*Women Leaders: Rulers throughout History.* ABC-CLIO.

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**Rolling Role Models: Women Leaders on CD-ROM**

In the wake of the stunning popular interest in the Women's World Cup, the first U.S. space voyage under the command of a woman, Eileen Collins, the presidential campaign of Elizabeth Dole, and the success of films like <cite>Elizabeth</cite>–all of which the media cite for their importance as role models–the appearance of a CD-ROM devoted to women leaders should be a welcome event. Here, using an appealing technology that provides instant access to information, a researcher can peruse biographies of 380 women rulers/leaders worldwide from Ada to Zoe (from earliest recorded history to today), as well as search across them for patterns. Because computer based formats (CD-ROM and websites) are now so widely used for study (and are important developing media with so much potential), I want to address concerns I have, as a college teacher and researcher, about this product. <p> The CD-ROM and accompanying booklet provide copious technical information on how to use the resource, i.e. how to install, navigate, browse, and then collect and export data (directly and seamlessly into a term paper, it appears). They also direct you to a glossary, maps, timelines, and what are described as photographs [sic] of many of the leaders. However, there is no introductory tour (or easily found introduction) to help you figure out the rationale for the resource or how optimally to benefit from its content or configuration. <p> The Main Menu presents four choices: Name Index, Subject Index, Attribute Search, Text Search. The Name Index leads to individual women leaders arranged alphabetically. Here each person receives four things: a portrait; a caption identifying the person and supplying the dates of rule or office; a brief textual biography (with hyperlinks to definitions and maps, as appropriate); and

one or two bibliographical references. The Subject Index, comprising names of countries and some terms (e.g. colonialism, empress), takes you to words appearing potentially in several entries. The Attribute Index permits searching by type of office, date, and country (and combinations thereof), while the Text Search is free form. <p> Sounds good, but what's wrong with this picture? First, there is a certain haphazardness in the terms used to describe these women's roles. This is the greatest flaw, for the sophisticated searching tools that make this medium powerful are limited when there is no consistency in the search terms. Let me give some examples. Among the terms used to define the leaders you will find: queen, duchess, sovereign, ruler, despina, president, prime minister, augusta, chief, empress, chieftainess, governor, and military leader. Certainly individual situations employ different titles, but for term searching to produce meaningful results, some clear understanding of the basis for ruling authority needs to be made clear, i.e., some queens are sovereigns, others are not. Some duchesses had ruling authority, but in most cases, it is simply a title. <p> For the same reason, more attention needs to be paid to consistency in names. In the west, ruling women's names take several forms: their first name, e.g., Cleopatra or Mary, often with a numeral, e.g., I or II; their country name, e.g., Mary of Scotland, or the name of their ruling house, e.g., Mary Stuart. Queens in their own right are generally known by their first name, while Queen consorts (i.e., married to the King) who ruled temporarily as regents tend to be known by their family name or country of origin, e.g. Catherine de' Medicis (family name) and Blanche of Castile or Anne of Austria (birth country names). All three women were queens consort and re-

gents in France. Some discussion of this would have been enlightening. <p> Term searching can produce some interesting results. Using the Subject Index (predetermined words): "regency," produced 114 entries; "saint," 6, and "President," 8 (one of whom, Vijaya Pandit, presided over the UN General Assembly, not a country). Using the Text Search (where you can input your own search terms): "regent" produced 120 entries; "saint" 10, and "President" 28. Perhaps more interesting, however, "poison" yielded 16; "island" 26; "widow" 28; "sister" 98; "mother" 111;"wife" 137; "son" 258; and "daughter" 259. Following up these hits might lead to some interesting hypotheses about what kind of woman becomes a ruler or leader and in what sorts of situations. Genealogical charts would have clarified the important relationships at work here. "Salic Law," however, produces only three items, all from the nineteenth century. These contain a hyperlink with a definition, but no real discussion of the Law's importance in keeping women from inheriting the throne in their own right, from the Middle Ages onward, in countries like France where it was observed. It does not figure as a term in the Subject Index. <p> To make the product more appealing visually, images accompany each entry. Too many of these seem carelessly chosen, without regard for whether or not the image derived from the time period of the ruler or was made later. Visual representations often play an important role in how we experience "history"; they are evidence, especially for underserved populations like women. When made in the ruler's lifetime, such portrayals participate in the creation of her authority; if made later, in her subsequent mythologizing. To treat them simply as garnish for the verbal text is to do serious damage. Sometimes the wrong portrait appears: e.g., twelfth-century Eleanor of Aquitaine's biography is accompanied by a portrait of sixteenth-century Eleanor Habsburg, queen of Portugal and then France; fifteenth-century Joanna II of Naples is illustrated by Raphael's sixteenth-century portrait of a later Joanna of Aragon. Then, presumably, when the staff could not find portraits, they substituted architecture, which sometimes creates really strange juxtapositions, e.g., a view of the exterior of a mosque in Mali (identified as such only when you click on the image to enlarge it) bears the caption, "Bendjou, Empress, ca. 1345." The intent may have been for such images to create "atmosphere," but these and other anachronistic views–of the sixteenth-century part of the Doge's Palace in Venice or the late seventeenth-century Palace Chapel at Versailles–are used to illustrate entries on women who lived long before these were made or in completely different geographical locations. Thus they do great damage to a sense of history that such an ency-clopedia should seek to foster. How can the history or art history teacher insist upon accuracy (of dates, places, and names), when the reference tools marketed for their students' use do not give them serious consideration? <p> The maps provided (which can be printed out for easy attachment to a report) are standard physical maps of the world. If the reader wanted to know the geographical location of a place of rule, following a link in an entry, she would find an arrow indicating a single point of land, with no national boundary, but with the (not terribly important in this context!) color-coded information that it was x or y feet above sea level. <p> Finally, the bibliographical citations are generally limited to similar encyclopedic works, textbooks, or other very general and old sources, or to articles from newspapers or National Geographic. This CD-ROM will not introduce students to the accessible books in English on historical queens and rulers by scholars like Antonia Fraser, Ruth Kleinman, Carole Levin, Grace Harriet Macurdy, Rosalind Marshall, Janet Nelson, John Carmi Parsons, Nancy Roelker, Pauline Stafford (to name but a few), not to mention biographies and autobiographies of individual modern leaders. <p> As stated earlier, no meaningful rationale for the product is easily found. There is also no serious exploration of what the terms ruler or leader include (and omit) or explanation of the selection process. At first, therefore, the inclusion of Diane of Poitiers [sic] boggled my mind. Only again if you happen to find the "Credits" (or if you've read the marketing materials on their website) do you see any mention of what the work purports to be: "a biographical reference work of 400 female rulers, de facto rulers, and constitutional monarchs of the world's kingdoms, empires, nations, islands, and tribes [...] Included are women who have risen to power, been elected to office, and acted as the power behind the throne, in addition to some more legendary than historical [...] profiles present their lives, accomplishments, and controversies." As mistress to the King of France, Diane de Poitiers was certainly a power behind the throne, but her biography here irresponsibly describes her as having had "absolute power over [King] Henry's decisions." In the context of rule, "absolute" power has a very specific historical meaning in no way equivalent to a mistress's influence, no matter how extensive. To be consistent with the power-behind-the-throne category, shouldn't Eva Peron have been included, as well as Isabel? <p> Such a collection of biographies of women leaders presumes that it is a coherent category or that such information is lacking elsewhere. There is no statement or discussion of why such a collection of women rulers/leaders makes sense now, or is useful

or mention that such collections themselves (also emphasizing biographies and controversies) have a history (e.g., Giovanni Boccaccio's <cite>Concerning Famous Women</cite> or Christine de Pisan's <cite>Book of the City of Ladies</cite>, both composed in the fourteenth century). <p> One cannot, moreover, readily find the authors of this CD-ROM on its Main Menu (nor in the accompanying booklet). It presents itself as an authoritative reference resource but, unlike many such encyclopedias, does not list individual authors. Only once inside and navigating through several levels to locate the button for "Credits" can one discern that this CD-ROM is based upon data from Guida M. Jackson's award-winning book <cite>Women who Ruled</cite> (also published by ABC-Clio), and that the 20 "creative" and "technical" personnel listed, under the overall direction of Tim O'Donnell, contributed the visual materials and the search mechanisms. Their contributions make the product jazzier and more appealing to the computer generation, but the basic content doesn't advance our knowledge. <p> I'm left with two hopes: that perusal of this reference work will spark interest and (with the guidance of teachers and librarians) provoke further research in the via ardua of more authoritative sources; not the via facilis of this one with its potential to download and splice an instant report or term paper. Also, significantly, what the perceptive young reader, inspired by the accomplishments of her soccer idols, will learn from navigating through this CD-ROM is that while women in the past have ruled and in the twentieth-century have served as President or Prime Minister of many countries around the world–e.g., Bangladesh, Britain, India, Ireland, Israel, Nicaragua, Norway, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Turkey–no woman has been elected to the presidency in the United States.

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