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The Name of a Queen: William Fleetwood's *Itinerarium ad Windsor*

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Estelle Paraque

The Name of a Queen: William Fleetwood's Itinerarium ad Windsor is a valuable piece of research, as it offers the publication of a very intriguing and little-studied source written in 1575. In analysing this source which is both considered as a 'document and fiction' (pp. 4-5), the *Itinerarium* revisits Queen Elizabeth I's queenship and legitimacy in a male-dominated world in which people asked themselves 'Why should a woman be allowed to rule with the same powers as a king?' (p. 1). The editors have not only published the valuable source itself, but also a collection of essays by historians and literary scholars, of which Fleetwood's *Itinerarium ad Windsor* is the focus. The book is divided into three sections: the copy of the primary source *Itinerarium ad Windsor* which is a dialogue between William Fleetwood, Thomas Sackville Lord Buckhurst and Robert Dudley Earl of Leicester, a close counsellor of the queen. The second section focuses on the participants of the dialogue and the last section addresses the ramifications of such a source for our understanding of queenship in a broader setting.

The book begins with an interesting introduction by Dennis Moore who explains the significance of such a source and why the varying manuscript locations have made it difficult for historians to acquire it. Moore

also claims that this source could be useful for those interested in 'Elizabethan court culture and its literature, gender studies, the history of English law, and the development of historical scholarship.' (p. 11) Then, *The Name of a Queen* offers the printed version of the source before discussing its authenticity 'dealing with the date itself and the transmission of this dialogue.

The second section of the book introduces the reader to the participants of this dialogue. In chapter two, Charles Beem focuses on William Fleetwood and provides detailed biographical information. Beem is also interested in discussing Fleetwood's motives as well as the accuracy of the dialogue, which had taken place. He explains that Fleetwood was a 'lawyer, jurist, antiquarian, parliamentarian, and legal scholar' who had strong connections with the government, notably with Leicester and Lord Burghley (p. 63). This chapter relates Fleetwood's life 'enabling the reader to understand this intriguing and fascinating character and how he became so close to two key figures of the Elizabethan government. Fleetwood was a fervent Protestant (p. 67) and his militancy during Mary I's reign and his legal skills brought him to Lord Burghley. In going through William Fleetwood's important life events, Charles Beem strives to understand Fleetwood's motives in writing *Itinerarium ad Windsor*. For Beem, Fleetwood's links to Leicester and the queen's vulnerability as an unmarried woman without a successor could have explained the willingness to write such a dialogue, defending the legitimacy of both queen and government (p. 76). Beem claims that though Fleetwood did not use scriptures to base his arguments on, he used 'his various skills as an antiquarian, collector of manuscripts, and legal theorist to build a waterproof justification for English female rule' (p. 77). Furthermore, his work praises Leicester's qualities, making a claim that if the queen decided to marry Leicester it would not 'compromise her royal authority' (p. 78). To end his chapter, Charles Beem questions whether this dialogue actually took place, and wonders 'how widely *Itinerarium ad Windsor* circulated?' (p. 80). The strength of this chapter is that it not only offers the reader important information on Fleetwood's life as well as his links to government, but also reveals his motives behind such a crucial document defending female rule during the early modern period.

Chapter three examines Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester and his 'talents at self-promotion' (p. 85). Jacqueline Vanhoutte is particularly interested in Leicester's 'strategic mode of patronage' (p. 86) and how *Itinerarium ad Windsor* legitimises his position at the court and as a favourite of the queen. In providing a short biography of Leicester, Vanhoutte highlights the ambitions and strategies of a powerful family: the Dudleys who had constantly fought for royal favour and had been attracted to power. Vanhoutte also explains the context in which this document was written 'the fear of a foreign marriage for Elizabeth and the rise of a feeling of nationalism and Protestantism 'were often allied in pro-Leicestrain works' (p. 91). In all, this chapter highlights how *Itinerarium ad Windsor* depicted a flattering portrait of Leicester (p. 99).

Chapter four focuses on the relationship of William Fleetwood and Thomas Sackville, Lord Buckhurst. Rivkah Zim reveals important life events of Thomas Sackville and how he defended in a play entitled *Gorboduc* 'the authority of parliament' in case of 'the death of the last of royal dynasty' (p. 109). Zim explains that the queen chose to ignore the message conveyed in this play as it was 'first and foremost a pleasant fiction' (p. 110). The main goal of this chapter is to show that *Itinerarium ad Windsor* was written in a more complicated context in which the succession issue was predominant (p. 113). Zim also insists on the role of gender in *Itinerarium ad Windsor* and how queenship affected the characters, and more particularly Buckhurst (p. 118-20). The first three chapters dealt with the lives of the three protagonists who were mentioned in *Itinerarium ad Windsor* and, as Rivkah Zim correctly points out, they were very much aware that 'an English queen regnant was already a successful, everyday political reality' (p. 120).

The subsequent section of *The Name of a Queen* aims to contextualise the source. The fifth chapter focuses on Fleetwood's interest in history and how it influenced *Itinerarium ad Windsor*. James D. Alsop who has already worked on William Fleetwood, shows the connections between Fleetwood and Elizabethan historical scholars (p. 134 and p. 145).⁽¹⁾ Though this chapter can be seen at first sight as confusing in mentioning the different people who influenced Fleetwood's career, the author manages to shrewdly explain the academic background of Fleetwood in order to highlight his reputation as a historian as much as an antiquarian. In this chapter, I found particularly intriguing the mention of Fleetwood using Bodin's *Methodus* in his comprehension and defence of British history (p. 135-6). Alsop manages to reveal Fleetwood's ability to

engage with the historiography of his time and to portray a man who was fascinated with 'archival study' (p. 140). Also also demonstrates how Fleetwood's historical skills helped him to defend the 'best right to the Crown' (p. 144). Undoubtedly, this chapter encapsulates Fleetwood's various qualities and skills as well as his important role during Elizabeth's reign.

In the next chapter, Carole Levin and Charles Beem look at how *Itinerarium ad Windsor* defines English queenship (p. 156). While this chapter refers to the works of the preceding chapters to substantiate its arguments as well as showing how all the essays are intricately intertwined with one another, it also endeavours to understand and define the complexity of the term 'queenship' and its interaction with Fleetwood's work. Levin and Beem tackle these questions in four steps. First, they choose to focus on the historical context of the text. Fleetwood wrote the conversation at a time when Elizabeth was pressured by national and international issues. The 1570s were difficult for the Tudor queen who persisted in remaining single and in not settling the issue of succession (p. 158). Levin and Beem also argue that it was not the first time that a text was produced to defend a king's legitimacy and offer the example of a text written in times of crisis at the beginning of the Tudor dynasty (p. 159). This information allows the reader to grasp the importance of such texts in the representation of the defence of kingship itself. The term 'queen' is analysed in this chapter and the authors explain that both Mary I (Elizabeth I's sister, 1553-58) and Elizabeth were king and queen of England (p. 161). Levin and Beem also highlight the different meanings of the word 'queen' - the wife of a king, the mother of a king and regnant queen. Therefore, in this essay, they explore how Fleetwood managed to define the term 'queenship' thanks to his legal skills and his background as a historical scholar (p. 165-8). To end this chapter, the authors choose to introduce the importance of the king's body politic into the difficult paradigm that represents the term 'queenship', and argue that the dialogue defends 'the idea that possession of the body politic of kingship washes away all former infirmities, such as being a woman' making a strong case for Elizabeth's rulership (p. 170).

This chapter represents a transition between the defence of Elizabeth's legitimacy as king and queen of England and her sister's rehabilitation as a fair ruler. The last chapter, chapter seven, focuses on how *Itinerarium ad Windsor* finally defended Mary's queenship as much as Elizabeth's. In this chapter, Sarah Duncan engages with the historiography that has depicted Mary as a Catholic failure who burnt her Protestant subjects and who could not rule over England successfully (p. 175). She then explains that more recent scholars have attempted to re-evaluate and rehabilitate Mary's reputation as a good queen. In her chapter, Duncan is interested in making a claim that in defending queenship, *Itinerarium* ultimately gave another perspective of Mary's reign. Fleetwood depicted in his work a queen who was concerned by her realm's welfare (p. 185). Beyond religious confession, Fleetwood's goal was to defend 'a model for regnant queenship' through Mary and Elizabeth (p. 185). In demonstrating the image of a 'good' Mary in Fleetwood's *Itinerarium*, Duncan argues that though we are not sure of how the text circulated and its authenticity, it still revealed the influence of Mary in Elizabeth's queenship.

With these fascinating essays and the printing of such an interesting source, the authors manage to rethink the term queenship as well as highlighting the role of Thomas Fleetwood in Elizabethan politics and social life. Whether the dialogue happened or not is not the issue. *Itinerarium ad Windsor* embodies the questions and issues posed by the term queenship for England and how it had an impact on people's understanding of rulership. Though the source studied was directed to England I think that it would have been interesting to add a chapter on Mary Queen of Scots and the impact of such a text on her representation as a Catholic queen who embodied an important threat to Elizabeth. The strength of *The Name of a Queen: William Fleetwood's Itinerarium ad Windsor*, in my opinion, is that it highlights and encapsulates the concerns and hopes that represented the power of a queen during the early modern period.

Notes

1. James D. Alsop, 'William Fleetwood and Elizabethan historical scholarship?', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 25 (1994), 155-76. [Back to \(1\)](#)

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