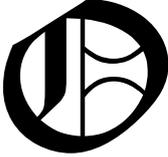




*Queenship and Revolution in Early
Modern Europe: Henrietta Maria
and Marie Antoinette,*
Carolyn Harris
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Review by: Courtney Herber

Queenship and Revolution in Early Modern Europe: Henrietta Maria and Marie Antoinette. By Carolyn Harris. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. ISBN 978-1-137-49772-7. xii + 273 pp. \$100.

n the surface, Henrietta Maria and Marie Antoinette had much in common. Each was the youngest daughter of a ruling woman (Marie de Medici was regent for Henrietta Maria's brother, Louis XIII, and Maria Theresa was a ruling empress), a foreign-born princess who grew up to be queen, was childless in the first years of her marriage, and was consort during a time of revolutionary upheaval in her adopted country. It is in the examination of those similarities that historian Carolyn Harris aptly demonstrates the subtle changes in political thought, the ideal role of women in the household or domestic sphere, and the role of queen consort over the century that separates these two queens. In this comparative study of Henrietta Maria and Marie Antoinette, Harris examines not only circumstances and events in each queen's life that impacted how each queen was perceived by her new countrymen and women but also each woman's reaction to those events. The book is separated into five body chapters with an introduction and conclusion. The chapters are thematic and treat each queen's life individually and each ends with a summary comparative section.

The introduction opens the book with a quote from Marie Antoinette in which she compares her and her husband's troubles facing the Revolution to those faced by Charles I a century before, in the Wars of the Three Kingdoms. Historians have paid attention to the similarities between both kings, Louis XVI and Charles I, but, as Harris points out, not much work has been done to compare the lives of their queens, and this book is an effort to close that gap in the scholarship. She recognizes that each queen's role as wife of the sovereign and mother of royal children was a highly visible and inherently political one. From there, Harris clearly lays out her rationale for choosing the topics she incorporates into the text.

The formative and brief years from birth to marriage are a natural place to begin, and in chapter one Harris examines the early lives of Henrietta Maria and Marie Antoinette through three major themes: academic and practical education, the influence of each princess's mother in her childhood, and perceptions of past consort queens in England and France. Each queen had a period of acculturation in her new homeland that was difficult for her. Henrietta Maria had come from a court where she was close with members of her household to one that insisted on separation and protocol. Marie Antoinette strove to create a private domestic space that was anathema to the French, who were accustomed to frequent accessibility of their sovereign and his family.

After each queen officially took her role as consort, either to the king in Henrietta Maria's case or the *dauphin* in Marie Antoinette's, she became head of her own household, if not in word then in deed. In chapter two, Harris investigates how each woman performed that role, in her appointments to positions, in her relationships with her staff, and how the role showcased her foreignness. Both Henrietta Maria and Marie Antoinette's household appointments caused scandal which shifted the population's opinion of her. Harris presents a thorough description of how each woman planned to run her household and how reality fell short of those expectations. Henrietta Maria expected to run her own household independently of Charles's interference. He exerted control over her household and dismissed her French Catholic staff, which became an ongoing source of conflict between the royal couple. Throughout the rest of the book, Harris makes the case that the king and queen projected an effective image of perfect domestic bliss, even though they vehemently disagreed on key issues, such as her household appointments and religion. Marie Antoinette's disappointment came not in arguments with her husband, but their lack of shared interests. She wanted to have a true companionate marriage in which she and her husband happily spent time with one another and their eventual children in their private domestic sphere. Instead, her husband worked on his blacksmithing and she spent time with her close friends. Both couples sought to project an image of domestic happiness, but the reality was far more complex.

Harris continues the ongoing theme of expectations versus reality in chapters three and four. Chapter three examines how each woman saw her role as wife of the sovereign and how expectations, as wives, were different for them because of their rank and visibility. Chapter four deals with the queens' lives as mothers of royal children, capable of inheriting the throne, and how once again, due to the visibility of the household in the public's eye, the expectations of a royal mother were different from that of a mother in the general population. Each queen was involved in rearing her children to different degrees, at the ends of a spectrum of contemporary thought the best developmental practices in rearing children. The role of royal mother was one to which women in the general population could relate, and each queen was criticized for her involvement in the raising of her children.

Chapter five deals primarily with the public perception of each queen's domesticity and how that influenced the major conflicts of each woman's life. Public indictment of Henrietta Maria in her impeachment and of Marie Antoinette in her trial was a way for the public to pass popular judgement on each queen for her foreignness and her perceived transgressions as consort. Harris examines these indictments in relation to three tenets of consort queenship: how each queen lead her household as its head, her relationship with her husband and how she presented herself as the wife of the sove-

reign, and how she raised her children.

The conclusion neatly ties the book together and moves us forward in time to examine comparative struggles of two other queens who were also foreigners in their new lands. Both were descendants of Queen Victoria: her daughter Victoria, Princess Royal of England, and her granddaughter Empress Alexandra of Russia were criticized in a similar manner to Henrietta Maria and Marie Antoinette. Victoria, like Henrietta Maria, much preferred the language and customs of her homeland, drawing criticism from Otto von Bismarck who said “The ‘English’ in it does not please me, the ‘marriage’ may be quite good... If the Princess can leave the Englishwoman at home” (200). Alexandra, or Alix, like both of the subjects of the text, was staunchly loyal to her friends and appointed members of her household who were both German and English, but not Russian. Her relationship with Grigori Rasputin was considered highly unusual and, like her household appointments, scandalous. Her husband, Czar Nicholas II, trusted her to be loyal to him and Russia, and when he took over control of the armies in World War I, he ordered his ministers to report to her. Still, she was thought by the Russian population to be loyal to Germany or England, rather than her adopted homeland.

In an eminently readable and accessible book, Harris, through the use of a variety of printed and manuscript sources, paints a detailed picture of two queens. Though separated by a century, they faced similar struggles and both lost much in those battles. Comparative work can be difficult, but Harris’ work makes for a compelling and informative read. She shows the reader, through their comparison with one another, more about who each of these women were as living, breathing people, and she aptly demonstrates how the role of the consort subtly changed in the century from Henrietta Maria to Marie Antoinette.

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