

REBEL PRINCESSES

by Pihla Hintikka



Princess Pingyang of Tang Dynasty Cunning Chinese combatant

Forget about blingbling tiaras and diamond necklaces. Princess Pigyang, formally Princess of Zhao of Pingyang (598-623) was anything but a trophy princess who sat next to her father and waved her hand to the masses from the terrace of a fancy palace. The daughter of Emperor Gaozu of Tang, Princess Pingyang played a powerful role in founding the Tang Dynasty, the imperial dynasty of China, which ruled until 907. She successfully fought against Sui Dynasty helping her father seize power and gain his throne. From early age on Princess Pingyang was not only talented at martial arts but also an excellent negotiator. She managed to forge important alliances with Sui defectors converting them to his father's side. After that she recruited several hundred into her father's armed forces. When her father began the revolt, the clever princess was supplementing their troops with local militias mostly comprising outlaws and gangsters. At the same time she trained them into a disciplined army. The famous Army of Lady was born. In addition to her cunning expertise the warrior princess was also a very human politician. She forbade her army from looting and violence. Instead she ordered food to be distributed to the poor peasants, thereby winning their loyalty as well. No wonder she was her father's favourite out of eighteen daughters. After several battles led by the warrior princess, Tang Dynasty got in power in 618. When China was conquered, Princess Pingyang, appointed a military marshal, spent the rest of her life ruling over a golden age of China, making China the most powerful empire in the 7th century. When she died in 623, Emperor Gaozu ordered a grand military funeral for her, fit for a high general. Princess Pingyang was the only woman ever to have a military funeral with music in China.



Cleopatra VII Bewitching ruler of Egypt

You know the image: beautiful woman dressed as Venus, the goddess of love, wearing a graphic black bob with a fringe and smokey cat eye make-up as well as golden headdresses. It is Elizabeth Taylor, who incarnates Cleopatra VII (69 BC – 30 BC), the last pharaoh of ancient Egypt, in a British-American-Swiss epic drama film, Cleopatra (1963) by Joseph L. Mankiewicz. The real Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt, undoubtedly had the accessories and wealth, but beauty? No one actually knows. In February 2007, English researchers discovered a coin, dated 32 BC, bearing a portrait of Cleopatra, which renewed debate about whether she was actually as beautiful as is imagined. On the coin Cleopatra has a large nose, narrow lips and a sharp chin. This woman has nothing to do with Elizabeth Taylor. But the discovery doesn't diminish the power of Cleopatra. What made the Egyptian Queen remarkable was beyond physical beauty. She had something rare called charm. Cleopatra ruled ancient Egypt as co-regent for almost three decades, first with her two younger brothers and then with her son. But she was the one in real power, being a highly intelligent woman and an astute politician. As a clever woman she intentionally seduced the Roman leader Julius Caesar and had a scandalous affair with him for three years before he was killed. Afterward she used her spell on the successor of Caesar, Mark Antony, to maintain Egypt's position with the expanding Roman Empire, and it worked – of course.



Victoria, Crown Princess of Sweden Queen-to-be who married her personal trainer

Victoria, Crown Princess of Sweden, 34, is a perfect example of a rule-obeying and well-educated princess who eventually couldn't handle everything in her life being controlled by others – or that's how she felt. Somewhat unsurprisingly from 1996 on, she suffered from the eating disorder, anorexia. She moved to the United States to get professional treatment, to shoo the press away from her and live anonymously. Princess Victoria came back to Sweden in the beginning of the 2000's looking happier and healthier than ever. But after a while people found out that there was another reason for her happiness other than recovering from an eating disorder. This happiness had a name: Daniel Westling, her personal trainer. While Victoria's muscles got a boost, there was also an unexpectedly warm feeling running through her veins. Princess found the love of her life at a gym. The new relationship came as much of a surprise to the royal family as to the ordinary family of Mister Westling. At first, Victoria's father, Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden, wasn't pleased to realize that the heiress-apparent to the Swedish throne had found a commoner lover. Soon he had to mellow down in front of this determined daughter of his and made the arrangements for the couple to get married. On the 19th of June more than 1 200 guests gathered at Stockholm Cathedral to witness the biggest royal wedding since that of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer. 500 000 people are estimated to have been weeping in front of their televisions when the Princess said yes to her fitness trainer. No wonder the Swedish monarchy, regarded as the world's most modern royal family, has become even more popular in recent years. The fairytale wedding of Victoria and Daniel was a reminder that the royals are not so far from us regular people after all: they want to be happy and no royal decree will rule over that.



Princess Margaret Peculiar Princess of England

On the surface Princess Margaret of England (1930-2002), second daughter of George VI and only sibling of Elizabeth II, was the picture perfect princess: beautiful, self-assured and fashionable in the waspwaisted dresses of the post-War era. However, the reality of the life of Princess Margaret was quite the contrary. As a child Margaret was known to be fun but naughty, a witty girl with a wicked sense of humor and ability to mimic especially the royals to their delight, or not. Her older sister was the opposite: she was calm and responsible, preparing herself for the formal duties of the future Queen of England. It is said that Margaret had what it takes to be The Queen but as she never had the opportunity to prove it, she eventually chose her own path to be a princess, a path that would strongly question the role of princess later on. Margaret loved the arts and artists and wasn't scared of showing it. As soon as she turned 18, she began to go out and party hard. She smoked and drank a great deal. And the press followed. For a member of the royal family this hint of Marie Antoinette's style was considered unconventional and disapproved of. But then she met Group Captain Peter Townsend, the love of her life. There was just one turbulent detail in his marital status: divorced. The couple wished to be married but when the news hit the stands, it was game over. The royal family gave Margaret an ultimatum: marrying this man she would have to give up all her rights as a princess. She chose to be a princess. In 1960 Margaret got married with a magazine photographer Antony Armstrong-Jones, later known as Earl of Snowdon. Margaret was the first princess of England to have her wedding televised. The stylish marriage with two kids hid secrets behind its curtains: both had affairs. When the News of the World published a photo of Margaret and Roddy Llewellyn together on Mustique, the West Indian Island, the private life of the royal family suffered from a shock. Margaret was the first one to have been photographed wearing a bathing suit. By then she had already lost her image as a respected princess in public but now she was met with even less sympathy. In 2002 Princess Margaret suffered a massive stroke and died. An unconventional princess to the last she wanted to be cremated unlike most royals.



Gloria Von Thurn und Taxis From Punk Princess to Pope's best friend

When you think about a royal princess, you don't necessarily have an image of a female version of The Cure's singer Robert Smith in mind. However, this is exactly how the German Princess Gloria Von Thurn und Taxis could be described: wild and punk. No wait, now she's actually the classy best friend of the Pope Benedict XVI. How is this possible? The controversial and colorful Princess, Gloria Von Thurn und Taxis, was born in 1960. Although she was a countess, her family wasn't rich. Gloria even waited tables in the Swiss ski resort St. Moritz. Then she met Prince Johannes von Thurn und Taxis, Germany's richest aristocrat and her distant cousin, who was 34 years older than her. But the age difference didn't matter. They got married and had three children. However, everyone learned pretty quickly that Gloria, nicknamed Princess TNT, wasn't particularly royal. She dyed her hair when she wanted and wore it in a mohawk. She was a wild socialite who loved partying and meeting rock stars. She barked like a dog on David Letterman show. She went out with Prince. She got busted for possession of hashish at the Munich airport. Not very expected princess-like behavior. Then again her husband wasn't exactly the model prince either when showing off with his open bisexuality. After having a crazy party animal's life, she drastically calmed down when her husband died in 1990. Gloria returned to her main residence, the enormous Schloss St. Emmeram, in the German city of Regensburg, and became a devoted Catholic and respected housewife dealing with a billion-dollar fortune. Today she travels between Germany, New York and Rome where she goes to see her good friend, the Pope. Religious as ever, Princess TNT is nowadays a self-assured business woman in her 50's in the head of The Princely House of Thurn und Taxis, a 500-year-old family empire that began as Europe's first transnational postal service in 1490.



Queen Margot Seductive scandal Princess of France

Paris, 18th of August in 1572. Nineteen-year-old Princess Marguerite (1553-1615), the youngest daughter of King Henry II of France and Catherine de Medici, stands at the altar of a cathedral about to be forced to say yes to her wedding vows – alone. Her groom, Henry de Bourbon, King of Navarre, is kept outside for religious reasons. The arranged marriage of Catholic Princess and Protestant King was Marguerite's mother's attempt to create harmony between Catholics and the Protestant Huguenots, a union that was designed to reunite family ties. Nice idea on paper, which didn't work out. Instead it was only a prelude of one of the cruelest events of the history of France. Six days after the wedding the St. Bartholomev's Day massacre of French Calvinists began. Several thousand Huguenots were murdered. Some say the actual intention of the marriage had been the massacre, luring the most powerful Huguenots to their death under the guise of wedding guests. Princess Marguerite, later becoming Queen Margot, was left in the middle of a religious war drawn towards two different directions by her background and marriage, in the end saving her husband's life to guarantee her trophy. It still didn't mean that Princess Marguerite, a member of the last generation of the Valois family, which ruled France for over 200 years, was in love with her husband. On the contrary she took many lovers during her marriage and after the divorce. She was also famous for her beauty and being one of the most fashionable women of her time, influencing most of Europe's Royal Courts wardrobes. As a gifted poet and writer, the sneaky princess also took the pleasure out of revealing the secrets of her family. Of course the royal family didn't really appreciate her misbehavior. As Queen Margot butted head again and again with her brother, Henry III, and her husband, she was finally imprisoned in the castle of Usson. There she spent 18 years living her life as the Queen of the Castle, writing. The Memoirs were published posthumously in 1628 and caused a public scandal.