



*Elizabeth of York and her Six
Daughters-in-Law: Fashioning
Tudor Queenship, 1485-1547*

Retha M. Warnicke

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Review by: Nicola Clark



Elizabeth of York and her Six Daughters-in-Law: Fashioning Tudor Queenship, 1485-1547. By Retha M. Warnicke. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. ISBN: 978-3-319-56380-0. ix + 291 pp. £89.99.

The wives of the first two Tudor monarchs, as Retha Warnicke explains, are usually treated biographically, rather than compared thematically, and this makes the thematic approach of this study an excellent and original basis for a monograph. Warnicke herself is extremely well-placed for this research, having authored a number of books about several of these queens consort, including her excellent study of the short-lived marriage of Anne of Cleves (*The Marrying of Anne of Cleves*, 2000). The aim of this study, as laid out in the introduction, is to “fashion” Tudor queenship, and to provide a “comparative analysis of the royal accomplishments of Elizabeth of York and her six daughters-in-law” (2). The structure, therefore, is broad, with chapters focusing on Marriages and Coronations; Income and Expenditures; Religion and Family Life; Governance and Patronage; Revels and Celebrations; and Death and Burial. Overall, the book achieves its stated aim, placing these various elements of the consorts’ roles, life events, and agency side by side, often for the first time, and this will make it an excellent place to find factual information on these topics quickly.

In many ways, this book functions as a ‘jumping-off point’ for further research, since by being so wide-ranging, it does, to a degree, sacrifice depth for breadth. It remains focused on the factual material throughout, with historiography confined largely to the endnotes unless the author wishes to offer a direct corrective. There is nothing that might be termed a literature review, either in the general introduction or the individual chapter introductions, which does mean that we are not given a very clear sense of precisely where Warnicke intends this book to sit within the field of queenship, or of Henrician political history more broadly. Instead, the introduction gives a brief chronological outline of the marriages of Henry VII and Henry VIII and the decisions and circumstances behind them, and details the duties, roles, and purposes of a queen consort, briefly discussing the content of the chapters to follow. A tantalising statement is made that “when compared to the high medieval queenship, the Tudor version appears somewhat diminished in influence and power” (8). While Warnicke goes on to briefly explain that “even so, the queens’ role remained significant because of their possible private influence with their husbands, because of the importance of their other family duties ... and because of their influence over patronage, appointments, and financial matters in their households and sometimes at court” (8), this is one point at which a lengthier discussion of

existing debate would have been helpful, and this remains the case throughout the other chapters.

Chapter 3 on “Income and Expenditures” deserves singling out as particularly timely, given the recent surge of interest in the economics of queenship (see, for example, the work of Theresa Earenfight). It does, however, spend a considerable amount of time discussing the structure of the household before turning to finances, and it might have been helpful to include the keyword ‘household’ in the chapter title. The content of this chapter is undeniably useful: it discusses continuity and change of household personnel, highlighting the continuity of service across the reigns of successive consorts and makes the interesting point that the king often referred to the queen’s officials as his own servants in official grants. It then directly compares the queens’ incomes from their jointures. Again, the pursuit of breadth means that the reasons for these things and their wider implications are not extrapolated—the core argument appears to be that “In short, their courts embodied centers of power, patronage, and influence, reflecting their superior status in England and their membership among the ruling dynasties of Europe” (59), which is neither new nor surprising—but the information is nevertheless useful for other scholars looking to build upon it.

This is something of a pattern through the rest of the chapters. Though the book achieves its stated aim of being “the first book to examine, compare, and contrast the reigns of the Tudor consorts, rather than providing discrete biographical details about them” (241), one is left feeling that the result is more like a textbook, bringing vast amounts of information together in a new configuration, without engaging closely with wider debate or finding the space to draw any strikingly novel or different conclusions from those already in circulation. The argument that these queens were influential is not new to those working in the field, and the book does not present fresh findings about the nature of queenship during this period, about the roles played by these queens, or about the different themes explored. The discussion of coronations in chapter one is a case in point. Structured chronologically as most of the chapters are, it moves through each queen in relation to the theme under discussion, meaning that we are given a brief discussion of the significance of coronation followed by a narrative account of the salient points of the coronations of the three queens who had them (Elizabeth of York, Catherine of Aragon, and Anne Boleyn). This structure allows for comparisons to be made as the accounts unfold, but it tends to be made in passing, rather than spending any significant space in pure analysis.

There is an impressive wealth of primary material in the footnotes. Occasionally issues arise whereby a calendared version from *The Letters and Papers of Henry VIII* has been used in place of the original manuscript from

State Papers Online; the discussion of the number of women in service with the queen on page 72, for example, uses a calendared version of a list of women from 1519 (*LP III*, 491) to argue that there were two ladies of the “privy chamber,” when in fact the original document (*SP1/19*, fol. 117, available on *State Papers Online*) calls them “ladies in preasannce,” which has a significantly different meaning. The habit of placing the majority of the references for each paragraph in one single endnote also makes these unnecessarily difficult to unpick and follow.

In sum, then, this is a useful book, rearranging existing information thoughtfully into a thematic rather than a biographical comparison, and it should be placed on reading lists for any number of undergraduate courses dealing with queenship during this period. Though the lack of scholarly aims beyond this might be considered a drawback, and the absence of a strong situation within academic debate a real pity, the overall argument—that these queens were central to court life and politics, and that thematic comparison makes this clearer than ever before—is undisputable, and should hopefully pave the way for more scholarship in this vein.

NICOLA CLARK

University of Chichester