

Elise M. Dermineur, *Gender and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Sweden: Queen Louisa Ulrika (1720–1782)* (Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2017). 253 pp.

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In eighteenth-century Sweden, from 1721 to 1772, political power was held by the Diet (*riksdag*), and the country's political system was constitutional monarchy. The ruler had little power and Sweden as a state was a pawn in the European power politics. This is the framework for Elise M. Dermineur's study of Swedish Crown Princess and later Queen Louisa Ulrika (1720–1782). Dermineur focuses on gender, political culture and the role of queen consorts in eighteenth-century Europe. Hence, the study aims at a more general and deeper analysis of these complex phenomena than going through Louisa Ulrika's biography as a queen. The book is a result of the HERA-funded project «Marrying Cultures: Queens Consort and European Identities», led by Helen Watanabe O'Kelly.

The aim of the book, according to the introductory chapter, is «a study of the dynamics between gender and politics in eighteenth-century Sweden» (p. 2) and of the role of the queen consort in the political landscape. Dermineur links her study to previous scholarship on politics, sociability, court society and the strategies of queen consorts in eighteenth-century Europe. The research draws on a convincing and wide panoply of archival sources, especially letters from and to Louisa Ulrika, in archives across Europe. However, the comprehension of the sources and research literature used is impeded by the lack of a consistent bibliography. References to primary sources are given only in endnotes, situated at the end of each

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chapter, which makes it particularly difficult to gain a reasonable understanding of Dermineur's empirical evidence.

The six chapters of the book are arranged chronologically and are well justified according to key periods or political events in the life of Louisa Ulrika from her birth as a Prussian princess to her status as a dowager queen at the court of her son, King Gustav III. The other four pivotal periods and events are Louisa Ulrika's time as Crown Princess of Sweden (1744–1751), her frustration as a queen when her attempts to revise the constitution and restore the power of the ruler aborted time after time (1751–1756), the failed *coup d'état* in 1756 that Dermineur stresses as a turning point in Louisa Ulrika's political agency, and again Louisa Ulrika's tireless pursuit to reinforce the royal prerogatives through her personal contacts in Sweden and abroad (1756–1770), until her political role was dimmed by Gustav III. He acceded to the throne in 1771, and with the revolution of 1772 he succeeded in what had been Louisa Ulrika's objective throughout her political era in Sweden, and in which she had failed repeatedly. Through these stages, Dermineur strives for a deeper analysis of an early-modern political culture that is commonly described as not dominated by men, but gendered, which gave women considerable possibilities to act in political and social circles. In this milieu queen consorts did not have a predetermined political role, but they could gain considerable power if they were interested in political agency, like the ambitious and capable Louisa Ulrika.

Despite well-motivated research questions and good points of departure, Dermineur's study lacks a deeper analysis of politics in eighteenth-century Europe as well as of Louisa Ulrika's agency and motives. Louisa Ulrika is presented as heartless, ambitious and bitter, «acerbic» and «furious» being adjectives frequently used to describe her actions, letters, or state of mind. Louisa Ulrika's actions are more often described at a chronological and narrowly political level than reviewed in the larger context of princesses reared for dynastical purposes. The wider political opportunities for queen consorts, the mental impact of a dynastic marriage and the move to a foreign country as consort or queen, and the role as a mother and head of her own royal household could have been reflected upon much more.

However, Dermineur does show the importance of political and dynastic endeavours for royal and princely marriages. Furthermore, the analysis of the coronation of Adolf Fredrik and Louisa Ulrika in 1751 as a political act is convincing. Nevertheless, the study of the events and Louisa Ulrika's agency after the royal couple's failed *coup d'état* in 1756, orchestrated by the queen, remains on the chronicling of political events and on citing a number of Louisa Ulrika's letters without clear connection to the aims of the research or a more thorough analysis

of the letters. A number of mistakes, such as confusing Louisa Ulrika's chief political adversary Axel von Fersen with his brother Carl von Fersen (p. 36) or claiming that the nobility was the Second Estate in Sweden (p. 132), where it was the First Estate, or citing in the endnotes works that are not given full bibliographical references, disturb the reading.

The book would have benefitted from a wider reading of historiography, especially concerning eighteenth-century Sweden, but also on gender and politics in eighteenth-century Europe. Moreover, the «traditional historiography» several times mentioned, and its relation to Dermineur's study, should have been scrutinized more thoroughly. Particularly surprising is that the analysis of Louisa Ulrika's actions does not relate to recent scholarship on eighteenth-century politics and sociability. For instance, My Hellsing, Karin Sennefelt, Henrika Tandefelt and Charlotta Wolff have published important studies concerning politics and court in eighteenth-century Sweden, but they are referred to only scarcely, if at all. Tim Blanning's research on the political power of culture could also have supplemented the analytical tools, especially since previous research has stressed Louisa Ulrika's cultural and scientific interests and her use of them to reach her political goals. Most striking, however, is the omission of Elaine Chalus's seminal theorizations of female power and «social politics» apart from in the introduction and conclusion. In her conclusion, however, Dermineur gives a more positive image of Louisa Ulrika as a person than previously in the book and contextualizes her political role, her understanding of the monarchy and her personal ambitions. I would have welcomed similar interpretations throughout the book, which is unfortunately characterized by hasty and thin analysis.

Several solutions concerning the book's contents and structure are hardly convincing. The use of at least two levels of subheadings and subchapters less than a page long blur the structure of the study and leave the aim of the book difficult to apprehend. Furthermore, ill-suited headings such as «Waiting for Godot» (p. 183) erode the analysis. The decision to provide notes and a bibliography (primary sources cited only in the endnotes) separately after each chapter and omit a bibliography of sources and secondary literature is particularly unsuccessful. Moreover, the quotations from the letters from and to Louisa Ulrika are given only in English translations in the book. The translations often feel too modern, and the reader cannot avoid questioning whether Louisa Ulrika was more eloquent in the mostly French originals.

Dermineur's study of the political agency of Queen Louisa Ulrika in the wider context of gender and politics in eighteenth-century Europe has ambitious objectives. Her aim to explore Louisa Ulrika's informal and formal political role and

analyse it in a wider context of queen consorts and gendered social politics of the era is well founded. Despite the sound analysis of the function of dynastic marriages or the semiotics of the coronation, and despite an abundant source material, Dermineur regrettably contents herself with explaining the political events from Louisa Ulrika's point of view, without deepening the analysis at a more abstract level and without actually problematizing gender or politics within wider scholarship on eighteenth-century political culture.