Alexander Samson. 2020. *Mary and Philip: The Marriage of Tudor England and Habsburg Spain*. Manchester: Manchester University Press

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As the subtitle indicates, this book by Alexander Samson brings together not just two monarchs, Philip and Mary sharing the throne of England, but the intersection of their countries and cultures during the brief reign of Mary I (1553–1558). A reader looking for the personal aspects of the marriage is going to find little of that here. Samson has other interests, and these are expressed from the start. First and foremost, this study brings forward the positive aspects of Mary's queenship. True it is that the re-evaluation of her figure started with Catholic historians in the nineteenth century and all recent studies reject the legendary "Bloody Mary" grotesque depiction, which has however pervaded in popular fiction until the present.[1] But there has been a certain caution about praising the achievements during a period in the history of England that is often considered a "barren interlude," an awkward parenthesis that failed to produce any lasting advances and brought the country to a dangerous loss of identity by coming too close to the Habsburg empire. Nevertheless, reenvisioning Mary Tudor has been a general trend in the last fifteen years, and biographers such as Linda Porter, Anna Whitelock, and Judith Richards have explored a new, more benign perspective on Mary's life and personality, while William Wizeman has reconsidered the theological and spiritual accomplishments of the Marian church. In *Mary Tudor: Old and New Perspectives* Susan Doran and Thomas Freeman claim in the introduction to the collection of essays that these are "unashamedly revisionist" (2011, 15) while, in Spain, Maria

[1] An exhibition in the London Dungeon "Bloody Mary: the Killer Queen" (Merlin Entertainments, 2010) portrayed her as a zombie and in the video game "Identity V" (Asylum Entertainment, 2019) she is a playable hunter that attacks with a knife covered in blood.

Jesús Pérez Martín has been a powerful advocate of Mary's life and personality (2009).

Against this background Alexander Samson proposes a new understanding of the queen by shedding light on the advantageous aspects, not only of Mary's reign but also of her decision to marry Philip, which opened up a path for international policy that brought her realm closer to a convergence with European trends. His aim is

> to open up a space for alternative interpretations of the Spanish marriage, not by making a claim for its unqualified success, but rather by showing the fundamental lack of evidence for judging it, as all too often has been judged, in personal terms. (9)

To do so, he brings to the study a wealth of cultural aspects that show how England gained from the presence of Philip in the English court, making it more magnificent and sophisticated, promoting science and navigation, a new system of taxation, a new artistic temperament and military training, and making of it the most prestigious court in Europe for the short period of the Marian reign.

Bringing Philip to the foreground in his role as king of England has proven rather elusive up to the present. The reason may lie in the ambiguities construed into his position as *jure uxoris* and king of England but in fact deprived of a range of powers attached to actual kingship. Traditionally presented as someone who exploited Mary Tudor for his own ends, it is difficult to reverse this negative vision without entering into considerations about their private relationship. Samson looks at the tensions provoked by the anomalous situation of a woman having more power than her husband and at the same time trying to conform to the role of obedient wife. The marriage treaty and the "Act for the Queen's Regal Power" were the two legal documents that determined the duties and limits, the checks and balances that would govern this arrangement. Samson puts the emphasis on the continuities rather than the breaks that both brought with them. Spanish history had a recent precedent for such an arrangement when Isabella of Castilla married Ferdinand of Aragon, and this provided an example for what otherwise was a new power structure in England. Likewise, the "Act for the Queen's Regal Power" that was passed in April, a few months previous to the marriage ceremony in July of 1554, would also establish a framework for female rule that would have continuity in the reign of Mary's sister, Elizabeth (1558–1603).

Pertinently, Samson starts by examining the economic and trade relations that existed between Spain and England just before Mary's accession. These had been deteriorating in the years after the Reformation and it was an obvious area that would see the benefits of an Anglo-Spanish union, even though the improvement was not as radical as one might expect. Economic relations can be easily and rapidly destroyed but take longer to rebuild. With so much at stake, economically, strategically, and religiously, Europe had a hiccup when news of the death of young king Edward reached continental courts. The European dynastic powers positioned themselves to prepare for what might come and Spain had a clear goal in mind. As Samson points out "Philip became king of England to secure and retain the wealthiest and most troublesome part of his dynastic inheritance, the Low Countries" (27). But the course of history was to be played out inland with Mary as an active player of her destiny. According to Samson she had carefully planned ahead for this outcome, being able to gather strong popular support in a very short time. From a Spanish perspective Mary's accession was "embedded in a providential narrative about the Hispanic monarchy" (34).

Philip's attitude to the marriage is perhaps the most controversial aspect and the most difficult to reconsider in a positive light. Samson argues that there is not enough evidence to prove that he was disinclined towards it. With Charles V in a state of melancholy it was Philip's own decision to abandon his already arranged Portuguese match to opt for Mary. His important financial contribution to the English treasury, demonstrated by Glyn Redworth based on an analysis of the accounts of Domingo de Orbea and Thomas Egerton, proves that not only did he not plunder it but, quite the opposite, he generously covered the costs of his household and expenses (173). Whether he was satisfied with the degree of power that he was allowed to exercise is a challenging matter. Samson goes into lengthy detail about the iconography of the balance of power, from the ceremony of marriage and the royal entry into London, to their image on coins and their choice of dress. All these instances show how carefully the image of the royal couple had to be crafted to deliver the message that Mary was not subjected to her husband but rather the opposite. However, it is also evident that Philip was seriously involved in questions of government, and that he remained so even after his departure from England. On the other hand, the couple's private life is left unexplored

and most significantly there is no mention of their childlessness or Mary's long periods of fruitless pregnancy.

The book is rich in detail that contributes to contextualize the co-monarchy in the cultural and social atmosphere of the time. Pamphlets in favour and against female rule are analysed, as well as anti-Spanish tracts feeding into the Black Legend imported from Italy. Spanish phrase books and vocabularies were published, although Samson finds that this did not produce an uptick in translations from Spanish into English. Material culture is considered at length to show how "power was exercised symbolically, ceremonially and ritualistically, through intimacy, clientage, courtly exchange, festival, tournaments, religious observance and music" (209). The very Spanish *juego de cañas*, of Moorish origin, was performed in London, to great amusement, although it would not be consolidated after Philip's departure. All in all, *Mary and Philip* is a work that offers a wide ranging vision of a period in the middle of the sixteenth century often seen as an inconvenient parenthesis that brought Spain and England together. Samson stresses its continuities and, indeed, its successes. England had a talented and prepared female monarch who chose the partner she wanted for herself and exercised power supported by most of her subjects in an independent fashion, also sharing the burden of government with her husband. Philip and Mary made of London the centre of a magnificent European court, multicultural and open to external influence and exchanges. In times of Brexit and the rise of self-centred nationalisms, this is a period to revisit.

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