



*Becoming a Queen in Early
Modern Europe: East and West*

Katarzyna Kosior

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Review by: Courtney Herber



Becoming a Queen in Early Modern Europe: East and West. By Katarzyna Kosior. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019. ISBN 978-3-030-11847-1. xii + 256 pp. \$84.99.

Katarzyna Kosior's *Becoming a Queen in Early Modern Europe* is the first Anglophonic study to bring Polish queens and their experiences into the scholarly conversations regarding European queenship. The book is an utterly fascinating insight into the world and rituals of the Jagiellonian queens, and shows how those ceremonies connected eastern European queens to those in the west through both blood and shared experiences.

Kosior's monograph on pan-European queenship opens with an intriguing and seldom-analyzed incident of an (understandable) royal emotional outburst. Catherine of Austria, hardly pleased to be getting into a proxy marriage bed with the cousin of the woman who supplanted her sister, Elizabeth of Austria, physically struggled against her father and brother, who forcibly placed her in said bed. As Kosior explains, "this moment of tension has much to teach us about queenship, royal ceremonies, and royal families" (2). Through the course of the proceeding chapters, Kosior analyzes the ceremonies used to impart a queen's responsibilities, authorities, and prerogatives upon her, namely the rituals surrounding weddings, coronations, and motherhood. She devotes a chapter to each of those semi-universal life events, and I truly appreciated Kosior's sensitivity and careful reading of her sources, especially when it comes to her inclusion of what she calls "non-biological motherhood."

By including Polish and French queens in her comparative study on queenship, Kosior aptly demonstrates the interconnectedness of European ritual and the performance of royalty. Digging deeper, Kosior also devotes some of her text to the study of emotion. It is here that she truly shines: Kosior deftly illuminates not only the performance of queenship and motherhood, but also the underlying emotive relationships that these very public figures had with their spouses, siblings, children (and stepchildren), and other more distant kin. These relationships, especially with the "less glamorous relatives and members of the court," and the feelings they evoked, are analyzed through the material culture or heirlooms and correspondence they left behind (171).

Kosior's focus on material culture suits her well when she begins her work with a detailed examination of bridal trousseaus belonging to some of the queens she includes in the study. This too, is where Kosior's obvious linguistic skills are put to good use. Throughout the text, she cites and partly translates works from French, Polish, and to a smaller degree Latin, helping to

make this text more accessible. The bridal trousseaus in her study were, of course, meant to be a way to show off the wealth, power, and sophistication of the homeland the bride left behind, but Kosior investigates further, analyzing some of the items that have extant descriptions or were included in portraiture. For example, Kosior discusses Catherine of Austria's trousseau and a necklace of hers that was described as "A pendant in the shape of the letter 'C' composed with diamonds, with a crown made of rubies at the top" (42). This necklace does not sound like much of a dynastic or emotive statement on its own, but when Kosior includes the well-researched proper context—specifically that two of her sisters, Sophie and Anna, also owned necklaces in that style and that they each wore them for the Jagiellonian family portraits—shows that Catherine may have been attached to that piece for sentimental reasons that connected her with her sisters.

After exploring the rituals and ceremonies associated with royal weddings, mindful of the actual people and the real emotions they were expressing, Kosior moves on to examine the similarities between the coronation rituals for French and Polish queens consort. It is here, especially, that Kosior's case for including Poland into a pan-European study of queenship is at its strongest. By comparing several coronations performed throughout the sixteenth century, Kosior convincingly argues that queens of Poland need to be included into historical studies of the period because, even though there were regional differences between Polish and French coronations and other rituals surrounding the incorporation of a foreign bride into the king's body politic, the function and form of said rituals was largely similar. The traditionally held East–West divide crumbles away as Kosior uses examples from the coronation rituals of several queens to show that what united them, or what was similar between them, was far greater and of more import than what was different. These similarities, especially when studying the *ordo* and the regalia (perhaps partly due to past queens consort bringing with them their kingdom's traditions and rituals), show how expectations of queens consort were near universal. The similarities, writes Kosior, are "remarkable, because the ideological content of the coronation, encapsulated in gestures and prayers, was almost exactly the same in both countries" (97).

In her final chapter, "Conception, Childbirth, and Motherhood: Performing a Royal Family," Kosior turns her attention to the kinship networks of the Valois and Jagiellonian courts. She correctly asserts that "when analyzing royal ceremonies, historians rarely juxtapose the ceremonial image of queenship with its realities" (139). Typically, it has been dynastic or visual aspects of familial expansion—such as portraiture—that have been explored, neglecting the physical realities of these women experiencing pregnancy and the emotional realities of childbirth or the tragedies of

miscarriages and infant mortality, which need to be included as well. By incorporating biological and non-biological motherhood and infertility into her work, Kosior shows the importance of the individual women as family members, and not only because of their reproductive capabilities to further dynastic aims, but also because of their relationships with the people in their families. We see this especially in her examples of Eleanor of Austria, who upon her second marriage became Queen of France and stepmother to Francis I's children with the late Queen Claude, Francis and Henry, and Bona Sforza, who married Sigismund the Old and became stepmother to his two daughters by Barbara Zapolya, Jadwiga and Anna. Where Francis never came to care much about Eleanor, his two sons did, which is demonstrated by her inclusion in Henry's wedding to Catherine de Medici, and that her miniature portrait was included in her daughter-in-law's prayer book. Bona's close relationship with her stepdaughters is suggested in correspondence between Sigismund and Bona, after Anna's death. The bereaved father wrote to Bona thanking her for her "affectionate maternal care" (168).

A queen consort's strength lay not only in her wealth and political connections, but also in her relationships with her natal and marital families. Her lack of strong relationships with her new family, or her failure to participate in the rituals that bound her closer to her family in the eyes of their subjects, could lead to a queen's ruin, as Bona found out to her detriment when she and her son fell out, which led to her exile and murder.

Kosior has crafted a well thought out and impeccably well-researched monograph that leaves her readers wanting more. Indeed, peppered throughout her text are references to other articles or chapters she has written, and it would have made this work even stronger had she been able to include more than a passing reference to these other pieces. This work is an approachable, groundbreaking study that should make its way onto syllabi and into the to-read lists of researchers of royal studies, women's history, courtly ceremonial, and the early modern period in general.

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