

Carole Levin and Robert Bucholz, eds. *Queens and Power in Medieval and Early Modern England*.

Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009. xxxiii + 326 pp. index. illus. bibl. \$35. ISBN: 978-0-8032-2968-6.

As the editors point out, “queens are in fashion these days, receiving scholarly attention as never before” (xiii). On the other hand, a few queens, like Elizabeth I and Mary Stewart, have always been popular subjects, while others, like Henrietta Maria, have never been neglected. With seven of fourteen chapters devoted completely or partly to Elizabeth, one on Henrietta Maria, and one on Shakespeare, this volume does not aggressively explore unfamiliar terrain. But the essays do advance new arguments about mostly familiar subjects.

Charles Beem opens the collection with the only chapter on a medieval queen, the twelfth-century Empress Matilda. It usefully explores how this daughter of King Henry I and widow of the Holy Roman Emperor Henry V attempted to assert her claim to the English throne as her father's only surviving child against her cousin, Stephen. Matilda emphasized her status as a king's daughter and empress, ignoring her second marriage to a mere Count of Anjou who was more interested in his French territories than his wife's ambitions. She briefly gained the upper hand in a struggle with Stephen, but never received a coronation and ended her life in Normandy, in part because misogynist prejudices hampered her ambitions.

Sarah Duncan follows with an essay on how the traditional association of queens with mercy, in contrast to the stern justice dispensed by kings, shaped the public image and political behavior of Mary I and Elizabeth I. Carole Levin's contribution ostensibly focuses on Elizabeth's travels as princess, although the actual discussion ranges more widely. It usefully highlights ways in which the later progresses and Gloriana's famous ability to work a crowd were anticipated by events early in her life. John Watkin's ambitious chapter portrays negotiations over the 1559 Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis as a transitional event separating a "premodern aristocratic political culture" (81) in which women often played a significant role in negotiating dynastic alliances, from a more modern epoch, in which national interests and institutions like Parliament became increasingly dominant. His argument does not entirely convince, ignoring as it does both the complex interplay between dynastic and other political interests that had long shaped international relations and the continuing importance of dynastic alliances well into the seventeenth century.

Linda Shenk is more successful in exploring how printed prayers in English, Latin, French, Spanish, and Italian, written by or attributed to Elizabeth portrayed her to an international audience as a modern Solomon and European defender of Protestantism. Elaine Kruse supplies a useful survey of diplomatic relations between Elizabeth and Catherine de Medici, while Anna Riehl intriguingly explores angelic symbolism in several Elizabethan texts and images. Although we have become familiar with prophetic and apocalyptic literature of this period the role of angels in Elizabethan culture has largely escaped notice, making this essay especially welcome. Marjorie Swann rounds out the coverage of Elizabeth by reviewing posthumous representations of her sexual life by seventeenth-century writers.

Among the other essays Michelle Osherow provides a sensitive reconstruction of sixteenth-century readings of the ambiguous biblical figure of Esther. Richardine Woodall's analysis of Shakespeare's Cleopatra seems more a work of conventional literary criticism but it does provide a reading of its main text. Michelle White reviews perceptions of Henrietta Maria and her efforts to procure European aid for Charles I during the 1640s, showing how misogynist stereotypes made the queen and her cause vulnerable to attack. In probably the strongest essay in the book, Robert Bucholz analyzes how Queen Anne's gout-ridden and corpulent body shaped perceptions of her role as queen from her own reign down to recent

histories. He points out that although Anne's unassuming personality and large girth make her easy to dismiss, she presided over one of the most successful periods of British history and arguably deserves more respect than she has received. Two poems on Elizabeth finish the collection.

This book does not really fulfill the editor's claim to provide a longitudinal study of queenship from the Middle Ages to the early eighteenth century but it does contain some useful essays.

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