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# *Forgotten Queens in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Political Agency, Myth-Making, and Patronage*

**Valerie Schutte and Estelle Paranque (eds.)**

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*Forgotten Queens in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Political Agency, Myth-Making, and Patronage.* Edited by Valerie Schutte and Estelle Paranque. London: Routledge, 2018. ISBN 978-1-138-08546-6. xiii+198pp. £29.99.

This collection is an interesting addition to the ever-expanding literature on queenship that has emerged in recent decades, particularly in volumes published by Palgrave Macmillan's "Queenship and Power" series. The volume's chief intended contribution to this busy field, as laid out by the editors in their introduction, is in elucidating the role of "overlooked" or "unfamiliar" queens, with a focus on consorts and dowagers rather than regnant queens (1–2). This tantalising promise has potential to appeal to both a scholarly and popular (or at least enthusiast) audience, and its affordably priced paperback format certainly places it more easily within the reach of that wider readership. All of the chapters are well-written, engaging, and thoroughly researched. Unusually, they are presented chronologically by queen (running from the ancient mythical founding queens of Albion to eighteenth-century Naples), rather than grouped thematically. This is effective for two reasons. Firstly, as the editors themselves state when justifying the decision, the volume's three central themes (political agency, myth-making, and patronage) "cross over so frequently among the chapters" (2). The chronological ordering therefore allows each individual chapter to engage with the ideas of the volume as a whole, providing some level of coherence and communication between the pieces to build an overall picture of these recurring aspects of queenship. A discernible but not obtrusive editorial hand provides structural consistency to aid the chapters being read in this way. But crucially, this approach also allows the chapters to stand alone as independent contributions, enabling a reader (whether academic or not) to dip into a particular figure or context of interest without necessarily reading the rest.

All of the chapters engage significantly with one or more of the key themes of the volume's subtitle. The idea of the queens being "forgotten"—a central element of the main title—is, however, less clearly emphasized in the volume. While the editors' introduction attempts to tackle this head on in the very first paragraph, defining forgotten queens as those "whom history, and historians, have glossed over, made little mention of, or dismissed as a 'non-event'" (1), the idea in itself is rather neglected throughout the rest of the introduction. The volume is solidly placed within the context of current literature on queenship, but the introduction does not focus on long-term reputation and historiography, and offers no explicit reference to works on cultural memory. Although the topic is touched on when introducing the four chapters focused on "myth-making," it is not explicitly returned to until the

final paragraph that declares "most of the queens covered in this volume will be unfamiliar to most readers," and offers a brief explanation as to why that might be (4). Even here, however, the topic seems to be engaged with only fleetingly. Additionally, it is unclear as to exactly who "most readers" would be. A non-academic reader might be unfamiliar with queens with little profile in popular culture, while an Anglophone reader might be unfamiliar with those who were consorts outside of England and have been neglected or ignored in Anglophone scholarship. Yet the volume seems more likely to appeal to an academic audience already familiar with these queens. Although the chapters are written in fairly accessible language, each is specialist in its approach, in its familiarity with the sources, and in its engagement with, and framing within, existing literature on their respective queen(s) or topic. In her excellent chapter on Catherine of Braganza, for example, Eilish Gregory is not incorrect to describe the queen as "generally forgotten in the history books of early modern British history" (129), and to argue that she and her political role "merit appreciation and further study" (142). However, she is certainly not unknown, nor (more recently) overlooked to the academic audience of scholars and students of the Restoration, or English Catholicism, or the late-Stuart monarchy, who, I would imagine, would be the majority of Gregory's readers. Coming from a different angle, Valerie Schutte's own chapter on Katherine Howard acknowledges that her subject "is scarcely a 'forgotten queen'" but justifies her inclusion as presenting "a new angle" less focused upon her sexuality (79). Again, however, the notion of Katherine as forgotten, overlooked, or misinterpreted is somewhat irrelevant to the contents of what, read in any other terms, is a thorough and interesting study adding to Schutte's increasingly well-established and innovative work on book dedications to Tudor royal women. Although she sandwiches her argument between references to the queen's wider reputation and profile, specifically her portrayal in Showtime's *The Tudors* (2007-2010), the meat of her study, like Gregory's, is clearly aimed at a more specialist rather than popular audience, and the main focus is upon source content rather than on previous or widespread neglect of the topic.

This overlooking of the notion of "forgetting" or "forgotten" queens can also be said of the fascinating chapters by Sybil Jack on Katarina Jagiellonica and Sophie of Mecklenburg-Güstrow, and by Cinzia Recca on Queen Maria Carolina of Naples, although the latter does discuss Maria Carolina's longer-term reputation as a "bad queen" (185). Lledó Ruiz Domingo's chapter on Maria of Navarre provides another very able exposition of an understudied but active and interesting style of queenship. While its primary focus is on detailing and analysing the life and role of Maria, rather than on critiquing posthumous perceptions, this chapter does engage

more with ideas about memory and historiographical impact, framing the chapter as a recovery of the academically "forgotten" first queen of Pedro IV of Aragon whose "subsequent wives have all been accorded prominent positions in the history of Aragon" (60, 69). Reasons for this contrast are hinted at—the context of a similar neglect of Pedro's own reign in this period, or Maria's tender age as a child bride, still only seventeen years old at the time of her death—but it is a shame that there is no conversation between the chapter and some of the others in the volume when it comes to discussions about the role of motherhood and succession to the throne. Undoubtedly, Maria's ultimate failure to produce Pedro's regnal successor has impacted historiographical perceptions of her significance, as it has for queens such as Catherine of Braganza, Katherine Howard, and significantly, sisters-in-law Berengaria of Navarre and Joanna of Sicily (the subjects of Gabrielle Storey's chapter), and the sixteenth-century mother and daughter, Elisabeth of Austria and Marie-Elisabeth of France (case-studied here by Estelle Paranque).

Storey's chapter explicitly cites Berengaria's and Joanna's "childlessness" as key to explaining their being "largely omitted from the historical record" (50–53). Meanwhile, Paranque discusses dynastic nullification, examining how the death of her husband Charles IX curtailed Elisabeth of Austria's reign, with the ineligibility of her infant child to succeed him under Salic law and Marie-Elisabeth's own death in early childhood being the unspoken factors accounting for why these two figures have been "largely forgotten by scholars and the public" (114). Both Storey and Paranque are focused on accounting for the apparent "forgetting" of their respective subjects, and both do so convincingly through careful analysis of primary written material. These materials differ in both volume and type. For Storey there is a paucity of sources, and the style of history writing in the chronicles she examines tends not to discuss queens aside from "major life-cycles or unusual events" (53). For Paranque, "there is no shortage of primary sources" but apparently little appetite to examine them (114–115). Both authors, however, ultimately conclude that much of the queens' low profile is accounted for (by both contemporaries and later commentators) by the lack of "scandal" associated with them (53, 122).

In her chapter on Marie Leszczinska, Jennifer Germann also considers lack of notoriety as key in making "the longest-reigning queen of France ... the quintessential forgotten queen," especially when contrasted with her successor, Marie Antoinette (149). This outstanding chapter is well-structured and clearly focused on ideas of memory and legacy, or perhaps more accurately half-remembering and echoes, as Germann traces the afterlife of the queen's portraiture, particularly Jean-Marc Nattier's painting of 1748, and how it influenced images and historiographical interpretations of Marie

Lezczinska, her family and successors, and notions of royal femininity and queenship. Demonstrating the "essential" role of "reproduction and consumption [of this portrait] in various mediums and formats" in moulding this "afterimage" (151), this chapter is an important reminder of the importance of the visual in myth-making and perceptions of the past, even (perhaps especially) when those perceptions are drawn more from "adaptations" than original "historical context" (168). This is a very welcome interdisciplinary addition to the volume, with clear relevance to the key "forgotten" theme of the title.

The first two case studies in the collection, by Andrea Nichols and Lois Huneycutt, also demonstrate clear relevance to this theme. Huneycutt's chapter on post-Conquest memories and affiliations to the formerly reigning House of Wessex is a real highlight, demonstrating the intermittent "familial remembering and forgetting" of St Margaret, Queen of Scotland as dynastic matriarch, "a process of changing family identity and loyalty to the House of Wessex" (33). The fluctuating use (and usefulness) of memory to royal dynastic identity neatly marries the fields of memory studies and queenship studies as hinted at by the volume's title. It is also nice to see discussion of matrilineal descent—something often neglected in studies of royal dynasties in Western Europe where patrilineal descent and male-preference primogeniture have dominated succession and inheritance laws and cultures. Nichols's chapter differs from all the others in considering an ancient mythological past, forgotten during the early modern period. Like Huneycutt, she ably analyses the changing creation and usability of queenly myths—in this case "Queen Gwendolen and the thirty-three daughters of King Dioclesian," who gradually "faded" from historical consciousness in Britain to be superseded by Britannia by the end of the Stuart era (13–14). The chapter is articulate, well-grounded in primary literature, and nicely balanced by an obvious familiarity with pertinent scholarship on cultural memory and/or national(ised) mythology, such as Daniel Woolf's *Reading History in Early Modern England* (2000) and Emma Major's work on Britannia (2012). As such, the chapter would be particularly useful as a starting point for scholars and students developing an interest in national historicism in this period.

Overall, this is an interesting and informative collection that I would recommend to scholars and students of queenship, particularly those interested in the themes of "political agency, myth-making, and patronage." For those interested in ideas and analysis of historical "forgetting," the volume as a whole may prove a little disappointing, as this theme is somewhat muddled and lost when reading the book from cover to cover. About half of the chapters, however, do significantly engage with this part of the title, and any or all of these would be thought-provoking to scholars and students of

memory and useable history of or during the medieval and early modern periods. Ultimately, the book is best approached as an anthology of individual chapters on aspects of queenship with (perhaps) "unfamiliar" case studies, rather than a coherent volume about "Forgotten Queens." Perhaps this theme might have been better highlighted through some cross-referencing between the chapters, and/or more editorial exposition (a longer introduction, or even the addition of a conclusion) to knit the premise together. Or perhaps the title should just have omitted "Forgotten." Certainly, as a study of "Queens in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Political Agency, Myth-Making, and Patronage" it delivers a welcome and stimulating handbook to the field.

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