

B O O K R E V I E W S

Estelle Paranque, ELIZABETH I THROUGH VALOIS EYES: POWER, REPRESENTATION, AND DIPLOMACY IN THE REIGN OF THE QUEEN, 1558–1588, Queenship and Power (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 235; ISBN: 9783030015282

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‘A marriageable woman’, ‘a musical monarch’, ‘a mounted, armored heroine’ – if Elizabeth I’s image has birthed a large critical coverage, it largely overlooks French diplomatic sources.¹ In *Elizabeth I of England through Valois Eyes*, Estelle Paranque expertly reconstructs the queen’s image in the French court from 1558 to 1588. Looking at previously untranslated and unpublished letters and reports between French ambassadors in England and the French royal family, Paranque proves that French royal and ambassadorial perceptions of Elizabeth I were not monolithic but multi-faceted and ever-changing. She debunks the myth that the representations of the queen in France were entirely negative and argues, to the contrary, that they were as complex as they were in England.

By exposing the dynamics of the relationship between successive French monarchs and Elizabeth I, this monograph offers a new perspective on Anglo-French relations. It amply demonstrates that ambassadors had an instrumental role in shaping the French royal court’s opinion of the queen and also establishes that Elizabeth was skilled in purposefully moulding her own image across the channel, even though good relations with the Valois stemmed primarily from French diplomatic self-interest. Indeed, throughout her work, Paranque shows that Elizabeth and her French counterparts remained mostly on good terms and that nothing was so important to the Valois as to maintain amicable diplomatic relations with England.

As stated in the introduction, the author follows in the footsteps of other scholars who looked into diplomatic relations between Elizabeth and foreign

¹ Alessandra Petrina, Laura Tosi (eds), *Representations of Elizabeth I in Early Modern Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 18; Katherine Butler, “By Instruments Her Powers Appear”: Music and Authority in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth I’, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 65, no. 2 (2012), 353–84 (p. 353); Susan Frye, *Elizabeth I: The Competition for Representation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 4.

rulers to recreate the queen's image abroad. Unlike her predecessors, however, Paraque provides a thorough exploration of the queen's many representations and 'counterbalance[s] Anglocentric views of Elizabeth' (p. 7) by exploiting mostly French sources. This enables her to dig deeper into the queen's reputation and draw unique conclusions. She translates and studies hundreds of holographs and scribal diplomatic letters and, through meticulous textual analyses, unveils many a portrait of the queen. More than a historical survey, this book showcases the author's aptitude for palaeography, translation, and literary analysis. In studying royal representation abroad, she also provides what she calls 'a necessary alternative to the familiar policy-led narratives, which are characterized by assumptions of stable diplomacy and business-as-usual among royal ambassadors' (p. 19).

The volume includes six chapters in chronological order. After a comprehensive introduction, Paraque reviews the state of Anglo-French relations at the beginning of Elizabeth's reign and shows that, thanks to her correspondence with French ambassadors de Noailles and de Seurre, the queen was seen as powerful, respectable, and diplomatically talented. Paraque then turns to a pivotal three-year period wherein the queen's reputation took a downturn because of both domestic turmoil in England and her support of the Huguenots in the French Wars of Religion. The fourth chapter looks at the diplomatic ramifications of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre and contends that, although Elizabeth's capacity for decision-making was called into question, the queen was seen as merciful and understanding by the Valois. Chapter five focuses on the latter years of the marriage negotiations between the queen and the Duke of Anjou and argues that, in the eyes of the Valois, Elizabeth aroused more and more suspicion and distrust and was increasingly perceived as indecisive and unreliable. In the final chapter, Paraque concludes that between 1584 and 1588 the French royal family saw Elizabeth as a potential enemy and a pirate queen more so than before, but that demonstrations of affection and goodwill never ended.

Although this study purports to look at the queen's image from a Valois vantage point, Paraque's rationale for ignoring the last fifteen years of Elizabeth's reign – that scholars have overlooked the relationships between Elizabeth and her Valois cousins – is not convincing in light of the fact that Henry IV's correspondence with the queen of England has received very little attention. This shortcoming, however, does not diminish the value and reach of Paraque's fine scholarship. This work's achievement lies in helping scholars to value Elizabeth's skills in sculpting her own image abroad and to appreciate the Valois' unremitting reliance on the English monarch's friendship despite conflicting representations. A scholarly *tour de force*, Paraque's monograph adds missing and forgotten pieces to the diplomatic puzzle of early modern Anglo-French relations and makes a most valuable contribution to Carole Levin and Charles Beem's 'Queenship and Power' series.