



The State Visits of Edward VII: Re-inventing Royal Diplomacy for the Twentieth Century, Matthew Glencross (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

Review by:
Laura Cook

The State Visits of Edward VII: Reinventing Royal Diplomacy for the Twentieth Century. By Matthew Glencross. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. ISBN: 978-1-137-54898-6. 230 pp. £63.00.

This absorbing book reveals much of a lesser-appreciated facet of the public life of King Edward VII: that of an astute diplomat, responsible for the early twentieth century revival of the European royal state visit as an asset capable of ensuring continuing popular support for the British monarchy. Before many of his advisors realised the significance of his actions, the King sought to capitalise on the potential symbolic power of the monarch as a representative of the British nation overseas. Providing an alternative to the profligate facade more commonly attributed to Edward VII, this publication provides a new scholarly perspective on the diplomatic landscape of the day by emphasising the King's active promotion of cordial international relations by means of symbolism and ceremony. In turn, this helped create an atmosphere complementary to concurrent attitudes on foreign policy held by the British government and the diplomatic service.

As a Fellow at the Institute of Contemporary British History, King's College London, Matthew Glencross is well placed to make use of a wide range of source material illustrative of the attitudes held by the contemporary popular press and major political figures of the day, as well as records held by the Royal Archives at Windsor. He begins the first chapter by tracing the royal visit as a tool of inter-state diplomacy from the early decades of the nineteenth century. In both British and European royal houses, ceremonial courtly rituals were, during this period, re-imagined for the mass popular consumption afforded by developing media. From his parents, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, the young Prince of Wales gained a comprehensive understanding of the significance of cultural symbols in diplomacy both at home and overseas.

From this point, the mid-section of the book is structured chronologically to allow for detailed analysis of several of the most significant state visits conducted over the nine years of Edward VII's reign between 1901 and 1910. The earliest visits to the major European powers took place following the King's accession to the throne. Chapter two provides an account of the first quasi-informal royal visits to Germany in 1901. Glencross demonstrates how, despite the ostensibly private nature of these visits, Edward VII ably recognised the potential of the associated pomp and ceremony to serve as an active and personal adjunct to his government's official diplomatic initiatives. Chapter three outlines the King's first official visit to Italy in early 1903, focusing on how he began to explore the flexibility

of the constitutional boundaries between himself and his ministers, demonstrating that the presence of a genial monarch during a state visit readily garnered popular approval, despite political and religious tensions therein.

Chapter four argued for the King's active influence in the establishment of the 1904 Entente Cordiale affirming friendly Anglo-French relations, primarily through the agency exerted during his celebrated visit to Paris in mid-1903. Here, his personal charm and seemingly spontaneous emphasis on points of cultural commonality between the two nations served to create an atmosphere unexpectedly conducive to subsequent negotiations. For the British government, this confirmed the King's usefulness in winning popular goodwill within rival nations. The significance of this is confirmed in chapter five, which analyses the state visit to Spain in 1907 as an adjunct to British foreign policy on alliances in the Mediterranean. In this case, Glencross demonstrates how the government's misguided constraint of the King's ceremonial visibility limited the success of the corresponding negotiations.

The following section of this book shifts the discussion to the peripheral European powers, where the author further analyses how lessons learned from previous tours were put into practice. As chapter six explains, even in the absence of fixed British diplomatic imperatives, royal state visits nonetheless effectively affirmed for the host nation their strategic importance to Britain. During his 1908 state visit to Scandinavia, Edward VII understood the value of ceremony and attendant press coverage in subtly affirming British interests in eastern Europe - Russian expansionist ambitions notwithstanding. Chapter seven goes on to analyse the state visit to Russia of the same year, illustrating how this dispelled some of the prevalent political tension, but also demonstrated to the British government the importance of careful management of state visits. Amid the international scrutiny, the appearance of the King could impact both harmoniously and negatively on official diplomatic mechanisms.

The final chapter shows how, even as he reached the height of his diplomatic prowess with his first official state visit to Germany in 1909, Edward VII's health began to fail. Glencross argues that, even in a reduced visible capacity, his appearance in Berlin soothed to some extent the hostility of some influential sections of society towards British relations. The state visit of Tsar Nicholas II to Britain later that year was necessitated in part by the King's continuing ill-health, but nonetheless also marked a triumph of royal diplomacy despite the complex political negotiations in Anglo-Russian relations that such encounters entailed.

This book contributes an alternative view of the success of the state visits of Edward VII beyond Britain's borders. It convincingly argues for the development of a particular type of early twentieth century royal diplomacy that sought to capitalise on the localised popular and press scrutiny of British culture generated by the appearance of the King. This served to create a template for state visits as distinct from, yet subtly complementary to, broader issues of foreign policy conducted by elected politicians. Edward VII both emphasised his own personal attributes and respected the formal constitutional constraints of democratic government. This, Glencross summarises, created a context where "the individual personality of the monarch mattered less than the symbolism of the presence of the British monarch" during formal ceremonial occasions (208). This combination of accessibility and symbolism would be later employed in imperial tours beyond Europe, and the template is still powerfully evident in more recent royal tours undertaken by Edward VII's successors. This book confirms the relevance of this area of scholarship to those interested in British diplomacy and royal visits, and invites further comparative research into overseas journeys undertaken by subsequent monarchs.

LAURA COOK

The Australian National University