

RAYNE ALLINSON, *A Monarchy of Letters. Royal Correspondence and English Diplomacy in the Reign of Elizabeth I*. Pp. xii + 251 (Queenship and Power). Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. Hardbound £55.00 (ISBN 978 1 1370 0835 0).

*A Monarchy of Letters* charts an unedited chapter of the diplomatic history of Elizabethan England by exploring its development through the lens of the letters the Queen exchanged with contemporary foreign rulers. While European archives show a steady growth in the epistolary exchanges between monarchs in the sixteenth century, their value as sources for the study of early modern diplomacy has generally been overlooked (xii): through the reappraisal of royal letters as tools of executive diplomacy and as ‘a distinct genre of political writing’ (xiii), Rayne Allinson’s compelling study proposes an assessment of this substantial evidence. The book is introduced by two chapters on royal letter-writing in England, followed by eight case-studies examining the use of letters in the first two years after Queen Elizabeth I’s accession (Chapter 3), the correspondence threads dominating the central years of her reign (Chapters 4–8), and the long-lasting holograph exchanges with Henry IV of France and James VI of Scotland (Chapters 9 and 10). Informed by diplomatics, the eight case studies uncover the manifold political implications underlying the language, form, materials, and presentation of royal letters. The correspondence with James VI of Scotland, in particular, provides evidence of the political weight of kinship terminology as a vehicle through which the monarchs defined, negotiated, and established the terms of the Anglo-Scottish alliance beneath the lines of their personal relationship (Chapter 10). The implications of the forms and materials of letters are then especially dealt with in the case studies examining the correspondence with Tsar Ivan IV of Russia (Chapter 7) and the Ottoman Sultan Mur\_ad III (Chapter 8). Through their procedures and protocols these exchanges shed light on the flexibility of the inner workings of the English Secretariat by

reflecting its readiness to adapt to the requirements of international diplomacy in order to bridge cultural and political divides, nurture communications, and foster commercial and diplomatic links (129, 149). Further, contrasted with the simplicity of letters to Western monarchs, the embellished forms and the ornamentation of letters to non-Western rulers mirror how different conceptions of sovereignty might be made ‘manifest on paper’ (133), as vividly illustrated, for instance, in the description of one letter sent to Elizabeth I by Safiye, the favourite concubine of the Ottoman Sultan (130). However simple in form, letters to European rulers would require careful presentation, as shown by Allinson with reference to the detailed instructions for the delivery of two letters to the French King: both by the Queen, these had to be carried by two different messengers and handed over at a specific time, accompanied by precise ritual gestures (33). The very ritual of send-and-receive then conveyed political meaning: the regular exchange with Catherine de’ Médici, even after her regency had formally ended, indicates continuing recognition of her authority and political importance—alongside enduring amicable relations between England and France—(Chapter 6), in contrast with the ‘silent diplomacy’ enacted with the Queen of Scotland (73), or with the dramatic consequences of the suspension of the correspondence with Philip of Spain (Chapter 4). As it complements our understanding of early modern diplomacy, Allinson’s scholarly contribution spans beyond its central argument: outlining the history of royal letter writing in England, the introductory chapters address the definition of royal authorship from the Middle Ages to the early modern period (Chapter 1), and examine the form and construction of Elizabeth I’s letters alongside the details of her working relationship with her secretarial staff (Chapter 2). The scholar’s sensible and balanced approach views letter-writing as an essential part of an early modern ‘monarch’s job description’ (1) and early modern authorship as a concept which ‘encompassed (and often even assumed) the participation of secretaries’ (18), thus providing a fresh interpretation of Queen

Elizabeth I's writing practices and of collaborative text production. Importantly, Allinson stresses the role played by the members of the Secretariat in the construction of royal letters—such as Cecil's occasional subterfuges to have his way when it came to the formulation of their contents (24)—and the opportunities of interference of merchants and ambassadors into the cogs of diplomacy through their involvement in royal correspondence—such as Harborne's role in promoting the beginning of a sustained correspondence with the Ottoman Sultan (132), or the liberties taken by ambassador Barton when translating the Queen's letters (147). Sharply receptive of scholarly challenges across research fields, and solidly grounded on a rigorous and accurate analysis of a rich body of primary materials, this book demonstrates the potential of truly interdisciplinary research. The chronological arrangement of the case studies allows an appreciation of the developments of English diplomatic strategies as it stimulates a comparative reading of the correspondence taken into consideration. The substantial primary sources are conflated into a gripping and accessible narrative on the establishment of the geopolitical influence of England in Europe and beyond, thus making the volume an illuminating resource for both specialists and non-specialists. Finally, the wealth of the historical sources presented and Allinson's discerning analysis of early modern English diplomacy, letter-writing and royal authorship will, make this publication hugely useful to a wide range of scholars in the fields of history, literature, political science, and manuscript studies.

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