



*Unexpected Heirs
in Early Modern Europe:
Potential Kings and Queens*

Valerie Schutte (ed.)
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Thanks to fairly smooth monarchical successions in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, we tend to forget that in medieval and early modern Europe, succession more often than not deviated from the monarchical ‘ideal’—that is, where a king died peacefully of old age, and was succeeded by his eldest son (who had reached his majority). Untimely deaths, childless monarchs, and religio-political upheaval all impacted succession far more frequently than is generally considered. *Unexpected Heirs in Early Modern Europe*, in bringing together a range of unexpected heirs from this period, collectively makes us more aware of just how frequently succession deviated from the ideal.

The book is divided into four sections. The first—“Securing a Dynasty”—opens with Kristen Geaman’s excellent chapter on Edward of Westminster, the son of Henry VI and Margaret of Anjou. Geaman explains how the long-awaited birth of Edward did not secure the Lancastrian succession: the seven-year delay between Henry and Margaret’s wedding and the prince’s birth allowed Yorkists to claim that Edward was the result of his mother’s adultery, and therefore a bastard. While killed in his first battle, Geaman discusses how Edward’s education reflected “the essential aspects of medieval kingship—military, diplomatic, and legal prowess,” giving a more rounded image of the Prince than the one in Shakespeare’s *Henry VI, Part 3* (22).

Retha Warnicke’s chapter re-assesses the relationship between Lady Margaret Beaufort and Elizabeth of York (mother and wife of Henry VII, respectively), demonstrating that there is no evidence for the feud that supposedly existed between the two women, and that “Henry did not slight his wife and that his mother did not keep her in subjection” (49). Confusingly, Warnicke refers to Margaret as both Margaret Tudor and Lady Richmond throughout: the former being her granddaughter’s moniker, and the latter, while potentially more accurate, is virtually unknown. Their inclusion in the collection is perhaps unexpected, given that in 1485 “no one argued that a woman should or could succeed to the English throne” (37). However, their role in ‘securing the dynasty’ is well made, and Warnicke provides good context for succession in the period.

Section Two, “Preparing an Heir,” contains three studies. The first, by Valerie Schutte, compares the pre-accession book dedications of Mary I and Elizabeth I. Schutte argues that these dedications are an un(der)explored avenue of comparison between the two monarchs, especially given the

women's changing status pre-accession. While the chapter is more a descriptive summary of the dedications than an analysis, Schutte's argument—"that before their accessions, dedicators perceived Mary and Elizabeth very differently, with Mary assumed to have influence at court and means to give patronage, while Elizabeth was perceived to be irrelevant to court politics and have little or no patronage power" (64)—is both convincing and interesting.

Susan Broomhall's chapter considers Catherine de Medici at the French court, with particular emphasis on her "transition from duchess to *dauphine* to queen consort" (87). The chapter is thought-provoking, and Broomhall demonstrates the various affective techniques Catherine employed to secure her position before she "was able to demonstrate the reproductive capabilities hoped for in a royal wife" (101). Nevertheless, Catherine's inclusion in the volume is somewhat surprising: although her husband was an unexpected heir, she was not.

The section concludes with Troy Heffernan's chapter on Queen Anne, which focuses on the last Stuart monarch's education: specifically, how it did not prepare her for the role of queen, and how her tutors shaped her devotion to Protestantism. The chapter, however, is heavily descriptive, devoting many pages to explaining how other Tudor and Stuart royal women were educated rather than analysing Anne's own education. Anne—who is curiously referred to as Anne Stuart throughout—was certainly at an educational disadvantage compared to her predecessors, but Heffernan makes clear that the education she did receive informed her reign.

The third section, "Second Sons," opens with a chapter by Estelle Paranque on Henry III of France. As a third son, Henry was definitely an unexpected heir, and Paranque's chapter discusses "how a king who was not supposed to rule managed to fashion a strong royal identity" by analysing Henry's letters and speeches, as well as his military exploits under his brother, Charles IX (140). Paranque argues that Henry—a king whose (negative) legacy is being re-assessed—viewed monarchy in similar ways to his predecessors and contemporaries, and that more emphasis should be placed on his own words.

Cathleen Sarti's chapter compares the succession of the first four Stuart kings of England. Observing that both Stuart monarchs who were deposed were second sons, the chapter argues that by "trying to emphasize their royalty," Charles I and James II ended up "distancing themselves from their subjects to their own detriment" (5). While largely biographical in focus, Sarti pays attention to the personality traits of the four kings, showing that while their education may have impacted their views on monarchy, their personalities largely lay behind their downfall.

The section closes with Jonathan Spangler's stimulating study of second sons in seventeenth-century France. Spangler focuses on Gaston, Duke of Orléans, and Philippe of France—younger brothers who were both heir presumptive, but never succeeded—examining how they continued to cause tension for their brothers, even after they were supplanted by the birth of a nephew, and the way that their public role often revolved around patronage and the arts, rather than anything that might upstage their brother.

The book's final section focuses on "Unexpected Survival." Camilla Kandare's brilliant study of Christina of Sweden—an unexpected highlight of the collection—focuses on Christina's body and her movements, pithily reminding us "Christina perhaps can best be described as an unexpected heir in the sense of being an heir who did the unexpected" (208). Rather than her abdication "signalling her withdrawal from public life," Christina "saw it as an opportunity to take on a more prominent role on a larger stage," and her (unexpected) actions throughout the rest of her life show her as a woman fully in command of her position as a sovereign without a country, even if those around her struggled to make sense of it (212).

The final chapter is another on Elizabeth I of England. William Robison provides a 'synthesis' of the last Tudor monarch's life, focusing on the succession crises of Elizabeth's reign, and the many occasions where luck was on her side. As Robison perceptively notes, Elizabeth's legacy is both the stuff of legend, and is convoluted and contested, resulting in a vast "gap between the Elizabeth scholars know and the Elizabeths popular culture depicts" (234).

As these summaries show, the collection is dominated by England: only four chapters don't focus on English royals; and of those four, three focus on France, and one on Sweden. The collection would have benefitted from a larger geographical focus, and given the generous definition of 'early modern' applied in the collection (Edward of Westminster and Margaret Beaufort are really 'medieval'), the inclusion of Juana I of Castile & Aragon or the three Jagiellonian brothers who successively ruled as kings of Poland (for example) would have enhanced the volume.

These criticisms aside, the collection brings together an array of interesting and well-researched chapters that collectively enhance our understanding of monarchical succession. While succession today could almost be described as uneventful, the contributors to *Unexpected Heirs in Early Modern Europe* remind us that succession was of perpetual concern in an early

modern state, and that even with the succession apparently secured, more often than not, things went awry.

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