The History of Female Empowerment I: Regna



One of the most significant neolithic societies of south-eastern Europe (in what would later be Dacia / Transnistria) is now known to archeologists as the Cucuteni-Trypillian civilization, which subsisted from the 6th to early 3rd millennium B.C.Their culture was overtly matriarchal; and their godhead was a female.The next major civilization (from c. 2600 B.C. to c. 1100 B.C.) was that of the Minoans, primarily located on Crete.That was also a predominantly matriarchal culture.The Minoans worshipped only goddesses (a precursor to Rhe[i]a–inspiration for the mythical princess, Ariadne).

The enfranchisement of women goes back to the Bronze Age.Notable were the Sumerian “naditu”: women who owned and managed their own businesses.This is a reminder that mankind is a work-in-progress, making advancements in fits and starts.Such cultural saltations often occur pursuant to revolutionary movements; but sometimes civility is–as it were–baked into the cultural fabric by some serendipitous accident of history.

To assay the empowerment of women across history and geography, let’s begin by surveying five ancient societies.

Ancient Bharat[a] (India): Even as it was addled by the precedent of “varna” (a de facto caste system), the majority of women had a right to an education.Indeed, literacy was encouraged amongst both men and women; and it was even common for women to become “acharyas” (teachers). In the Cullavagga section of the “Vinaya Pitaka” (ref. the Pali Canon), Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha) declared that women are every bit as capable of achieving enlightenment as are men.

Meanwhile, women were allowed to earn their own money, and had legal rights to property inheritance. While arranged marriages did occur, betrothals were generally a family affair; and rarely were women forced into arrangements for which they expressed staunch protest.Men were not permitted to hit their wives; and the “Manu-Smriti” (code of laws) allowed a man or woman to annul a fraudulent / abusive marriage.Meanwhile, in southern India, both Tamil (Hindu) and Sinhalese (Buddhist) cultures exhibited matriarchal features.

Ancient Egypt: Women were equal to men in almost every way.Egyptian women were legally and financially independent.They seem to have been accorded esteem consummate with their personal achievements.They had the right to marry and divorce of their own accord, and could even dictate the terms of pre-nuptial agreements.They commonly participated in political and religious activities, and–as we’ll see–often wielded significant power.For work, they received compensation on par with men.One of their preeminent deities was female: Isis.

Ancient Greece: Reverence for females was evident with the invocation of the Greek “moirai” (fates) and “mousai” (muses).In Greek society, women were afforded a modicum of rights–depending on the time and polis.Athens was probably the Greek city with the LEAST amount of feminism.Even as they were generally subordinate to men, Athenian women could acquire rights over property through gifts, dowry, and inheritance (though, ultimately, a woman’s male “kyrios” had the right to dispose of her property in the event he saw fit to do so).

Esteem was often afforded to outstanding women who were un-connected to nobility–a fact demonstrated in the following essay: Women of Battle, Women of Letters.This was sometimes the case even in more misogynist environs like notoriously patriarchal Athens.

Meanwhile, in Sparta, women enjoyed a tremendous amount of status.Indeed, Spartan women commanded an inordinately high degree of both power and respect.By c. 300 B.C., women owned between a third and half of all Spartan land /

estates.And through the Hellenistic period, some of the wealthiest Spartans were women.Indeed, women in Sparta often owned their own property OUTRIGHT; and even controlled the property of male relatives who were away with the army.

Other than Sparta, records exist of Greek women owning land (the most prestigious form of private property at the time) in ancient Delphi, Gortyn, Megara, and Thessaly.

Much of the prevailing philosophy was in keeping with certain aspects of Greek jurisprudence–notably regarding the value of testimony.Women were routinely used as witnesses in both ancient Greek and Roman courts. The Stoic philosophers ARDENTLY argued for the equality of the sexes (ref. Seneca, Zeno, and Epictetus).In their view, inequality between the sexes was inimical to the laws of nature.Meanwhile, the Cynics argued that men and women should be able to wear the same kinds of clothing and were entitled to the same degree of education.Moreover, they saw marriage as a companionship between equals.

Ancient Greece also gave us the Pythagorean, Archimedean, Epicurean, Cynic, and other philosophical schools that were all very welcoming to women…and even had some female super-stars.As we'll see, Ancient Greece gave us renown female physicians (Metrodora and Agnodike), renown female poets (most notably, Sappho), renown female philosophers (Aspasia of Miletus), renown states-women (Artemisia of Caria), and even a renown female astronomer (Aglaonike of Thessaly).In Antiquity, reverence for women was evident in the works of Plutarch–most notably his "On the Bravery of Women" and "On the Virtues of Women".

Ancient Rome: Many prominent Roman women were accorded reverence.Notable examples include Fulvia, Hortensia, Livia Drusilla, Agrippina The Older and Younger, as well as Aelia Galla Placidia.The series of Thracian / Bosporan and Armenian client Queens (suzerains) of the Roman Empire is also worth noting–as with Queen Philoromaios (a.k.a. "Dynamis") in the 1st century B.C.

But what of the COMMON-women of ancient Rome?Though they were typically not allowed to hold high public office, free-born women were citizens who enjoyed the full compliment of legal privileges.Women could marry AND divorce as they pleased.A Roman mother had a right to own real estate and to dispose of it as she saw fit.This included setting the terms of her own will.

During the Roman Empire, women of the Imperium could acquire considerable political power.We might recall that it was Julius Caesar's mother who first advanced her son's fabled career.Later, Plotina exercised tremendous influence over her husband, the emperor Trajan…as well as his successor, Hadrian. Her petitions on official matters were routinely made available to the public–indicating that her views were considered important by the wider population.

Clearly, this was not good enough.(It hardly constituted universal suffrage.)Be that as it may, such precedents established a benchmark for further progress.It was one more step to realize that, if ARISTOCRATIC women were capable, then rank and file woman should also be afforded the benefit of the doubt.Happily, common-women in Rome could own property, manage their own estates, enter into contracts, appear in court to argue cases, and engage in private business.All else being equal, a woman's testimony held the same weight as a man's.Roman law even recognized rape as a capital crime (in which the victim bore no guilt).

Ancient Persia: There is limited information about jurisprudence regarding women in the Parthian (Arsacid) Empire of 3rd-century Persia (precursor to the Sassanian Empire).Parthian art often depicted wealthy women in reverential ways.Noble-women sometimes commanded estates; though property ownership was likely far more limited for common-women.In any case, reverence for prominent women was the norm (Parthian Queen consort Musa was depicted on Persian coins).There was nothing in Zoroastrianism that demeaned women, so there was no doctrinal justification for misogyny.Though Persia was Zoroastrian, it was in no way theocratic.Freedom of individual conscience was allowed.We might note that in the late 4th / early 5th century, Sassanian King Yazdegerd afforded his consort, a Jewish woman (Queen Shushandukht), prodigious political power–even allowing her to establish Jewish colonies in Isfahan, Sushtar, and Susa.

Under Sassanid rule, Persian women often received a good education.Literacy was widely encouraged–and facilitated–amongst both men and women.Women had the prerogative to marry / divorce at their own discretion and even to own their own property.

The point here is not to paint a rosy picture of ancient India, ancient Egypt, ancient Greece, the Roman Empire, or the Parthian / Sassanian period in Persia.These societies were far from ideal.(Only salient features are highlighted here.)The point is to show that elements of feminism can be found throughout the world going back

thousands of years.We might even venture to northern Europe–where reverence for females was evident in the Germanic legends of the “Walküren” (Valkyries) and the Norse legends of the “Norns” (impresarios of destiny).

Throughout history, matriarchal societies have certainly not been the rule; but they have occurred enough to demonstrate that there exists a nascent capacity to respect women at various places / times throughout the world–a potential waiting to be realized under the right conditions.The list of matriarchal cultures throughout the world is long.The Carolinians had a matriarchal society in Austronesia.In Tibet, the Musuo are matriarchal (though not matrilineal).The Tibeto-Burman “Garo” people of northeastern India remain a matrilineal society to the present day. (Their religion is “Song-sarek”.) And the Garo are matrilineal (though not matriarchal).In northern Africa, certain Berber tribes (notably, the Tuareg) were matriarchal / matrilineal… that is, prior to adopting Islam.In Sumatra (Indonesia), the (Melayu) Minangkabau were one of the world’s major matriarchal / matrilineal societies…that is, prior to adopting Islam. {8}

The Tlingit, an Eskimo culture in Alaska, use a system of matrilineal kinship to the present day.They posit “Aientsik” as the mother of all mankind (traced through her daughter, Tekawerahkwa).Iroquois clans are matrilineal (women hold property; hereditary leadership passes through maternal lines), and are governed by a “clan mother” system. They have been a matriarchal culture for many centuries.

Such systems have occurred in various Native American tribes–from the Iroquois to the Hopi to some bands of the Sioux.Even the Lenape, the nation that originally occupied what is now the metropolitan New York City area, exhibited matriarchal tendencies.

We might also note some features of Byzantine society.Women in the Eastern Roman Empire sometimes ran their own businesses; and even occasionally participated in affairs of the state.Byzantine women had equal rights to bequeath and inherent property.When married, they usually had total control over their dowries.

What of heads of state in the modern era?The point is rarely made: During the 19th century, not just the most powerful person in the world, but the TWO most powerful people in the world were women (one Anglican, one Confucian): Queen Victoria of England and Empress [dowager] Cixi of China.This is made even more striking when we note that–arguably–the most powerful person in the world during the PREVIOUS century (the 18th) was also a woman: Russia’s Catherine the Great.

The augmentation of civic ontogenesis in Europe may be due to the fact that, pursuant to the Enlightenment, the influence of the Holy Roman Emperor was beginning to wane.

Before proceeding with a survey of female regna, let’s be clear about the significance of sovereignty.This particular metric is used in an effort to outline the esteem accorded to women throughout history in the political context.In doing so, we can see if any patterns are discernible.Such a heuristic is, of course, imperfect; which is why I perform a survey using other metrics (military and scholarly / literary) in the next essay.

What qualifies as indicative of empowerment and what doesn’t?The selective arrogation of prestige based on kinship does not constitute universal suffrage.Nepotism is not feminism.And while many women have earned renown for piety, this is hardly an estimable character trait.Sycophancy is not a basis for any worthwhile conception of a “vanguard”.There is a difference between being an acolyte and being a pioneer.For more on qualifications for the present survey, see the Appendix at the end.

The point here is not to insinuate there was universal suffrage based on the existence of isolated cases.It would be a mistake to infer general female empowerment from the incidence of a few extraordinary individuals. {1}In focusing on the breaking of glass ceilings, we mustn’t forget about all the women left in the basement.The former typically involves a minuscule fraction of the total female population while the latter involves the vast majority.It is the common-woman with whom we should ULTIMATELY be most concerned.

Here, I use political power (incidence of female regnancy) as the sole metric.I will use two other metrics (military leadership and scholarly / literary achievement) in the next essay.Rulers, warriors, and writers are–of course–not the only surveys that can be conducted; but these are certainly three of the most salient measures for female empowerment.

Admittedly, we are using broad strokes here; but that’s fine for the present purposes.Simply noticing significant historical figures is not the same as indulging in the so-called “Great Man” theory of history; which I reject.Here I am using key figures as a (not THE) metric for gauging cultural tendencies. We might bear in mind that incidence of high socio-economic status is not necessarily the most pertinent way of gauging female enfranchisement.

Other key metrics certainly exist.Notably, disparities when it comes to employment opportunities (as well as compensation for comparable positions) are indices of inequality.Such disparities can be attributed to any of a number of factors; so, when evaluating the commonweal of any society, the trick is to control for the variable that one wishes to isolate.

In the present era, to ascertain gender equality, surveys might be conducted on such things as participation in major business enterprises (say, incidence of corporate executives and/or middle management) and participation in the political process (say, incidence of high government appointments). Any other kind of elevated socio-economic status (without strings attached) is a dependable way to ascertain a willingness to accord respect.

Those in “the West” are most familiar with the Abrahamic tradition.Alas.The incidence feminism there is quite wanting in that domain.One of the preeminent “shofet” [“leaders”; though typically rendered “Judges”] in the Hebrew Bible was a prophetess: Deborah of Ephraim.Yet here, the track-record for the treatment of women has been less than stellar.Women have been vilified throughout Judaic lore–starting with Eve’s insolence in eating from the tree of knowledge; and all the way to the depiction of Jezebel of Sidon.In any case, value accorded to most prominent female characters in the Hebrew Bible was based on their utility to bare male heirs. (It was their uteruses, not their minds, that mattered.) The Witch of Endor was not seen as a wise woman.Instead, she was portrayed as a devious sorceress.And the conniving Philistine seductress, Delilah, was not shed in a good light (even as the bawdry tale illustrated the prodigious power women can wield over even well-meaning men).

Though accounts are likely apocryphal, there are several fabled women who may have been based on historical figures:

- The fabled Persian Queen Esther of Persia in Judaic lore
- The fabled Phoenician princess Elissa “Dido” (founder of Carthage in the 9th century B.C.), who became a popular folkloric figure due to her role in Virgil’s “Aeneid”
- The fabled Amazon warrior-queens Eurypyle, Aegea, Lampedo, Marpesia, Bremusa, Otrera (and her daughters, Penthesilea and Hippolyta), Aegea, et. al.
- The fabled Volscian Queen Camilla in Greco-Roman lore
- The fabled Briton Queen Cordelia in English lore

- The fabled Celtic Queen Medb (a.k.a. “Maev”) of Cruachan / Connacht in Irish lore
- The fabled Norse Queen Aslög / Aslaug (a.k.a. “Kraka”; a.k.a. “Randalin”)

The propagation of such legend demonstrates an open-ness for–even a desire by–the society to suppose the hero of a cherished tale to be women.Such an occurrence in hallowed lore indicates at least a nascent respect for the fairer sex.

As the following survey shows, when we look at the exceptions (empowered women) to the rule (patriarchal orders), the women were, indeed, quite exceptional. The incidence of such women shows a clear pattern: BY FAR, the most patriarchal societies (that is: societies that have been oppressive to women) were those governed by the three major Abrahamic Faiths. The salience of Abrahamic religionism is made blindingly obvious once we look at communities characterized by the un-diluted (read: fundamentalist) instances of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In ALL such cases, said oppression is THROUGH THE ROOF. This is flagrantly obvious to the present day. One need only look at ANY community that espouses Haredi Judaism or Evangelical Christianity or Salafi Islam to see patriarchy on steroids. {9}

One could argue that virtually ANY religion taken to extremes will tend to espouse patriarchy (along with a raft of other severe dysfunctions); and that is generally true. But it is hard not to notice a glaring pattern with the Abrahamic religions, which have this particular iniquity BUILT INTO the doctrine from the get-go.

When we look back five millennia (to the 30th century B.C.), we are reminded that the legacy of empowered women dates back to the earliest recorded civilizations.Behold Egyptian Pharaoh Merneith (a.k.a. “Meryet-Nit”).Later, there was:

- Egyptian matriarch, Hetepheres (daughter of Huni and mother of Kufu) ruled as Pharaoh c. 2600 B.C. {2}
- Sumerian Queen Puabi of Ur ruled c. 2600 B.C.
- Sumerian Queen Kug-Bau of Kish [a.k.a. “Kubaba”] ruled in the late 25th / early 24th century B.C.

At one point or another, in **every century** for the last four millennia, a woman has ruled somewhere in the world.Let's look at highlights from the 3rd millennium B.C.:

- Egyptian matriarch, Sobek-neferu (a.k.a. "Neferu-sobek") ruled as Pharaoh in the 19th century B.C.
- Amorite queen Shibtu of Yamhad served as de facto regnant of Mari (in the absence of Zimri-Lim) in the 18th century B.C.
- Queen Ah-hotep was the de facto ruler of Egypt in the 17th century B.C.
- The great female pharaoh, Hatshepsut of Karnak / Thebes was a celebrated architect, warrior, and leader who parlayed a regency into a regnancy in the late 16th / early 15th century B.C.
- Though officially consort, Nefertiti of Mitanni was the de facto ruler of Egypt in the 14th century B.C.
- The highly-influential Hittite stateswoman, Puduhepa, who was accorded significant political power in the 13th century B.C.
- Egypt was ruled by another female Pharaoh, Twosret in the 12th century B.C.
- The quasi-apocryphal Briton Queen Gwendolyn ruled in the 11th century B.C.

Female rulers were not unheard of in world history. {3}From the Queen of Sheba in the 10th century B.C. to Russian Empress "Catherine the Great" in the 18th century A.D., many women have been accorded momentous respect in bygone eras…in numerous places…for a myriad of reasons.

The dozen examples mentioned thus far were just the beginning.Here are 52 more examples of female rulers after c. 1000 B.C. through Late Antiquity:

1. **Sabaean** Queen Makeda of D'mt [a.k.a. the Queen of Sheba] (10th century B.C.)
2. **Hebrew** Queen Athaliah of Judah (9th century B.C.)
3. **Assyrian** Queen [regent] Sammu-ramat of Assur / Kalhu [Nimrud] (late 9th / early 8th century B.C.)
4. **Arabian** (Qedarite) Queens Zabiba, Samsi, Yati, and Te'el-hunu (8th century B.C.)
5. **Assyrian** Queen [regent] Naqia [a.k.a. "Zakutu"] (7th century B.C.)
6. **Cyrenaean** (Libyan) Queen Eryxo (6th century B.C.)
7. **Scythian / Persian** Queen Tomyris (6th century B.C.)
8. **Carian** (Anatolian) Queen Artemisia (5th century B.C.)
9. **Carian** (Anatolian) Queens Ada and Artemisia II (4th century B.C.)
10. **Galatian** (Celtic) leader, Ono-maris (4th century B.C.)

11. **Macedonian** (Greek) Queen Olympias of Epirus (3rd century B.C.)
12. **Illyrian** (Ardiaean) Queen Teuta of Rhizon (late 3rd / early 2nd century B.C.)
13. **Egyptian / Syrian** (Seleucid) Queen Eueteria [a.k.a. “Cleopatra Thea”] (2nd century B.C.)
14. **Sarmatian** Queen Amage (2nd century B.C.)
15. **Nubian** (Kushite) Queen [Kandake] Shanakdakhete of Meroe (2nd century B.C.)
16. **Egyptian** (Ptolemaic) Queen Kleopatra VII [a.k.a. “Cleopatra”] (1st century B.C.)
17. **Caucasian** (Anatolian) Queen Hypsicratea of Pontus [co-regnant] (1st century B.C.)
18. **Sinhalese** (Sri Lankan) Queen Anula of Anuradhapura (1st century B.C.)
19. **Hasmonean** (Jewish) Queen S[h]alome Alexandra (1st century B.C.)
20. **Nubian** (Kushite) Queens [Kandake] Amanirenas and Amanishakhete of Meroe (1st century B.C.)
21. **Indian** (Kamboja) Queen Aiyasi of Rajuvula / Mathura (late 1st century B.C. / early 1st century A.D.)
22. **Nubian** (Kushite) queens [Kandake] Nawidemak, Amanitore, Amantitere, Amanikhatashan, and Furude Rika of Meroe (1st century A.D.)
23. **Nabataean** (Syriac / Arab) Queen Shaqilath (1st century A.D.)
24. **Icenian** (Celtic) Queen Cartimandua (1st century A.D.)
25. **Icenian** (Celtic) Queen Boudicca (1st century A.D.)
26. **Khmer** (Cambodian) Queen Neang Neak of Funan [a.k.a. “Soma”] (1st century A.D.)
27. **Armenian** (Caucasian-Iberian) Queen [regent] Ghadana of Parthia (2nd century)
28. **Chinese** (Han) Empresses Deng Sui [a.k.a. “Hexi”] and Liang Na [a.k.a. “Shun-li”] (2nd century) {4}
29. **Japanese** (Yayoi) Priestess / Empress Himiko of Yamatai-koku [Wa] (late 2nd / early 3rd century) [possibly apocryphal]
30. **Japanese** (Yayoi) Empress Jingu of Wa (3rd century)
31. **Syriac** (Palmyrene) “Septimia”, Bat-Zabbai [a.k.a. “Zenobia”] (3rd century)
32. **Nubian** (Kushite) Queen [Kandake] Maleqorobar of Meroe (late 3rd century)
33. **Nubian** (Kushite) Queen [Kandake] Lakhideamani of Meroe (early 4th century)
34. **Mayan** (Tikai) Queen Une B’alam (4th century)
35. **Berber** (Tuareg) Queen Tin Hinan (4th century)
36. **Marcomanni** (Germanic) Queen Fritigil (4th century)
37. **Arabian** (Tanukhid) Queen Mavia (late 4th / early 5th century)

38. **Byzantine** “Aelia” [Empress] Pulcheria (5th century)
39. **Chinese** (Xian-bei) Empress Feng of Northern Wei [a.k.a. “Wen-ming”] (5th century)
40. **Ostro-Goth** (Arian) Queen Amalasuntha (6th century)
41. **Mayan** (Meso-American) Queen of Tikal (6th century)
42. **Byzantine** “Aelia” [Empress] Theodora (6th century)

As it turns out, when it came to high esteem for women, certain societies were quite amenable.Note, for example, the ten Nubian “Kandakes” of Kush listed (seven regna in the span of just over a century).Indeed, generally-speaking, some cultures are much more conducive to respect for women than others.

It is telling to note that only 3 of the 66 rulers mentioned thus far were Abrahamic (the Hasmonean queen and the two Byzantine empresses).Queen Fritigil eventually became another possible exception to the non-Abrahamic trend, as she is alleged to have adopted Christianity after coming to power (apparently for political purposes).

The last female ruler listed (Theodora) successfully expanded women’s rights in the Eastern Roman Empire–including property rights and the right to freely marry / divorce.She outlawed sex slavery, and enacted anti-rape legislation.Rapists were aggressively prosecuted; and coerced prostitution was outlawed.The Empress even took the bold stand that women convicted of adultery should NOT be executed.She also gave mothers augmented rights (i.e. guardianship) over their children and estates.

Fittingly, following Theodora’s death, there were three Augustas (“Aelias”) in the Eastern (Byzantine) Empire: Sophia, Ino Anastasia, and Constantina (the third being an Empress consort of the empire).All three of these prominent women were contemporaries of Mohammed of Mecca.There were at least seven female rulers during Mohammed’s lifetime:

- Japanese Empress Suiko Tenno
- Persian (Sassanid) Queen Puran-dukht (a.k.a. “Boran”)
- Persian (Sassanid) Queen Azarmi-dukht
- Lombard Queen Theodelinda
- Merovingian [regent] Queen Brunhilda of Austrasia
- Mayan Queen Ix Sak K’uk of Palenque (a.k.a. “Muwaan Mat”)
- Mayan Queen Yohl Ik’nal of Palenque

By this point, there had been women from dozens of different societies around the world who were accorded sovereignty.Surely the Abrahamic deity was aware of all these women.

And yet… According to Mohammed's famed companion, Abu Bakra: When MoM heard that Persians had made the daughter of "Khosrau" their ruler, he declared: "Never will a nation succeed that makes a woman its ruler."(Note that there were two successive female rulers in the empire directly to the east of Arabia during Mohammed's lifetime.)

Beginning the year of Mohammed's death, THREE women would rule the Korean peninsula: Queens Seondeok (a.k.a. "Deokman"), followed by Jindeok and Jinseong of Silla.Also during the reign of the so-called "Rashidun" [k]Halifah, a woman ruled Japan: Empress Saimei; né Kogyoku.During the reign of (Umayyad) caliph Abd al-Malik, another woman (Empress Jito) ruled Japan; another woman (Queen K'abel) ruled the Mayan Empire; another woman (Javanese Queen Maharani Shima) ruled Kalinga; and another woman (the notoriously Machiavellian Empress Wu Zetian) ruled China.There was also a female dynasty ruling the (Cambodian) Chenla Kingdom during the 7th–and into the 8th–century.During the Umayyad caliphate of the early 8th century, Japan would be ruled by a succession of THREE MORE empresses: Genmei (a.k.a. "Genmyo"), then Gensho, then Koken.Thereafter, Koken–rechristened "Shotoku"–would continue to rule.

More than a dozen East-Asian female sovereigns in the span of just four generations constitutes a trend.Though often based on nepotism, female empowerment within the halls of power was alive and well in the medieval Far East.

Alas. Once Western Sumatra fell under Islamic control, the traditionally matrilineal culture of the Minang-kabau (alt. the "Urang Minang"; "Suku Minang") was negated, though not quite abolished.

Over the course of the next millennium, there were 66 more female regna from around the world:

1. **Khmer** (Cambodian) Queen Jaya-devi of Angkor ruled the Chenla Kingdom in the late 7th / early 8th century
2. **[k]Hazar** (Turkic) stateswoman, Parsbit (a.k.a. "Barsbek") became the leader of the Turks in the 8th century.Queen Po Beg (né Fu Pu) ascended to the throne soon thereafter.

3. **Greek** stateswoman, Irene of Athens was made Empress of the Byzantine Empire at the end of the 8th century.
4. **Bohemian** (Slavic) Queen Valasca (a.k.a. Vlasta) [possibly apocryphal]
5. **Polish** (Polabian) Princess Wanda of the 8th century [possibly apocryphal]
6. **Siamese / Mon** Queen C[h]ama-devi of Lamphun / Hariphunjaya ruled the Dvaravati (Lavo) Kingdom in the 8th century.Her two daughters then ruled in unison.
7. **Norwegian** (Viking) Queen Asa Haraldsdottir of Agder ruled in the 9th century.
8. **Javanese** (Medang) Queen Sri Isyana Tunggawijaya ruled in the 10th century.
9. **Mercian** (Anglo-Saxon) Queen Æthelflæd of Warwick (a.k.a. Ethelfleda) ruled England in the 10th century.
10. **Mongol** (Khitan) Empress dowager Shulu Ping (a.k.a. “Yueliduo”) ruled in the 10th century.
11. **Abyssinian / Ethiopian** (Falash / Agaw) Queen [n]Gudi[t] of Damot / Shewa (alt. “Badit”; a.k.a. “Tedin bint Maya”; “Judith”) conquered Aksum in the 10th century or 11th century.
12. **Russian** (Kurik) Queen [Helga] Olga ruled Kievan Rus in the 10th century.[She eventually converted to Christianity.]
13. **Mongol** (Khitan) Empress Xiao Yanyan ruled in the late 10th century.
14. **Italian** (Tuscan) queen, Matilda of Canossa ruled in the early 11th century.
15. **Macedonian** (Greek) stateswoman, Theodora Porphyrogenita became Empress of the Byzantine Empire in the 11th century.
16. **Punjabi** (Soomra) Queen Zainab Tari ruled Sindh in the late 11th century.Her Rajput-influenced dynasty was likely a hybridization of Hindu and Islamic elements.
17. **Galician** (Portuguese) Queen Teresa of Leon was regnant for five years in the early 12 century.
18. **Edessan** (French) [Roman Catholic] Queen Melisende (and then her granddaughter, Sibylla) ruled Jerusalem in the 12th century.Sibylla was followed by Queens Isabella I, then Maria, and then Isabella II.
19. **Castilian** (Spanish) Queen Urraca of Leon was anointed Empress of Spain in the early 12th century.
20. **Castilian** (Spanish) Queen Petronella of Aragon reigned in the 12 century.
21. **French** (Ramnulfid) potentate, Eleanor of Aquitaine wielded power in the 12th century.
22. **Georgian** (Bagrationi) Queen Tamar(a) [a.k.a. “Tamar the Great”] consolidated the Caucuses in the late 12th century.She spent most of her time (successfully)

staving off Ottoman encroachment.Her daughter, Rusudan, succeeded her as Queen regnant.

23. **Sinhalese** (Buddhist) Queens Lilavati and Kalyanavati of Polonnaruwa ruled Sri Lanka in the late 12th / early 13th century.
24. **Mongol** (Khitan / Karaite) “Khatun”, Sorghaghtani (early 13th century) {5}
25. **Jurchen** warrior-Queen, Boto-hui [strong and fierce] Tar[k]hun (early 13th century)
26. **Georgian** Queen Rusudan (13th century)
27. **Basque / French** Queen Joan[a] of Navarre / Champagne (13th century)
28. **Vietnamese** (Dai Viet / Champa) Queen Ly Chieu Hoang (13th century)
29. **Indian** (Kakatiyan) “Maharaja” Rudra-deva of Orugallu / Telangana [a.k.a. “Rani” / “Rudhrama-Devi”] (13th century)
30. **Kashmiri / Tibetan** “Rani”, Kota of Ladakh (14th century)
31. **Javanese** (Majapahit) Queen Tribhuwana-wi-Jaya-tungga-Devi (“Jaya-Vishnu-wardhani”) [a.k.a. “Dyah Gitarja”] (14th century)
32. **Dalmatian** (Serbo-Croatian) Queen Jelena of Zahumlje / Bosnia [a.k.a. “Gruba”] (14th century)
33. **Sidama** (Ethiopic) Queen Furra (late 14th century)
34. **Polish** (Jagiellonian) “King” Jadwiga [a.k.a. “Hedwig”] (late 14th century)
35. **Norse** (Kalmar; Norwegian / Danish) Queen Margaret of Denmark (late 14th / early 15th century)
36. **Samoan** Queen Salamasina (15th century)
37. **Javanese** (Majapahit) Queen Suhita (15th century)
38. **Mon / Burmese** (Hanthawaddy / Pegu) Queen Shin-Saw-pu [a.k.a. “Binnya Thau”] (15th century)[not to be confused with the earlier Queen consort, Queen Shin-Saw of Pagan / Ava from the 13th century.]
39. **Aztec** (Acolhua) Queen Azcasuch (late 15th / early 16th century)
40. **Taino** (Caribbean) Queen Anacaona of Xaguar, Kiskeya [Haiti] (lat 15th / early 16th century)
41. **Cochasqui** (Meso-American) Queen Quilago of Tabacundo [Ecuador] (late 15th / early 16th century)
42. **Mongol** “Khatun”, Mandukhai of Northern Yuan (late 15th / early 16th century)
43. **English** Queen Elizabeth (16th century)
44. **Scottish** Queen, Mary Stuart (16th century)
45. **Huegonot** Queen Jeanne III of Navarre [a.k.a. “Jeanne d’Albret”] (16th century)
46. **Siamese** Queen Chiraprapha of La-Na (16th century)
47. **Malay** (Kelantan) Queen Siti Wan Kembang (16th century)
48. **Malagasy** Queens Rangita and Rafohy (16th century)

49. **Hawaiian** Queens (Mo'i) Kukaniloko and Kaikilani (16th century)
50. **Indian** (Tuluva) "Rani", Abbakka Chowta of Ullal / Karnataka (16th century)
51. **Indian** (Lingayat) "Rani", Chennamma Nayaka of Keladi / Karnataka (17th century)
52. **Hawaiian** Queens (Mo'i / Ali'i nui) Kalaimanuia, Keakamahana, and Keakealaniwahine (17th century)
53. **Malay** (Kelantan) Queen Puteri Saadong (17th century)
54. **Japanese** Empress Meisho (17th century)
55. **Swedish** Queen Christina "Alexandria" (17th century)

In India, it is telling that both Rudrama Devi and Dyah Gitarja transcended antiquated Hindu dogmas during their reigns.

In the Muslim world, the closest a woman came to being a ruler was the 13th-century (Seljuk / Mamluk) Sultana of Delhi, Jalalat ud-Din Raziyya [bint Shamas ud-Din Iltutmish] (a.k.a. "Razia Sultana"), who was disallowed from being a full-fledged sultan by the city's Muslim nobility.(The Andalusian Muslimah, Habiba of Valencia (a.k.a. "Thoma") is likely apocryphal.The Harari Queen known in folklore as "[c]Araweelo" (purportedly from the 11th or 12th century) was also likely apocryphal.)

The most prominent Muslimah during the Middle Ages was the (Isma'ili) Yemeni "Malika" [queen], Sayyada Arwa bint Ahmad al-Sulayhi (late 11th / early 12th century), who reigned as an Isma'ili (Sulayhid) suzerain under the aegis of the (Shia) Fatimid caliphate.Arwa's ascension to the throne can in no way be attributed to advocacy for women's rights. {7}

In the advent of the Mohammedan movement, Arabians may have wished to look back on their own history.They would have noticed the great Nabataean Queen Shaqilath from the 1st century.Shaqilath was preceded by another female ruler of renown, consort Chuldu [alt. "Huldo"]; and she was followed by another female ruler, consort Gamilat.Mohammedans may have also noted Arabian Queen Mavia, who ruled two centuries before their prophet's lifetime.Such figures were testament to the fact that–even in ancient Arabia–it was possible for women to be accorded high esteem…and power.And, if they wished, Mohammedans could have gone back even further into their history–noting the five Qedarite warrior-queens in the 8th and early 7th century B.C.: Zabiba, Samsi, Yati, Te'el-hunu, and Tabua.

Barring the Kairouan (Tunisian) pedagogue (Fatima al-Fihri) and the two Andalusians mentioned (Lubna and Fatima), virtually every major Islamic culture is conspicuously un-accounted for in the catalogue of female luminaries.Bali (Indonesia) had some female suzerains during the 10th – 13th centuries.A few “Seri Ratu” sultanas in Aceh (Indonesia) presided in the late 17th century.The (Malay) Pattani Kingdom had a few female suzerains (i.e. “Rajas”) from the late 16th to the early 18th century.None of these women had regnant status–as they were all ultimately beholden to superior (male) potentates.

An interesting note on the Mughal Empire.The most revered woman in the empire’s history was not even Muslim; she was Hindu: Miriam uz-Zamani (Begum), Akbar the Great’s most prized wife.Also referred to as “Hira Kunwari” [alt. “Harka Bai”], she was known as the Queen Mother of Hindustan (India).Tellingly, it was her (non-Muslim) son–not the sons of Akbar’s other (Muslim) wives–who was chosen to be the Emperor’s successor. A reformer and quasi-humanist, Akbar wanted to marry Miriam so much that he respected her wish to remain Hindu.

In Antiquity, reverence for women was evident in the works of Plutarch–most notably his “On the Bravery of Women” and “On the Virtues of Women”. Yet even when Giovanni Boccaccio published “De Claris Mulieribus” [Concerning Famous Women] in 1374, such a work–celebrating women’s role in society–would have STILL been inconceivable in the Muslim world.

It is worth mentioning that arguably the most powerful person during the Renaissance was a woman.One of the most renown female rulers in history, Queen Elizabeth of England (late 16th century) is famous for having rejected Roman Catholicism.She was undeterred by the Vatican’s countermanding positions; and–like all great women in history–she didn’t care what any other theocratic potentate said either.Like the other women listed here, she ascended to her position IN SPITE OF the ambient religious climate, not because of it.In Poland, Jadwiga bucked Roman Catholic precedent in order to become “King” in the 14th century.(The Vatican refused to recognize her as a “Queen”.)The same applied to the next Polish “King” Anna in the 16th century.

That brings us to the Enlightenment (during which–arguably–the most powerful person in the world was a woman).Russian czarina, Yekaterina II Alexeyevna (Catherine II; a.k.a. “Catherine the Great”) commanded unparalleled influence during the 18th century.It should be noted that she was preceded by THREE OTHER

Russian queens-regna that century: Yekaterina Alexeyevna (a.k.a. “Catherine I”), Anna, and–notably–Empress Yelisaveta Petrovna of the House of Romanov (a.k.a. “Elizabeth of Russia”, daughter of Peter the Great).

During the 18th century, other female regna included:

- German Empress Wilhelmine Amalia of Brunswick-Lüneburg
- Queen Anne of England
- Japanese Empress Go-Sakuramachi
- Maratha (Indian) “Maharani” [Queen] Ahilya Bai Holkar of Malwa [Maharashtra]
- Hawaiian Queen Kamakahelei
- “Apostolic” Habsburg Empress Maria Theresia
- Portuguese Queen Maria

During the 19th century, female regna included:

- Queen Ranavalo-Manjaka (a.k.a. “Ranavalona”) of Madagascar
- Maratha (Indian) warrior-queen, Lakshmibai of Jhansi (a.k.a. “Rani of Jhansi”)
- Lingayat (Indian) warrior-queen, Chennamma of Kittur / Karnataka [not to be confused with Chennamma Nayaka of Keladi from the 17th century]
- Kyrgyz “Datka”, Kurmanjan Mamat-bai of the Altai
- Empress Cixi of China {6}
- Queen Victoria of England {6}
- Queen “Dona” Maria II of Portugal
- Queen Isabella II of Spain
- Baoule / Akan (Ashanti / Ghanan) Queen Pokou of Kumasi
- Hawaiian Queen Lili’uokalani

The survey of women in history provided here is not to suggest that things were splendid regarding women’s rights at any given place–at any given time–in the ancient / medieval world.There was plenty that was objectionable.Even so, there were a few notable high-points.For example, in the 13th century, the Hanseatic city of Lübeck afforded all women the same legal status as men.(Many German women belonged to workers’ guilds and ran businesses.)

Other female rulers from the 19th century who are worthy of esteem include Maratha (Indian) warrior-queen, Lakshmibai of Jhansi (a.k.a. “Rani of Jhansi”), Queen regnant Ranavalo-Manjaka (a.k.a. “Ranavalona”) of Madagascar, and Spanish Queen Isabella II.Also of note was the Punjabi “Rebel Queen”, Mahrani Jind Kaur of Gujranwala (a.k.a. “Rani Jindan”), who served as regent of the Sikh Empire.

Oddly, when it came to appointing a sovereign women, it was the DUTCH–of all people–who were the “latest to the show” in the Occident.The Netherlands did not boast a female regnant until the end of the 19th century: Queen Wilhelmina (followed by her daughter, Juliana, and granddaughter, Beatrix).By that time, though, the Netherlandish monarchy had become a token station; and a woman in Europe no longer needed to have a crown in order to be accorded reverence.In fact, it became ever-more-likely that a woman could earn merit when socio-economic privilege was not involved in the assessment.

In sum: Though it has typically been the exception, not the rule, respect for women has been known since time immemorial.Today, there is something we might learn from such salutary cases.

[To be continued.In part II of this series, I survey the incidence of female warriors and military leaders around the world; and then do the same for female writers and intellectuals.]

{1This is plain to see by looking at instances of female empowerment in the contemporary Muslim world.The fact that certain women came to power (Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan in 1988, Khaleda Zia and Hasina Wazed in Bangladesh in 1991 and 1996 respectively, Tansu Çiller in Turkey in 1993, Mega-wati Sukarno-putri in Indonesia in 2001, and Roza Otunbayeva in Kyrgyzstan in 2010) does not mean that misogyny has been vanquished from those countries.Quite the contrary: Dar al-Islam still boasts the most patriarchal systems on the planet.These women were tentatively accorded political power insofar as they–and those who supported them–were SECULAR: a far cry from the circumstances of most women in the Muslim world.When adducing correlation, it is important not confuse “because of” with “in spite of”.}

{2She began as princess, continued as regnant, then as consort, before becoming dowager.}

{3Another famed Egyptian Queen was Nefertari-Meritmut, chief wife of Ramses the Great in the 13th century B.C.Though “only” a consort, she wielded prodigious power and commanded tremendous respect.}

{4They were technically regents, though they could be considered de facto regna.}

{5Sorghaghtani was arguably one of the most powerful women in history.She was “Khatun” [Empress] of the (Mongol) Keraite Empire for almost a half century (1204-1252), outliving her father-in-law (Ghengis Khan) by 25 years.Tengri-ist by Faith, she was a champion of cosmopolitanism.}

{6Though they were stupendously powerful (ruling, as they did, entire nations), Cixi and Victoria were not laudable women.Both were decidedly conservative; and obdurately Reactionary.The former was cruel and borderline incompetent; the latter was a stewardess of British colonialism and promulgator of puritanical sensibilities.Each was an icon of hyper-traditionalism in her domain.But the fact remains that they were women accorded supreme power by their respective societies.Cixi was, by most accounts, an odious women.With her ultra-long fingernails and stentorian bearing, she never did or said anything estimable.The point of the present survey, though, is to gauge the degree to which a society was willing to accord power to a women.Both women were significant in this sense.Victoria might be contrasted with the Roman Catholic fanatic, Queen “Bloody” Mary of England (16th century), who was not an indication of female empowerment–as she was begrudgingly accorded sovereignty due to the fact that she was the daughter of Henry VIII.That did not end well for anyone; and she was promptly repudiated by everyone but the most deluded Catholic sycophants.}

{7The only other exception was the Mughal Sultana Razia ad-Din (who presided in Delhi for almost four years in the 13th century).She was the only Sunni Muslim woman in history (prior to the modern era) to serve in a quasi-regnant position.Even she did not have absolute power–as she was primarily beholden to (male) religious leaders.For example: While she promoted Hindu philosophy / literature in the sultanate’s schools, she was often held in check by the presiding Islamic nobles (who saw such material as sacrilegious).In this sense, ambient religiosity that STYMIED her.To wit: She was only able to make headway insofar as she THWARTED Islamic influences.}

{8The Minang-kabau were influenced by the (Hindu) Maja-pahits.Their language was Old Malay.}

{9 One could also look at Hassidim / Haredim (for Judaism); Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, Evangelicals, and hard-line Roman Catholics (for Christianity); as well as Khomeinism (for Shia Islam).}



Appendix 1:

Obviously, this survey does not include every female monarch–lest we find ourselves cataloguing thousands upon thousands of women, most of whom only commanded status because of who their husbands / parents happened to be.Only women with “suo jure” (a.k.a. “regnant”) status are counted.Over the course of history, many consort / vassal / regent / dowager monarchs may be worthy of high esteem; but identifying such cases would require a parsing process that goes far beyond the scope of this survey.(Spanning several millennia, such a survey would encompass countless of women around the world.)While most female sovereigns came to their lofty station by nepotistic means, the ones enumerated here proved their mettle as rulers in their own right.

Hence queens consort (women who were queen simply by dint of being married to a king), client queens (i.e. suzerains rather than sovereigns; a.k.a. “vassal” monarchs), and queens regent (interim / provisional monarchs) are not counted.This also excludes dowager queens: former consorts who–as monarchical widows–sometimes served as regents or important advisors (as a matter of course).Such a woman is essentially a monarch emeritus.Barring four special cases (regents Sammu-ramat, Naqi’a, Ghadana, and Olga), I only list women who had regnant status (i.e. who were rulers in their own right).For instance, as a vassal of the Assyrian Empire, Semitic Queen Naqi’a was highly influential in the late 8th / early 7th century B.C.–and ruled as though she were absolute sovereign.

Though the three Queens of Caria listed were technically under the umbrella of the Persian Empire, they could be considered de facto regna.

Examples of suzerains (rulers of client-states) were the three (Eastern Orthodox) Anatolian Queens of Trebizond (a client-state of the Mongol Empire) in the late 13th / early 14th century.

There are several notable queens consort / regent who were icons of female empowerment–most notably “Gorgo”, Queen of Sparta (who, when asked why it was that women should be able to rule men, famously replied that it was–after all–women who gave birth to them).A few other cases are worth mentioning:

- Perhaps the most influential woman in the archaic world was the Hittite Queen Puduhepa, consort of King Hattusili III (13th century B.C.)Prior to becoming queen, Puduhepa was a prominent priestess of the Assyrian / Babylonian goddess, Ishtar.
- There were several prominent Nubian (Kushite) queens consort in Egypt: Tabiry, Tabekenamun, Abar, Qalhata, Pebatjma, Tadibastet III, Khensa, and Peksater (during the 8th century B.C.); Atakhebasken, Takahatenamun, Khedebneithirbinet, and Naparaye (during the 7th century B.C.)Also of note was the high priestess, Amenirdis (a.k.a. “Hatneferumut”), daughter of Pebatjma, who was revered as the divine “adoratrice” of Amun in the late 8th century B.C.
- There were several other queens of Ptolemaic Egypt who did not have complete sovereignty: Arsinoe II and IV, Cleopatra I-VI, Cleopatra VIII (a.k.a. Numidian Queen Cleopatra Selene II of Mauretania); as well as Berenice III and IV.Ptolemaic (Macedonian) Queen Arsinoe II was co-regnant with her brother-husband, Ptolemy II Philadelphus; and was allegedly a champion

charioteer.Cleopatra I of Syra was a Seleucid princess who wielded tremendous power–though she was technically a Ptolemic consort.
- There were two Thracian (Odrysian) queens in the 1st century: Antonia Tryphaena and Pythodoris II.While both were vassals of the Roman Empire, they were accorded prodigious autonomy.
- Ostrogoth Queen regent, Amalasuntha (daughter of Theoderic the Great) was extremely influential in the early 6th century; and was highly revered by Byzantine Emperor, Justinian the Great.
- There were two other Mayan queens of note: “Lady of Tikal” in the early 6th century, followed by Lady K’ab’al Xook (a.k.a. “Lady Xoc”) in the late 7th century.Though not technically regna, they both seem have been highly influential.

European queens of limited sovereignty are not counted in the main list.For example, the three queens of Naples in the 14th thru 16th centuries (Joan I, II, & III), the five queens of Sardinia in the 13th / 14th century (Elena of Gallura, Benedetta of Cabliari, Adelasia of Torres, Joanna of Gallura, and Eleanor of Arborea), the four queens of Sicily in the 12th thru 16th centuries (Constance I & II, Maria, and Joan the Mad), and the various queens of Navarre from the 10th thru 16th centuries (notably, Marguerite of Angouleme) were vassals / consorts.

In general, why are consorts not counted in this survey?Because anyone can be an important man’s wife.Whenever there was a king, he usually had a spouse–a fact that does not attest to some lofty enterprise to effect women’s rights.Being married to a king–in and of itself–is not an impressive accomplishment.(Just as it is no great feat to come out of a queen’s birth canal.)While many female regna ascend to their station through accident of birth (i.e. nepotism), what we are concerned with here are societies that permitted females to enjoy “suo jure” status.

To summarize: For my survey, regnant status was not in and of itself sufficient; I list only regna who were both successful and lauded.The fact that their society allowed them to BE sovereigns–and that they were evidently rather good at it–qualified them for the list.

In this survey, I have disqualified two other kinds of female sovereigns (even if they were technically regna): Unsuccessful / insignificant ones and opprobrious ones.

The first kind includes Ptolemic Pharaoh Berenice IV Epiphaneia (1st century B.C.), Sri Lankan Queen Sivali of Anuradhapura (1st century A.D.), Kashmiri Queen Sugandha and Anglo-Saxon / Mercian Queen Ælfwynn (10th century); as well as Empress Matilda of England in the 12th century.

Other female monarchs of nil consequence include: Hungarian / Croatian Queen Maria, Bosnian Queen Jelena Gruba, and Isabella of France (Queen consort of England)–all in the 14th century.Also note Bulgarian / Shishman Queens Komnena and Ruzhina in the late 14th / early 15th century; and Queen Isabella of Castile (15th century).Neither Transylvanian ruler Catherine of Brandenburg (17th century) nor Tahitian Queen [O]purea and Swedish Queen Ulrika Eleonora (18th century) are counted either.There were some minor queens in ancient Africa as well–such as Nigerian Queen Pupupu of Ondo (16th century) and Angolan / Mbundu Queen Anna Nzinga (late 17th / early 18th century).There were also the “Rain Queens” of Balobedu in South Africa–as well as queens of Sine, Waalo, Maldives, and Boina (Madagascar)–at various points during the Middle Ages.Finally, there were a few Samoan queens (“Tui Manu’a”) and Tahitian queens during the 18th and 19th centuries.Their significance was middling.

Worth noting, though, was Queen regnant Ranavalo-Manjaka (a.k.a. “Ranavalona”) of Madagascar in the 19th century–who I did list, as she was significant, yet who is only worthy of opprobrium (as she was a psychopath).

Examples of the second kind of deliberate omission include the notorious Kashmiri Queen Didda in the late 10th century; the highly-influential Spanish Queen [consort] Isabella of Castile (Catholic tyrant, and mother of Queen [consort] Catalina of Aragon) in the 15th century; the Catholic tyrant, Queen “Bloody Mary” of England in the 16th century; and the Nahua traitor, Doña Marina (a.k.a. “La Malinche”; consort of Cortez and collaborator with the Conquistadors) in the 16th century.Such figures are not exemplars of female empowerment.

I make an exemption for Chinese Empress Wu Zetian: notorious for nefariousness, as she was very significant in world history…and profoundly intelligent.The same might be said of the ambitious Grand Empress Dowager Feng of Northern Wei (5th century A.D.)Though Spanish Queen Isabella of Castile was extremely influential in world history, she was a (tyrannical) religious zealot–and, in any case, merely a consort.Her successor, Joanna of Castile, never had any real power.

Appendix 2:

The most vaunted Hadith (that of Bukhari), states that women are not allowed to participate in leadership (9/88/219). And it is attested that MoM scoffingly pronounced that "a nation will never succeed that makes a woman its ruler" during the battle of Al-Jamal, upon hearing that the Persians had made the daughter of Khosrow queen regnant. It should come as no surprise, then, that there was NEVER a female regnant in Dar al-Islam prior to the late 20th century…whereas virtually EVERY CULTURE IN THE WORLD boasted female leaders at some point, as will be shown forthwith.

What of the females that came to be leaders of Muslim-majority countries toward the end of the 20th century? In every case, they came to a position of political power IN SPITE OF Islam, not because of it. Let's look at the five cases (the ONLY cases that exist since the advent of Islam):

- Pakistan: Benazir Bhutto (1988)
- Bangladesh: Khaleda Zia (1991); Hasina Wazed (1996)
- Turkey: Tansu Çiller (1993)
- Indonesia: Mega-wati Sukarno-putri (2001)

The empowerment of each was entirely secular in nature; religion had nothing to do with it. Both Turkey's Çiller and Indonesia's Sukarno-putri were largely Progressive. Neither was known for her religiosity. (Recall that, until Erdogan's revanchist regime, post-Ottoman Turkey was a predominantly secular State, pursuant to Kemal-ism in the post-World War I era.)

Meanwhile, Roza Otunbayeva–who became head of state in Kyrgyzstan in 2010–was an avowed atheist. (!)

And as I write this, Halimah bint Yakob is the president of Singapore, which is a categorically secular city-State. Yakob became a figurehead for AWARE (the Association of Women for Action and Research), fighting for women's rights on patently secular grounds–a laudable cause with zero connection to the Sunnah. Starting with being designated as Woman Of The Year by Her World magazine, her estimable career is clearly not attributable to piety.

What of female heads of State elsewhere?

- Nicola Sturgeon is the Prime Minister of Scotland

- Angela Merkel is the Prime Minister of Germany
- Tsai Ing-wen is the president of Taiwan
- Jacinda Adern is the president of New Zealand
- Erna Solberg is the Prime Minister of Norway
- Michelle Bachelet is the president of Chile

Shall we thank (respectively) Presbyterianism, Lutheranism, Taoism, Mormonism, the Church Of Norway, or Roman Catholicism for the political careers of these women? Clearly not.

The other female heads of State are: Katrin Jakobsdottir of Iceland, Mette Frederiksen of Denmark, and Sanna Mirella Marin of Finland. All three are democratic socialists. (The recently-ousted Prime Minister of Thailand, Ying-luk Shinawatra, was a Buddhist. The recently-ousted Prime Minister of South Korea, Park Geun-hye, was an atheist.)

Pakistan and Bangladesh currently have some of the worst women's rights records in the world–due entirely to adherence to a traditionalist conception of "sharia". (Bhutto was–predictably–assassinated by Islamic fundamentalists.) Clearly, the ascension of the women in these two nations was not attributable to the Sunnah.

These women are not evidence of female empowerment in Dar al-Islam; they are demonstrations of what happens when Islam is trumped by secular principles.