moved away from attempting to reconstruct real women's experiences, instead analysing the social expectations of women, and how they were presented by male authors. Scholars recognise that ancient writers used specific *topoi,* language and stereotypes to characterise women, and these women were often reduced to ciphers.[15] These language devices, plus the virtues and vices associated with the behaviour of imperial women, had not changed much over the imperial period.[16] For this reason, it is therefore highly likely that Cassiodorus and Procopius were influenced by models of imperial women in their characterisation of Ostrogothic queens. The decision to base the position of the Ostrogothic queen on the institution of the Roman empress in order to gain support from the Roman Senate and the broader Roman land-owning population is logical according to the literary conventions of this historical context, because, as Stafford notes, '[the writers] also recognised ways in which women could and should act… their opinions were shaped by models of female action.'

[13] Radtki, 2016: 124; Gwynn, 2017: 64
[14] Eder, 2005
[15] Lung, 2017: 5; Tougher, 2020: 188; Dircksen, 2020: 104 uses 'direct definition' and 'indirect presentation',
[16] Richlin, 2014: 104

The structure of this thesis follows the main principles of monarchy. Chapter Two surveys the research context on this topic and identifies areas where this thesis contributes. It reviews the literature on Ostrogothic queens as well as the development of gender theory in early medieval queenship studies. Chapter Three centres around the role these queens played within the family, including both the power they had as family members and how they strengthened the family itself. It assesses the Amals claim to *nobilitas* and the use of women in transmitting the dynasty, as well as the ways Amal women acted as Roman *matronae* and framed their rule as nurturers of the state. Chapter Four examines the political actions of Ostrogothic queens in the administration of Italy and in diplomacy. It also surveys how the Ostrogothic monarchy borrowed from Roman concepts of power by representing some of the Ostrogothic queens as partners within the monarchy and as wealthy patrons. Finally, Chapter Five explores how Ostrogothic queens were represented as ideal Roman women who exhibited a combination of traditional Roman virtues. It also assesses how ancient sources used rhetoric to contrast these queens with negative models and disassociated them with damaging stereotypes that had been frequently used to describe empresses, in order to depict them as surpassing their earlier Roman counterparts.

The similarities found in both the roles and representations of the Ostrogothic queens and Roman empresses in these three main aspects of monarchy lead to the conclusion that Procopius and Cassiodorus were influenced by models of Roman Imperial women in their depiction of Ostrogothic queens. The roles of these queens indicate that the Ostrogothic regime reconstructed the Roman monarchy, not just the Roman emperor.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter reviews the existing literature about Ostrogothic queens as well as the development of gender history and theoretical frameworks which inform this thesis. Earlier political and military histories frequently dismiss the impact of Ostrogothic queens altogether, arguing instead how Ostrogothic kings restored the institution of the Roman emperor. There is therefore more room to ascertain the role of Ostrogothic royal women in the reconstruction of the Roman monarchy. The development of gender history and the evolution of the definition of power have led to more discussions on both the study of women and of early medieval queenship. The combination of gender history and politics has led to studies on masculine and feminine attributes of power and the importance of the family and the private sphere in discussions of female power. Scholars have focused almost exclusively on Amalasuntha due to her prominence in the texts of Cassiodorus and Procopius; frequently examining her portrayal in one or the other text. Scholars who study these texts as a whole have pinpointed their Greco-Roman influences more broadly, as well as how Cassiodorus intended for the Ostrogothic monarchy to resemble the Roman monarchy in his collection and publication of *The Variae.* Scholars have gauged some parallels between Amalasuntha and Galla Placidia, especially in their circumstances, although the extent to which Cassiodorus and Procopius were influenced by Roman models of female power, especially from the early empire, has not been determined. My thesis responds to this opening by studying the females of the Amal dynasty as a whole and compares them to a range of Roman models of women in power to better understand how the institution of the Roman empress

shaped the image of the Ostrogothic queen. In doing so, I situate Ostrogothic queens more firmly within the framework of monarchy and take up more recent definitions of power.

A particularly influential paradigmatic development in studies on Late Antiquity has been the challenging of the notion of the Decline and Fall of the western empire as a result of barbarian invasions. In particular, Brown's works have impacted studies on Late Antiquity by articulating this shift in scholarship and by advocating for the study of Late Antiquity as a period of cultural and religious transformation.[17] Some scholars criticise Brown's view as limiting or making discussions of 'decline' and 'crisis' impossible, although a general balance in this discourse has emerged.[18] Scholars acknowledge that the West experienced transformations and Roman continuities, without neglecting the various disruptions due to violent invasions and the installation of Germanic populations into Roman territories.[19] Longue durée accounts observe Roman marks on post-Roman culture, society and politics, with McKitterick arguing that the 'strength of Roman heritage in many different contexts and the degrees of continuity and discontinuity with the Roman world needs to be explored further.'[20] Other aspects of continuity, such as gender roles, deserve further study.[21] While scholars identify continuities between late Roman empresses and Byzantine empresses, there is room to ascertain how the institution of the Roman empress influenced the development of the western early medieval queen.[22]

By contrast, a major aspect of Roman continuity discussed in scholarship is how Ostrogothic kings, especially Theoderic, adopted characteristics of the Roman emperors and thereby

[17] Brown, 1971
[18] For example, Ward-Perkins, 2005: 182-183; Marcone, 2008: 16
[19] Kulikowski, 2012: 32
[20] McKitterick, 2001: 3; see also Pohl et al. 2018 for collection of essays on Roman continuities and transformations of post-Roman world
[21] Smith, 2000
[22] Brubaker, 1997; Herrin, 2016; Earenfight, 2013: pg. 42; Croke, 2015

continued elements of Roman Imperial rule.[23] Theoderic ruled both Goths and Roman land-holding elites in Italy and he cultivated a relationship with the Byzantine emperor Zeno. Scholars articulate how Theoderic tailored his image to suit his different audiences, arguing that adopting aspects of imperial rule would better legitimise his position, as it demonstrated an understanding of Roman culture and tradition.[24] This interest in Roman Imperial continuity has therefore sparked more discussions on the diplomacy and foreign relations of Ostrogothic male monarchs, such as Theoderic, Theodohad and Vitiges.[25] Scholars analyse *The Variae* within this framework by highlighting continuities of Roman administration and the role of the Roman Senate in the Ostrogothic regime.[26] Bjornlie situates *The Variae* within the context of the Byzantine invasion of Italy, interpreting the collection and publication of *The Variae* as an apologetic narrative which bears witness to a Roman regime.[27] *The Variae* as a collection was therefore intended for a Roman audience, as well as many of the individual epistles. Cassiodorus likely included letters from or about Ostrogothic royal women and emphasised their Roman characteristics and virtues to better convince Italian and Byzantine elites that the Ostrogoths continued the Roman monarchy in Italy.[28] My thesis question therefore arises from these discussions as I investigate the role Ostrogothic royal women played in Theoderic's reconstruction of the Roman monarchy to strengthen both their political position and sustain their diplomacy with Roman audiences.

[23] For example: Burns, 1980: 127. Burns argues that the Gothic monarchy developed out of a combination of the Gothic concept of kinship and Roman influences and pressures. Moorhead, in contrast to other scholars, is not convinced that Theoderic was seen by contemporaries as an emperor and instead makes the distinction that the ways that Theoderic's power was displayed were imperial (1992).
[24] Arnold, 2014; Scholl, 2017
[25] Heather, 2013; Vitiello, 2014; Sarantis, 2018
[26] Olson, 2007; Innes, 2007: 145; Bjornlie, 2012; Radtki, 2016. Radtki argues that Theoderic understood the importance of the senate for the legitimisation of his rule.
[27] Bjornlie, 2012. Gillett, 1998 has contested this, instead believing Cassiodorus' preface which explains his decision to publish the letter collection, to serve as model letters for his Senatorial friends to emulate.
[28] Cassiodorus, Variae 4.1, 5.43 and 9.1 are letters which talk about Theoderic's niece and sister and are addressed to western kings. However, as part of the Variae collection they would have been read by a Roman audience and are therefore examined within this thesis. These letters also demonstrate that the Roman characteristics of the Amal monarchy were on display to western kings who were outside the Italian and Byzantine groups with whom the Amals sought diplomacy.

General overviews and political and military histories of the period therefore focus almost exclusively on kings and kingship. Historians frequently exclude Ostrogothic queens from their discussions or dismiss them as weak and ineffective rulers. Burns claims Theoderic's diplomatic networks were his crowning achievement and ignores Amalasuntha's diplomacy and rule, instead fixating on how the elevation of her cousin Theodohad as her co-ruler was a mistake in judgement that led to her death.[29] Wallace-Hadrill, concentrating mostly on Theoderic, argues that his main misfortune was that he had no son to rule after him and that consequently, 'disintegration was bound to follow.'[30] Heather fixates on the foreign relations with the East and the political agendas of Theoderic and Theodohad while characterising Amalasuntha as fragile and unable to rule.[31] As a consequence of not situating Amalasuntha's actions within the context of female power struggles, Thompson's military study frames Amalasuntha's dealings with Justinian as treachery against her Gothic people.[32] Thompson does concede that Amalasuntha had been popular and questions whether 'the southern Italians [would] have joined Belisarius [in the Gothic War] if she had still been their ruler?'[33] This indicates that Amalasuntha earned the support of the Senatorial class, although how she did so is something I explore more deeply. Lee suggests that Amalasuntha had a passive role in diplomacy as an assassination victim who was secretly murdered by Justinian in order to justify his invasion of Italy.[34] Furthermore, Baynes' short article on the negotiations between Justinian and Amalasuntha was more concerned with establishing a true chronology of events.[35] Despite Amalasuntha's near ten-year reign as regent for her son,

[29] Burns, 1980; 127; Burns 1984
[30] Wallace-Hadrill, 1985: 37. Wallace-Hadrill mentions Amalasuntha briefly, but not by name, calling her "Theoderic's daughter" instead.
[31] Heather, 2013
[32] Thompson, 1982: 94. This refers to Amalasuntha's secret plans with Justinian to see his protection and refuge, which she did not go through with (Procopius, *Wars* 5.2.23-25.) Female power struggles during this period included a lack of public authority and the inability to lead the army.
[33] Thompson, 1982: 103
[34] Gwynn, 2017; Lee, 2009.
[35] Baynes, 1925

her rule is glossed over or dismissed as ineffective because she was a female ruler, although studies of female power and strategy would emerge more frequently due to a rise in gender studies.

The Feminist movement in the 1970s and 1980s generated a surge in women's history and gender analysis.[36] The recognised distinction between biological sex and gender as a social construct initiated numerous discussions on how society, culture and politics shape the ways women and men act and how society views them. While Pomeroy's 1975 work helped bring women to the forefront of studies in Classical Antiquity, Clark's study (1993) illuminated the lives and experiences of women in Late Antiquity specifically.[37] Clark's understanding of gender as a social construct influenced her deconstructive analysis of sources such as patristic texts and law codes to understand how society conceived of women, instead of merely dismissing the ancient sources as prejudiced male perspectives. In Roman and Late Antique studies, scholars understand the social expectations of gender roles and behaviours as manifesting in a Roman canon of virtues and vices that are often distinctly masculine or feminine, as well as masculinised forms of female power.[38] Stewart, for example, analysed Procopius' *Wars* through a gendered lens, to gauge how Procopius' concept of masculinity and the ideal male influenced his writings.[39] Brubaker claims that women who exhibited typically masculine virtues such as wisdom, courage and justice were perceived as being masculine women by ancient writers.[40] Brubaker also recognises that the trope of the masculine woman is often accompanied by a feminine man, in order to make the male appear weak.[41] Scholars demonstrate that this gender inversion was often apparent in politics, with

[36] Scott, 1986 advocated for gender analysis in the study of history and power dynamics
[37] Pomeroy, 1975; Clark, 1993
[38] Brubaker, 2005
[39] Stewart, 2017
[40] Brubaker, 2005
[41] Brubaker, 2005: 430

powerful and successful women 'described as possessing masculine reason and vigour.'[42] Gender as a means of historical analysis has therefore resulted in studies of how society perceived women and what was expected of them, and this is demonstrated in modern studies of Amalasuntha.

The acknowledgement that Roman society distinguished masculine and feminine virtues and behaviours has led to numerous studies on both the feminine and masculine aspects of Amalasuntha's character. This is a very common method of analysis of Amalasuntha. Scholars argue that Procopius employed gender stereotypes and literary tropes to signify Amalasuntha as a tragic heroine, whose feminine weaknesses caused her downfall and whose death prompted Justinian's invasion of Italy.[43] These ideas would benefit from a more detailed explanation of what these tropes and stereotypes were and how they have been previously used, as well as highlighting examples of where they were used in Cassiodorus and Procopius' texts. It is possible that these tropes had precedence in the language used to portray earlier Roman empresses, although this needs further determination. Conversely, different scholars highlight Amalasuntha's masculine qualities in both Procopius' *Wars* and *The Variae*, with La Rocca claiming that the letters subverted gender roles by framing Amalasuntha as the masculine ruler and Theodohad as the feminine consort.[44] Scholars have clearly established the motives behind the assigning of masculine and feminine traits by ancient writers, by situating the ancient texts within their political and historical context. However, by determining how these tropes were used to describe Roman Imperial women,

[42] Foβel, 2013: 70
[43] Frankforter, 1996; Cooper, 2016: 311. Although Procopius does claim Amalasuntha was deceived by her own judgement, he does not attribute this to feminine weakness, instead focusing much more on Theodohad's betrayal and treachery (Procopius, *Wars,* 5.4.2). I discuss this further in Chapter 5. Procopius does heavily emphasise that Justinian entered the war because of Amalasuntha's murder (Procopius, *Wars,* 5.5.1)
[44] For Amalasuntha's masculine characteristics in Procopius *Wars,* see Boy, 2017; for Amalasuntha's masculine characterisation in *The Variae,* see La Rocca, 2012; Hillner, 2019: 363

the strategies behind these gendered representations and the extent to which Amalasuntha and other Ostrogothic queens drew upon Roman Imperial models can be established.

Gender analysis coupled with political studies has revolutionised the definitions of power and resulted in studies on queenship which is independent of kingship. Harrison surveys narrative sources about early medieval western queens to study a society's concept of female power.[45] Harrison mainly focuses on Frankish queens, although he argues Gregory of Tours' account of Amalasuntha and other foreign queens sheds light on the Frankish concept of queenship.[46] This method opens avenues to analyse Procopius' account to glean insight into Byzantine concepts of female power based on how they received and treated with Amalasuntha and Gudeliva. Political studies of queens and royal women have increased substantially due to the widening definition of power in gender history.[47] Erler and Kowalkeski articulate that instead of simply public authority, power consists of 'the ability to act effectively, to influence people or decisions and to achieve goals'.[48] Stafford subsequently widened the definition of power even further, claiming that it is 'the ability to have and follow a strategy, to be a social actor, to have long- and short-term aims and to be able to follow them - with the emphasis on strategy and pursuit rather than primarily on successful outcome'.[49]

This change in definition has led to a differentiation between the public and private spheres of politics, with the private sphere incorporating political influence and the queen's role within the royal household. Stafford was a leading scholar on early medieval queenship, and her influential monograph *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers,* structured around a queen's stages of life, articulates the role of women in the domestic sphere and how they wielded

[45] Harrison, 1998
[46] Harrison, 1998: 174
[47] Kelleher, 2015
[48] Erler and Kowalkeski, 1988: 2
[49] Stafford, 1995: 11

power through their position in the family.[50] Stafford characterises Amalasuntha as a vessel through whom power was transmitted, as opposed to wielding power herself in her own right.[51] Becker-Piriou's study on the role of women in diplomacy in the fifth and sixth centuries also adopts this paradigm, by claiming women exercised power through influencing their husbands, and by transmitting power to their sons in marriage alliances.[52] Although Becker-Piriou describes Amalasuntha's diplomatic circumstances as being similar to Galla Placidia, she does not delve into how Amalasuntha used the models of Roman empresses to cultivate a better relationship with the Eastern court, who would have understood the Roman models. Also, de la Bodeyere demonstrates that Roman Imperial women gained power and influence through their role in the family and as transmitters of dynasty.[53] The extent to which early medieval royal women, especially Ostrogothic queens, drew upon models of Roman Imperial women to legitimise their position as actors in both power and diplomacy is something I explore more deeply.

Frameworks of women in power have evolved from involving the family and the distinction of public and private spheres into studies of the male and female roles in monarchy. Earenfight, an influential scholar on medieval queenship, has challenged both the scholarly reliance on family and on the public and private distinction, claiming that the queen's power incorporates political, social and economic power as well as influence in the family and that the public and private spheres exist on a continuum.[54] The dissatisfaction with the family paradigm materialised in discussions of Amalasuntha, where Procopius framed

[50] Stafford, 1983. The stages of the queen's life in Stafford's structure include bride, wife, queen consort and queen mother. McNamara and Wemple's essay, "The Power of Women through the Family", also examines this, claiming that a woman could exercise considerable power in the private sphere as a result of the wealth she might accumulate and her role in the family (1988: pg. 84).
[51] Stafford, 1983: 137. As well as transmitting power through her role in the family, Browning has argued that Amalasuntha gained power only through her role in the family, as the mother of the king (2003: pg. 105).
[52] Becker-Piriou, 2008
[53] de la Bodeyere, 2018
[54] Earenfight, 2013; 2017

Amalasuntha's conflict with the Goths as a domestic dispute, based on Athalaric's education. Scholars believe this small conflict symbolised a greater issue, although have not proffered alternative viewpoints due to the lack of information in the ancient sources.[55] Earenfight has also critiqued studies of agency as they focus too much on the individual as opposed to what aspects of society made the person's agency and political authority possible.[56]

The study of queenship within the context of monarchy has invited discussions of politics and society's concept of female power. The 2021 *Routledge Companion to Women and Monarchy in the Ancient Mediterranean World* investigates the role of royal females in monarchies in many different cultures, although it terminates at the Constantinian dynasty.[57] This framework has led to more discussions of Amalasuntha's administration, her diplomacy and her continuing of Theoderic's legacy, especially in how she desired cohabitation between the Goths and Romans living in Italy.[58] Halsall's brief treatment of Amalasuntha mostly recites events of her life, though he acknowledges her political and diplomatic capabilities.[59] Fauvinet-Ranson's in-depth study of Cassiodorus' panegyric to Amalasuntha demonstrates that this ambition for cohabitation is manifested in his characterisation of Amalasuntha herself: she is the perfect Gothic-Roman hybrid.[60] Hillner interprets the twin letters of Amalasuntha and Theodohad as presenting a partnership, thereby highlighting Amalasuntha's role in politics and as part of a monarchy.[61] Though Hillner claims that these letters drew on the precedent of twin letters written by Pulcheria and Marcian, there is no

[55] Innes, 2007; Heather, 2013
[56] Earenfight, 2013: 26
[57] Carney and Muller, (eds.) 2021
[58] Herrin, 2020; Becker-Piriou, 2008; Fauvinet-Ranson, 1998. Boy has also challenged views that Justinian invaded Italy in order to restore Roman Imperial rule, arguing that he instead invaded in order to restructure and reorganise Italy which had faltered after Amalasuntha's death (2017). From this, the notion that Amalasuntha was an effective ruler and cultivated a strong relationship with Justinian can be extrapolated and can be further explored.
[59] Halsall, 2007
[60] Fauvinet-Ranson, 1998. For example, she is well-educated and can speak Gothic, Latin and Greek fluently, and she exhibits Roman virtues but takes after her Gothic ancestors.
[61] Hillner, 2019

discussion on the implications or significance of using this precedent for Amalasuntha's drawing on Roman models to establish her position in discussion with Byzantium.[62] Craddock's thesis discusses the portrayals of Amalasuntha in the ancient sources and analyses her political significance.[63] Furthermore, Vitiello's monograph synthesises all of the sources depicting Amalasuntha, thereby reconciling and explaining the different gender portrayals.[64] Scholars highlight similarities between Amalasuntha and late Roman empresses Galla Placidia and Ariadne, however, crucially, there is space to determine how all of the Ostrogothic queens drew on a wide range of Roman empress models, starting as far back as the traditional Roman matron in Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi, and Livia, the first Roman empress.[65] My thesis places these Ostrogothic royal women more firmly within these recent gender analysis developments by analysing their role in the Ostrogothic monarchy, as opposed to merely their administrative capabilities or political actions. This framework allows for a combination of themes of power that fit into these new definitions, such as family, wealth, status, politics and public image, instead of favouring one and ignoring the impacts of others and instead of focusing exclusively on political authority.

The overwhelming majority of studies have centred on Amalasuntha, due to her relative prominence within the ancient sources. Other Ostrogothic royal women typically receive a mention in a paragraph or a brief prosopographical study in modern scholarship. Vitiello studies Ostrogothic queens as a group, highlighting trends in their education and intellectual qualities.[66] Arnold has also mentioned some of the Roman virtues and qualities of Ostrogothic queens and how these qualities helped set them apart from other early medieval western monarchies.[67]Although scholars refer to the marriages of Matasuntha,

[62] Hillner, 2019: 364
[63] Craddock, 1996
[64] Vitiello, 2017
[65] For example, Vitiello, 2017; Cooper, 2016; Fauvinet-Ranson, 1998, Becker-Piriou, 2008; Craddock, 1996
[66] Vitiello, 2006
[67] Arnold, 2014

Amalasuntha's daughter, to the Gothic king Vitiges and later to Germanus, a relative of Justinian, the status and power she was anticipated in bringing to her marriages deserve further study.[68] Amory describes how the women of Theoderic's family were used in marriage alliances and describes some of their good qualities, and his prosopographical appendix has short biographical accounts of these royal women.[69] Scholars have also briefly studied letters written by Theodohad's wife Gudeliva which are addressed to Empress Theodora, claiming that she attempted to befriend the empress by drawing on fertility metaphors, and disguised important political communication in this cultivation of friendship.[70] The lack of scholarship on other Ostrogothic royal women therefore invites an analysis of these queens as a group, especially in terms of how they contributed to Theoderic's reconstruction of the Roman monarchy within the Ostrogothic regime. An examination of how they were received by the Roman Senate and the Byzantine East will allow for a study into how they contributed to the strengthening of the Amal dynasty by drawing on Roman models.

While the development of gender analysis has generated more in-depth political discussions of royal women, my thesis situates Ostrogothic queens more firmly within their post-Roman context by examining continuities of early imperial concepts of female power. Scholars recognise similarities between Amalasuntha and some late Roman empresses, whereas I articulate how the Ostrogothic royal women helped reconstruct the Roman monarchy by comparing these queens to a range of Roman Imperial women and matrons. This unique approach more firmly establishes to what extent Ostrogothic queens were influenced by Roman empresses by searching for similarities in the language, tropes and characteristics used to portray them in the sources, whereas scholars currently highlight similarities in their

[68] Moorhead, 2005; Gwynn, 2017: 71; Kovacs, 2019
[69] Amory, 1997 pg. 63 and appendix
[70] Hillner, 2019: 361; Frankforter, 1996: 50-51

actions and circumstances. Finally, my thesis circumvents Earenfight's criticism of agency, by arguing that the position and power of these Ostrogothic royal women, as well as their relations with Roman audiences, were made possible due to the basing of their roles on the already established institution of the Roman empress, whose duties and privileges were still recognised by their Roman populations.

Chapter 3: Family

This chapter examines the roles of Ostrogothic royal women within the family unit. These females acted as transmitters of the Amal dynasty and of their *nobilitas*, which contributed to both the strength and the legitimacy of the Ostrogothic monarchy, as well as other monarchies into which these women married to forge diplomatic alliances. The characterisation of some of these women as virtuous *matronae* was heavily based on the Roman archetype of the ideal wife and mother. The expectations of these Ostrogothic queens, as well as the language used to portray them, indicate that they had statuses and roles within the family which were similar to those of earlier Roman Imperial women.

Transmitters of Dynasty

Having demonstrated his military power in Italy after defeating Odoacer in 493, Theoderic sought to secure the strength and future of his monarchy. In Gothic society the right to leadership was based on martial prowess; although fathers may have wished for their sons to succeed them, it was never assured that a man earned the right to kingship based on lineage.[71] As Theoderic ruled Italy over a population of both Ostrogoths and Romans, he was obliged to tailor the image of his monarchy to both these audiences. Although Roman emperors could be chosen due to skill in battle and the support of the army, emperors also advertised their legitimacy by retroactively connecting themselves to members of the previous dynasty or by forging one themselves. Theoderic therefore established an Ostrogothic monarchy, flaunting his right to rule based on his lineage of noble Amal ancestors. This reliance on dynasty both strengthened his claim and secured the future of the

[71] Wallace-Hadrill, 1985: 35

Ostrogothic monarchy by strongly implying an Amal succession, as the right to rule came from possessing Theoderic's blood.

The notion of dynasty relies on the role women played in the family structure. Female members of the Roman Imperial family were crucial transmitters of dynasty through their roles as wives, mothers and daughters of the emperor. In a similar way, the women in Theoderic's monarchy transmitted legitimacy and power to their husbands and sons. The *nobilitas* and virtuous behaviour of the royal women also bolstered both the image and stability of the family. The Ostrogothic monarchy reconstructed the Roman Imperial monarchy through its reliance on the role royal women played in strengthening the family position and in continuing the Amal dynasty.

Theoderic's choice of succession demonstrates the important roles the Amal women played in the transmission of dynasty. Despite having an adult male nephew who could theoretically lead the army, Theoderic chose his daughter Amalasuntha's ten-year-old son, Athalaric, to succeed him, and appointed Amalasuntha as regent. This decision indicated Theoderic's value of inheritance based on direct lineage through the female line in his monarchy. Amalasuntha continued Theoderic's policy by selecting Theodahad as her co-ruler because he was the son of Theoderic's sister, Amalafrida, and therefore shared Amalasuntha's royal pedigree, again through the female line. Cassiodorus penned a letter to the Roman Senate on Theodahad's behalf which announced his elevation and emphasised 'the ancestral imperium' and the 'good family' that Theodahad shared with Amalasuntha.[72] Cassiodorus further justified Amalasuntha's choice to the Senate, stating that her co-ruler was not only imbued with Roman virtues but 'conspicuous in the distinction of [her] family… born from the line of the Amals.'[73] While Cassiodorus did not highlight that Theodahad owed his Amal descent

[72] Cassiodorus, *Variae,* 10.4.1; 10.4.5
[73] Cassiodorus, *Variae,* 10.3.3

to his mother, he neglected to mention Theodahad's father or paternal ancestry at all.[74] Cassiodorus' omission and his deliberate focus on Theodahad's eligibility to rule based on his ancestry through the female line in his letters to the Senate demonstrated that the Ostrogothic monarchy purposefully made decisions about the succession according to established Roman tradition, and emphasised this to their Roman audience in order to strengthen their rule.

Amal women also strengthened the monarchy and transferred *nobilitas* through marriage. Burns calls Theoderic's diplomatic network across Europe, achieved chiefly by marrying the women in his family to royals in other western kingdoms, his crowning achievement.[75] Theoderic married his 'illegitimate' daughters Theodogotha and Ostrogotho to Alaric II, the Visigothic king and to Sigismund, the Burgundian king respectively.[76] The *Anonymus Valesianus* referred to Ostrogotho as "Areagni", a name which bears similarity to the name of the *Augusta* Ariadne, which the *Anonymus Valesianus* spelled "Ariagni".[77] As Ostrogotho had spent time with Theoderic at Constantinople during her youth, she could have been baptised Ostrogotho Ariadne to show Theoderic's esteem for the empress.[78] This name hints that Theoderic's Greco-Roman practices were also apparent in the naming of his daughter, possibly to curry favour with the court at Constantinople.

Theoderic married other members of his family to post-Roman western kings. Cassiodorus, on Theoderic's behalf, authored a letter to Hermanfrid, the king of the Thuringians, which assured Hermanfrid he would 'gleam even further with the brightness of Amal blood' through his marriage to Amalaberga, Theoderic's niece.[79] Another of Cassiodorus' letters

[74] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 10.3 and 10.4. The identity of Theodahad's mother was very likely common knowledge, therefore Cassiodorus may not have felt the need to restate this detail.
[75] Burns, 1984: 183
[76] Jordanes, Getica, 297
[77] *Anonymus Valesianus*, 39, 63
[78] Vitiello, 2017: 204
[79] Cassiodorus, Variae, 4.1.1

chided the Vandal king Thrasamund for hindering Amal interests by supporting a potential Visigothic king who was not related to Theoderic through his marriage alliances.[80] Theoderic reminded Thrasamund of their alliance and kinship, as Thrasamund's wife was Theoderic's sister, Amalafrida, and reiterated that she was 'of the Amal family'.[81]

Theoderic's words were confirmed by his actions, as he had sent Amalafrida to the Vandal king with 1000 Gothic elite warriors plus 5000 armed retainers and a large dowry which included the Sicilian city of Lilybaeum – a procession and dowry fit for an Amal lady of such distinction.[82] These marriage alliances were reported frequently by contemporary writers, indicating that they were a prominent feature of Theoderic's reign.[83] Jordanes recorded that Theoderic made these marriage alliances 'so that he might extend his family as much as possible'.[84] Theoderic's diplomatic marriages therefore strengthened the position of the Ostrogothic monarchy and demonstrated the value he placed on the women of his family, as he believed their Amal blood would increase the noble status of the royal families into which they married. Additionally, these women were expected to carry on Amal blood to their children and therefore the next generation of kings. An example is Theodogotha, whose son Amalaric became King of the Visigoths.

Furthermore, to continue his dynasty, Theoderic married his 'legitimate' daughter Amalasuntha to Eutharic, who was also of Amal blood, with the expectation that this marriage would lead to Eutharic succeeding him, although this did not occur as Eutharic predeceased Theoderic.[85] Although Eutharic's son by Amalasuntha would ascend the throne,

[80] Cassiodorus, Variae, 5.43
[81] Cassiodorus, Variae, 5.43.1
[82] Procopius, *Wars* 3.8.12-23; Cooper, 2016: 302
[83] *Anonymus Valesianus*, 63, 68, 70; Jordanes, *Getica*, 295-299, Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 4.1, 5.43, Procopius *Wars* 5.12.22
[84] Jordanes, *Getica*, 299
[85] Jordanes, *Getica* 80-81, 298; Olson, 2007: 28-9 refers to Eutharic as a descendant of a former Ostrogothic king, Ermanaric.

their daughter Matasuntha also imparted Amal legitimacy on her marriages. Moorhead and Amory both observe that the election of Matasuntha's first husband Vitiges as king after Theodahad's death was a Gothic decision based on the criterion of strong military command, therefore ostensibly dismissing the importance of Amal blood from the Ostrogothic perspective.[86] Why then, as Jordanes and Procopius recorded, did Vitiges travel from Rome to Ravenna so quickly, cast aside his commoner wife and marry Matasuntha against her will?[87] Burns argues that Vitiges' marriage to Matasuntha earned Vitiges legitimacy and Kovacz believes his connection with Theoderic's family could stabilise his reign.[88] However, it is unlikely that Vitiges married the Amal princess to pander to the Ostrogoths since they preferred military prowess to lineage in their leaders. Instead, Vitiges took advantage of the legitimacy of Matasuntha's ancestry that he and the Amals believed carried so much weight with the Roman population in Italy. Vitiges also believed that marriage to Matasuntha would appease Emperor Justinian during a time of tense relations with the Byzantine court. Cassiodorus' diplomatic correspondence to Justinian showed Vitiges reminding the emperor of Matasuntha's mother Amalasuntha and the protection Justinian extended to her.[89]

> 'Nam si vindicta regis Theodahadi quaeritur, mereor diligi: si commendatio divae memoriae Amalasuinthae reginae prae oculis habetur, eius debet filia cogitari, quam nisus vestrorum omnium perducere decuisset ad regnum , ut cunctae gentes potuissent agnoscere vicissitudinem vos gratiae tanto pignori reddidisse.'
>
> 'For if retribution against King Theodahad is sought, I deserve to be cherished: if the praise of Queen Amalasuntha of divine memory is held before your eyes, her daughter ought to be regarded, whom it would have been proper for the effort of all your agents

[86] Moorhead, 1986: 120-121; Amory, 1997: 163. Burns notes that Vitiges was raised on a shield, amid a ceremony of circled swords, which emphasised the choice as being based on martial prowess. (Burns, 1984: 106). Vitiges mentioned this detail in his letter to the Gothic people announcing his elevation as king (Cassiodorus, *Variae* 10.31.1)
[87] Jordanes, *Getica*, 311; Procopius, *Wars* 5:11.27
[88] Burns, 1984: 93; Kovacz, 2019: 121
[89] Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 10.32.2

> to restore to the regnum, so that all nations would be able to acknowledge how you returned such a daughter to a change of fortune.'

Vitiges therefore presumed that his removal of Theodahad and his elevation of Matasuntha to her rightful place as Amalasuntha's successor, by choosing her as his consort, would diffuse tension between Italy and Constantinople. Although Justinian's general Belisarius invaded Italy regardless, Vitiges' marriage demonstrates how he used a female member of the Amal dynasty to both strengthen his claim to the Roman Senate and improve relations with Constantinople.

Justinian also recognised Matasuntha's potential to transfer *nobilitas* and continue the dynasty. During the Gothic War in 540, Belisarius took Matasuntha and Vitiges, as well as Amalaberga and her children, back with him to Constantinople.[90] After Vitiges' death in 542, Justinian married Matasuntha to his nephew, Germanus, making Matasuntha a Patrician Ordinary.[91] Scholars suggest that Justinian expected this imperial union with an Amal would mitigate Ostrogothic hostilities and would create a dynasty to rule Italy.[92] Procopius recorded Germanus' hope that 'if the woman should be with him in the army, the Goths would probably be ashamed to take up arms against her, calling to mind the rule of Theoderic and Athalaric.'[93]

This was not the case, as Ostrogothic soldiers resisted imperial forces and persisted to elect military leaders as kings who were even more important in a time of conflict, such as Ildibad and Totila. Moorhead, noting that these kings were also anti-Roman and from humble

[90] Jordanes, *Getica*, 81; Procopius, *Wars* 8.25.11-12, Herrin, 2020: 142
[91] Jordanes, *Getica*, 81. There is some uncertainty in modern scholarship as to whether Germanus was Justinian's nephew. For example, Croke (2007: 50) refers to Germanus as Justinian's cousin.
[92] Heydemann, 2016: 39; Moorhead, 2005: 128; Heather, 2013: 164; Bjornlie, 2012: 112; Cameron, 1996: 198 notes it was Germanus' first step in his quest for glory
[93] Procopius, *Wars* 7.39.14-15

backgrounds, argues that the Ostrogoths elected kings who were the opposite of what the Amals had represented.[94]

Justinian's hope that his marriage alliance formed with Matasuntha would quieten Gothic soldiers was more reflective of the Roman concepts of marriage and dynasty than it was Gothic. In early medieval western kingdoms, women and their role in marriages were seen as important for mutual economic benefits and 'extending clan identities sideways'.[95] By contrast, Justinian's unification of the Amal dynasty with his kin, and therefore potential heir, revealed the value the emperor placed on the *nobilitas* of the Amals as carried by Matasuntha. This action reflected the Roman Imperial custom of recognising that women as well as men carried the dynasty.

This exploitation of the position of the royal women in the monarchy as vessels of dynasty drew heavily upon precedents set by Roman emperors. As with Theoderic, who consolidated his rule in circumstances following conflict, so too did emperors such as Augustus and Septimius Severus purposefully highlight the unity of the family and the strength of the dynasty through the women in the monarchy after a period of civil strife.

Like Theoderic, Augustus forged diplomatic marriage alliances with the women in his family, such as his daughter Julia to Agrippa and subsequently to Tiberius, and his sister Octavia to Mark Antony. He gave special rights such as statues and theatre seating privileges to females to whom he was biologically related, as well as his wife, Livia, thereby elevating the status of the women of the imperial family akin to that of a Vestal Virgin. Augustus' adultery laws also promoted the stability of the family institution to the population and awarded mothers with three children, and freedwomen with four children, the right to

[94] Moorhead, 1986: 120-1
[95] Wickham, 2001: 70

administer their affairs without a guardian.[96] Additionally, Gorrie argues that Septimius Severus later attempted a reconstruction of this importance of family in order to strengthen the dynasty after civil war by promoting images of his wife Julia Domna to the Senate, the general population and the military.[97]

Furthermore, Augustus had no sons of his own and instead anticipated that his successors would be the sons of his daughter Julia: Gaius and Lucius, thereby demonstrating his plan that the imperial dynasty would continue through the female line. Due to the premature deaths of Gaius and Lucius, the dynasty initially survived through Livia's son Tiberius, showing that Livia herself was a vessel of power through her marriage, and Augustus adopted her in his will to further establish a line of descent. Augustus himself was related to Julius Caesar through the female line – his grandmother was Caesar's sister – which, as well as his military victories, contributed greatly to his legitimacy and personal image.[98] Furthermore, though descending from Livia and Octavia, Emperor Claudius strengthened his rule and earned greater legitimacy through his marriage to Agrippina the Younger, who was herself a great-granddaughter of Augustus through her mother and Livia through her father.[99] Hekster argues that Claudius emphasised the importance of his retrospective lineages, which connected him to the family, (parents and grandparents) and prospective lineages (wives and children) which would continue the family.[100] Tacitus mentions Agrippina's connections and the legitimacy she passed on to her son from her first marriage, Nero, as well as the legitimacy she had the ability to transfer to prospective husbands:

> 'Pallas, in his eulogy of Agrippina, insisted on the point that she brought with her the grandson of Germanicus, who fully deserved an imperial position: let the sovereign unite to himself a famous stock, the posterity of the Julian and Claudian races, and

[96] Hallett, 2012: 373
[97] Gorrie, 2004: 61-64
[98] Tregiarri, 2005: 140
[99] De la Bodeyere, 2018: 3
[100] Hekster, 2015: 129 uses the example of Claudius' triumphal arch at Rome celebrating victory in Britain, which included portraits of his mother, wife and children

> ensure that a princess of tried fecundity, still in the vigour of youth, should not transfer the glory of the Caesars into another family!'[101]

Nero succeeded Claudius because he was the son of Agrippina, having been adopted by Claudius. Nero's father, Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus, was also the grandson of Octavia. As de la Bodeyere notes, no Julio-Claudian emperor was succeeded by his son, showing just how crucial the female line was to the survival of the dynasty.[102] The emperors relied on wives, daughters and mothers to continue the dynasty and to transmit the imperial power out of necessity, as emperors frequently had no surviving sons to succeed them.[103]

After the Julio-Claudian dynasty, new emperors emphasised their marriages to women of the imperial family and the legitimacy this brought. The *Historia Augusta* recorded Marcus Aurelius as lamenting that sending away his wife, Faustina the Younger, meant returning her dowry: the empire.[104] The writer further clarified that Marcus Aurelius had inherited the empire through his father-in-law, Antoninus Pius.[105] In other words, Marcus Aurelius succeeded Pius through marriage to his daughter, just as Theoderic anticipated Eutharic to succeed him through his marriage to Amalasuntha. Although this statement was perhaps an apocryphal exaggeration, it demonstrated that both the emperor and the population acknowledged the power and legitimacy that the wife contributed to the marriage.[106] Marcus and Faustina's daughter, Lucilla, was married to Lucius Verus, Marcus' adoptive brother and imperial colleague, to uphold ties between the emperors. Coinage depicting Faustina

[101] Tacitus, *Annals*, 12.2
[102] De la Bodeyere, 2018:3
[103] Certain emperors in the Julio-Claudian dynasty, such as Augustus and Caligula, had no biological sons to succeed them, though they sometimes adopted potential successors as their sons (e.g. Augustus adopted Tiberius after the deaths of Gaius and Lucius). Claudius did have a biological son, Brittanicus, though he was succeeded by his step-son and adopted son, Nero. Successors were therefore sometimes male family members of the emperor or the emperor's wife.
[104] Historia Augusta, Life of Marcus Aurelius, 19.8
[105] Historia Augusta, Life of Marcus Aurelius, 19.9
[106] Meyers, 2016: 487

and Lucilla respectively referenced their dynasty and birth family as opposed to their husbands (figs. 3.1 and 3.2).[107] Many of Lucilla's coins are inscribed LVCILLAE AVG ANTONINI AVG F, referring to the dynasty into which her mother was born and her father adopted (fig. 3.2).

[107] Meyers, 2016: 488. For example, RIC III 503Ba

Figure 3.1. RIC III Antoninus Pius 503Ba. Gold aureus 145 – 161 CE. Bust of Faustina the Younger, bare-headed, with hair waved and coiled on back of head, draped, left, FAVSTINA AVG PII AVG FIL / Dove, right, CONCORDIA. ANS 1958.223.6

Figure 3.2. RIC III Marcus Aurelius 756. Gold aureus 164-180 CE. Bust of Lucilla, bare-headed, hair waved and fastened in a bun on back of head, draped, right, LVCILLAE AVG ANTONINI AVG F / Concordia, draped, seated left on low seat, holding patera in extended right hand and resting left elbow on statuette of Spes; under seat, cornucopiae, CONCORDIA. British Museum R.12609

The Constantinian dynasty further recognised the legitimacy imperial women brought to their marriages. Like Theoderic, Constantius II strengthened the family's position by using his sisters in marriage alliances.[108] McEvoy recognises how Procopius the Usurper anticipated the validity and military support an association with Constantia, the last member of the Constantinian dynasty, would bring to his right to rule.[109] This parallels Matasuntha's circumstances as the last of her dynasty and the Gothic support Justinian expected when he married her to his nephew.

Furthermore, Holum argues that the political roles and prominence of the Theodosian women expanded and consolidated due to Theodosius I's 'dynastic impetus' and reliance on 'concrete channels of friendship and blood'.[110] Emperor Honorius elevated his sister Galla Placidia's husband Constantius to *Augustus*, a decision which Salisbury interprets as 'reaffirming that it was his connection to the royal bloodline that made emperors, not any military achievement'.[111] While military achievement sometimes made emperors and the support of the army was paramount, the actions of emperors clearly show that they anticipated a dynasty to endure and the women in the imperial family plainly had a role in that continuation. In another sense, Pulcheria and later Ariadne, both daughters of emperors, influenced the succession by transferring the imperial power to men they chose and subsequently married. Pulcheria married Marcian and Ariadne married Zeno and later Anastasius. While she did not marry Theodahad, Amalasuntha had the authority to choose him as her co-ruler because a precedent had been set with Roman *Augustae*.

The early imperial tradition of using female members of the royal family to continue the dynasty was taken up by later emperors to strengthen their power in times of crisis. Theoderic

[108] Tougher, 2020: 198
[109] McEvoy, 2016: 162
[110] Holum, 1982: 3
[111] Salisbury, 2015: 129

and the Ostrogothic monarchy strategically continued this tradition as it was what their Roman population recognised. As the Ostrogothic monarchs were also relying on Byzantine acceptance for rulership of Italy, it was crucial that they continue Roman structures to better facilitate stronger diplomatic relations with Constantinople. The Ostrogothic monarchy therefore anticipated that their Roman population and Byzantine allies would have been more accepting of the Ostrogothic regime, as the monarchy's use of Amal royal women in this way was another step in the reconstruction of the Roman monarchy. The dynastic expectations of Amal women followed their Roman Imperial precedents, which indicates that the positions of the Ostrogothic royal women were based on Roman concepts of female power.

Matrons

Another way in which the Ostrogothic monarchy modelled itself on the Roman monarchy was by presenting the Amal women as respected *matronae.* The Roman *matrona* fulfilled the expected roles for women in Roman society as devoted wives and mothers, while also harbouring certain virtues such as *castitas, pudicitia* and *modestia.*[112] The loyal wife and mother archetype was used heavily in the public images of Roman Imperial females, to the extent that it became an imperial institution.[113] The maternal virtue displayed by Amal women indicates that the Ostrogothic monarchy revitalised late republican and early imperial Roman traditional values.

Interestingly, Theoderic's wife and mother were not as prominent in the sources as the women who carried Amal blood. It is likely that Theoderic saw the Roman concept of transmission of dynasty and blood literally and preferred to flaunt the nobility of Amal blood

[112] Hemelrijk, 1999: 6
[113] Purcell, 2014: 171, 180

through them, unlike Livia, for example, who enjoyed much greater prominence and carried the dynasty despite being biologically unrelated to Augustus. However, Theoderic's wife and mother both appeared in the ancient sources as respected *matronae*.

The *Anonymus Valesianus* introduced Theoderic's mother as a Goth named Erelieva, who converted to Catholicism and was baptised Eusebia.[114] Erelieva is another example of a female member of Theoderic's family adopting the name of a Roman empress, and her conversion and name-changing signalled her assimilation into Roman society. The writer follows the description of Theoderic's parents with an affirmation that '*hence,* Theoderic was a man of great distinction', therefore implying he inherited positive qualities from his mother.[115] Jordanes referred to Erelieva as a concubine and mother of Theoderic.[116] Ennodius, in his panegyric to Theoderic delivered in 507, mentioned his respectable mother and venerable sister, and included a passage where Theoderic praised his mother's fecundity and glory in giving birth to a man.[117] Erelieva appeared in the sources due to her fulfilment of her function as a mother, for which she was esteemed.

Like his mother, Theoderic's wife Audofleda appears in the sources simply as Clovis' sister whom Theoderic married in c. 493 as part of a diplomatic alliance with the Franks, and as Amalasuntha's mother.[118] Gregory of Tours reported a story in which, after Theoderic's death in 526, Amalasuntha did not adhere to Audofleda's marriage counsel, and Audofleda raged and sent an army as a result.[119] Amalasuntha poisoned her mother's Arian communion cup in retribution, causing Audofleda's death, which led to the Italians accepting Theodahad

[114] *Anonymus Valesianus* 58. Henceforth I will refer to Theoderic's mother as Erelieva to distinguish her from the empress Eusebia, wife of Constantius II
[115] *Anonymus Valesianus*, 59. Emphasis mine.
[116] Jordanes, *Getica*, 269
[117] Ennodius, *Panegyric to Theoderic*, 42-3
[118] Jordanes, *Getica* 295-297; Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, 3.31
[119] Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, 3.31

as king instead and resulted in Amalasuntha's murder, to the shock of the Franks.[120] Gregory of Tours therefore vilified Amalasuntha specifically because she did not listen to her mother's wisdom and committed matricide. Unlike Procopius and Cassiodorus, Gregory was not a contemporary of Amalasuntha, having been born in c.538, after Amalasuntha's death. This story is unsupported by other sources describing Amalasuntha's life and, as Doolittle remarks, includes biblical stereotypes which give it a didactic flavour.[121] Harrison's deconstructive analysis of Gregory's text concludes that this story reveals more about the concept of queenship and the negative perception of Arianism in Frankish society, as opposed to any truths about Amalasuntha and her mother.[122] The anecdotes indicate the continued importance of the mother and the mother's advice in a post-Roman society and demonstrate that Audofleda appears in the ancient sources only as a mother, just like Erelieva.

Unlike Livia or Julia Domna for example, Audofleda did not enjoy the same public prominence as the wife or mother of an emperor did to bolster the image of the imperial family. As mentioned, Theoderic likely placed more importance on women in the royal family who were biologically related to him as they carried the Amal dynasty. After Theoderic's death, the role of the respected *matrona* instead fell to Amalasuntha, who ruled as regent for her son Athalaric from 526-534. Amalasuntha, along with her statesmen, capitalised on the importance the Romans ascribed to the *matrona* figure as a respectable role for women and empresses, to strengthen her position as regent.

Cassiodorus' panegyric to Amalasuntha, delivered to the Senate of Rome in c.533, employed adjectives and nouns which characterised Amalasuntha as a Roman *matrona*.[123] Cassiodorus

[120] Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, 3.31
[121] Doolittle, 2018 argues that Gregory drew on the story of Cain and Abel to show the evilness of parricide and hatred.
[122] Harrison, 1998: 169-174
[123] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 11.1

consistently referred to Amalasuntha as 'domina', a term used to address Roman empresses occasionally as well as female overseers, or the mistresses of the household.[124] Bjornlie translates this term into English as 'matron', showing a connotation between a domina and a maternal figure.[125] Cassiodorus described the 'maternal genius [which] is so great in her', that 'even a foreign *Princeps* by right ought to serve'.[126] As well as fulfilling her role by providing an heir to the throne, Cassiodorus lauded Amalasuntha for achieving 'what both sexes consider extraordinary: for she has reared a magnificent king… and she defends the broadest imperium with strength of spirit'.[127] Cassiodorus therefore directly states that Amalasuntha's function as a mother fulfilled what the audience, the Roman Senate, believed was the ideal role for women. Amalasuntha's achievement of the best of both sexes, as well as her guardianship of Italy on behalf of her son, implied that she embodied the roles of *mater patriae* and *pater patriae.*[128] A letter from Amalasuntha addressed to the Senate told them she is a 'pious mother', reminding them of the death of her son, and that she continued to serve the interests of the public instead of her grief.[129] By combining images of Amalasuntha as a wise *matrona* figure and her deft abilities in handling the army and the administration, Cassiodorus portrayed Amalasuntha as a mother and a nurturer of her children and of the state.

Procopius also viewed Amalasuntha as a *matrona* and nurturer of the state, claiming she administered the government in Italy as the guardian of her child.[130] Procopius also seemed to approve of Amalasuntha's rearing of her son in the manner of Roman princes, as she

[124] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 11.1; Dickey, 2008: 94
[125] Cassiodorus and Bjornlie, 2019. This is the most recent and comprehensive English translation of *The Variae.*
[126] Cassiodorus, Variae 11.1.5
[127] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 11.1.14
[128] Arnold, 2014: 49
[129] Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 10.3.1 'Post flebilem filii nostri divae recordationis occasum vicit animum piae matris generalitatis affectio, ut non maeroris sui causas, sed vestra potius augmenta cogitaret.' See also Chapter 5.
[130] Procopius, *Wars* 5.2.1-3

found him a teacher of letters and Gothic mentors who 'she knew to be prudent and refined' and chastised her son when he did something wrong.[131] Procopius recorded that Amalasuntha was approached by Gothic nobles who requested that Athalaric be educated in a more Gothic sense, in the way of war.[132] Procopius described the consequences of this decision made against Amalasuntha's approval, as Athalaric became depraved, idle and debauched, 'wasting away' as he did not heed his mother's advice and was not educated by her in the Roman way.[133] Procopius' story therefore shows the matron's responsibility for the educational and moral development of their children in the Roman fashion and the dire ramifications that can occur if a mother is denied this prerogative in favour of more 'barbarian' customs.

Scholars view Procopius' retelling of the domestic dispute between Amalasuntha and the Gothic nobles as signifying a much greater political issue, although they remain undecided as to what this issue might be.[134] Instead, this anecdote symbolised the downfall of Italy from Procopius' point of view, as its Roman ways continued by Amalasuntha wasted away like Athalaric due to barbarian influences. This story therefore also combined the role of Amalasuntha as matron of her children and matron of the state, by specifically referring to Amalasuntha in her maternal capacity and using domestic issues to symbolise political conflict. Furthermore, as with the Senate, Amalasuntha briefly acknowledged the death of her son in a letter to Justinian before announcing her political decisions, therefore reminding the emperor of her role as a mother and how her position as ruler came from being the mother of the dead king.[135] Amalasuntha therefore based her position of power as a regent for her

[131] Procopius, *Wars* 5.2.6-9
[132] Procopius, *Wars* 5.2.11-13
[133] Procopius, *Wars* 5.2.19
[134] Innes, 2007: 151; Heather, 2013: 150. Also, Craddock, 1996: 106 points out that it is unclear how Procopius learned this information.
[135] Cassiodorus, Variae, 10.1.1. This letter announced her choice of Theodahad as her successor.

son on the figure of the Roman matron, which was accepted and revered by her Roman population.

As well as Amalasuntha, the Amal family considered Amalafrida as a matron figure. Cassiodorus wrote to Hilderic, King of the Vandals on behalf of Athalaric, chiding the Vandal king for causing the death of Amalafrida after seizing the throne when her husband died.[136] This letter, written c.526, was most likely sent at Amalasuntha's initiative, as her son was around ten years old and a new king. Cassiodorus referred to Amalafrida as 'domina' in this letter also.[137] Although Amalafrida was not Hilderic's mother, the letter accused Hilderic of 'a kind of parricide', thereby characterising Amalafrida as a mother of the kingdom since she was the wife of the king. Langford argues that as the Roman population viewed the emperor and empress as the father and mother of the empire, killing them could constitute parricide.[138] The letter therefore illustrates that the Amals continued this Roman belief and treated the female members of their family as akin to the mother of the state.

Cassiodorus continued to refer to Amalafrida as a mother figure who transmitted both power and *nobilitas:*

> 'Rather, instead, she ought to be considered as the mother who transferred the kingdom to you. For this, too, would have been advantageous to your nobility, if you would have retained within the line of the Hasdings the purple dignity of Amal blood.'[139]

This statement demonstrates a number of points. First, the 'purple dignity' in their blood shows that the Amals considered themselves as akin to the Roman Imperial family, as emperors adorned themselves in purple cloth.[140] Secondly, it provides another example of

[136] Cassiodorus, Variae, 9.1. Amalafrida let a revolt against Hilderic and died in prison after defeat.
[137] Cassiorodus, Variae, 9.1
[138] Langford, 2013: 50
[139] Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 9.1.2
[140] Arnold, 2014: 94. Arnold states that the tradition of emperors wearing purple was practiced since the Julio-Claudians

how the Amals saw their females as important transmitters of dynasty and of Amal blood. Thirdly, like Livia, Amalafrida was not biologically related to the Vandal kings and was still thought to transmit dynasty through marriage. Fourthly, although Amalafrida was not Hilderic's mother, the Amals argued that she should have been treated as such, as this would have added to Hilderic's legitimacy. This indicates that Amals saw the *matrona* figure, manifested in Amalafrida, as important to Hilderic's monarchy and his legitimacy. The letter also shows how much value the Amals placed in their female members, as it claimed Hilderic should have returned her to Italy rather than imprisoning her, and that her death dishonours them.[141] This letter therefore indicates the importance of the *matrona* figure in the Amal family and lectures another king on how this figure ought to be used. Like Amalasuntha, the Amals chose to base the position of Amalafrida on the revered Roman role of the *matrona*, a figure with which Roman empresses also desired to be associated.

Boatwright claims that public images of early Roman empresses emphasise their motherhood, as 'to be a mother was the most respected function women could have in Rome'.[142] Associating themselves with such a respected office would not only advertise their political position as mother of the dynasty but would also set them up to be an ideal role model to the population. As Amalasuntha had legitimised her right to rule by adopting acceptable Roman concepts of power, so too did Livia establish her role as the first lady of Rome by basing her position on the traditionally most lauded duty of a Roman woman: a respectable wife and mother.

The quintessential, virtuous mother who earned admiration during her time in the Roman Republic and afterwards was Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi (c.190s – c.115BCE). Cornelia was a politically prominent figure, who, like Amalasuntha, earned praise rather than

[141] Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 9.1
[142] Boatwright, 2021: 100

resentment as she based her position within the socially accepted forms of Roman motherhood.[143] De la Bodeyere argues that her education and political judgement were esteemed because they allowed her to support the educational development and political careers of her sons.[144] Though her correspondence no longer survives, the memory of her erudition and virtue did, as Cicero later praised her letters, claiming 'that her sons were nursed not less by their mother's speech than at her breast'.[145] As Amalasuntha educated Athalaric in the Roman way, Cornelia also supervised the learning of her son, choosing for him Greek tutors and fostering his learning of Greek literature, again to Cicero's approval.[146]

During Augustus' rule, women of the imperial family appeared in public images as mothers or as a part of the family.[147] Furthermore, after Augustus' death in 14, Livia continued to earn prominence as the mother of the new emperor, Tiberius. Tacitus reported that the Senate proposed to bestow on her the title "*Mater Patriae*" or "*Parens Patriae*", although Tiberius vetoed this.[148] It is possible that Tiberius felt threatened by the prestige granted to Livia through this title, although it indicates that the Senate considered Livia as a mother and nurturer of the state, setting a precedent later adopted by Amalasuntha and advertised to the Roman Senate. A coin type from Lepcis Magna depicts Livia seated on the reverse with the accompanying legend AUGUSTA MATER PATRIA[E], showing that certain provinces honoured her with the title nevertheless (fig. 3.3).[149] The title was later given to Julia Domna, which was also inscribed on coins, along with MAT[ER] SEN[ATUS] ("Mother of the Senate") (fig. 3.4).[150] Other coins also emphasised the maternal nature of Julia Domna, as her portraits were accompanied by titles such as MATER AUGGG ("Mother of the

[143] De la Bodeyere, 2018: 26
[144] De la Bodeyere, 2018: 25-6
[145] Cicero, Brutus, 211
[146] Cicero, Brutus, 104
[147] Boatwright, 2021: 90 cites the Aras Pacis as an example.
[148] Tacitus, Annals, 1.14
[149] RPC I 849
[150] See for example RIC IV Caracalla 380 with legend MAT AVGG MAT SEN M PATR

Augusti") (fig. 3.5) and MATER CASTRORUM ("Mother of the [Military] Camps") (fig. 3.6).[151]

Figure 3.3. Reverse type of RPC I 849. Tiberius, Leptis Magna, AE. Livia veiled, seated, r., holding patera and sceptre, AVGVSTA MATER PATRIA. British Museum 1874,0715.429

Figure 3.4. RIC IV Caracalla 380 (aureus). Gold aureus 211-217CE. Bust of Julia Domna, hair elaborately waved in ridges and turned up low at the back, draped, right, IVLIA PIA FELIX AVG / Julia Domna, draped, standing left, holding branch in extended right hand and sceptre in left hand, MAT AVGG MAT SEN M PATR. Berlin 18200272

[151] For example of coins with legend MATER AUGG, see RIC IV Septimius Severus 562; for coins with legend MATER CASTRORUM see RIC IV Septimius Severus 563A and 563B

Figure 3.5. RIC IV Septimius Severus 562 (denarius). Silver denarius, 196-211CE. Bust of Julia Domna, hair waved and coiled at back, draped, right, IVLIA AVGVSTA / Julia Domna, towered (as Cybele), draped, seated left in quadriga of lions, holding branch in right hand, MAT AVGG Mainz University ID1056.

Figure 3.6. RIC IV Septimius Severus 563B. Silver denarius, 196-211CE. Bust of Julia Domna, hair waved and coiled at back, draped, right, IVLIA AVGVSTA / Julia Domna, draped, standing left, sacrificing out of patera in right hand over altar (around which serpent coils?) and holding sceptre in right hand; to left, three standards, MATER CASTRORVM. ANS 1948.19.1505

The fertility and motherhood of empresses were further highlighted on coin images. After her death, when her role as provider of heirs had been fulfilled, Caligula chose to depict his mother Agrippina the Elder on coinage, naming her as his mother of divine memory (fig. 3.7.)[152] As Agrippina the Elder was the granddaughter of Augustus, Caligula likely saw fit to advertise this connection as well as the importance of the mother figure on his coinage.[153] Hekster notes how the 'emphasis on family and the role of maternal blood ties' legitimised Caligula's position, claiming that it was important for Caligula to emphasise his connections to the imperial family as he was not formally adopted by Tiberius.[154] Agrippina's daughter, Agrippina the Younger, was portrayed on the obverse of coins facing her son, Nero, again

Figure 3.7. RIC I[2] Gaius/Caligula 55. Bronze sestertius 37-41 CE. Bust of Agrippina the Elder, right, her hair falling in queue down her neck, AGRIPPINA M F MAT C CAESARIS AVGVSTI / Carpentum, with ornamented cover and sides, drawn right by two mules, S P Q R MEMORIAE AGRIPPINAE. ANS 1944.100.39318

named as the mother of the emperor (fig. 3.8.)[155] In a Sebasteion Relief from Aphrodisias,

[152] For example, RIC[2] Gaius/Caligula 55. See Wood, 1988: 410
[153] McIntyre, 2010: 111
[154] Hekster, 2015: 122-123
[155] RIC I[2] Nero 1.

Agrippina was also depicted crowning Nero, showing the direct transferral of power from mother to son.[156]

Figure 3.8. RIC I^2 Nero 1. Gold aureus, 54CE. Bust of Nero, bare-headed, right, bust of Agrippina the Younger, draped, hair in long plait, left, facing one another, AGRIPP AVG DIVI CL AVD NERONIS CAES MATER / Legend NERONI CLAVD DIVI F CAES AVG GERM IMP TR P surrounding oak-wreath enclosing EX S C. ANS 1905.57.291

[156] Smith, 1987: Plate XXIV. Hekster argues that since Agrippina's superior height and action of crowning Nero makes her the 'senior member of the family.'

Furthermore, empresses such as Faustina the Younger and Fausta, wife of Constantine I, were frequently depicted on coins with reverses showing themselves or personifications surrounded by young children (figs. 3.9, 3.10 and 3.11).[157] Emperors therefore flaunted the maternal nature of their wives and mothers to display the traditional virtue and duty of the imperial family.

Figure 3.9. RIC III Marcus Aurelius 676. Silver denarius, 161-176CE. Bust of Faustina II, bare-headed, hair waved and fastened in a bun on back of head, draped, right, FAVSTINA AVGVSTA / Fecunditas, draped, standing left between two children reaching up and holding two infants in her arms, FECVND AVGVSTAE. ANS 1956.127.954

[157] For example, Faustina the Younger is depicted on the obverse with a personification of *Fecunditas* on the reverse, who is holding two children with two more children reaching up to her (RIC III Marcus Aurelius 676). Another example has a bust of Faustina the Younger on the obverse, with Faustina also on the reverse holding two infants and surrounded by children standing up (RIC III Marcus Aurelius 718). In a similar fashion, Fausta is depicted on the reverse of some coin types holding two infants (RIC VII Nicomedia 77).

Figure 3.10. RIC III Marcus Aurelius 718. Gold aureus, 161-176 CE. Bust of Faustina II, bare-headed, hair waved and fastened in a bun on back of head, draped, right, FAVSTINA AVGVSTA / Faustina, draped, standing left, holding two infants in her arms; at left and right, a child standing, TEMPOR FELIC. British Museum R.12601

Figure 3.11. RIC VII Nicomedia 77. Gold solidus, struck under Constantine I, 324-325 CE. Bust of Fausta, waved hair, mantled, right, FLAV MAX - FAVSTA AVG / Fausta, veiled, draped, standing front, head left, holding two children in her arms, SALVS REI – PVBLICAE, in exergue: SMN. British Museum 1964,1203.150

The framing of Amalasuntha and Amalafrida as the nurturing mothers of their respective kingdoms therefore indicates a direct continuation in the importance of the Roman *matrona* in Ostrogothic Italy. Other female members of the Ostrogothic monarchy who did not share the Amal blood such as Erelieva and Audofleda appeared in the ancient sources as mothers, for which they received esteem. Roman Imperial females also adopted the role of the *matrona* both to strengthen the idea of the monarchy as a dutiful and virtuous family and to establish their political positions within the acceptable confines of Roman womanhood. Amalasuntha and other female members of the Amal dynasty also legitimised their power through their motherhood both legitimately through their sons and symbolically through their persona as nurturer of the state. The Amal dynasty therefore based the political position of their women on what was both acceptable and revered by their Roman population in order to strengthen the Ostrogothic monarchy.

Chapter 4: Power and Politics

This chapter assesses how Ostrogothic queens both wielded political influence and how their power and public presence were represented. Ostrogothic queens advised and assisted males in the family, intervened in legal cases and took initiatives that demonstrated reverence for Roman culture. These more covert types of political actions mirrored the unofficial mechanisms of power accessed by early Roman Imperial females. The Ostrogothic monarchy placed importance on the roles played by Amalasuntha and Gudeliva in sustaining relations with Constantinople. While formal diplomacy became more common in Late Antiquity, the key diplomatic skills such as negotiation, communication and receiving of embassies were also practised by earlier imperial women. The representations of Amalasuntha and Gudeliva as partners in the monarchy were based on the Roman concept of joint rule. While Roman empresses were more frequently represented on coins and public statues, Ostrogothic queens possessed a similar status and wealth that these coins and statues conveyed. This status is manifested in their patronage of literature and buildings, which again demonstrated their nurturing of Roman culture.

These similarities indicate that Ostrogothic queens helped legitimise the monarchy to their Roman population and explain how Amalasuntha formed alliances and ruled smoothly as regent for almost a decade. The ancient sources depicted them as acting in ways that had been acceptable and expected of a female member of the imperial household. Cassiodorus also tailored his depiction of Amalasuntha to suit nuanced differences in the concepts of female power for old Rome and new Rome. Ancient writers were therefore influenced by Roman concepts of female power in their depiction of Ostrogothic queens.

Wielding of Power

Influence and Intervention

While powerful Roman Imperial females often earned criticism, Roman authors frequently acclaimed the political actions of Ostrogothic queens. These political manoeuvres were acceptable to Roman society because of their unofficial nature and because these queens acted within the confines of ideal Roman womanhood. Ostrogothic queens acted politically through supporting their family, either by advising their husbands or acting as regents. Theoderic described how Thrasamund's wife-to-be, Amalafrida, was 'wondrous in her giving of advice'.[158] Similarly, Theoderic claimed that his niece Amalaberga would 'arrange [the Thuringian] nation with a sweeter manner of living' upon her marriage to Hermanfrid, who would benefit from 'the comfort of [Amalaberga's] faithful advice'.[159] The notion that women could advise their husbands was accepted in both Germanic and Roman societies.[160]

Whereas Amalasuntha wielded political power due to her role as regent and later queen regnant, there is also evidence that Erelieva had political influence as the mother of Theoderic. A fragment of a letter written c.493-496 by Pope Gelasius was addressed to Erelieva:

> 'I hastened to send Peter the *defensor* of the church to petition my lord, your most excellent son the king, with my letters, to feed the poor. Upon his return, I did not cease also to greet your Highness, beseeching you to deign to help the case of the poor for your salvation and the increase of your prosperity.'[161]

This letter testifies that Erelieva was kept informed of at least some political dealings with the Church. Perhaps Gelasius believed that notifying Erelieva of his pleas with Theoderic

[158] Cassiodorus, Variae 5.43.1
[159] Cassiodorus, Variae 4.1.1
[160] Vitiello, 2017: 22
[161] Gelasius, Fragment 36

would lead her to intervene and encourage her son to feed the poor, although Gelasius also acknowledged that Erelieva could do the same and therefore had the means to do so. Erelieva's conversion to Catholicism improved her standing with the Church and allowed Gelasius to approach her. Charitable acts and distributions of largesse were also expected of Roman emperors and empresses, especially Christian empresses who were praised for their philanthropy and Christian piety.

There is more evidence of the political influence of Amal women after Theoderic's death, however. Amalasuntha wielded more political power in her dealings with Italian and East-Roman populations. This was made possible through her role as regent for her son, a position that had precedent in both Constantinople and Italy. Her political actions were further accepted by Roman authors as they revealed her awareness of acceptable concepts of power for Roman Imperial females as well as a deep respect for Roman key values such as *iustitia, civilitas* and regard for the law.

By the end of his reign, Theoderic's relationships with his Roman allies were waning. He received the eastern embassies with hostility and executed Senators on false charges or without proper hearings.[162] His paranoia that these Senators, Symmachus and Boethius, were plotting against him, together with his disregard for Roman justice, further antagonised his Roman population. Conversely, at the beginning of her regency, Amalasuntha rebuilt relations between the Ostrogothic monarchy and the Roman Senate by restoring the families of Boethius and Symmachus to their estates.[163] Additionally, Thompson recognises an edict issued around this time to the Roman people in Athalaric's name as Amalasuntha's initiative, thereby acknowledging her unofficial influence behind the official mantle of her son's

[162] *Anonymus Valesianus,* 86-87; 92
[163] Procopius, Wars 5.2.5 Moorhead, 1986: 116

auctoritas.[164] The edict recalls the glorious Roman past and pledges continuation of Theoderic's earlier policies:

> '…we cause the bearers of this letter to promise you under the sanction of divine witness to protect justice and, with God's blessing, to protect the equitable clemency that nourishes a people, and that before us the law will be equal for Goths and Romans, lest anything become unfair between you, except that the Goths undergo the labours of war for the common weal, while you increase in the peaceful habitation of Rome… Behold, we restore the shining example of Trajan to your age.'[165]

Similarly, Procopius reported Amalasuntha's strong affiliation with her Roman population, claiming while 'she stood at the head of the government, she inflicted punishment upon no Roman in any case either by touching his person or by imposing a fine'.[166] Amalasuntha demonstrated political savvy by earning the support of an important legitimising body in the Roman Senate with promises of *iustitia* and *clementia,* after Theoderic had alienated them.

Amalasuntha's further political actions included official appointments and tactful interventions which were praised for their inconspicuous nature. She appointed Cassiodorus to *Magister Officiorum* and Liberius to *Patricius Praesentalis* and command of the army.[167] Amalasuntha therefore conferred military command on a male supporter instead of upsetting Gothic or Roman customs by assuming this position herself. Theodahad's letters to Justinian and the Roman Senate revealed Amalasuntha's appreciation for *civilitas,* which lay at the heart of Roman culture. To Justinian, he claimed she 'both disposes her own *regnum* with remarkable order and she preserves the agreeability promised to all with firm strength'.[168] To the Senate, he mentioned her skill in discerning matters of importance and pronouncing verdicts at the last moment, thereby framing her political administration as judicious and

[164] Thompson, 1982: 93
[165] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 8.3.4-5
[166] Procopius, *Wars* 5.2.4
[167] Radtki, 2016: 141
[168] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 10.2.2

unassuming.[169] Theodahad had just been appointed by Amalasuntha as co-ruler and was likely glorifying Amalasuntha's political decisions to present this appointment as equally valid. However, he did, with the help of Cassiodorus, sketch her actions as laudable according to the Roman sense of proper political behaviour for women in the monarchy.

Theodahad also reminded the Senate of her high regard for *iustitia*, as he experienced it firsthand when she intervened to stop his unlawful accrual of properties in Tuscany.[170] This case was known in Constantinople, as Procopius described how Amalasuntha called Theodahad to an investigation and compelled him to pay back his acquisitions.[171] Not only are Amalasuntha's actions exercised within the boundaries of acceptable political involvement for Roman Imperial females, but she also revealed a deep respect for Roman culture by cultivating notions of law, *iustitia* and *civilitas* and explicitly supporting the interests of Senatorial families.

Earlier Roman writers similarly viewed the power wielded by Julio-Claudian through to Severan women as acceptable if they were advising male members of the monarchy or intervening on behalf of allies. When these females were considered to have been overzealous in their accumulation of power, they were frequently maligned by ancient writers.[172] Moore argues that Octavia achieved an effective balance by combining Roman ideas of motherhood and family piety with Hellenistic monarchic concepts of female public power.[173] Livia's political actions strongly resembled Amalasuntha's: she intervened with Augustus on behalf of friends and Senators, offered advice to her husband and son and

[169] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 10.4.6
[170] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 10.4.4
[171] Procopius, *Wars* 5.4.1-2
[172] See Chapter 5 for how Cassiodorus convinces the Senate that Amalasuntha is emphatically not over-meddling in politics.
[173] Moore, 2021: 376

appointed officials.[174] For example, Tacitus reported that she intervened on behalf of her friend Urgulania in a court case.[175] Ovid hoped Livia would intercede to recover him from exile, although he acknowledged that it was formally the emperor's decision.[176] Dio included a long passage where Livia supported and counselled Augustus, and Suetonius recorded that Tiberius did not want to publicly appear to heed his mother's advice, although occasionally he needed it and followed it.[177] Livia therefore exercised power through indirect channels such as her husband and son and by intervening legally, like the Ostrogothic queens. Gelasius' expectation that Erelieva could intervene and persuade Theoderic to feed the poor therefore stemmed from the established idea that women intervened and advised their husbands and sons.

Subsequent *Augustae* pushed the boundaries by participating more in imperial administration. Tacitus called Agrippina the Younger's act of sitting in state before Roman standards an unprecedented innovation.[178] He also commented on her intervention with Claudius to give Burrus the command of the Praetorian Guard and to recall Seneca from exile and appoint him to the praetorship.[179] De le Bodeyere assesses Agrippina's influence as effective, as Claudius' administration improved.[180] Plotina convinced her husband Trajan to make the processes for solving disputes with the imperial treasury more accessible.[181] Dio claimed Julia Domna also gave her son Caracalla advice, to the extent that he put her in charge of petitions and his correspondence in both languages, except for very important matters.[182] While scholars interpret Julia's astute behaviour as a rhetorical foil for

[174] Kunst, 2021: 392
[175] Tacitus, *Annals* 2.34
[176] Ovid *Ex Ponto* 3.1.110-130
[177] Dio, *Roman History* 55.14-21, Suetonius, *Life of Tiberius* 50.2
[178] Tacitus, *Annals* 12.37.4
[179] Tacitus, *Annals* 12.42, 12.8; Boatwright 2021: 41
[180] De la Bodeyere, 2018: 211
[181] Burns, 2007: 111
[182] Dio, *Roman History*, 78.18.2

Caracalla's immorality, it shows that imperial females could access important positions in the administration while their sons were otherwise indisposed – just as Amalasuntha did with Athalaric.[183] Dio praised Julia's advice and assistance as 'excellent', only frowning when she desired too much power, which he ascribed to her downfall.[184] De la Bodeyere argues that the power empresses could wield was less prescribed, allowing them a certain flexibility.[185] Roman Imperial women acted within the boundaries of what was acceptable for wives and mothers, with certain later empresses building upon and stretching what was possible.

Although Cassiodorus reminded the Roman Senate that there had been a previous female regent in the example of Galla Placidia, the idea of a female regent was more prevalent in Constantinople.[186] The development of New Rome with its imperial spaces, court rituals and the concept of a Christian monarchy allowed women to explore more prominent political roles.[187] Julian's *Panegyric to Eusebia* attests to more public power for women. Julian mentioned how Eusebia both conferred honour and offices on 'countless persons', and personally investigated Julian's charges and intervened with her husband, Constantius II, on Julian's behalf.[188] Further female members of the imperial monarchy who gained considerable power were Theodosius II's sisters, especially Pulcheria. The Ecclesiastical Historian Sozomen observed how Pulcheria 'governed the Roman Empire excellently and with great orderliness; she concerted her measures so well that the affairs to be carried out were quickly decreed and completed.'[189] Pulcheria was therefore praised for efficiency and discretion, for which Amalasuntha also earned praise. Holum also notes that Sozomen

[183] Scott, 2017: 424
[184] Dio, *Roman History*, 79.23-24
[185] De la Bodeyere, 2018: 7-8
[186] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 11.1.9
[187] Herrin, 2000: 5-6
[188] Julian, *Panegyric to Eusebia*, 115, 118
[189] Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, 9.1

assured readers that Pulcheria handled affairs in the name of her brother, for whom she acted as guardian ('επιτροπος').[190] Vitiello observes that Procopius used the same word to describe Amalasuntha, which indicates a continuation of Roman female power models in Italy and emphasises Amalasuntha's role as guardian of the state.[191] Furthermore, as Theodosius II appointed Galla Placidia regent for the West on behalf of her son Valentinian III, it is therefore likely that the concept of female regency was more accepted in Constantinople.[192] Frankforter claims that due to these examples, the east-Romans believed it was conceivable for a woman to hold the position of regent for Italy, as the east-Romans considered the ruler of Italy at the time as a kind of regent for the empire.[193]

Diplomacy

Ostrogothic queens further wielded power by negotiating, especially with the Byzantine court at Constantinople. As with the Senate of Rome, relations between Italy and Constantinople were 'at a low ebb' at Theoderic's death.[194] Successful negotiation with Byzantium was also crucial following the conquest of the Vandals, as Italy was now enclosed by Byzantine forces to the east and south.[195] The fact that Amalasuntha was able to repair and sustain diplomacy with Justinian during a tense time once again shows her political aptitude. Using clues from *The Variae* and Procopius' *Wars,* Vitiello has already demonstrated convincingly how Amalasuntha restored this relationship to the extent that Justinian both recognised her as queen regent of Italy and established a protective guardianship over her.[196]

[190] Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, 9.1.5-6; Holum, 1982: 91, 97
[191] Procopius, *Wars* 5.2.3; Vitiello, 2017: 36
[192] Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History* 7.24
[193] Frankforter, 1996: 47
[194] Browning, 2003: 102
[195] Vitiello, 2014: 61
[196] Vitiello, 2017. Also, Cameron, 1993: 108 calls Amalasuntha Justinian's protégée

Procopius emphasised this protective relationship by framing Amalasuntha's murder as a *casus belli* for Justinian's invasion of Italy, which Cooper argues is 'one of the places where historical veracity is eclipsed by narrative impulse'.[197] While this may be the case, Procopius also acknowledged Amalasuntha's role in maintaining this relationship, claiming Amalasuntha 'cultivated the friendship of Justinian very carefully, and she gave heed to his commands in all matters and at that time promised to provide a market for his army and did so'.[198] Procopius also included letters sent between Belisarius and Amalasuntha which were probably not verbatim but resembled the dealings between Amalasuntha and Justinian. Belisarius threatened Amalasuntha because she claimed the fortress city of Lilybaeum, allowed runaway Byzantine slaves to remain in Italy and treated the city of Gratiana outrageously.[199] Amalasuntha's response was forceful: without buckling at his threats, she justified her claim over Lilybaeum and explicitly reminded the emperor of the indispensable aid she provided him during his Vandal conquests.[200] While Amalasuntha spoke on behalf of Athalaric, the Byzantine envoys approached her and she was authorised to respond.[201] Although not commanding the army herself, she took military decisions by aiding Justinian's army.

Cassiodorus omitted Justinian's letters to Amalasuntha from his collection, therefore only one side of the diplomacy is accessible nowadays. The few letters which Cassiodorus included from Amalasuntha and Theodahad's wife Gudeliva to Justinian and Theodora, however, provide insight as to how these women conducted diplomacy. Cassiodorus' panegyric supports Procopius' observation that Amalasuntha received envoys herself, as Amalasuntha's knowledge of three languages, Greek, Gothic and Latin, allowed her to hear

[197] Cooper, 2016: 296
[198] Procopius, *Wars* 3.14.6
[199] Procopius, *Wars* 5.3.17-18
[200] Procopius, *Wars* 5.3.19-27. Amalasuntha claimed Lilybaeum because it had 'belonged to the Goths from ancient times' and had been part of Amalafrida's dowry upon her marriage to the Vandal king.
[201] Procopius, *Wars* 5.3.16

envoys without an interpreter.[202] Not only does Amalasuntha's extensive Roman education in languages facilitate her political authority, but this statement also attests to the diplomacy of royal women as they received envoys.

La Rocca notes that Amalasuntha used 'terms such as '*dilectio*' and '*amicitia*', characteristic of the language of kinship' without indicating that Italy was officially under Justinian's control.[203] The letters do have a deferential tone however, showing respect for the emperor without being overly flattering. This balance is evident in phrases such as 'most clement *princeps*', 'bearing duly reverent greetings', 'harmony with you ennobles me absolutely', and 'we wholly appreciate your benevolence to be well-disposed to us'.[204]

Another of Amalasuntha's letters to Justinian, which negotiated the delivery of marble, expressed immense gratitude for this action, claiming 'our adornment is to your glory'.[205] Furthermore, Amalasuntha's letter to Theodora speaks of hope of concord between Amalasuntha and Theodora, thus indicating Amalasuntha's belief that diplomacy with Constantinople involved friendship with the empress as well as the emperor.[206] Amalasuntha's tone and language in her diplomatic letters therefore fit what Gillett describes as the *amicitia* cultivated by epistolary correspondence between rulers.[207] Amalasuntha's diplomatic methods were based on the Roman tradition of elite friendship, with language suggesting she is under Justinian's protection and works alongside him according to his interests, as opposed to an outright declaration of her dominance and right to rule Italy.

Theodahad's consort Gudeliva was another Ostrogothic queen trusted with diplomacy. Though without the power afforded to Amalasuntha as regent, Gudeliva also corresponded

[202] Cassiodorus, Variae 11.1.6-7
[203] La Rocca, 2012: 137
[204] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 10.1
[205] Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 10.8
[206] Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 10.10
[207] Gillett, 2003: 181

with Theodora.[208] An excerpt from one of Gudeliva's two letters to Theodora highlights the importance of the empress' approval to successful diplomatic relations with Constantinople:

> 'we have taken care that the respectable legation of our lord husband must be directed specifically to your healthful eminence through *ille*, so that, returning our affection to your serenity, he may bring delight regarding the preservation of peace and he may cause us to rejoice in celebration of a secured favour. For by such an advantage both the order of affairs is well-disposed and the twin affection of your tranquility is increased. Therefore, may we receive the goodness of your heart, since it is a truly royal purpose to enjoy the glorious affection of all people.'[209]

Frankforter argues that letters between queens instead served as channels of undercover information, disguised as idle gossip when read aloud to a public audience.[210] Parts of Gudeliva's letters were vague as they referred to matters to be discussed by the envoys. For example, Gudeliva claimed 'a situation of importance has emerged which ought to make us even more dependent upon your sense of equity.'[211] Frankforter claims that the cryptic nature of Gudeliva's letters confirms the secret assassination of Amalasuntha, which Procopius claimed Theodora had ordered.[212] While scholars still debate the extent of Theodora's involvement in Amalasuntha's death, Procopius' passage was one in a sea of attempts to vilify Theodora. [213] Claiming she murdered a just, Roman-like queen under Justinian's protection out of jealousy seemed an effective way to do so.[214] Perhaps Cassiodorus edited out the nature of the agreement, leaving it deliberately vague so that his friends could more easily use the letters as a template for acceptable diplomatic rhetoric.[215] Whatever the true

[208] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 10.21 and 10.24
[209] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 10.24.2
[210] Frankforter, 1996: 50
[211] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 10.21.2
[212] Frankforter, 1996: 50 cites "be advised that things have been arranged as, we believe, will be agreeable to your understanding" from Var. 10.20, a letter written from Theodahad to Theodora, as proof of their shared conspiracy to murder Amalasuntha. This letter was accompanied by an epistle from Gudeliva: Cassiodorus, *Variae* 10.21. Also, Procopius, *Secret History,* 16.1-5
[213] See for example, Vitiello, 2014: 109; Frankforter, 1996: 50; Browning, 2003: 106; Lee, 2009
[214] The Roman nature of Amalasuntha's rule as described by Procopius is in line with his attempt to justify Justinian's invasion of Italy after Amalasuntha's death – her Roman rule of Italy died with her and Italy would need to be reorganised. See also Boy, 2017.
[215] This was Cassiodorus' stated purpose in collecting the letters of the Variae, as mentioned in his preface.

nature of the letters, the fact remains that Gudeliva was entrusted to play a role in diplomacy by facilitating a friendship with Theodora. Even though it is assumed Cassiodorus wrote the letters, the monarchy chose to send them in Gudeliva's name, with the expectation that the involvement of the queen would carry weight. This assignment indicates a level of political influence, a role of the king's wife which went beyond that of an advisor to her husband.

Ostrogothic queens negotiated in ways that earlier Roman Imperial women also practiced. Becker-Piriou argues that in the early empire, official diplomacy was lacking independent of war, although the key cruxes of successful diplomacy included networking and communication, sometimes through unofficial channels. The unofficial nature of the power of Roman empresses, such as Livia's interventions with Augustus and in the law courts, demonstrated their capability to communicate and negotiate effectively. Octavia was famously trusted, on her own initiative, as a negotiator between Octavian and Antony, using her close relationship with the two to facilitate diplomacy.[216] Agrippina the Elder networked to her advantage, forming an alliance with Senators in opposition to Sejanus.[217] Like Amalasuntha and Gudeliva, Agrippina the Younger 'received various embassies and sent letters to peoples, governors and kings' early in her son's reign.[218] Julia Domna's charge of letters 'in both languages' indicates she was communicating with people across the empire. Although the roots of diplomatic negotiation are visible in the nature of power wielded by early Roman Imperial females, the potential political influence in diplomacy available to women continued to evolve in Late Antiquity.

When Galla Placidia was captured by the Visigoths in 410, she enhanced their knowledge of Roman culture and was the object of negotiations between the Romans and the

[216] Plutarch, *Life of Antony*, 31.2; 35.1-4; Moore, 2021: 378
[217] Hallett, 2012: 376
[218] Dio, *Roman History*, 61.3.2

Visigoths.[219] During her regency, Placidia adopted a more active role in diplomacy, writing letters to her nephew Theodosius II, to whom she referred as her son, asking for aid against the Vandal invasion.[220] Placidia's daughter Honoria also sent a secret message to Attila the Hun asking to be saved from an arranged marriage.[221] These moves speak more of personal wishes as opposed to diplomatic moves to improve relations between two states. The monarchy at Constantinople also allowed women to adopt a more official, active role in diplomacy. In a similar manner to Amalasuntha, Eudoxia used deferential adjectives to describe St Peter and Leo in her letters.[222] Hillner mentions Pope Leo's correspondence with Pulcheria, in which he asked Pulcheria to persuade Theodosius II to accept Leo's proposal of a new council to meet in Italy, and Pulcheria responded by outlining her progress.[223] The letters to Theodora sent by Gudeliva, Theodahad and Amalasuntha confirm that the empress was also involved in diplomatic negotiations, and she perhaps replied.[224] The ability of women to act in official diplomacy actively rather than passively, especially in the East shows that Ostrogothic queens adopted a role expected of female members of the Roman monarchy. Ostrogothic queens wielded the political influence that was available to Roman women, and the way they represented their power also draws upon Roman models of female power.

Representations of Power

The Ostrogothic queens engaged in patronage, framed their political manoeuvres as part of a joint rule and were portrayed using certain rhetorical stereotypes, which had also been used to describe Roman Imperial females. Though Ostrogothic queens did not appear on coinage

[219] Orosius, *History* 7.43; Harlow, 2004: 143-144
[220] Hillner, 2019
[221] Discussed in Herrin, 2016: 19. Jordanes, *Getica*, 224 mentioned Honoria dispatched a eunuch envoy to Attila 'for protection against her brother's power'
[222] Hillner, 2019: 360
[223] Holum, 1982: 204-211
[224] Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 10.10, 10.20, 10.21, 10.23, 10.24

or as frequently in public statues, the ways these queens both displayed their political positions and how they were depicted by the ancient sources, indicates that once again the Ostrogothic monarchy learned from Roman empresses in their establishment of the political positions of the Ostrogothic royal women.

Joint Monarchy

While queens such as Amalasuntha and Gudeliva exercised power through their husbands and sons (see earlier), ancient writers also represented them as ruling alongside male members of the monarchy. Moorhead argues that the Ostrogothic subjects perceived joint rule as Roman as opposed to Germanic, as this form of power was lacking in Germanic societies until the sixth century.[225] Roman Imperial society had more explicit representations of joint rule in Late Antiquity, although there are also hints of this depiction in the early empire.

Expression of the concept of joint rule was most apparent in the Ostrogothic monarchy's use of twin letters. Twin letters were two epistles, one sent from the male and one sent from the female in the partnership. The two letters contained similar content, with the female's letter typically restating the objective of the male's letter. This second letter therefore expressed the female's support of the male's endeavour and indicated her input and knowledge of the political decision. Dispatching twin letters demonstrated collaboration between members of the monarchy to the receiving party.

Both Amalasuntha and Gudeliva's correspondence with the Senate of Rome and Constantinople was accompanied by a letter from Theodahad on the same subject. Notable examples of these twin letters include the announcement of Theodahad's appointment to the co-regency to Constantinople and the Roman Senate respectively, as well as the expression

[225] Moorhead, 2017: 132

of gratitude for the marble delivery to Justinian.[226] La Rocca argues that Amalasuntha's and Theodahad's twin letters subverted gender roles by placing Amalasuntha as the powerful king and Theodahad as the supportive consort.[227] Cassiodorus further inverted gender roles by sending the main letter announcing Theodahad's appointment to Justinian from Amalasuntha, accompanied by Theodahad's twin letter supporting her decision. Vitiello supports this argument by observing that Amalasuntha's letters precede Theodahad's in *The Variae* collection.[228] The use of gendered language indicates a subordinance of one of the parties in the joint rule, therefore likening it to the practice of having senior and junior emperors in Late Antiquity.[229]

The groups of twin letters announcing Theodahad's appointment delivered to the Roman Senate and to Constantinople differ slightly. The letters to the Roman Senate strongly allude to a co-monarchy between Amalasuntha and Theodahad with both members ruling equally. Cassiodorus achieved this by having Amalasuntha list Theodahad's many credentials which would convince the Italian elites of Theodahad's suitability to rule Italy. Not only did Theodahad possess *nobilitas, moderatia, patientia*, he displayed an astute sense of justice and was thoroughly educated in both literature and ecclesiastical texts.[230] Cassiodorus further represents their rule as a joint monarchy by referring to shared power and using imagery of pairs:

> With God's guidance, we have chosen the most fortunate Theodahad as partner in our regnum, so that we, who thus far have borne the mass of the republic by our singular deliberation, may now pursue the common weal with conjoined counsels, to the extent that by the efforts of two, we may be known as one in thought. The very stars of heaven are governed by shared assistance, and under their illumination they direct the world by the exchange of shared labours. Likewise, divine providence conferred two hands, paired ears and twin eyes, upon humanity, so that work that

[226] Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 10.1 and 10.2; 10.3 and 10.4; 10.8 and 10.9
[227] La Rocca, 2012
[228] Vitiello, 2014: 63
[229] Vitiello, 2017: 137
[230] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 10.3.3-7

> must be completed by the agreement of two would be accomplished more effectively.[231]

By contrast, Amalasuntha's letter to Justinian encourages the emperor to accept her choice of co-ruler based not on Theodahad's merits, but upon the trust Justinian had in Amalasuntha and her hope of harmony between the two *regna.*[232] Amalasuntha wished Justinian:

> 'would advance the peace, which always occupies your mind and which you already retain for me especially, to be confirmed by the addition to my household. For given that the concord of Principes would always be preferred, harmony with you ennobles me absolutely, when a man [Theodahad] committed to your glory without reservation is elevated so greatly.'[233]

As discussed, late antique Constantinople was familiar with more public displays of power by imperial females, for example, their active roles in diplomacy, their positions as regents and their involvement in administration. This familiarity is reflected in how Amalasuntha reminded Justinian of how she had fostered their diplomatic relationship and could also be the reason why Justinian took his diplomatic relations with a female ruler seriously. It is also reflected in Procopius' assertion that Theodahad was a mere figurehead and Amalasuntha intended to continue ruling as she had done before, and why Justinian dispatched an envoy declaring his support of Amalasuntha's rule after Athalaric's death.[234]

This familiarity with female public power could also explain the decision to represent Theodahad and Gudeliva's partnership in the form of twin letters also. No twin letters from Gudeliva and Theodahad sent to Rome or Justinian were included in the collection, suggesting that Amalasuntha's ability to send supporting letters to these audiences stemmed from her position as regent.[235] After Amalasuntha's death, Theodahad and Gudeliva

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[231] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 10.3.2
[232] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 10.1. Amalasuntha does mention Theodahad's Amal blood and his wisdom, though does not include the myriad of merits she discloses to the Roman senate
[233] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 10.1.2
[234] Procopius, *Wars* 5.4.8, 5.4.22
[235] On the other hand, since precedent for a partnership existed between husbands and wives as well as mothers in sons in the early empire, these letters could have existed and Cassiodorus simply chose not to include them in the collection.

dispatched twin letters to Theodora in 535, which aimed to cultivate *amicitia* with the empress.[236] This continuation therefore suggests that this partnership was apparent not only with a queen regent and her choice of co-ruler but with a king and his consort. Procopius also mentioned that Gudeliva together with Theodahad gave oaths to the Byzantine envoy Peter in 536 to 'retire the kingship in favour of Justinian'.[237] Giving oaths together presents a united front, which signified the importance of the king's wife in the monarchy. This anecdote revealed that the eastern empire recognised the Ostrogothic king and queen as a joint monarchy. Hillner argues that the decision to use twin letters reflected a male and female partnership that occurred in Late Antiquity, especially in Constantinople.[238] These partnerships were similarly reinforced by twin letters, for example, those sent by Pulcheria and Marcian as well as Galla Placidia and Honorius.[239] Both Amalasuntha's letter to Justinian and the twin letters sent by Gudeliva and Theodahad indicated that the Ostrogothic monarchy was familiar with eastern imperial concepts of female power, and tailored their correspondence according to these concepts. The idea of joint rule was apparent even during Justinian's reign, as his wife Theodora was involved in administrative decisions and, as we have seen, in diplomacy.

The Ostrogothic twin letters were therefore based on a direct precedent of Roman monarchical power, however, the concept of a ruling partnership that the epistles conveyed existed to some extent in the early empire. Livia added her name to Tiberius' correspondence for a short period and passed Senatorial decrees alongside Tiberius.[240] Though the pair did not send separate letters, the inclusion of Livia's name suggests her counsel and approval in

[236] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 10.20 and 10.21; 10.23 and 10.24
[237] Procopius, *Wars*, 5.6.11
[238] Hillner, 2019: 354; Vitiello, 2017: 138. A contemporary example was Theodora and Justinian.
[239] Hillner, 2019; Salisbury, 2015: 126
[240] Bertolazzi, 2015: 421; Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, 56.47.1

political matters as well as collegiality between mother and son. De la Bodeyere argues that Livia and Augustus were depicted as co-rulers in eastern areas such as Thrace where this concept was more widespread, and a Roman empress would not be depicted this way in Rome until Agrippina the Younger.[241] For example, Agrippina and Claudius were portrayed together on the obverse of some numismatic issues during Claudius' reign (fig. 4.1).[242]Agrippina and Nero were also depicted together on issues from Nero's early reign (fig. 3.8).[243] Replicating specific concepts on coinage also validated Nero's new issues as they were familiar to the public. Therefore, re-using this idea of joint monarchy on Nero's coinage signified both a continuation of a form of power and that the public recognised this concept. Tacitus reported that Agrippina saw herself as a partner in the empire.[244] Just as Gudeliva and Theodahad gave oaths to Justinian together, Agrippina and Claudius together received declarations of obeisance from the Celtic chief Caratacus and his family, who had been pardoned.[245] Furthermore, Scott interprets Dio's use of the term 'αρχη' in connection with Julia Domna as an implication that the empress acted as a kind of regent.[246]

[241] De la Bodeyere, 2018: 120
[242] For example, RIC I^2 Claudius 119
[243] For example, RIC I^2 Nero 1
[244] Tacitus, *Annals*, 12.37.4
[245] Tacitus, *Annals*, 12.37; Burns, 2007: 65
[246] Scott, 2017: 419

Figure 4.1. Obverse type of RIC I^2 Claudius 119. Silver cistophorus 50-51 CE. Head of Claudius, laureate, right, and Agrippina the Younger, bare, jugate, left, TI CLAVD CAES AVG AGRIPP AVGVSTA. Berlin Münzkabinett 18213947

The hints of co-monarchy in the early Roman Empire explain why Amalasuntha and Theodahad sent twin letters to the Roman Senate, not just the court of Constantinople. The lengthy list of Theodahad's attributes overshadowed Amalasuntha's involvement in politics and showed her support for her cousin. These ideas reflected the more traditional republican concepts of acceptable female power which were more prevalent in the early empire, such as the unofficial, discreet power for royal women and the value in supporting the family. The different ways that Cassiodorus tailored the announcement of Amalasuntha and Theodahad's joint rule according to what he deemed was more acceptable to his respective audiences suggests that old Rome and new Rome had nuanced differences in their conceptions of female power. The deliberate tailoring of how royal females were portrayed according to

what different Roman audiences expected indicates that the Ostrogothic monarchy represented the females with reference to Roman concepts of female power.

Patronage, Wealth and Status

Another role of the Roman empress that Ostrogothic queens adopted was as patronesses of Roman culture, notably literature. Shortly before his death, Theoderic commissioned Cassiodorus to compose a Gothic History that detailed the pedigree of the Amal dynasty. The work is now lost, although we know Cassiodorus completed it under Amalasuntha's patronage.[247] Herrin highlights how Amalasuntha further continued Theoderic's legacy through patronage: both through building and support of writers and education.[248] Athalaric's letter to the Roman Senate, which Herrin interprets as Amalasuntha's initiative, demonstrated the value of Roman education by assuring that the incomes of grammar, rhetoric and law teachers remained secure.[249] Significantly, the letter also stressed the importance of this education for Roman culture, by emphasising that 'barbarian kings do not employ this… For other nations have arms too; eloquence is found only in obedience to masters of the Romans.'[250] This reminder set Amalasuntha and Athalaric apart from other barbarian rulers by illustrating that they were patrons of Roman ways of life, as well as Roman educators.

Furthermore, Amalasuntha's letter thanking Justinian for his supply of marble indicates that she had a building program.[251] Herrin's observation that Ravenna at the time was built of local brick, with Theoderic's mausoleum a notable exception, therefore reveals that Amalasuntha's marble constructions would have been prominent.[252] Although the purpose

[247] Herrin, 2020: 140
[248] Herrin, 2020
[249] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 9.21
[250] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 9.21.4
[251] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 10.8. Also *Variae* 10.9 is a letter from Theodahad about the same subject.
[252] Herrin, 2020: 137

of this building is unclear, scholars suggest it was a church.[253] If so, Amalasuntha also supported the Church like her grandmother Erelieva did.[254] Bjornlie notes that the vagueness of these letters suggests a purpose other than instruction in bureaucratic writing, remaining undecided as to why they were included.[255] The inclusion of these letters likely followed Cassiodorus' true purpose in convincing Constantinople that he worked for a solidly Roman government. Perhaps this inclusion of marble construction recalled Augustus' famous claim that he 'found Rome a city of bricks and left it a city of marble', thereby linking Amalasuntha with the glorious Roman past.[256] These letters reveal that Amalasuntha echoed the actions of her father and Roman rulers by demonstrating care for the city's urban and religious development. Amalasuntha's patronage of Ravenna and of aspects of Roman culture reflected her role as nurturer of the state.

Ostrogothic queens differed from Roman empresses in their lack of presence in public statues and coinage. The consular diptych of Orestes is a confirmed visual representation of Amalasuntha, which Vitiello has persuasively argued has iconographic similarities to Empress Ariadne's portraits.[257] Another indication of public presence is Theodenanda's inscription, which Vitiello and Amory believe was originally in Rome.[258] The inscription refers to Theodananda with Roman names and titles, such as 'Fl[avia] Amala Amalafrida Theodenanda [c]larissima [f]emina'.[259] Vitiello further argues that Theodenanda and her

[253] Johnson, 2016: 359; Bjornlie 2012: 251 suggests it could have been San Vitale.
[254] See also Craddock, 1996 for Amalasuntha's religious policy
[255] Bjornlie, 2012: 251
[256] Suetonius, *Life of Augustus,* 28.3
[257] Vitiello, 2017: chapter 5
[258] Vitiello, 2014: 135; Amory 1997: 457
[259] See Vitiello, 2014: 272 note. 275 for the transcription of the inscription.

mother Gudeliva also accompanied Theodahad on his *adventus* to Rome, thereby presenting themselves as a monarchy to the Roman public.[260]

These examples show that Ostrogothic queens had a degree of public presence, although not to the extent of some of the Roman *Augustae*. Unlike many Roman Imperial females, there are no confirmed examples of Ostrogothic queens on coinage. Scholars have attributed a monogram on the reverse of some issues bearing Justinian's image to Matasuntha, although this remains unconfirmed.[261] Despite Theodora's political prominence, she was not depicted on coins either. Theoderic typically minted coins in the image of the Byzantine emperor, perhaps to demonstrate a sense of harmony.[262] The omission of Ostrogothic queens on coinage therefore suggests a continuation of Theoderic's policy or that the Italian mints followed Byzantine minting practices.

Coinage and public statues indicate that Roman Imperial females had a privileged, royal status, which the Ostrogothic queens possessed in other ways. Amalafrida's dowry, Erelieva's means to feed the poor, Justinian's planned sumptuous receipt of Amalasuntha upon her planned arrival in Constantinople, and Justinian's betrothal of Matasuntha to Germanus are examples which demonstrate the wealth and noble status of the Ostrogothic females. Although the Ostrogothic queens did not have the extent of public presence that Roman Imperial females did, their royal statuses, which symbolised the wealth and power of the Ostrogothic monarchy, are confirmed in other ways.

Like Amalasuntha, Roman Imperial females engaged in patronage such as building programs and support of education which showed a deep nurturing of Roman virtues and religion. Patronage indicated a level of political influence which Roman women wielded

[260] Vitiello, 2014: 135
[261] Grierson, 1959, instead attributes this monogram to Mastinas, King of the Moors and Romans.
[262] Arnold, 2014: 84-85. Arnold states there are some exceptions of coins with images and legends of Theoderic and his successors, such as the Senigallia Medallion.

independently through the accumulation and distribution of wealth.[263] De la Bodeyere argues that Livia mirrored Augustus' restoration of republican virtues through her building program, especially her restoration of the ancient temple of Bona Dea Subsaxana.[264] Bricks stamped 'from the brickyards of Domitia, wife of Domitian' from 123 indicated that Domitia facilitated urban development in Rome, long after her husband's assassination in 96.[265] Agrippina the Younger supported Seneca, while Hadrian's wife Sabina was the patron of the poet Balbilla.[266]

Similarly, Julia Domna also encouraged the construction and restoration of structures relating to the family.[267] Her inscription at Ephesus shows her piety, her care for the people and cities and her passion for learning:

> 'I join in the prayer of all cities and all peoples
> to receive (benefactions) from my dear son, the emperor,
> especially in the case of your city on account of (its magnificence)
> and beauty and the rest of its endowment and because of the fact that
> it is a school for those who come from anywhere to its seat of learning.'[268]

Furthermore, Helena, mother of Constantine promoted Christianity through her construction and adorning of churches such as that at Bethlehem. Julian's statement that Eusebia had not forsaken ancient Greek cities such as Athens, Sparta or Corinth symbolised her regard for ancient philosophy and education.[269] Galla Placidia commissioned a church to St John the Evangelist in Ravenna, adorning it with decorations that emphasised her dynastic connections to the Constantinian family, mirroring both Amalasuntha's building program and patronage of Cassiodorus' Gothic History.[270] Additionally, like Amalasuntha's financial

[263] McNamara and Wemple, 1988: 84
[264] De la Bodeyere, 2018: 122
[265] Burns, 2007: 100
[266] Levick, 2014: 25
[267] Gorrie, 2004: 65
[268] trans. Tuori, 2016: pg. 191 note. 45
[269] Julian, *Panegyric to Eusebia*, 119
[270] Harlow, 2004: 138

support of Roman educators, Holum states that Eudocia 'took an interest in stabilising academic life in the dynastic city and in honouring successful teachers'.[271] Amalasuntha therefore represented her power through the distribution of her wealth, by supporting organisations and virtues which promoted Roman culture and values, an action for which Roman empresses were lauded.

While scholars argue that Amalasuntha had political similarities with late antique eastern *Augustae*, the concepts used in how her power and status were represented, as part of a joint rule and through patronage and displays of wealth, were also prevalent in the early empire. The negotiation skills and receiving of embassies, as well as the more covert nature of power these queens wielded, also suggests that they were aware of the expectations and limitations of the political power of Roman Imperial females. These examples therefore demonstrate that Amalasuntha and other Ostrogothic royal females represented their power by continuing imperial traditions which were founded on republican values, and would have been understood by their Italian audience, not just their counterparts in Constantinople. The nuanced differences that existed between how the power of Ostrogothic royal women was represented to both eastern Roman and Italian audiences reinforce the point that the Ostrogothic monarchy, with Cassiodorus' help, deliberately tailored the images of these queens to suit their Roman audiences.

[271] Holum, 1982: 126

Chapter 5: Ideal Roman Women

Ostrogothic royal women strengthened the public image of the monarchy by adopting Roman virtues which recalled late republican and early imperial family values. Augustus similarly encouraged the public prominence of the women in his family to display them as models of feminine virtue. The portrayal of Ostrogothic queens as ideal Roman women to legitimise the monarchy to the Roman population indicates that the Amals reconstructed the Roman monarchy, not just the Roman emperor.

While most Amal women were only referred to briefly in the ancient sources, their Roman virtues were the key features of those references. Cassiodorus chose to include the ideal nature of Ostrogothic women when both writing his letters and publishing his collection. Cassiodorus was under Amalasuntha's patronage and favourably portrayed her according to gender expectations informed by his Roman context. Strengthening the monarchy would safeguard Cassiodorus' position. Also, by painting female members of the Ostrogothic monarchy as ideal Roman matrons, he assured members of the Byzantine court that he worked for a family which resembled the Roman monarchy.[272]

Ostrogothic queens displayed a combination of virtues that surpassed the models of Roman empresses. The emphasis on their Roman education and particularly an Italian upbringing also made these virtues appear genuine as they were learned and mastered. Also, Procopius and Cassiodorus were influenced by Roman models of female power as they assured that Ostrogothic queens did not fit into the negative stereotypes and vices of women in power.

[272] This is in line with Cassiodorus' true purpose in collecting and publishing the letters. He attempted to protect himself and his position by showing to Justinian he did the right thing by supporting a Roman monarchy as opposed to a barbarian ruler who maligned Roman culture. This was important as the Byzantine Empire was at war with Ostrogothic Italy. *The Variae* was therefore carefully curated to show the Roman nature of the Amals disguised behind an intent to publish model bureaucratic letters for his friends. See Bjornlie, 2012: 5 and Heather, 2013: 53-55

Education

The Ostrogothic monarchy established the ideal nature of its royal women by emphasising their Roman education. Heather notes that education through classical literature, as well as codified law, signified Roman culture and set Romans apart from other cultural groups.[273] Theoderic's letter to Hermanfred, composed by Cassiodorus, highlighted Amalafrida's education 'which Italy has nourished', noting her knowledge of letters as well as her polished behaviour.[274] Theoderic asserted that Amalaberga's 'feminine dignity' would allow her new country to 'glitter in her very habits', thereby stressing how Amalaberga's image would glorify the monarchy into which she was marrying.[275] Vitiello argues that the pattern of instruction of the Amal women resembled the education of the Roman elite, shown for example in Theodenanda's composition of elegiac couplets which demonstrated her knowledge of literary form and genre.[276] Theodahad's admiration for ancient wisdom and literature was therefore also fostered in his daughter, showing the extent of Roman education in women in the Ostrogothic monarchy who were not as politically active as Amalasuntha.

Cassiodorus also highlighted Amalasuntha's thorough education, especially to the Roman Senate. Vitiello argues that Amalasuntha's Roman education was nurtured as she was born and raised in Italy and 'became deeply familiar with imperial modes of government' due to her proximity to Theoderic in the palace at Ravenna.[277] Cassiodorus called attention to Amalasuntha's flawless eloquence in three languages: Latin, Gothic and Greek, to symbolise her fitness to rule the different populations in Italy.[278] Fauvinet-Ranson remarks that Amalasuntha's knowledge of Greek set her apart from many Romans as it had become rarer

[273] Heather, 2013: 56
[274] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 4.1.2
[275] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 4.1.2
[276] Vitiello, 2006: 400
[277] Vitiello, 2017: 6
[278] Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 11.1.6

at the time.[279] Amalasuntha's instruction in Greek was therefore closer to early imperial education than it was to sixth-century Italian education.

'Conjoined to these qualities, as though an extraordinary diadem', Cassiodorus continued, 'is a priceless familiarity with literature, through which, since it teaches the wisdom of the ancients, her royal dignity is ever increased'.[280] Like Amalaberga, Cassiodorus explicitly stated that Amalasuntha's Roman learning enhanced her royal image. Cassiodorus' metaphor which equates Amalasuntha's rich learning with a diadem, a symbol of Roman Imperial power, also contributes to this royal image.

Another letter to the Roman Senate penned by Cassiodorus in Theodahad's name further described Amalasuntha's intellect:

> hinc est quod eius doctrina mirabilis per multiplices linguas magna ubertate diffunditur, cuius ingenium ita paratum reperitur ad subitum, ut non putetur esse terrenum. in libris regum regina austri venisse legitur ad discendam sapientiam Salomonis: hic principes audiant quod sub ammiratione cognoscant. paucis verbis sensus clauditur infinitus et surama facilitate componitur, quod ab aliis nec sub longa deliberatione formatur.[281]
>
> 'Hence it is that her remarkable learning flows with great fluency in many languages; her intellect is found so prepared at a given moment, that she does not seem to be of the earth. It is read that a queen of the south came to the Books of Kings in order to learn the wisdom of Solomon; in her case, Principes hear what they learn with admiration. She encapsulates infinite meaning in a few words, and what is given shape by others only with long elaboration, she composes with the greatest facility.

Amalasuntha's sophisticated word economy demonstrated her mastery of grammar and rhetoric, two pillars of Roman education. Cassiodorus described her wisdom using biblical anecdotes familiar to a Roman Christian population. Cassiodorus was quite zealous when listing Amalasuntha's literary qualities as she was the patron of his Gothic History and later appointed him praetorian prefect. Cassiodorus hid this relationship by describing

[279] Fauvinet-Ranson, 1998: 23
[280] Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 11.1.7
[281] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 10.4.6

Amalasuntha's intellect through Theodahad's voice instead of her own, which also demonstrated Amalasuntha's *modestia,* a key Roman feminine virtue. It also showed that male members used the ideal Roman qualities of female members in the monarchy to lift the image of the family in the minds of the Roman elite population, thereby strengthening the monarchy.

Although Amalasuntha's varied political education and the praise of her surpassing wisdom was perhaps more atypical for Roman women, the education of the Amal females included a specifically Roman learning in letters, languages and literature as well as correct modes of female behaviour. This combination of qualities demonstrates that Amal women were schooled in how to be the early imperial Roman conception of ideal women.

Females in late republican Rome were barred from public office and this was reflected in their educations: women were prepared for marriage and motherhood and were less consistently educated than boys in literacy and rhetoric.[282] However, in the first century BCE leading into the early empire, elite and imperial females could be educated in a similar way to males, according to the resources and discretion of their families.[283]

Hemelrijk, an expert on the education of Roman women, disputes the assumption that Julio-Claudian females received an exclusively domestic education based on Suetonius' claim that Augustus taught his daughters and granddaughters spinning and weaving.[284] Hemelrijk instead puts forward Macrobius' description of Augustus' daughter Julia's 'love of letters and great erudition, not hard to come by in her house' as well as a letter from Augustus which praised the rhetorical talent of his granddaughter Agrippina, which both indicate an education in literature and rhetoric.[285] Pliny and Tacitus both mentioned that Agrippina the

[282] Hemelrijk, 2015: 292-3
[283] De la Bodeyere, 2018: 31
[284] Suetonius, *Life of Augustus*, 64.2; Hemelrijk, 1999: 20
[285] Hemelrijk, 1999: 20-21

Younger wrote memoirs about her life and her house, although unfortunately these are lost.[286]

In later centuries of the empire, educated imperial females were more commonly praised which explains how the education of the Amal women made them desirable wives. Cassius viewed Julia Domna's devotion to philosophy as praiseworthy, especially in contrast to Caracalla who neglected his duties.[287] Zosimus described Eusebia as 'extremely well educated and wiser than women usually are'.[288] The fact that Pulcheria oversaw most of the education of her brother, Theodosius II, although she was only two years older than him, testifies that Pulcheria herself had an extensive education.[289]

The references to the education of early Roman Imperial women, while infrequent, suggest an education based on ancient literature and learning of Latin and Greek. This is similar to the education of the Amal females, whose Roman learning and Italian upbringing were highlighted. An education based on 'polished behaviour' and ancient literature, fostered in Italy itself would surely have appealed to the Roman Senate.

Imperial Virtues

Ancient writers portrayed Ostrogothic queens as exhibiting the ideal qualities of Roman Imperial women in their Roman education in literature and correct behaviour, their *nobilitas* and *fecunditas* and as worthy matrons (chapter 3). Additionally, these writers explicitly stated that Ostrogothic queens had imperial virtues and disassociated them from negative traits. The ideal virtues of the Amal women reflected well on, and therefore strengthened the image of, the Ostrogothic monarchy.

[286] Tacitus, *Annals* 4.53.3, Pliny, *Natural History* 7.8
[287] Dio, *Roman History*, 78.18.3
[288] Zosimus, *New History*, 3.1.2
[289] Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, 9.1

Cassiodorus has Theoderic mention Amalafrida's *prudentia*, which he claimed was equal to her prospective husband's and should earn her respect in her new kingdom.[290] After Athalaric's death, Amalasuntha claimed to the Senate that 'affection for the public conquered the temperament of a pious mother'.[291] Amalasuntha therefore inhabited the multiple dimensions of *pietas*, which included respect for both country and family.[292] While her son was alive, Cassiodorus carefully emphasised the *concordia* fostered between mother and son, which contradicted the domestic disputes described by Procopius.[293] Cassiodorus assured the Senate of a harmonious relationship between mother and son to proffer an image of a united monarchy. This action simultaneously quelled any associations with negative stereotypes of women in power, which included discord between imperial females and the male members of her family. Amalasuntha was further shown to value *concordia* through her epistles to Justinian and Theodora, both explicitly and in her respectful tone.[294] Gudeliva's cultivation of *amicitia* with Theodora similarly demonstrated a value for political *concordia* (chapter 4).[295]

Cassiodorus continued to state the virtues of the Amal women through his use of panegyrics. The text followed the typical Roman panegyrical structure, which included fitting the deeds of the addressee into categories associated with the four main imperial virtues: temperance (11.1.4-5), wisdom (11.1.6-10), courage (11.1.11-14) and justice (11.1.15-18).[296] Cassiodorus concluded with a claim that the virtues of Amalasuntha's ancestors were mirrored in Amalasuntha herself, again following the panegyrical structure as recommended

[290] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 5.43.1 'feminam prudentiae vestrae parem'
[291] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 10.3.1
[292] Langford, 2013: 1
[293] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 11.1.4
[294] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 10.1; 10.8; 10.10. To Theodora, Amalasuntha claims "Concord is not only had in immediate presence, for on the contrary, those who conjoin themselves with the deepest affection behold each other more truly"
[295] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 10.21; 10.24
[296] Fauvinet-Ranson, 1998 : 8

by Menander.[297] Cassiodorus listed Amalasuntha's ancestors and the qualities she inherited from them, such as:

> 'enituit enim Hamalus felicitate, Ostrogotha patientia. Athala mansuetudine , Vinitarius aequitate, Unimundus forma Thorismuth castitate, Valamer tide, Theudimer pietate, sapientia, ut iam vidistis, inclitus pater.'
>
> 'Amalus, [who] basked in his good fortune, Ostrogotha in patience, Athala in kindness, Winitarius in equity, Unimundus in beauty, Thorismuth in chastity, Walamer in trust, Theudimer in duty, [and Amalasuntha's] illustrious father, as [the Senators] have already seen, in wisdom.'[298]

A comparison to a myriad of virtuous ancestors also emphasised Amalasuntha's *nobilitas.*

Fauvinet-Ranson argues Cassiodorus 'uses history rather than invention to glorify Amalasuntha', comparing the regent to past Gothic kings as opposed to Roman Imperial women.[299] However, Cassiodorus evoked a comparison to Roman empresses by associating Amalasuntha with imperial 'feminine' virtues, especially kindness, beauty, chastity and duty. Cassiodorus further lifted the image of the Amal family by listing Matasuntha's combination of virtues also delivered in a panegyric to celebrate her wedding to Vitiges. According to Cassiodorus, Matasuntha displayed *castitas, uerecundia, moderatia, pietas, sapientia* and *modestia.*[300] This focus on sexual virtues and modesty also harkened back to traditional Roman virtues for women. Both Amalasuntha and Matasuntha had virtues that characterised them as quintessential ideal Roman women, and the sheer amount of these virtues also indicated that they outshone their Roman precedents.

Cassiodorus described Amalasuntha as superior due to her combination of virtues, and that her Gothic ancestors would feel joy 'from such an heir, who was able to surpass the merits of each'.[301] Amalasuntha's qualities, coupled with this joy, legitimised her political position

[297] Fauvinet-Ranson, 1998 : 9
[298] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 11.1.19
[299] Fauvinet-Ranson, 1998 : 9
[300] Cassiodorus, *Orationum reliquiae,* ed. Mommsen and Traube, pg. 480, lines 2-15
[301] Cassiodorus, Variae 11.1.19-20

as a female regent. Cassiodorus even posed how could ancient *Augustae* compare to Amalasuntha due to her numerous virtues inherited from her male ancestors?[302] Bjornlie observes that Cassiodorus emphasised Amalasuntha's merits and portrayed the monarchy favourably because Amalasuntha chose Cassiodorus as *Praetorian Prefect*.[303] Cassiodorus therefore both flattered his patroness and enhanced his own image to the Senators, since such a wise, virtuous regent would naturally make shrewd appointments. Amalasuntha may not have truly had all these Roman qualities, although Cassiodorus chose to portray her as such, using a Roman medium in the form of a panegyric.

Procopius's work coincided with Cassiodorus' portrayal, claiming that Amalasuntha 'held the strictest regard for every kind of virtue'.[304] Other Amal women showed superiority in their qualities, such as Amalafrida whom Cassiodorus named the 'unprecedented distinction of the Amal family' in a letter from Theoderic.[305] Cassiodorus' use of superlatives, for example to label Amalaberga as a 'wife delightful and most pleasing', aimed to show the pre-eminence of the Amal women.[306] Additionally, Cassiodorus described Amalasuntha as the 'wisest *domina*' and characterised Matasuntha's virtues as 'most honourable sisters.'[307] Cassiodorus' agenda was therefore twofold: he praised his mistress and supporter, as orators also praised Roman emperors, and he painted the Amal women as glorious Roman women to make the Ostrogothic monarchy resemble the Roman Imperial monarchy.

Cassiodorus' explicit descriptions of the virtues of the Amal females recalled the ideal traditional virtues of Roman women. The rhetorical decisions to list a multitude of their virtues, to characterise them as superlative and to frame them as outshining their precedents

[302] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 11.1.19
[303] Bjornlie, 2012: 306-7.
[304] Procopius, *Wars* 5.4.29
[305] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 5.43. 'generis Hamali singulare praeconium'
[306] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 4.1.1 'dulcedinem suavissimam coniugalem'
[307] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 11.1.7 'prudentissimae dominae' and Cassiodorus, *Orationum reliquiae*, (ed. Mommsen and Traube, pg. 480, lines 3-4) describes Matasuntha's virtues as 'sorores honestissimae'

indicate that these women went above and beyond their ancient Roman counterparts. The deliberate attempt to have Ostrogothic royal women outshine Roman Imperial women demonstrates that Procopius and Cassiodorus were influenced by how Roman *Augustae* were expected to act and reused these details in their sketch of Amal women.

Roman Imperial women were also presented as inhabiting and personifying these traditional 'feminine' virtues, especially on coinage. Scholars categorise Roman female virtues as supportive of the family, including by showing respect and maintaining family relations *(concordia, pietas),* remaining chaste and modest *(castitas, pudicitia, fides, moderatia, modestia)* and being otherwise pleasant (*forma, constantia, felicitatis).*[308] Earenfight argues that late antique and medieval queens and empresses continued exhibiting early imperial virtues of marital fidelity and harmony as these values fit with ideal Christian 'feminine' virtues.[309] Augustus' moral reforms, which promoted chastity, fecundity and spousal loyalty, also influenced which virtues were expected of the women in the monarchy.[310] The image of virtuous behaviour of the women in Augustus' family contributed to his personal dignity, and therefore his *auctoritas.*[311] Amalasuntha's decision to remain unmarried after her husband's death meant that she also fit the late republican concept of the *univira,* as she demonstrated loyalty to her late husband. Both Matasuntha and Amalasuntha were associated with *pietas,* which entailed proper family relationships and was 'regarded as the pivotal core of Rome's social and political cohesiveness.'[312] Livia was depicted as a personification of *Pietas* on coins (fig. 5.1)[313] Domitia Longina and Matidia were portrayed

[308] Boatwright, 2021: 9; Gorrie, 2004: 63; Earenfight, 2013: 39; de la Bodeyere, 2018: 17
[309] Earenfight, 2013: 39-40
[310] Hallett, 2012: 373. Augustus' daughter and granddaughter were banished for not conforming to these laws.
[311] Burns, 2007: 11
[312] Riess, 2012: 492
[313] For example RIC II^2 Titus 426

with a personification of *Pietas* on the reverse (figs. 5.2 and 5.3).[314] With imperial female coinage becoming more common during Hadrian's reign, his wife Sabina was portrayed with many virtues, including *pietas, pudicitia* and *concordia.*[315] *Concordia* was an important virtue during the Antonine period, with Faustina the Elder, Faustina the Younger and Lucilla all depicted with the personification of the virtue on the reverse of their coins (figs. 5.4, 5.5 and 5.6).[316]

Fig 5.1. RIC II 1 Titus 426. Bronze dupondius of Titus, 80-81 CE. Bust of Livia as Pietas, draped and veiled, right; wearing stephane, PIETAS / Legend surrounding SC, IMP T CAES DIVI VESP F AVG REST. ANS 1944.100.41827

[314] RIC II Part 1 2nd edition Domitian 156 and RIC II Trajan 758
[315] Rowan, 2011: 245
[316] Such as RIC III Antoninus Pius 328B; RIC III Marcus Aurelius 671 and 755

Fig 5.2. RIC II 1^2 Domitian 156. Silver denarius, 82-83 CE. Bust of Domitia, draped, right; hair bundled in front and in long plait in back, DOMITIA AVGVSTA IMP DOMIT / Pietas seated left, holding sceptre in left hand and holding out right to child standing left, PIETAS AUGUST. British Museum 1842,0214.63.

Fig 5.3. RIC II Trajan 758. Silver denarius, 98-117CE. Bust of Matidia, draped, right; hair coiled and jeweled on top of head; hair in front decorated with by comb, with aigret, MATIDIA AVG DIVAE MARCIANAE F / Pietas, veiled, standing left, sacrificing over lighted and garlanded altar PIETAS AVG. British Museum BNK,R.347

Fig 5.4. RIC III Antoninus Pius 328B. Gold aureus, 138 – 139 CE. Bust of Faustina I, draped, left, hair elaborately waved in several loops round head and drawn up and coiled on top, FAVSTINA AVG ANTONINI AVG P P / Concordia, draped, seated left, holding patera in right hand and resting left arm on statuette of Spes set on low base; cornucopiae under chair, CONCORDIA AVG. British Museum 1864,1128.75

Fig 5.5. RIC III Marcus Aurelius 671. Gold aureus, 161 – 176 CE. Bust of Faustina II, bare-headed, hair waved and fastened in a bun on back of head, draped, right, FAVSTINA AVGVSTA / Concordia, draped, seated left on low chair, holding patera in right hand and resting left arm on chair; below, cornucopiae, CONCORDIA. ANS 1958.223.9

Fig 5.6. RIC III Marcus Aurelius 755. Gold aureus, 164 – 180 CE. Bust of Lucilla, bare-headed, hair waved and fastened in a bun on back of head, draped, right, LVCILLA AVGVSTA / Concordia, draped, seated left on low seat, holding patera in extended right hand and resting left elbow on statuette of Spes; under seat, cornucopiae, CONCORDIA. British Museum 1864,1128.83

Written texts also praised the virtues of Roman empresses, and like the Amal women, these virtues were often described as unprecedented or exemplary. Plutarch's passage about Octavia described her myriad of virtues, accentuating her role in family harmony.

> ἐλπίζοντες τὴν Ὀκταουίαν ἐπὶ κάλλει τοσούτῳ σεμνότητα καὶ νοῦν ἔχουσαν, εἰς ταὐ τὸν τῷ Ἀντωνίῳ παραγενομένην καὶ στερχθεῖσαν, ὡς εἰκὸς τοιαύτην γυναῖκα, πάντω ν πραγμάτων αὐτοῖς σωτηρίαν ἔσεσθαι καὶ σύγκρασιν. [317]
>
> 'For they hoped that Octavia, who, besides her great beauty, had intelligence and dignity, when united to Antony and beloved by him, as such a woman naturally must be, would restore harmony and be their complete salvation.'

The writer of the *Consolatio ad Liviam* asked if they could follow better patterns of virtues than Livia does as the Roman (female) *princeps*?[318] This question characterised Livia as pre-

[317] Plutarch, *Life of Antony,* 31.2
[318] *Consolatio ad Liviam* 355-356

eminent in her virtues. Velleius Paterculus called Livia the 'most eminent of Roman women in birth, in sincerity, and in beauty'.[319] Tacitus presented a rather polarising portrayal of Livia, although he acknowledged that her domestic virtue was of ancient times.[320] Tacitus described how the crowd after the death of Drusus called Agrippina the Elder 'the one surviving model of the old values.'[321] Tacitus connected Livia and Agrippina's virtues to the glorious ancient past just as Cassiodorus did with the Amal women.

Pliny the Younger in his *Panegyric to Trajan* claimed that Trajan's wife Plotina's ancient virtues, such as her modesty and obedience, contributed to his honour and glory.[322] While Herodian recorded an anecdote of Julia Domna restoring harmony between her sons and therefore exhibiting *concordia,* Scott argues that Dio, by contrast, emphasised the discord and rivalry between Julia Domna and Caracalla, and also between Livia and Tiberius and Agrippina and Claudius, caused by the imperial females having too much influence.[323] Alluding to family discord was a rhetorical mechanism to vilify women in power, and on the other hand, *concordia* was a virtue associated with Roman Imperial women. These reasons explain why Cassiodorus adamantly highlighted the harmony between Amalasuntha and Athalaric, contrary to what Procopius recorded.

The Amal women therefore inhabited virtues that were frequently expected of Roman Imperial women. The way these virtues were described, as a combination of many of them and as unprecedented and superlative, followed how the virtues of Roman empresses were described and signified that the Amal royal women outshone their Roman counterparts.

[319] Velleius Paterculus, *Roman History*, 2.75.3
[320] Tacitus, *Annals*, 5.1
[321] Tacitus, *Annals* 3.4: 'unicum antiquitatis specimen appellarent'
[322] Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 83
[323] Herodian, *History of the Empire*, 4.3.8-9; Scott, 2017: 425. Dio, *Roman History* on Julia Domna and Caracalla: 78-79, on Livia and Tiberius: 57.12, on Agrippina and Claudius: 61.32

Overcoming 'Feminine Vices'

Ostrogothic royal women continued to be ideal Roman women by not subscribing to typically 'feminine vices'. Cassiodorus especially emphasised to Roman and Byzantine audiences that Amalasuntha was a suitable ruler due to her lack of 'feminine weaknesses', thereby proving that he was familiar with Roman concepts of female power and the negative stereotypes associated with powerful females. Neville reports that in Byzantine society, 'the way to be a good woman was to display one's restraint ostentatiously', a concept which stemmed from the praise Roman society gave to women who exhibited self-restraint.[324] In Amalasuntha's letters to Justinian and the Roman Senate, she briefly and respectfully mentioned the death of her child without hovering in grief, a sentiment which could paint her as emotional and therefore fragile.[325] Instead, she pragmatically moved on to her plans for the succession.[326] Additionally, Theodahad's letter to the Roman Senate characterised Amalasuntha as 'most serious in the moderation of her speaking'.[327] La Rocca argues that Roman society viewed females speaking in public as transgressive and hysterical, although Amalasuntha's position as queen allowed for her speech to be acceptable.[328] While Amalasuntha's position certainly makes her speech possible, the fact that Cassiodorus qualified her speaking as moderate suggests that he tailored Amalasuntha's image to suit the expected gender norms for the Roman Senatorial class. Cassiodorus perhaps surmised that the word 'moderate' would earn Amalasuntha more support, as her speech was unlike the 'untrustworthy' speech of other Roman females.

As well as framing her power as both more unofficial and supportive of the Romans, (chapter 4) Cassiodorus further characterised Amalasuntha as an ideal female member of the

[324] Neville, 2019: 38
[325] Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 10.1.1; 10.3.1
[326] Ibid.
[327] Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 10.4.6
[328] La Rocca, 2012: 140; Lung, 2017: 7-8; Neville, 2019: 39

monarchy by asserting she resisted over-meddling in politics, operating instead 'behind the curtain'.

> Sed cum tanta gaudeat perfectione linguarum, in actu publico sic tacita est, ut credatur otiosa. paucis litigia nodosa dissolvit: bella ferventia sub quiete disponit, silentiose geritur publicum bonum. non audis praedici quod palam videtur assumi et temperamento mirabili dissimulando peragit quod adcelerandum esse cognoscit.
>
> But, although she rejoices in such fluency with languages, she is so demure in public events that it may be credited to disinterest. She dissolves tangled litigation with a few words, she settles seething quarrels with calm, she manages the public weal in silence. You do not hear proclaimed what is openly adopted and, by a miraculous restraint, she accomplishes surreptitiously what she knows must be done in great haste.[329]

Cassiodorus' decision to specify the private and secret nature of Amalasuntha's politics responded to the negative connotations associated with more politically active women in Roman society.

Another way to show Amalasuntha's lack of 'feminine weaknesses' was to characterise her as masculine. This strategy was based upon a long tradition of characterising powerful Roman women as masculine using gender rhetoric. Cooper and Frankforter argue that Procopius dwelt on Amalasuntha's 'feminine weaknesses', using misogynistic stereotypes to frame her as a tragic heroine whose murder was the *casus belli* for Justinian's invasion of Italy.[330] Lung also agrees, claiming that Procopius' Amalasuntha was a virtuous heroine whose downfall occurred due to a lack of male guidance and 'feminine' characteristics such as naïveté.[331] However, Procopius focused more on Theodahad's betrayal as a cause for Amalasuntha's downfall, claiming that Amalasuntha was deceived by her own judgement.[332] By contrast, Procopius had earlier praised both Amalasuntha's lack of feminine weaknesses,

[329] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 11.1.8
[330] Cooper, 2016; Frankforter, 1996
[331] Lung, 2017: 10
[332] Procopius, *Wars* 5.4.10

claiming that she was not frightened at the earlier threat of the Gothic nobles, 'nor did she, womanlike, weakly give way'.[333]

As well as praising her as a Roman *matrona* (chapter 3), Procopius depicted Amalasuntha as possessing masculine traits, in a positive way. Procopius' description of Amalasuntha's 'masculine temper' and 'virile manner' as well as her courage, wisdom and sense of justice was part of a long Roman tradition of describing powerful women as masculine.[334] Stewart's assertion that Procopius adopted gender assumptions from classical Greek and Roman authors implies that Procopius was influenced by Roman concepts of gender and power when depicting Amalasuntha.[335] Brubaker argues that Procopius, like earlier Roman authors such as Tacitus, was hostile to powerful women, therefore the only way for a woman to rule was to do so with masculine qualities, which would negate their 'feminine weaknesses' such as irrationality and lack of courage.[336]

Cassiodorus similarly highlighted Amalasuntha's masculine nature, shown through his inversion of gender roles in his construction of twin letters (chapter 4).[337] Cassiodorus' portrayal of Amalasuntha as masculine and Theodahad as feminine also drew upon Roman rhetoric which highlighted the weakness of male rulers by depicting their female family members as powerful, strong and masculine. Procopius used this rhetoric by including Theodora's notably courageous speech at the Nika riots to illustrate Justinian's lack of leadership.[338] It is likely then, that instead of focusing on Amalasuntha's feminine weaknesses and thereby deeply contradicting his earlier assessment of her, Procopius instead

[333] Procopius *Wars* 5.2.21
[334] Procopius *Wars* 5.2.3; *Secret History* 16.1
[335] Stewart, 2017: 475-476
[336] Brubaker, 2005: 428; Foβel 2013: 70
[337] La Rocca, 2012
[338] Lung, 2018: 11-12; Procopius *Wars* 1.24.33-37. As noted previously, due to feminine speech being regarded as emotional or untrustworthy, Procopius could therefore have intended for Theodora's speech to reflect negatively on her as well as Justinian.

accentuated Amalasuntha's masculine strengths to expose Theodahad's weaknesses as a ruler.[339] Using this rhetoric therefore framed Theodahad as unfit to rule Italy and the symbolic Roman capital. Theodahad's murder of Amalasuntha made him sole ruler, putting Italy in a precarious position since Amalasuntha's Roman rule and political savvy had died with her, thereby justifying Justinian's invasion of Italy. The use of Roman gendered rhetoric therefore indicates that ancient authors such as Procopius and Cassiodorus were clearly influenced by Roman concepts of gender when representing Amalasuntha.

Furthermore, as well as contrasting Amalasuntha with Theodahad, ancient writers established Amalasuntha as an ideal Roman woman by contrasting her with negative female models. Frankforter observes that according to Procopius, Theodora considered Amalasuntha a more suitable wife to Justinian and therefore a suitable empress of the Romans, with Procopius seeing 'no impediment to her barbarian status nor her heretical Arian religion'.[340] Procopius listed the ideal qualities for the wife of Justinian:

> 'in the highest degree both well-born and blessed with a nurture sheltered from the public eye, a woman who had not been unpractised in modesty, and had dwelt with chastity, who was not only surpassingly beautiful but also still a maiden'.[341]

Lung argues that this feminine ideal was 'the result of the buildup of layers of cultural and religious traditions which characterised Byzantine society.'[342] Procopius sharply contrasted this multitude of qualities with Theodora herself, who was of a poor upbringing and a prostitute who ridded herself of pregnancies voluntarily.[343] Cameron argues that Theodora was a bad model not for transgressing her sex; 'rather she is the epitome of the 'feminine',

[339] Craddock, 1996: also suggests that Procopius portrays Amalasuntha as masculine to showcase Justinian's weaknesses
[340] Frankforter, 1996: 49; Procopius *Secret History* 16.1
[341] Procopius, *Secret History* 10.2
[342] Lung, 2017: 14
[343] Procopius, *Secret History* 10.3

with all the limitations that that implies to Procopius'.[344] Theodora's tarnished character reflected badly on Justinian.[345]

By having Theodora panic that Amalasuntha might be a more worthy wife to Justinian, Procopius contrasted Amalasuntha and Theodora, which achieved two objectives. Firstly, Procopius disassociated Amalasuntha with the negative gender stereotypes linked to Theodora. Though sixth-century Byzantines also portrayed barbarians as sexually deviant in an attempt to 'other' them, Procopius did not present Amalasuntha as such.[346] Therefore despite her status as a barbarian and a woman in power, Procopius did not describe Amalasuntha using the negative stereotypes associated with her gender and ethnicity. By forgoing these stereotypes, Procopius indirectly characterised Amalasuntha as a worthy Roman empress. Secondly, Amalasuntha's contrast with Theodora was buttressed by Amalasuntha's qualities, which fitted Procopius' image of the ideal wife of the emperor.[347] Procopius described Amalasuntha as nobly born, a queen, beautiful and of 'magnificent bearing'.[348] His claim that she knew how to get what she wanted, perhaps does not fit his image of a demure and noble empress, serving instead to make Theodora consider Amalasuntha more of a threat to her position.[349] Perhaps Amalasuntha's overwhelmingly positive image was a technique simply to make Theodora look worse, although it is telling that Procopius decided to use Roman Imperial virtues to portray Amalasuntha, an Ostrogoth.

Cassiodorus also used a foil to showcase Amalasuntha's ideal qualities. He compared her to Galla Placidia, who served as regent of the western empire in the fifth century, and whom his Roman audience remembered.[350] While at first, it seems that Cassiodorus justified

[344] Cameron, 1996: 81
[345] Procopius, *Secret History* 10.4
[346] Lung, 2017: 11
[347] Aside from that fact that Amalasuntha was a wife and mother: she was therefore not a maiden.
[348] Procopius, *Secret History* 16.1
[349] Procopius, *Secret History* 16.1
[350] Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 11.1.9

Amalasuntha's rule by using a female precedent, Cassiodorus instead listed Placidia's negative qualities, namely that she administered the empire carelessly, lost territory and weakened the army through inactivity.[351] Cassiodorus followed this list by explaining how Amalasuntha was different, especially through the military exploits achieved during her reign.[352] Procopius also saw the weakness in Placidia, stressing how her effeminate education of her son made him wicked.[353] By contrast, later in the text, Procopius considered Athalaric's weaknesses to be a consequence of a lack of his mother's influence and too much exposure to Gothic customs.[354]

Through their use of both male and female foil characters and disassociating Amalasuntha from negative stereotypes which typically accompanied women in power in earlier Roman texts, Procopius and Cassiodorus were demonstrably influenced by Roman concepts of female power in their portrayal of the Ostrogoth regent.

In earlier Roman Imperial times, empresses also earned praise for not meddling in politics and for their lack of susceptibility to emotions. Amalasuntha's restraint on the death of her son resembles that of Livia when her grandson died.[355] Also like Amalasuntha, Livia was praised by Velleius Paterculus for the surreptitious nature of her power, as her power was felt by no one except in more unofficial channels such as 'the alleviation of trouble or promotion of rank'.[356] Pliny lauded Trajan's wife, Plotina, for respecting Trajan's person, not his power.[357] Pliny also claimed that Trajan's wife and sister initially rejected the title

[351] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 11.1.9
[352] Cassiodorus, *Variae* 11.1.10-14
[353] Procopius, *Wars* 3.3
[354] Procopius, *Wars* 5.2.19
[355] Tregiarri, 2005: 147
[356] Velleius Paterculus, *Roman History*, 2.130.5 Kunst 2021: 392. See also chapter 4.
[357] Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 83

Augusta, content to be known as the emperor's wife and sister.[358] Conversely, power-hungry women were slandered and associated with negative stereotypes and vices such as envy and greed.[359] Tacitus used the trope of the evil stepmother to showcase how bitter and power-hungry Livia and Agrippina were and highlighted Agrippina's jealousy of her rival Lollia.[360]

Furthermore, ancient writers frequently accused powerful women, and sometimes men as well, of incest and adultery to denigrate them.[361] Panoussi argues that Tacitus' description of Messalina and Agrippina the Younger's sexual aggression simultaneously diverged from the acceptable behaviour of Roman exemplar women and rendered the men in these actions as inferior.[362] Suetonius alleged that Agrippina had incestuous relations with her son Nero, among a list of Nero's abusive behaviours and sexual misconduct.[363] Penella observes that Julia Domna was not depicted as an unwilling victim in her incestuous relationship with her son Caracalla.[364] Although Theodahad was made inferior to Amalasuntha through a reversal of gender roles, this is more in terms of a political sense than in a sexual sense, as no allegations of sexual misconduct were made about Amalasuntha or other Ostrogothic queens. The lack of accusations further contributed to the ideal image of the Amal women.

Dio further slandered Julia Domna through her heritage, claiming that she passed on adverse traits such as 'the craftiness of the Syrians' to her offspring and therefore, as Scott observes, to the future generation of emperors.[365] Dio's attempts to 'other' the empress and to criticise her initiative were continued through his claim that 'she hoped to become sole ruler and make herself the equal of Semiramis and Nitocris, inasmuch as she came in a sense from the

[358] Pliny, *Panegyricus*, 84
[359] Boatwright, 2021: 7
[360] Tacitus, *Annals* 1.3; 12.22; 12.26
[361] Mallan, 2013: 750
[362] Panoussi, 2018: 205
[363] Suetonius, *Life of Nero*, 28
[364] Penella, 1980: 382; Historia Augusta *Life of Caracalla*, 10.1-4 refers to Julia Domna as Caracalla's stepmother, which Penella (1982: 382) claims is because the author thought Caracalla was born to Septimius Severus' first wife, Paccia Marciana.
[365] Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, 78.10.2

same parts as they.'[366] This 'othering' was part of a pattern of denigrating foreign queens as the consequences of females in power. Notable examples included Cleopatra, whom Horace called 'regina dementis', and Dido, who lacked self-control – and therefore the ability to wield power – as she was susceptible to her emotions.[367]

Furthermore, like Amalasuntha, ancient writers typically characterised powerful Roman Imperial women as masculine. Scholars note that Roman historians used similar rhetorical stereotypes and narrative devices across the centuries to emphasise the masculine qualities of women in the imperial monarchy in order to highlight the ineptitude of male rulers.[368] Tacitus, for example, showcased Nero's weaknesses by contrasting him to two particularly masculine women in power: his mother, Agrippina the Younger, and Boudica. Tacitus stressed Agrippina's masculine nature by describing her politics during Claudius' reign as a 'masculine tyranny' and hinted at her courage when she faced her death, goading Nero's soldiers to strike her womb.[369] Boudica, like Amalasuntha, displayed the best of both sexes, she was a mother to her children as well as a warrior who took initiative in avenging them.[370] Dio also contrasted Julia Domna's diligence and interest in philosophy with Caracalla's wantonness, a choice that Langford argues framed Julia Domna as a masculine foil to her weak son.[371] McEvoy also observes that Julian ascribed to Eusebia the typically masculine virtues as recommended by Menander for an emperor to have: justice, temperance and wisdom, with the exception of courage which McEvoy explains was often achieved on the battlefield.[372] These rhetorical attempts to use women as narrative devices to criticise emperors likely did not reflect the reality of how these women acted or what their personality

[366] Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, 79.23.3
[367] De la Bodeyere, 2018: 58-63; Horace *Ode* 1.37
[368] Dircksen, 2020: 104-105; Lung 2017: 5-8; de la Bodeyere, 2018: 11
[369] Tacitus, *Annals*, 12.7 and 14.8
[370] Gillespie, 2015: 413; Tacitus *Annals* 14.35
[371] Dio, *Roman History*, 78.18; Langford, 2013: 7
[372] McEvoy, 2021: 119; Julian, *Panegyric to Eusebia* 106, 129

was really like, although it does indicate that the Romans characterised courage and power as masculine.[373] This notion continued in post-Roman Italy where Procopius and Cassiodorus drew attention to Amalasuntha's masculine traits, especially by contrasting her with weak Theodahad.

Though masculine Roman women were typically viewed as transgressive, Procopius and Cassiodorus viewed Amalasuntha's masculine nature in a positive light, perhaps because she 'achieved the best of both sexes' as a virtuous woman and model mother, and because of her positions as regent and later co-ruler; a masculine ruler was more acceptable to the Romans.[374]

Despite the fact that Amalasuntha was a powerful woman and an Ostrogoth, Cassiodorus and Procopius avoided describing her using the negative stereotypes commonly associated with women in power and with non-Romans.[375] They both had agendas to present Amalasuntha and the Amals in a more positive light. Amalasuntha was Cassiodorus' patroness, and in publishing his letter collection he aimed to prove that he served a dynasty which ruled like the Roman Imperial monarchy. Procopius depicted Amalasuntha as an ideal Roman empress both to justify Justinian's invasion of Italy after her death and to contrast her with Theodora whom he deemed unworthy of the mantle of empress. Cassiodorus and Procopius' attempts to disassociate Amalasuntha from these negative stereotypes by contrasting her to bad models demonstrated that these writers were aware of the negative stereotypes and vices associated with Roman women. This awareness shaped how they portrayed Amal women as ideal Roman empresses. Cassiodorus also separated Amal women from vices such as discord and sexual misconduct by emphasising the *concordia* between

[373] Priwitzer, 2021: 444
[374] Female saints also sometimes have masculine virtues
[375] The exception is Gregory of Tours who painted a more negative picture of Amalasuntha,although his prejudice is based on the fact that Amalasuntha is Arian and not of the Nicene faith (see Chapter 3).

Amalasuntha and Athalaric as well as the sexual virtue (*castitas)* of Amalasuntha and Matasuntha.

As well as overcoming feminine vices, Amalasuntha and other women of the Amal family were portrayed as ideal Roman women, notably through their education and upbringing which Theoderic expressed was Italian. Amal women also harboured virtues expected of Roman Imperial women and harkened back to republican values. They were not associated with simply one virtue, but a myriad and were often described as unprecedented, demonstrating that these Ostrogothic women were not only akin to Roman empresses, but outshone them. Cassiodorus and Procopius learned from the good and bad models of Roman empresses in written sources and coinage in their portrayals of Amal women, which indicates that they were strongly influenced by Roman concepts of female power in these portrayals.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This thesis responds to scholarship which has established that Amal men adopted characteristics of Roman emperors to legitimise their rule to the Roman elite population. It asked what were the roles of Amal women in this reconstruction of the Roman monarchy by exploring how ancient writers were influenced by Roman models of female power when depicting these women.

Scholars have adopted Feminist frameworks to ascertain Amalasuntha's agency and level of power, although these frameworks often overlook what made the power of queens possible.[376] The political positions of these post-Roman 'barbarian' queens were possible as these women worked within the acceptable parameters for women in power in Roman society. The communication of this conformity to the Roman Senate and broader land-owning elites was designed to win the support of these groups and thereby strengthen and legitimise the monarchy. Other scholars have employed gender frameworks to examine Amalasuntha's masculine and feminine characteristics. The gender rhetoric used to portray this regent was informed by Roman concepts of gender and power. In particular, Cassiodorus and Procopius attributed ideal masculine and feminine characteristics to Ostrogothic women to strengthen their image as virtuous Roman matrons or masculine leaders, or to contrast them to other political figures, such as Theodora and Theodahad, whom they deemed unworthy.

As well as studying more overlooked aspects of Amalasuntha's politics, such as her role in the dynasty, her diplomacy and the unofficial nature of her power, I examined the depictions of all the women in the Ostrogothic monarchy in Italy. Scholars have seen similarities between Amalasuntha and late Roman empresses such as Galla Placidia. Ostrogothic royal

[376] Earenfight, 2013: 26

women all have multiple similarities with earlier Roman empresses in both their roles and expectations, as well as their portrayals in the sources. Crucially, these similarities demonstrate that the Ostrogothic monarchy and their statesman Cassiodorus harkened back to the late republican and early imperial context when the imperial monarchy was establishing itself and when the Roman Senate was still at its height as a constitutional body. These traditions of the glorious past, fondly remembered by the Senatorial class, were important for a 'barbarian' group to both adopt the Roman monarchy and legitimise their rule to their Roman population.

The similarities in both the roles Amal women adopted as well as the language used to characterise them lead to the conclusion that Cassiodorus and Procopius were heavily influenced by depictions of earlier Roman empresses when portraying Ostrogothic queens. As opposed to discerning their individual agency or true experiences, the framework of monarchy allowed for an analysis of different forms of power and how the roles and images of Ostrogothic queens reflected back on the monarchy. Within the family, Ostrogothic women served as transmitters of dynasty and *nobilitas* and were virtuous *matronae* who nurtured the state. The same is true for the Roman monarchy which relied heavily on the female line and on the input of imperial females when choosing the next emperor. Using the Roman archetype of the virtuous mother to characterise Ostrogothic royal women both strengthened the monarchy and encouraged the acceptance of a female regent. Furthermore, the unofficial wielding of power and diplomatic moves of Ostrogothic queens were in line with what was acceptable for Roman empresses. The wealth and status of Ostrogothic queens are similar to those of Roman empresses, although sometimes portrayed in different ways, and their patronage of Roman culture and urban development demonstrated respect for their Roman subjects. Moreover, their representation as members of a joint rule was based on a Roman concept, the roots of which were present in the early empire. Finally,

Ostrogothic queens were cast as ideal Roman empresses who demonstrated virtues that were in line with late republican family values. These virtues are complemented by deliberate attempts to disassociate the queens from negative stereotypes typically associated with Roman empresses. These techniques indicate that Cassiodorus and Procopius learned from good and bad models when presenting Ostrogothic queens as ideal empresses according to their own separate agendas. The combination of similarities in the main aspects of monarchy (family, politics and image and representation), lead to the conclusion that the Ostrogothic monarchy reconstructed the Roman monarchy by basing the positions of Ostrogothic queens on Roman concepts of female power, especially the institution of the Roman empress in the early empire.

Finally, employing these ideas in other contexts can generate further research. While the framework of monarchy has been applied to women in the ancient world and in the medieval period, it has not been used as frequently for late antique empresses or early medieval queens. Applying this framework plus the methodology of comparison to earlier Roman empresses to queens in the other early medieval kingdom, such as the Franks, could help us establish continuations of Roman models of power and gender in the post-Roman world.

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