



Queen of the World

Robert Hardman

London: Century, 2018

Review by: Carolyn Harris



Queen of the World. By Robert Hardman. London: Century, 2018. ISBN 978-1-780-89819-3. xiv + 578 pp. £14.99.

 *Queen of the World* accompanied an ITV documentary of the same name and was one of the most informative and interesting popular royal biographies of 2018—a year that saw the publication of a variety of fresh perspectives on the royal family including *Ma'am Darling: 99 Glimpses of Princess Margaret* by Craig Brown, and *The Quest for Queen Mary* by James Pope-Hennessy and Hugo Vickers. Robert Hardman is an experienced journalist and royal correspondent whose 2012 book, *Our Queen*, examined both Queen Elizabeth II's life and her work as sovereign at the time of her Diamond Jubilee. *Queen of the World* examines events in the six years following the jubilee and places the Queen's role in a global context, examining her overseas tours and interactions with world leaders.

Queen Elizabeth II has travelled more extensively than any other monarch in history—making “more than 260 visits to more than 125 nations and territories” (424)—but most books about her reign focus on events within the United Kingdom. The popular perception of the Queen also focuses on her residences and public engagements in a British context. In recent years, there has been scholarly analysis of the Queen's role as Head of the Commonwealth over the course of her long reign, most notably *Monarchy and the End of Empire: The House of Windsor, the British Government, and the Postwar Commonwealth* by Philip Murphy (2013). In *Queen of the World*, however, Hardman not only analyses the Queen's role as Head of the Commonwealth and sovereign of sixteen Commonwealth realms—including Canada, Australia, and New Zealand—but also explores the significance of her diplomatic role in the wider world. Hardman provides fascinating behind-the-scenes descriptions and analysis of royal tours and state visits as well as subtle examples of royal diplomacy, from state dinners with foreign leaders to Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings.

Queen of the World includes interviews with numerous ambassadors, diplomats, and members of the royal household as well as The Princess Royal, The Countess of Wessex, and Andrew Parker Bowles. A constant theme in the interviews is how the Queen is well prepared and informed for every overseas engagement. For example, Sir John Birch, former British ambassador to Hungary, recalled that during a 1993 visit to Budapest, the Queen “knew a lot about Eastern Europe. It was a rather strange contrast with Mrs. Thatcher [in 1990] ... I was surprised—perhaps a comparison one shouldn't make—between the Queen's knowledge and the Prime Minister's knowledge. On that occasion, and on that subject, the Queen had the edge” (14). The Queen's

interactions with Thatcher on the world stage as well as her friendship with South African President Nelson Mandela receive their own chapter that examines the Queen's role in Commonwealth Heads of Government meetings that debated the best means of bringing an end to apartheid in South Africa.

Queen of the World is not only a study of the Queen's role in international relations over the course of her reign, but is also a look behind the scenes of royal tours. Hardman includes examples of detailed briefing notes reviewed by the Queen prior to royal tours over the decades that were intended to ensure all diplomatic occasions unfolded without incident. Hardman also discusses the various aspects of a successful royal tour, including the unique gifts, fashion choices, menus, and itineraries. There is an interesting section devoted to the role of the Royal Yacht Britannia in royal diplomacy before the ship was decommissioned in the 1990s that makes a case for the importance of how "the yacht could provide a detached platform for more restrained and harmonious discussions," but also notes that in an era of shorter, more focused royal tours, the yacht increasingly seemed to belong to a bygone age (344).

Queen of the World is a book with material of interest to a variety of audiences with different degrees of prior knowledge about the Queen and her reign. For readers who are well informed about the history of the monarchy, Hardman's interviews and fresh details about the significance of past royal tours will enhance their existing knowledge of the Queen's reign. In contrast, readers who have just been introduced to the history of the monarchy by Netflix's *The Crown* will find answers to their questions concerning the accuracy of this dramatization. Over the course of the book, Hardman addresses some of the inaccuracies in *The Crown*, including the circumstances surrounding the Queen's historic 1961 visit to Ghana where she danced with President Kwame Nkrumah.

Elizabeth II's long reign often prompts retrospective analysis, but Hardman places her global role within the context of current events, discussing the long history of the Queen's royal tours within a contemporary framework. *Queen of the World* begins with the April 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in London, which confirmed that the Prince of Wales will succeed the Queen as Head of the Commonwealth, and concludes with the marriage of Prince Harry to Meghan Markle in May of that same year. The bride's choice of floral emblems from the Commonwealth nations in the design of her wedding veil emphasized that the younger generation of working members of the royal family share the Queen's commitment to the Commonwealth.

While Hardman's writing and research is consistently engaging, the book encompasses such a wide scope that the structure occasionally becomes unwieldy. There are chapters focused on a particular continent, such as Europe or Africa, on an individual such as The Prince of Wales, or a theme such as The Royal Yacht Britannia. As a result, readers interested in the royal family's engagement with a particular country may find the material of interest to them spread out across a variety of chapters. For example, Hardman discusses the 2018 visit to Singapore by The Prince of Wales and The Duchess of Cornwall in the chapter concerning The Prince of Wales, but the first Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, which took place in Singapore in 1971, is part of the chapter concerning the Queen's role as Head of the Commonwealth. Fortunately, there is a detailed index, including events and dates under each country heading, which allows researchers to find material on particular topics or countries discussed in multiple chapters.

The Queen and the World is recommended to anyone interested in the global significance of the monarchy and the Queen's subtle role in international diplomacy. Hardman's perspective on the Queen's international role engages both scholars and general readers interested in learning more about the royal family in an international context.

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