



***Tudor and Stuart Consorts: Power,  
Influence, and Dynasty***

**Edited by Aidan Norrie, Carolyn  
Harris, J. L. Laynesmith, Danna R.  
Messer, and Elena Woodacre**

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**T***udor and Stuart Consorts: Power, Influence, and Dynasty* is the third in a four-volume series examining the careers of English, and then British, consorts from the Norman period to the twenty-first century. This particular book analyses the consorts who were married to monarchs between 1485 and 1714. The book is divided into two sections, with the first examining the Tudor consorts and the second devoted to the Stuart consorts. Each chapter investigates a consort with regard to a particular theme. There are also two closing chapters in the two sections, the first focusing on the literary afterlives of the Tudor consorts and the second discussing textual, visual, and material representations and counter-representations of the Stuart consorts. Each section begins with introductory chapters written by Aidan Norrie and Joseph Massey, respectively.

The strengths of the chapters lie in adopting thematic approaches to inform their analyses of how successfully, or otherwise, the consorts negotiated early modern expectations of consortship with particular emphasis on the dynastic, political, and religious contexts in which they held office. Thus, for example, Lauren Browne effectively demonstrates through her analysis of Elizabeth of York's political actions, motherhood, and charitable endeavours that the first Tudor queen can justifiably be regarded as the "Tudor trophy wife" (as the chapter is entitled), while "Her reputation as a pious queen, mother of the Tudor dynasty, and an exemplary royal consort persisted" after her death (39). Indeed, examining each consort with respect to a particular theme is refreshing because it has the effect of providing new insights into areas that can be overlooked or marginalised by scholars. As an example of this, Aidan Norrie's chapter on Jane Seymour moves away from this little-known queen's limited, posthumous epithet of being the wife of Henry VIII who "died" by instead centring its focus on an investigation of her activities as an intercessor, which demonstrate her desire "to embody the more traditional, medieval ideal of saintly queenship" (99). Usually, of course, Jane is remembered merely as the only wife of Henry VIII to provide him with a living male heir. Further, Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones' chapter on the body of Mary Beatrice of Modena convincingly concludes that "no other queen consort had a body so much discussed, praised, adored, desired, lampooned and derided than she" (294), thus situating Britain's last Catholic consort in a broader cultural

and political setting than has previously been the case, in addition to analysing representations of her appearance within a comparative context that contextualises her experiences with those of other consorts.

Other chapters offer interpretations that are perhaps less innovative but are widely held or in keeping with current scholarship, including that on Anne Boleyn. The emphasis on particular themes, however, means that discussion of some important issues is unfortunately neglected; thus, while the chapter on Catherine of Braganza provides intriguing insights into her activities as a politician that are often ignored or marginalised, it fails to offer a convincing explanation for why Charles II seemingly accepted that he would not be succeeded by a legitimate male heir by his wife. Indeed, analysis of this could have included a comparison with Henry VIII and his obsession with being succeeded by a male of his body. Another drawback to some of the chapters should be noted; namely, that some engage more fully with the relevant historiography than others, which follows on from the previous observation about the effectiveness of contextualising interpretations within broader historiographical and comparative contexts.

A particular strength of the chapters focusing on the Stuart consorts is the inclusion of a number of images that supplement the authors' analyses with effective visual representations; indeed, of the twelve images included in the book, only two pertain to the Tudor consorts. This unevenness is arguably a weakness of the volume, especially in view of opportunities to utilise visual sources to explore themes such as, for example, the co-monarchy of Mary I of England and Philip II of Spain and how contemporary gender issues were represented, and negotiated, in the medium of portraiture. In a chapter focusing on Katherine Parr with emphasis on her works as an author, it would similarly have been beneficial, perhaps, to have included at least one image of her literary output. The inclusion of family trees for both dynasties, however, is helpful. While well-edited on the whole, there are some vexing editorial inconsistencies, for example referring to Katherine of Aragon's mother as both "Isabella" and "Isabel" (42).

Since many of the consorts included in the book are well known, perhaps the greatest strength of the volume is in providing fresh interpretations of little-known or neglected consorts, including Elizabeth and Dorothy Cromwell (wives of the Lord Protectors of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland, and Ireland) and George of Denmark. (The editors justify the inclusions of Elizabeth and Dorothy on the basis that both women held positions akin to that of a consort.) These chapters make it clear that their subjects deserve to be better known especially with regard to how effectively, or not, they

performed the role of consort and negotiated its attendant expectations. Indeed, it is to be hoped that these chapters will spur scholars to conduct further research into consorts' lives in order to develop more rounded pictures of the political, cultural, and dynastic settings in which their careers took place. Through focusing on wide-ranging themes, the volume also places particular emphasis on early modern gender expectations and how these affected the success of a particular figure's consortship; the chapters on Philip II of Spain and George of Denmark are especially illuminating for that reason, in contrasting two individuals' very different experiences of being a male consort.

Undoubtedly, a consort's success was shaped, at least in part, by the success of their relationship with their royal spouse, and the chapters make apparent that a successful consortship often went hand-in-hand with a successful royal marriage: the experiences of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York, Henry VIII and Jane Seymour, and Anne and George of Denmark are perhaps the clearest examples of these. While the deliverance of a healthy male heir was an essential component of the consort's role, the experiences of Katherine Parr and Catherine of Braganza, for example, seem to indicate that fulfilling this duty was not necessarily always the defining characteristic either of a successful consortship or a successful marriage between king and queen. In all, *Tudor and Stuart Consorts* is a handsomely produced study of the careers of fifteen consorts between 1485 and 1714 and deserves attention from scholars seeking fresh perspectives of these individuals based on solid research.

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