

B O O K S R E V I E W

Katarzyna Kosior, *BECOMING A QUEEN IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE: EAST AND WEST* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 256; ISBN: 978-3-030-11847-1 (hardcover), and 978-3-030-11848-8 (eBook)

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The more than fifty books published in the Palgrave Macmillan *Queenship and Power* book series have contributed a great deal to our current understanding of the role of queens and princesses in medieval, early modern and modern politics and diplomacy. *Becoming a Queen in Early Modern Europe* is one of the series latest acquisitions and is the printed edition of the doctoral thesis Katarzyna Kosior completed at the University of Southampton in 2017. It offers an interesting comparison between the sixteenth-century ceremonies and rhetoric of queenship in the elective monarchy of Poland on the one hand and the Valois monarchy of France on the other. Although the ceremonies were accommodated to the political culture of the two monarchies, they also bore striking resemblances, which, according to Kosior, must be explained by the existence of a shared pan-European royal culture.

Becoming a Queen in Early Modern Europe focuses on the first stage of the career of early modern queens consort – that is, their transformation from princesses to queens or queens consort. After an introduction to the book's comparative approach, two ceremonies are thoroughly discussed: the royal wedding in Chapter two and the queen's coronation in Chapter three. The fourth chapter unravels how local political cultures gave shape to the particularities of the ceremonies. The last chapter before the conclusion shifts the attention to the performance of family relations outside the two discussed ceremonies and demonstrates that motherhood was an indispensable element of the political career and personal life of an early modern queen, even when she had no children of her own.

This book touches upon the importance of diplomacy as an integral part of European royal culture. Diplomacy was the motor behind the European dynastic marriage market, and many of the weddings and coronations Kosior discusses were the (by-)product of peace negotiations or other political alliances. Moreover, many of the shared elements of weddings and coronations were the result of the diplomatic protocol that permeated the royal culture. Royal nuptials consisted of a set of 'clearly recognisable stages', such as the wedding by proxy, the nuptial travel and the marriage ceremony, and ambassadors played a pivotal role in all of these stages. Kosior demonstrates that the diplomatic protocol was highly intertwined with the

performance of familial relations. Ambassadors negotiating the marriage were, for example, often relatives of the bridal couple and deployed behaviour and gestures that emphasised the integration of the bride into the dynasty of her husband. Underlining the performative aspects of this rhetoric, *Becoming a Queen in Early Modern Europe* builds on recent trends in the study of early modern courts and diplomacy.

Even though her observation that France and Poland had markedly different political cultures is not that innovative, Kosior does a great job in unravelling the tension between the international and local character of ceremonies of queenship. Based on the public celebrations organised to welcome the new queen, Kosior highlights the differences between the Polish and the French ceremonies. Urban institutions played, for example, a more prominent and active role in the French celebrations, whereas meddling in the celebrations was in Poland much more restricted to the nobility. Speeches and pamphlets concerning the secret marriage of Sigismund August and Barbara Radziwill (1547) reveal that the Polish parliament and nobility also used dynastic ceremonies to criticise the monarchy. The arrival of a new queen offered, one could argue, an opportunity to (re)shape domestic relations.

An element that may have deserved more attention is the impact of weddings and coronations of early modern queens on international relations. Dynastic marriages were not only expressions of political alliances; they could also form the starting-point of reinforced international contacts. What was the role of the queen's suite during the ceremonies and, later on, in the (diplomatic) contacts between the queen's natal and host dynasty? Furthermore, how did diplomats, courtiers and merchants use coronations and wedding ceremonies to come into contact with colleagues from other European countries? More attention for these cross-cultural contacts would have provided more insight into the coming about and consolidation of a pan-European royal culture.

Nevertheless, a book cannot cover every aspect of early modern queenship, and Kosior's book already covers a lot. Admirable is the wide range of primary sources at the basis of primarily the Polish cases discussed in the book, as Kosior analyses not only dynastic correspondence but also ambassadors' reports, occasional poetry and even objects such as prayer books. However, the most important advantage of *Becoming a Queen in Early Modern Europe* is its comparative character. It not only goes beyond a study of the lives of individual queens, but it also compares queenship in different countries. Kosior thus makes the history of Polish queens accessible to historians who are not familiar with the history of Poland or Polish sources. It opens up opportunities to compare the role of high-ranking women in diverse political settings, from absolute and elective monarchies to principalities and perhaps even republics. Historians dealing with early modern queens specifically, and diplomacy, dynasties and princely courts more generally will be inspired by this bold but productive approach.