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Review of the Rule of Women in Early Modern Europe, edited by A.J. Cruz and M. Suzuki

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Anne J. Cruz and Mihoko Suzuki, eds. *The Rule of Women in Early Modern Europe*.

Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009. vii + 224 pp. index. illus. bibl. \$25. ISBN: 978-0-252-03416-9.

This volume makes a significant contribution to our scholarly understanding of the exercise and representation of female political authority. The eleven essays brought together here range across a wide geography from England to Transylvania. The authors' research also attests to the engagement of a wide variety of source material — chronicles, clothing, heraldic shields, letters, to name only a few — and convinces the reader that this is still a field rich with possibilities and new insights. Rather than assess individual essays, this review will highlight a few of the significant threads that emerge from a reading of them collectively and what these might tell us about the future of studies on female power in the early modern period.

The first of these threads is how women who were not queens or rulers shaped the exercise and representation of female power. Tracy Adams's probing essay about how Christine de Pisan deployed the historical figure of Isabeau of Bavaria allows for an intriguing insight into Pisan as an advocate for queenship. Mihoko Suzuki's essay examines the English writer Anne Dowriche's *French Historie*, arguing that she used her text to provide political counsel to Elizabeth I. In a fascinating essay that proves the reign of Elizabeth I still has much to reveal to scholars, Catherine L. Howey analyzes how gifts of clothing allowed the women of Elizabeth's inner circle to influence the queen and protect their own political interests. Essays such as these should challenge scholars to not simply look at the male construction of and discourse about female power, but also to analyze how other women shaped it.

Another thread that runs throughout these essays is the question of shared power. While issues of shared sovereignty, regencies, and consorts are certainly not new to queenship studies, several of the essays offer fresh ways of thinking about them. Sometimes the question of shared sovereignty remained vexed or fraught. This is illustrated well by Barbara F. Weissberger's skilled analysis of the heraldic shield and motto employed by Isabel of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon. While these devices seemingly resolved the question of balancing their authority, the diverse interpretations that they offered made such a resolution elusive and allowed Isabel, as a consequence, considerable latitude in her exercise of power. Magdalena Sanchez's engaging essay about Isabel Clara Eugenia, daughter of Philip II and co-ruler with her husband, Albert, of the Low Countries, analyzes the prominent role that she played in governing — a role that was often more assertive and savvy than that of her husband. Her wifely submission in public and her assertions of piety, however, masked this assertiveness and perhaps explained her ability to exercise it. Thus, as these two examples and others in the book demonstrate, close investigations of shared sovereignty can serve to illuminate the operations of gender in premodern political culture.

A third thread is the enduring historical resonances of female political authority. Sandra Logan's essay traces the representations of Katherine of Valois in various sixteenth-century texts including a collection of fictive letters, *England's Heroicall Epistles*. In this text the author, Michael Drayton, uses Katherine's lineage to explore questions of her association with French and Welsh identity. As Logan notes, such a discussion was central to the Tudor monarchy's definition of itself during this period. Similarly, Elizabeth Ketner finds that the representations of Elizabeth I in the famous seventeenth-century novel, *La Princesse de Clèves*, became a means to critique absolutist rule. Spanning even greater historical distances, as Barbara Weissberger reveals, the Franco regime in twentieth-century Spain deployed the image of Isabel of Castile to bolster the legitimacy of its power. Thus, Isabel of Castile became an "icon of National Catholicism" (56) and Franco himself often identified with her. Each of these essays, then, demonstrates the power of queenship and female authority, and thus gender, to animate ongoing debates about political power.

As this wide array of topics and questions suggests, this is a rich and rewarding collection of essays. Scholars of gender and power in early modern Europe will

benefit from a close reading of this material and the directions for future research that it offers.

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