

Tryntje Helfferich. *The Iron Princess: Amalia Elisabeth and the Thirty Years War*.

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Women and warfare is an expanding subfield in historical studies. *The Iron Princess* examines an important case of a princely woman in early modern warfare: the regency of Amalia Elisabeth, landgravine of Hesse-Cassel, during the Thirty Years' War. Tryntje Helfferich presents a Hesse-Cassel on the brink of destruction when Amalia Elisabeth assumed the regency for her young son Wilhelm, following the death of her husband in 1637. The landgravine "saw herself as one of those singular women 'raised up by divine authority' . . . to be 'the nursing mothers of the church'" (7).

Helfferich exploits the rich manuscript correspondence of Amalia Elisabeth and the Hessian state, held in the Hessische Staatsarchiv Marburg, as well as diplomatic correspondence and papers. The book constructs a narrative of the conflict around the regent's attempts to attain her war aims of territorial expansion, Calvinist protections, and constitutional reforms. Helfferich argues that Amalia Elisabeth "was not fighting a war *of* religion, therefore, but a war *for* religion or inextricably intertwined *with* religion" (9).

The book presents a case study of a small state's involvement in the Thirty Years' War, effectively setting Hesse-Cassel within the context of regional dynastic disputes and imperial political struggles. Amalia Elisabeth managed local political tensions involving the Hessian councillors, nobles, estates, and ministers. On the regional level, the landgravine competed with Landgrave Georg II of Hesse-Darmstadt for control of Marburg and struggled to maintain Hessian dynastic

holdings. In imperial politics, Hesse-Cassel stood alone by the late 1630s as the only major German state opposing the emperor.

The regent continued Hesse-Cassel's alliances with France and Sweden, yet she periodically pursued negotiations with the emperor for a peace that would secure German liberties. Hesse-Cassel's delicate political position meant that Hessian communities were subjected to frequent attacks, raids, and contributions by Catholic League and imperial forces. Hessian experiences of warfare provide new perspectives on the complicated political history of the Holy Roman Empire in the seventeenth century.

The book is structured as a diplomatic narrative of Amalia Elisabeth's policies and her "strategy of delay" (97). Battles and sieges are mentioned briefly as events that suddenly changed the strategic possibilities and negotiating positions of the Hessian councillors and agents. Helfferich often employs twentieth-century diplomatic concepts and language: "domino effect," "in the game," "the emperor blinked first," "diplomatic game," "hot war" (74, 84, 104, 111, 146). The book provides a detailed presentation of Hessian involvement in the prolonged negotiations leading to the Peace of Westphalia.

The Hessian army fought to advance Calvinist and anti-imperial causes, as well as to protect the dispersed territories of Hesse-Cassel. Amalia Elisabeth and her son Wilhelm spent long periods of the war as exiles, far from the beleaguered city of Cassel, which was frequently blockaded and sometimes besieged. The regent had to manage difficult generals, burdensome military contributions, and complex war finances to maintain her army in the field and ensure Hesse-Cassel's complicated strategic position. The book might have investigated broader dimensions of the Hessian war effort, such as military contractors, contributions systems, occupied territories, and siege warfare.

Helfferich briefly discusses conceptions of feminine power and female rule (141–43), but provides surprising little gender analysis. A consideration of gender issues at the Hessian court and in the regency government would have provided a useful comparison with other female regents. The book occasionally describes marriages and festivities at the Hessian court, but rarely analyzes the court culture.

The Iron Princess successfully portrays the religious politics of the Thirty Years' War through Amalia Elisabeth's militant Calvinist faith and devout religiosity. Helfferich's research "underlines the need for a careful analysis of religion and politics when attempting to understand the motivations for war, and reinforces the argument that one cannot understand international relations entirely in terms of rational choice or *raison d'état*" (9). The landgravine fought hard and negotiated vigorously to win religious concessions and legal protections for Calvinism in the Holy Roman Empire. Helfferich refutes interpretations of the Thirty Years' War as essentially political, offering ample evidence of "the continued importance of religion in the second half of the Thirty Years War" (124). *The Iron Princess* thus adds an important new perspective on the complex religious politics during the latter stages of the devastating war.

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