

Valerie Schutte, Unexpected Heirs in Early Modern Europe. Potential Kings and Queens, Cham (Springer International Publishing) 2017, XII–280 p. (Queenship and Power), ISBN 978-331-955293-4, EUR 106,99.

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Distributing power along lines of family and inheritance was, by its very nature, an unpredictable affair. Heirs could not be forthcoming or they could be born only late into a marriage. Those groomed and prepared could perish suddenly leaving »spares« or an end of the male princely line in their wake. Marriages could produce many daughters, but not a single son. Well-prepared daughters could also suddenly find themselves sidelined by the birth of a single male heir. And this lists only the most common problems before likely and less likely heirs even began contributing to active politics. In theory, then, studying the dynastic contingencies of European monarchies up close offers historians a chance to come to terms with the unpredictable at the heart of early modern dynastic transitions.

The editor's overarching definition of the »unexpected« unfortunately combines the specific (listed above) with the highly unspecific. A definition centered on succession laws (»people not expected to inherit«) ties some of the individual contributions together. Another blurry and almost all-encompassing one (»unexpected situations that heirs found themselves in«) loosely encapsulates the rest. What is more, dynastic events may have been unpredictable, but one wonders if it is productive to describe them as »unexpected« given the long history of dynasty. Were not early modern subjects constantly forced to manage dynastic expectations with every twist of fate? And did not the rise of primogeniture, which Paula Sutter Fichtner has studied for the German lands, or of laws of succession, that Howard Nenner and recently Paula Kewes, Susan Doran, or Christoph Kampmann have studied, exemplify attempts to harness fate; if often with unintended consequences? As a result of this loose terminology, the introduction does not provide a single working definition of the subject at hand.

A first part (»Securing a Dynasty«) focusses on the social relations used to *secure an heir*. It brings gendered political alliances and news media into conversation with one another, but surprisingly neglects early modern corporeality, medicine, and royal reproduction. Kristen Gearman contrasts how – after being accepted at first – the late and, hence, »surprising birth« of Edward, Prince of Wales became the object of scandalization, when Yorkists challenged its legitimacy at the onset of the »Wars of the Roses«. Henry VI's mental illness, for instance, which precipitated these shifting power relations, is taken for granted. Readers are also not told about the logistics of information, how the oft-mentioned



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»rumors« about him or his son »spread« or who used what means to spread them. Retha Warnicke's contribution casts doubt on three Spanish ambassadors' diplomatic dispatches to positively re-evaluate the relationship between Lady Margaret Beaufort and her daughter-in-law Elizabeth of York. She portrays it as a typical one of »royal women facilitating marriages and peace«, but neglects to fully flesh out the role of the heir in all of this.

The second part seeks to contrast how differently heirs and »spares« could be educated. From book dedications to Mary and Elizabeth Stuart, Valerie Schutte's own contribution deduces the different expectations for the later Queens, both of whom king Henry VIII legitimated, later bastardized, and reinstated again even later. Elizabeth received less book dedications as authors considered her sister Mary to wield more considerable influence at the Henrician court. Schutte's contribution does not seem to be about unexpected heirs, unless female inheritance was to be generally conceptualized as unexpected (with far-reaching consequences for the volume as a whole).

Susan Broomhall's essay about the »gendered performativity« of Catherine de Medici studies the pressures on the later infamous Queen, playing a central role in France's wars of Religion, before she had given birth. Broomhall's intriguing essay on Catherine de Medici can only be counted as being about unexpected heirs at all, if her own later role as (unexpected) regent is concerned. Troy Heffernan tentatively moves the volume into the 18th century, studying princess (later Queen) Anne Stuart's lack of preparation for the throne focusing on a lack of »formal« education bestowed upon other royal children.

Given that the volume promises »new methodologies of the training« of heirs, Heffernan's approach to education remains too implicit, never actually linking Queen Anne's later political choices to her earlier education. Thinking about Aysha Pollnitz' recent work, the reader wonders if a focus on humanist education (by tract and tutor) could be supplemented or even supplanted in practice by day-to-day learning from experience. In other words, in whose eyes were these agents »lacking« education; sometimes it seems to be in the eyes of their numerous critics, at others judging by our modern categories.

A third part focuses on *second sons*, who were not expected to inherit, but were arguably not unprepared to play this role either due to the constant rivalry between royal brothers. Estelle Paraque's paper on the third son and later king Henry III of France, for one, suggests that this younger son utilized ideas of the just prince and presented himself as his brother's most important supporter. The reviewer was puzzled by Paraque's central claim, however, that Henry's »negative reputation can be fully reassessed by his own words«. Cathleen Sarti contrasts four Stuart kings arguing that some of the trouble of Charles I' and James II' reign related to their misunderstanding of royal power (as second sons). While most historians will share Sarti's observation that the Stuart kings' ruling styles differed, her portrayal remains too overtly schematic to convincingly attribute much significance to their status as second sons. Jonathan Spangler's contribution stands out since it most clearly conceptualizes the spare's status of potentiality



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(i. e., he/she might become a ruler) as a resource of power. It also advances a clear argument: For the second sons in the 17th century French monarchy, Gaston and Philippe, Spangler traces a shift away from »corporate monarchy«, sharing roles among the royal family interlaced with fierce rivalries, toward new, more consensual tasks for second sons, for instance, as collectors and patrons of the art.

A last part titled »unexpected survival« promises to finally raise the question, if – given the number of early deaths – reckoning with fate became a much-discussed necessity (as I would argue it did). The contributions assembled under this header seem to discuss different matters altogether, however. Of Camilla Kandare's article on Queen Christina of Sweden, who abdicated her throne, the introduction claims that she fits the shared framework because she was »very much unexpected in all her actions« (sic). William B. Robison places Elizabeth I in a longer history of Tudor dynastic uncertainty emphasizing above all her choice not to marry as »unexpected« leaving the reader wondering, what then is not to be included in this open category of »unexpected heirs«.

As this volume, that focuses predominantly on English, but also on French and Swedish families, shows, the study of dynastic contingencies is in much need of further research. Unfortunately, the present collection neither establishes a clear analytical concept of the »unexpected« studied throughout. Nor does it turn to how early modern agents framed the unexpected in terms of religious providence, fate and fortune, or the probable. The volume's individual contributions present case studies mostly honing in on dynasts (less often heirs) themselves. But in my opinion the volume does not quite work as a whole. Its many moving parts do not contribute to an overall sense of how early modern subjects sought to prepare for this form of the unexpected (one among many), how they conceptualized it, and (if it all), how it concretely affected their lives. »Unexpected« is a relational term, almost certain to prompt the questions, who is the one expecting or not expecting here, and what are they expecting precisely. Unfortunately, readers are not told.

With few notable exceptions, political historians have neglected dynastic turns of fate as coincidental. They happened, but as biological accidents they seemed to have had no history. Unfortunately, many contributors to the present collection treat this important subject in the same way. »Unexpected« dynastic events still feature as an occasion to tell a set of no-doubt related, but conceptually unconnected stories, interesting though these may be individually. For many early modern courtiers, diplomats, and officials, by contrast, these events could prove central, even life-changing. Those seeking an in-depth understanding of the concerns of those reckoning with and affected by dynastic death, the present volume (priced at around 100 euros) is going to disappoint.



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