

## BOOK REVIEWS



*Kingship and Masculinity in Late Medieval England*, by Katherine J. Lewis. London: Routledge, 2013. Pp. 284. ISBN: Pbk, 9780415316125; Hbk, 9780415316132.

THE FIELD OF medieval history has produced several hundred, if not thousands of volumes on kingship in the Middle Ages. Students of medieval studies are well acquainted with much of this literature, particularly that sparked by Ernst Kantorowicz's historiographical game changer, *The King's Two Bodies* (1957). Katherine Lewis's innovative study of the monarchy and masculinity of Henry V (r.1413-22) and Henry VI (r.1422-61, 1470-1) of England entitled *Kingship and Masculinity in Late Medieval England* deserves a place on the mandatory reading list for students of both medieval kingship and medieval gender.

Lewis fills a large lacuna in the study of masculinity and kings. Indeed, the field of medieval gender studies has been slow to offer in-depth examinations of the gendered politics and gendered bodies of medieval men. Women's historians, like Lois Huneycutt, Theresa Earenfight, and Elena Woodacre have done an excellent job at filling the gaps in our knowledge of women as rulers, especially in the last fifteen years. The masculine identity of kings, however, has not been examined in monograph-length studies, at least until Christopher Fletcher's *Richard II* (2008). Lewis follows in the same path. As she states, "Studying a king in terms of gender identity becomes a means of enlightening not only our understanding of politics, but also of ideologies of masculinity as they pertained much more widely within late fourteenth-century English society" (11).

After an introduction to the historiography and sources used in her argument (chapters 1 and 2), Lewis divides her study into two parts: the first is devoted to Henry V, the second to his son and heir, Henry VI. As a disclaimer, Lewis asserts that her work is not a comprehensive examination of the reigns of Henry V or Henry VI, nor does it offer new documentary evidence. Instead, Lewis is doing truly revisionist work. Henry V was viewed as a successful king, while his

son Henry VI failed in his rulership. Lewis asks her readers to “consider how and why father and son came to embody such contrary versions of masculinity” (45).

Chapter 3 begins with a look at the early years of Henry V. Henry’s early military training and experience on the battlefield in Wales might have contributed significantly to the formation of a “masterful and indomitable masculinity.” Lewis offers that without such experience “it is possible that his gender might have been differently forged” (69). Henry’s next steps into the administration of the realm also proved pivotal in his projection of a manly image. After illness forced his father out of governance, Henry took a leading role in managing the kingdom. While this should have made any father proud, Henry’s early leadership in a time of need only served to exacerbate an emergent competition between himself and his father. Once Prince Henry ascended the throne as Henry V, he worked actively to project himself as “the embodiment of a virtuous manhood” (80). In Chapter 4, Lewis shows how Henry perfected the model of the “the new man” by setting aside the adventures of his wild youth and cleansing the court of anyone who served as reminders of this past. His “new man” image was cultivated to show the adoption of a “virtuous manhood” built on self-restraint. Indeed Lewis notes that English kings frequently built their public image in response to the character of the previous king. In this case, Henry’s cultivation of “contained vigour and devout potency” (89) was a direct response to his father’s image of emasculated degeneracy. Lewis asserts that Henry’s delayed marriage to Catherine of Valois further increased his manly image as self-controlled and chaste.

Henry’s military victories, notably at Agincourt, served to underscore his manliness and that of the English as a whole. Chapter 5 delves into how the battles of the Hundred Years’ War reinforced this image and continued the propaganda of Henry’s military might. Chapter 6 explores the contrast between Henry and his brothers and Henry’s imposition of his own manly ideal upon his soldiers in the field. Henry’s own chastity was a model for English victory, especially when contrasted with the sexual passion of the French, whose own losses reflected their lack of sexual self-control.

Chapter 7 begins the examination of Henry VI’s reign after the untimely death of his father. The larger-than-life image of Henry V only served to enhance the deficiencies of his son as he began his reign over an uncertain political future. Henry VI became king as an infant, and even as he grew into his kingship, he was dominated by certain powerful advisors. This, Lewis argues, inevitably affected his own self-image as a potent king along with depriving him of the experience of ruling his own realm. Chapter 8 explores the beginning of

Henry's rule as a mature king and the pitfalls that he encountered managing his kingdom. Lewis asserts that Henry's apparent lack of manly vigor originated from his easy ascension to the throne. Henry VI never had to prove his manliness on the battlefield or justify his rule. Chapter 9 discusses how, while Henry had extensive opportunities for military training, his lack of interest in the martial arts not only damaged his public image as king but also left him physically and mentally unsuitable for life on the battlefield. Like warfare, marriage and sexual potency would have established Henry's masculinity; yet here, too, he failed to demonstrate his vigor. In Chapter 10, Lewis examines Henry's marriage to Margaret of Anjou, and the propaganda that depicted Margaret as an unnatural woman, domineering and aggressive, an image that would only damage the manliness of her king. Lewis's excellent analysis shows how the perceived gender performances of queens could affect the public images of their kings. Henry's eventual mental breakdown during a time of crisis only served to further emasculate his image. Chapter 11 discusses the ramifications of this breakdown, and Chapter 12 concludes with how Margaret of Anjou's attempts to assist her husband in ruling the kingdom only increased the perception of her unnatural womanhood and sexual immorality alongside Henry's emasculated rule. Public suspicion of Prince Edward's illegitimacy only added fuel to such perceptions.

Lewis concludes by pointing out new directions for the study of kingship and masculinity and by reminding readers that "the meanings of . . . manliness were not, indeed are not, absolutely fixed" (257). Lewis's study is richly and carefully researched. Her assessment of the sources for these kings considers the audience and bias of such texts. I think the greatest value of her study is the assertion that each English king was portrayed in the sources as building his own masculine identity in a direct contrast to that of his predecessor. As she notes in the concluding chapter, Edward IV demonstrated martial excellence, but embodied none of the chaste virtue of Henry V. Indeed, Edward's sexual appetites were well known among the aristocracy, and yet this did not seem to detract from his manly kingship. Further studies are needed to understand the complexities of medieval manliness and kingship, but Lewis's monograph is a sure step in that direction.

Jennifer D. Thibodeaux  
*University of Wisconsin-Whitewater*