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Review of Sylvia Z. Mitchell, *Queen, Mother, Stateswoman: Mariana of Austria and the Government of Spain*

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Mitchell, Sylvia Z. *Queen, Mother, Stateswoman: Mariana of Austria and the Government of Spain*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019. xii + 293 pp. + 10 ills.

Mariana of Austria has long been defined by the men surrounding her—as Queen to Philip IV, mother to Carlos II, and a weak regent influenced by “favorites” Everard Nithard and Fernando Valenzuela. Her legacy has been held captive to what Mitchell describes as “the typical double bind of powerful women,” dismissed as incapable yet also scheming and power hungry (5). Sylvia Mitchell dispatches with these tropes, utilizing a wealth of state and personal papers to reveal a complex and well-rounded woman who was prepared to step into power and who held her own against the noble pretensions, court factions, and international politics that continually challenged her. In so doing, Mitchell successfully brings Mariana back from the historical obscurity to which she was relegated by the Bourbon dynasty and subsequent generations of historians. Importantly, Mitchell embeds Mariana within the larger political context of her era, particularly the international politics of diplomacy and war, in which she successfully forged alliances and strengthened Spanish defenses but for which she has been overlooked. Building on recent revisionist scholarship that has refuted the notion of Spanish decline in the later seventeenth century, Mitchell offers a new perspective on Mariana’s regency as one of successful leadership that enabled continuity of power.

Mitchell proceeds chronologically over seven chapters, most of them examining Mariana’s life and work in two- or three-year increments. The first chapter covers the longest period of time, stretching across Marian’s childhood (and education) in Vienna, her marriage to Philip IV at age fourteen, her sixteen years as queen consort, and ultimately, her assumption of power as regent for young Charles II at Philip’s death in 1665. Mitchell shows us a young woman both well-educated and well-prepared to step into power when needed. Trained not only in court etiquette but also in diplomacy and international politics, Mariana was able to put her training to good use in Spain, where the Habsburgs had an established history of accepting women in positions of power.

Turning to Mariana’s reign, Mitchell presents a woman who had already begun to take on more public political functions before her husband’s death and who stepped immediately into her new role. Mitchell emphasizes both the strength of Philip’s support for Mariana assuming full power at his death and the smooth transition of power that ensued. Royal transfers of power were (and still are today) highly orchestrated events, heavy with symbolism as well as moments of vulnerability. Mitchell carefully unpacks the wording of Philip’s will to demonstrate the extensive legal authority Mariana held as guardian and regent. In

so doing, Mitchell successfully pushes back against the traditional view of Mariana as merely a figurehead who was beholden to the Regency Council (*Junta de Gobierno*) Philip established to work alongside her. Focusing on Mariana's actions, Mitchell argues that Mariana wielded "ultimate executive power over policy" (68).

After examining Mariana's assertion of control and reorganization of both the royal household and court, Mitchell examines the international conflicts that Mariana inherited from Philip IV, including the ongoing war with Portugal and rising tensions with Louis XIV who was determined to claim rights to the Spanish Netherlands through his Spanish wife, Maria Theresa. Immediately upon assuming power Mariana was faced with these complex international problems, which she did not shy away from. Arguing that "diplomacy, therefore, was Mariana's—and Spain's—greatest success" (107), Mitchell examines Mariana's ongoing efforts to strengthen Spain's international support system with both the English and the Dutch as she concluded successful peace settlements with both Portugal and France.

In examining the domestic crises that challenged Mariana's power, Mitchell keeps Mariana as the central figure, moving the principle male figures, including Don Juan (Philip IV's illegitimate son), Everard Nithard (Mariana's confessor) and Fernando Valenzuela (the protégé married to one of her ladies in waiting who rose in influence at court) to secondary focus. While scholars have long based their views of Mariana on the actions and writings of these (and other) men, Mitchell offers a new lens through which to interpret their interactions with Mariana. Above all, Mitchell dismisses the notion that either Nithard or Valenzuela were *validos* or court favorites who exerted undue influence on Mariana. Rather, she reframes them as trusted advisors, Nithard as the confessor who had arrived in Spain with the young Mariana and Valenzuela as a useful and capable figure who oversaw renovations and entertainments in the transitional period as the court expanded in preparation for Carlos to come of age and assume power. The downfall of each man, she points out, came as a result of varying political resentments and grudges.

When she handed power to her fourteen-year-old son in 1665, Mariana faced new challenges as critics, led still by Don Juan, sought to remove her influence on the young king. Portrayed by critics as an overbearing mother stifling the new king, Mariana eventually had little choice but to accept young Carlos's demands that she leave Madrid. During her period of exile, Mariana found ways to maintain some communication with her son, eventually reconciling with him and returning to Madrid.

Foregrounding Mariana of Austria within both domestic and international politics at the end of the seventeenth century, Mitchell's portrait of this overlooked queen is an important work that reframes our understanding of power

and politics in this era. Mitchell successfully rehabilitates Mariana as a capable leader and fairly astute diplomatic negotiator. While acknowledging Mariana's miscalculations and mistakes along the way, Mitchell nonetheless demonstrates Mariana was successful in assuming power well within her rights as guardian and regent. In so doing, Mitchell offers a new perspective not only on this queen, but more generally on queenship, gender, diplomacy, and early modern political history.

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