

Simone Buckreus. *Die Körper einer Regentin: Amelia Elisabeth von Hessen-Kassel (1602-1651)*. Köln: SH-Verlag, 2008. 196 pp. ISBN 978-3-89498-194-5.

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Split Personalities

The overarching aim of this work is to modify the traditional biographical form by abandoning the usual narrative method, which Buckreus argues is flawed and unproductive in the modern age, for a new theoretical framework. This new method, she hopes, will allow a deeper understanding and analysis of a subject's characteristics, beliefs, actions, and duties, and of the ways in which he or she was assessed by both contemporaries and later generations. Buckreus illustrates this method by examining the rule of landgravine Amelia Elisabeth of Hesse-Cassel (1602-51) through a modified take on the theoretical construct behind Ernst Kantorowicz's famous volume, *The King's Two Bodies* (1957).

Kantorowicz's book discussed an English legal concept, first elaborated by Elizabethan lawyer Edmund Plowden, which suggested that while individual rulers were clearly the possessors of mortal, imperfect, physical bodies (some of which were even female), royal authority was vested in an undying, perfect, and abstract body. Thus two bodies, one natural and one political, existed simultaneously within the person of the king or queen. Although this early modern English legal concept was not common (if present at all) across the Channel, Kantorowicz's book has been extremely influential among modern historians, and Buckreus now applies this construct to Amelia Elisabeth. She argues, however, that while the two-bodies metaphor is an extremely useful concept, it is also too confining and fails to allow for all circumstances. What if, as in the case of Amelia Elisabeth, the bodily nature of the ruler is also a necessary part of her pub-

lic political representation? For example, as Buckreus nicely explains, one of the foundations of Amelia Elisabeth's rule and public claim to power was her physical status as widow and mother. Thus, a dualist theoretical structure that separates the physical from the political is insufficiently flexible, and, she argues, one needs some kind of intermediate form between the two (p. 21). To accomplish this goal, and to make the construct more accommodating, she significantly modifies the idea of ruling bodies by expanding it from two—the physical and political—to three—the physical, the political, and the public.

Indeed, Buckreus also makes clear that the situation is even further complicated, as the early modern German states did indeed have, and frequently used, their own political body metaphors. These did not refer to an English-style abstracted ruler, however, but rather to what we might now call the body politic, a hierarchical structure containing all the political entities within the larger empire and state. In this metaphor each political unit or social group represented a different limb or organ, with the ruler usually designated as the head. This body, too, Buckreus argues, must now be added to the idea of the political body, which thus had a dual nature (the political body of a ruler and the larger body politic). Yet given the inadequacy of the two-bodies construction, along with the difficulty of imposing an English theoretical structure onto the German situation, one might wonder if the metaphor has now become too strained. Once we reach three (or is it four?) bodies, would it perhaps be more

fruitful to abandon bodies altogether and start thinking in terms of some other metaphor, such as hats?

After presenting the case for her three-bodies metaphor, the bulk of Buckreus's book is focused on investigating the nature and interaction of the three bodies of the landgravine. She first carefully analyzes the types of legitimization of rule available to female regents at the time, discussing legal precedents and theoretical conceptions of rule both outside and within the empire. Using a wide range of secondary literature and numerous published primary sources, along with some unpublished sources from the Hessische Staatsarchiv Marburg, Buckreus then dissects the various ways that the landgravine, after the death of her husband in 1637, justified her regency and political power, and so furthered her political, religious, and dynastic goals. She systematically breaks down these forms of legitimization into three large categories: a legal claim based on her husband's testament; a religious claim based on her status as pious Calvinist ruling by the grace of God; and a biological and social claim based on her role as both widow and mother. (I was gratified to see that Buckreus thus makes exactly the same points that I sketched out in chapter 2 of my 2003 Ph.D. dissertation on the landgravine: "The Scepter Rests Well in the Hands of a Woman": Faith, Politics, and the Thirty Years War," though perhaps she is unaware of the striking similarity, for despite an extensive bibliography, she did not cite this work.) Buckreus provides each of these forms of legitimization a detailed and sophisticated chapter-long analysis, and carefully situates and analyzes each of these issues in terms of her three-bodies construct.

Interestingly, Buckreus does not stop at the death of Amelia Elisabeth, but instead, building on the rich modern scholarship, moves into constructed memory and representation. She focuses in chapter 4 on the impor-

tance of "the dead body of the landgravine," which, she explains, "offers contemporaries as well as later chroniclers and biographers a great deal of room for their own interpretation of the person and rule of the Hessian landgravine" (p. 145, my translation). And here too, she argues, one can see how the characteristics of all three bodies once again unite, and how now, after the landgravine's death, their "religious-confessional" and "dynastic" dimensions are joined by a further dimension of memory and the creation of tradition (p. 125). In a way, although she does not clearly state as much, Buckreus is arguing here that of the three bodies, two—the political and public—are immortal, but none are immutable.

Buckreus's writing is fluid and clear, her scholarship is impressive, and her analysis makes use of a wide range of sources and evidence. Her focus on the importance of the individual ruler in shaping the early modern state is welcome, while her arguments about the nature of biography are provocative. What is the measure of a life? Buckreus argues that her theoretical construct of a tripartite body can grant the reader a much more complete picture of the person and her times than a traditional biography, which merely provides a "linear" representation of a life "from birth to death." Furthermore, she argues, her method offers "the foundation for an organizational schema that can be applied to other princesses as well" (p. 175). Like Kantorowicz, therefore, whose primary goal in positing the idea of the two bodies was to come to a better understanding of early modern states, Buckreus hopes that her new, modified three-body metaphor will advance even further our knowledge of the inner functioning of governmental systems such as Hesse-Cassel's. While one may or may not agree with her argument in this regard, anyone who is interested in historical biography, female rule and gender roles, early modern government, or the theory of the king's two bodies will find this volume well worth reading.

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