

**Jeroen Frans Jozef Duindam.** *Dynasties: A Global History of Power, 1300-1800.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. 435 pp. \$27.99, paper, ISBN 978-1-107-63758-0.

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In his latest work, Jeroen Duindam returns to familiar territory by looking at rule and power from the late Middle Ages to the nineteenth century. *Dynasties*, however, moves outside of an Eurocentric focus to assess dynastic leadership in a global context. By using a four-part model to investigate rulers, the company they keep, the legacies they leave, and the lands they rule, Duindam explores dynasties from Africa to Asia to the Americas, providing a fresh look at political leadership and patterns of historical development.

In addition to assessing dynastic power according to his four-theme model, Duindam also pays close attention to cyclical and long-term developments. Duindam uses examples from existing specialized studies, acknowledging that his work will reveal neither new sources nor investigate every dynasty during the time covered. Rather, by looking at “how divergent practices can be seen as part of the same pattern,” Duindam concludes “the detail brought together in each of the chapters underlines that striking similarities hide profound differences” (p. 14).

The first theme identified by Duindam is “The Ruler” himself (and much less often, herself). Duindam highlights varying definitions of the ideal ruler over time and space with his extensive ex-

amples of historic events and individuals, as well as excerpts from political and literary texts. Religion, regalia, and ritual all factor into the presentation of rulers physically and ideologically while simultaneously creating “unattainable and inconsistent standards” (p. 53). The distinctions between the actual leader and the position of ruler are further highlighted by Duindam as he details rulers’ lives, from the Mughals to the Manchu. Patterns emerge which highlight aspects of rule such as regency, education, advisors, and even abdication as both political and personal mechanisms of power.

Duties--of family and rule--are the second theme discussed by Duindam, and he assesses the role of women in terms of reproduction and rule alike. The pressure of royal succession often fell upon women as mothers, wives, concubines, and, less often, as rulers. Women were participants in dynastic marriages to create diplomatic alliances among and to exchange land between powerful noble families. While this is not new information for scholars, Duindam uniquely demonstrates how this took place globally, not just in a European context. Duindam contrasts concubinage and polygyny with the reproduction found in royal European relationships--that of a bastard by a mistress--and notes that the “Christian dictate of

monogamy frequently went together with ‘serial concubinage’ outside of the hallowed bond of matrimony” (p. 123). The former functioned around complex hierarchies of women and succession while the latter created “ineligibles” in the face of a fear of dynastic extinction. The rules of succession, based in patrilineal or matrilineal heredity, primogeniture, and indivisibility, developed over time, often overlapped, and could be usurped by kingmakers such as military men who could “sell their swords to the highest bidder or push forward candidates they expected to serve their interests” (p. 148). Regardless of the rules or mechanism used to circumvent them, once succession was determined, “the ‘rites of passage’ that transformed a royal eligible into a king were also a phase of fluidity and anxiety for society as a whole” (p. 149). From that point on, society and the court of the royal alike either supported or resisted the choice depending on their own political and social interests and status.

Duindam then looks at the royal court and all of its complexities. The term itself is problematic linguistically and by definition, as it has taken on a life of its own in historical application. Courts could be mobile, stationary, large, or small; they could be private or public; and they could be composed of family members alone or include numerous functionaries, advisors, and observers. Through the late Middle Ages and into the early modern period, courts generally became less mobile, and travel fell upon the members of the court itself rather than the king, queen, emperor, or other power-wielding authority. Courts were often centered in urban settings, the administrative and residential hubs of their respective realms but access may have been limited in terms of the inner and outer sanctums of palaces as well as in proximity to the ruler. Court was often voluntary but just as likely could be forced, as was the case with Versailles, as royals used courts to control and influence the behaviors of their nobility. They were places of refuge and companion-

ship, either female or a non-threatening male eunuch variety such as in Ming China, as well as locations of conflict and competition, the likes of which were found in the Safavid court of Suleyman. Duindam does well to provide examples for all of his observations, ultimately concluding that the importance of courts remained relatively consistent throughout the period and played a large role in the state-building activities of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Finally, Duindam looks at domestic and foreign matters in the context of rule, the realm, and service. Supporters were often rewarded with land and titles while detractors suffered an opposite fate, all of which was intended to demonstrate the power and prestige of the ruler. Ceremonies and celebrations, often highly ritualized events, allowed for the masses to participate in the glorification of the ruler in what could be considered an early popular culture phenomenon. As media became more common and more accessible via books, journals, and printed works, “the splash of ephemeral court culture ... reached audiences far beyond the groups able to attend” (p. 275). On the other side of that visibility, however, was an increase in criticism and rebellion, as the masses became increasingly aware of the excess, repression, and discontent in the realm.

Duindam sums up his critique of rule and rulers by emphasizing the commonalities of dynastic training, function, and demonstration while concluding that global change was eminent. Prevailing views of the “rise of the West” and the inherent difference between East and West are far less certain, according to Duindam, and the parallels in past and present rule call for further investigation.

Duindam’s book is dense and full of countless examples to prove his hypotheses about the similarities between East and West, which are important in terms of offering credibility to his claims. This,

however, makes it a very problematic read for students, as he is very convoluted in his overall goal. There are similarities, to be sure, among rulers and rule from 1300 to 1800 on a global stage but the work would be more functional if these were more clearly presented. The scope of the work is overwhelming, an obstacle which renders the work difficult to use in a classroom setting.

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