

The Scottish dimension would play a major role in Laud's downfall: unsurprisingly, Scottish charges against Laud were cast so as to appeal to the English parliament and the wider public. In the end, Laud's impeachment and trial were propelled by the 1643 Solemn League and Covenant, and yet, ironically, English sensibilities led to charges in which Scottish complaints played virtually no role at all.

The volume prompts a number of questions. If Laud's agenda were truly universal, extending to Anglophone churches abroad, foreign churches in London, even to the universities, what about the colonies? James altogether declines to discuss Laud's policies or even his attitude toward the churches in British North America. The study would also have profited significantly from the work of Jason Peacey about public culture and the emergence of the popular press during this period. Readers may wonder what James means when she speaks of "Anglo-Scottish forces in the early Long Parliament" (170).

Nevertheless, the volume does offer insight into the range of Laud and Charles's authoritarian program. Even if it does not recast the paradigm or reframe our understanding, it remains a competent, workman-like study. Laud may have had his limits, but Scotland was not one of them.

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J. L. LAYNESMITH. *Cecily, Duchess of York*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017. Pp. 288. \$114 (cloth).
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Cecily Neville, duchess of York (1415–1495), is among the most significant yet elusive figures of fifteenth-century English history. Born in the year of the Battle of Agincourt, granddaughter of John of Gaunt, wife and widow of Richard, duke of York, mother of kings Edward IV and Richard III, grandmother of the ill-starred Edward V and of Henry VII's consort Elizabeth of York, witness to the sudden rise and violent downfall of sundry "great men," Cecily Neville was no mere survivor but an apparently uncrushable matriarch who not only maintained but even increased her elite status and immense wealth over the eighty years of her dramatic life. It is unsurprising that she has featured in narratives of that turbulent century ever since More and Shakespeare rehashed it for their own literary endeavors. Yet, despite her shadowy fame on the sidelines of political histories and plentiful attention from popular historians and novelists, and regardless of narrower scholarly studies of her piety and literary interests, Cecily's life has never till now earned extended attention in its own right. J. L. Laynesmith, a respected historian of English royal and noble women of the fifteenth century, has remedied that lack with a richly detailed book that avoids the temptation to retell the Wars of the Roses from the duchess's perspective and instead undertakes a scholarly reconstruction of Cecily's whole life.

Laynesmith's qualities as a scholar are evident on every page. In the twenty and more years since she first began to research Cecily's life, she has amassed archival evidence from libraries and record offices across England, supplemented with many published primary sources. While Cecily's widowhood is particularly well recorded, Laynesmith skillfully manages to produce plausible accounts of her infancy, early years, and childhood marriage by combining what pieces of evidence remain with other primary sources of the era. Her book is especially valuable for its reconstruction of Cecily's estate management, involvement in the wool trade, religious and literary patronage, and political involvement through the decades of her adult life. As Laynesmith remarks, while the detailed household ordinances that prescribed a pious daily routine for the elderly Cecily, along with her extensive will, have inspired many studies of her piety and

book ownership, “her role as a major landholder and head of a powerful household have scarcely attracted any attention” despite the abundant sources surviving (1). It is only as a result of Laynesmith’s patient collation of widely scattered and often fragmentary archival records that we are now able to see a complete picture of this powerful woman’s life.

Among the book’s many merits is Laynesmith’s scrupulous maintenance of neutrality. Although she remarks in the opening pages on Cecily’s “pragmatism bordering on ruthlessness” (2), the book is largely free from the kinds of value judgments on the woman’s character—whether glowing or damning—featured by authors from Polydore Vergil to T. B. Pugh. Laynesmith consistently avoids psychological or emotive speculations on the motives and actions of Cecily or other key players. Such restraint is all the more admirable considering that some of the most terrible events of that bitter epoch tore at the heart of the duchess’s own immediate family, such as the execution (reputedly by drowning in a butt of Malmsey wine) of her son George, duke of Clarence, at the orders of his brother Edward IV, and her youngest son Richard’s possible involvement in the disappearance of her grandsons, the “Princes in the Tower.” Laynesmith is careful to explain Cecily’s political and familial position against the backdrop of such events, yet she does not allow her narrative to be sidetracked by them; nor does she indulge in hypotheses about what might “really” have happened during these legendary episodes. Where firm evidence is lacking, Laynesmith is generally content to lay out the possible scenarios without settling on any theory in particular.

She makes an exception, however, for the central myth and historical scandal attendant on Cecily’s life in particular: allegations of her adultery while resident in Rouen and the consequent illegitimacy of her son and future king, Edward. Such rumors seem to have begun circulating in the late 1470s and escalated after 1483 with Edward IV’s untimely death and resultant competing claims to the throne by Edward V and Richard, duke of Gloucester. Theories of Cecily’s adultery have been subject to revival many times since, most notably in Michael K. Jones’s 2002 work *Bosworth, 1885: Psychology of a Battle*. Laynesmith sensibly counters the illegitimacy thesis with a few brisk points: the duke of York was never more than a day’s ride from Rouen during the period when Cecily must have become pregnant; pregnancies can vary in length by up to thirty-seven days yet still be considered full-term; contemporaries who emphasized Edward’s legitimacy probably did so not in response to early fears of his illegitimacy but rather to draw contrasts with Henry VI’s son’s disputed paternity; and early plans between the duke of York and the French king for a future marriage between Edward and one of the French princesses could hardly have occurred if any question mark hung over Edward’s legitimacy. “It is highly unlikely that Edward IV was illegitimate. It is possible that he was born a week or two early,” she concludes (44). Nonetheless, gossip surrounding Cecily’s sexual history dogged her later years and, as Laynesmith submits, may have influenced the dowager’s conscious self-fashioning as highly devout in the final decade of her life.

Cecily styled herself by many forms in the documents and seals that attest to her choices in identity formation. By the mid 1460s, at the height of her influence, she and others on her behalf made regular assertions of her place in England’s true royal line. Her great seal announced her as “the lady Cecily, wife of the true heir of England and France and lord of Ireland, mother of King Edward IV, duchess of York” (120). As Laynesmith argues in her book’s conclusion, Cecily, duchess of York’s “power and significance” (184) in English medieval history surpasses that of many queens consort of the age, though she was never crowned as such. Laynesmith’s book provides a comprehensive and meticulous study of one woman’s exercise of power within the limits of medieval gender expectations and will serve as the standard account of Cecily Neville.

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