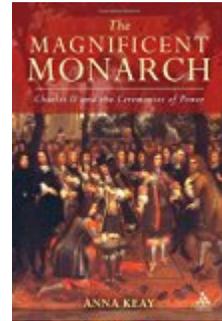


Anna Keay. *The Magnificent Monarch: Charles II and the Ceremonies of Power*. London: Continuum, 2008. Plates. xii + 319 pp. \$27.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-84725-225-8.

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Charles II and the Politics of Court Ceremony

The “Merry Monarch,” Charles II, has long had a reputation for laxity, in his attitude to protocol no less than to sex. Even among the historically literate, he is generally regarded as a shrewd but cynical ruler, who impatiently chafed under any restraints that got in the way of his pleasures and his ability to conduct business through informal and often underhanded methods. As such, he seems to stand in marked contrast to both his austere father, Charles I, and his contemporary, Louis XIV, who famously developed court ritual into a system of political control.

Anna Keay’s deeply researched and gracefully written study conclusively demolishes this view, revealing Charles II as a monarch fully aware of the political importance of ceremonial majesty and formality. She makes no claim to provide a general history of the reign, setting out instead to provide a “ritual biography” that reconstructs the evolution of Charles’s approach to court etiquette and ceremony in chronological order, from his early childhood to his death in 1685 (p. 2). She presents her findings as a straightforward narrative, without the theoretical scaffolding drawn from anthropology and other disciplines now commonly found in ritual studies. Although some readers may regret the absence of theory, it unquestionably makes the book more accessible to nonspecialists. Beneath the graceful and unpretentious literary presentation, however, this is a serious work, distinguished by close and technically demanding analysis of household records and the architectural and material framework of court life. Several useful appendices provide de-

tailed information about such matters as the numbers of people touched for the king’s evil in each decade of the reign, the frequency of Charles’s attendance of services in the Chapel Royal, and the identity of court officers, adding to the book’s value for specialists in the period.

Keay begins with an account of Charles’s early education in court ritual and etiquette, by his father and his governor, William Cavendish Earl of Newcastle. Both mentors took ceremony very seriously indeed and Newcastle subsequently wrote an analysis of its role in maintaining respect for kingship. This tract emphasizes the need to soften formality and majesty with gestures of courtesy and condescension, and Keay persuasively shows that Charles absorbed this lesson. When he wanted to maintain a sense of distance he enforced ceremonial protocols strictly, but when he wished to ingratiate himself with a visitor he softened the rules to allow a sense of personal contact.

During his exile in Europe in the decade following his father’s execution, Charles always carefully maintained the formalities of English court life, even when this required him to divide cramped apartments into spaces corresponding to the traditional sequence of rooms in the Chamber and Privy Chamber of Whitehall Palace. But his status as an exile and his poverty forced him to remain incognito, an established procedure in the period employed by princes wishing to travel privately, without the formalities and elaborate public receptions required during state visits. Because he remained incog-

nito, Charles always received visitors privately in his bedchamber rather than publicly in rooms of state. Keay argues that this experience helped establish a pattern that persisted after 1660, when Charles often continued to prefer relatively informal receptions in his bedchamber and other private settings to grander and more formal public ceremonies. The period of exile also gave Charles ample experience in negotiating ceremonial protocols with host governments that were often reluctant to treat him with too much respect, for fear of antagonizing the powerful Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell. He learned from an early age to insist on being treated with proper dignity. Interestingly in later years, despite his frequent preference for relative informality, he disliked incognito visits to London by foreign royalty, since these deprived him of the chance to orchestrate formal receptions that advertised the majesty of English monarchy.

At the Restoration, Charles divided the top posts in the royal household between old royalists and former Cromwellians who had played a role in restoring him to his throne. But middling level positions were given mainly to his former companions in exile leaving de facto control of the court to men he knew and trusted. The Office of Works (the department responsible for architecture and building) almost immediately began reconstructing the privy apartments, installing a railed alcove in the king's bedchamber modeled after that of Henry IV in the Louvre, which Charles had seen in Paris. This created a ceremonial bedchamber in the French manner, an innovation in the king's apartments in England.[1] The formerly strict division between public and private or privy rooms in Whitehall had, in any case, eroded during the Interregnum, making the king's apartments much more accessible to court visitors. Although Charles accepted this change, within a few years he ordered the creation of a second private bedchamber and then a whole new royal suite, which remained truly private.

Queen Catherine of Braganza made another contribution to the topography of court society by taking up the practice, originally reintroduced into England by Henriette Marie, of holding "royal circles," the name given receptions in the queen's apartments. These were soon moved from the public Presence Chamber into the more informal and private Withdrawing Room in the queen's apartments, allowing them to be conducted with less formality. They soon became important social events, which Charles would casually enter and leave as he pleased, interacting casually with other attendees.

Formal diplomatic receptions resumed at the Restora-

tion, raising tricky issues of protocol because detailed arrangements were perceived as reflecting the pecking order among princely houses of Europe. At the reception of a Swedish ambassador in 1661, the staffs of the French and Spanish embassies engaged in a violent altercation that resulted in six deaths and a threat by Louis XIV to declare war on Spain if he did not receive satisfaction for the insult offered his representative. Charles disliked the trouble caused by these rituals but knew he had to take them seriously.

Immediately after his return, he also began to touch for the king's evil, an ancient ceremony that advertised the sacred character of English monarchy. He managed to touch over seven thousand people during his first six months in England and roughly one hundred thousand during the next twenty-five years, or about 2 percent of the English population. Since it must have taken three or four hours to touch one hundred people, this represented a considerable investment of royal time and energy.

Keay devotes considerable attention to the Chapel Royal and the liturgical calendar of feast days, involving three cycles defined by the major events of Christ's life, the feast days of the evangelists and apostles, and English royal anniversaries, including Charles I's execution. During the greatest feasts—Christmas, Easter, and Whitsun—the king performed the priestly function of placing alms on the altar and took communion. Even lesser festivals were celebrated by formal processions to the Chapel Royal by the king and attending nobility. The conversion of James Duke of York to Catholicism, publicly revealed in 1673, and the resulting rise in anxiety over popish influence at court, led Charles to place even greater emphasis on the public celebration of Anglican rites. Members of the household and privy councilors were dragooned into attending services in the Chapel Royal on successive Sundays. The closet from which the king watched services was remodeled and the Chapel at Windsor was renovated in splendid baroque style.

Unfortunately none of this prevented the Exclusion Crisis of 1678-81, precipitated by revelations of a bogus Popish Plot and then sustained by fears of a Catholic successor and French Catholic influence at Whitehall. But the king's ostentatious support for the established church did shore up support for the Crown among orthodox Anglicans, thereby contributing to his ultimate victory over the Whigs. In the wake of this success, Keay shows, he further emphasized the ceremonial and material majesty of kingship, renovating the royal apartments at Windsor and ordering the construction of a major new palace

at Winchester, left incomplete at his death. Suggestively, these innovations were taking place at almost exactly the moment that Louis XIV moved the French court to Versailles.

Keay's book makes a double contribution to the history of Restoration politics and studies of court ceremony generally. Its findings should help sensitize all students of the English monarchy after 1660 to the importance of ceremonial protocols and palace topography.[2] At the same time, it implicitly points to the need for comparative studies that will allow us to view Restoration court ceremonies within wider chronological and geographic contexts.[3] One hopes that Keay, who has made a brilliant début with this book, will eventually contribute to this larger project.

Notes

[1]. The king's mother, Henriette Marie, appears to have introduced a French style ceremonial bedchamber at Somerset House in the 1630s. See Simon Thurley, "The Politics of Space in Early Stuart London," in *The Politics of Court Space: Europe and the Mediterranean, c. 1500-1750*, ed. Marcello Fantoni, George Gorse, and Malcolm Smuts

(Rome: Bulzoni, forthcoming).

[2]. For another attempt to deal with this issue, which Keay briefly discusses, see Brian Weiser, *Charles II and the Politics of Access* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2003).

[3]. Among the growing body of literature shedding light on the first subject, see especially the essays collected in David Starkey et al., *The English Court from the Wars of the Roses to the Civil War* (London and New York: Longman, 1986); Robert Bucholz, *The Augustan Court* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993); and several studies of English royal palaces of Simon Thurley. Studies providing a European perspective include John Adamson, ed., *The Princely Courts of Europe, 1500-1700* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1999); Fantoni, Gorse and Smuts, *Politics of Court Space*; and Jeroen Duindam, *Vienna and Versailles: The Courts of Europe's Dynastic Rivals, 1550-1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). For the French court in this period, see especially Gérard Sabatier, *Versailles ou la figure du roi* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1999); and Frédérique Leferme-Falguières, *Les courtisanes: Une société de spectacle sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2007).

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