

“Lutheranisms” at the end of the sixteenth century. Sommer’s book is a worthy contribution to the extant literature on the history of Lutheranism in the confessional age; it is an indispensable contribution to the history of Renaissance Denmark.

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***The Identities of Catherine de’ Medici.* By Susan Broomhall. Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions, 228. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2021. xiv + 394 pp. €157.00/\$189.00 hardback.**

Susan Broomhall has been writing about women and gender in early modern France for more than two decades, so it is no surprise that she decided to write a book about perhaps the most significant woman in the kingdom in the sixteenth century, Catherine de’ Medici. This is not a biography, as there are plenty of those widely available in both French and English. So, Broomhall has decided to write a very different kind of book, a monograph that examines the many competing identities of Catherine crafted by herself and her supporters, as well as those propagated by her critics and enemies during her lifetime. Moreover, Broomhall makes an effort to show how all these competing representations of Catherine were received by her contemporaries.

The book is organized in an interesting way. Rather than either a chronological analysis of Catherine’s career, or simply arranging her material into separate chapters based on Catherine’s allies and critics, Broomhall chooses to use various roles in Catherine’s life—as a daughter of the Medici, wife, queen, regent, mother raising sons and daughters, etc.—as lenses through which to view her from the perspectives of both her supporters and her enemies. And this works well in a variety of ways, though it leaves other possible identities of the queen unexplored. Nevertheless, what this way of looking at Catherine shows us, and this is perhaps the most significant argument of the book, is that identity formation for Catherine was always negotiated and a social process rather than an individual act, with both supportive as well as pejorative representations of her interacting and building upon each other. In the end, Catherine had a multiplicity of identities that were never static, making the job of historians trying to pin down who Catherine really was a complicated task. And because of the way women were perceived in the sixteenth century, especially those adjacent to power as Catherine was, it was normally the queen’s emotions that tended to dominate her competing identities constructed by friend and foe alike. Only a few voices claimed Catherine was a unique woman who had the emotions of a man. As Broomhall shows throughout the book, the authors of these constructions, written primarily by men, claimed to understand Catherine’s inner emotions, desires, feelings, and intentions and to represent them more truthfully than the queen herself.

The book bristles with insights in every chapter, but for readers of *Church History* there are three chapters that will be of particular interest, chapters 5, 7, and 8. Chapter 5 analyzes Catherine’s reliance on her Catholic religion in her role, as Broomhall labels it, of “chief mourner of the Valois.” Whether in personal acts of prayer and piety or more public acts such as funding masses for the dead for her husband and

sons, Catherine's commitment to the Catholic church comes through clearly. Chapter 7 focuses on largely, though not entirely, Protestant depictions of Catherine as a murderer, built upon her perceived role in ordering the St. Bartholomew's massacre in Paris in 1572. While it is very clear that Catherine alone cannot be blamed for this atrocity, her image as "the wicked Italian queen" grew very quickly after the massacre. Indeed, this representation of Catherine as someone with violent and uncontrolled emotions only echoed the more traditional view of the disordered nature of all women. Broomhall does mention at various points in this chapter that Catherine tried to present herself as a peacemaker rather than a murderer, but these two representations of her identity were always in opposition. The real surprise of the book is chapter 8, in which Broomhall shows us the identity of Catherine as a sister in a convent, going back to her early life in Florence, where she was placed in the convent of Le Murate as an orphan for three years in 1527. Broomhall shows how Catherine repeatedly referred back to this experience throughout her life as living in a liberating community of strong women who made a significant impact on her and gave her strength whenever she was troubled for the rest of her life.

Broomhall declares in the introduction and states again in the conclusion that her book is a study about power. What she means by this is that Catherine's identity constructions were "strategic bids for power" (7). Moreover, these identity constructions provided "the power to determine who Catherine was" (356). But as Broomhall also admits, her book is also about powerlessness, that is, the powerlessness of Catherine consistently to maintain control of her identity. Nevertheless, one area where Catherine's identity constructions did have power was in her use of paintings, sculptures, tapestries, architecture, pageantry, performance in political rituals, and numerous material projects throughout the kingdom as evidence of her patronage to the kingdom of France. Indeed, one of the strengths of the book is the ninety-six images, many in full color, that are distributed throughout the book.

But at the end of all these identity constructions, what is the representation of Catherine that remains? Although Broomhall makes no attempt to draw a definitive picture of Catherine de' Medici from all these competing constructions in the conclusion of this study, her book is nevertheless a very significant addition to the study of the queen. Indeed, anyone expecting a definitive portrait of the queen here is missing the whole point of her book. She has given all historians of the period a very valuable roadmap and guide that shows us how to better evaluate the many competing representations of Catherine's identity. Moreover, she has also underscored that historians who write about Catherine in the future will ignore the role of gender at their peril. One can hardly ask for more than that.

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