

Book Review: Nancy Goldstone's *Daughters of the Winter Queen: Four Remarkable Sisters, the Crown of Bohemia, and the Enduring Legacy of Mary, Queen of Scots*

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Nancy Goldstone. *Daughters of the Winter Queen: Four Remarkable Sisters, the Crown of Bohemia, and the Enduring Legacy of Mary, Queen of Scots*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2018.

Nancy Goldstone's joint biography of Elizabeth Stuart's four daughters covers far more than what the title implies. Elizabeth (1596–1662), known as the Winter Queen, was the granddaughter of Mary, Queen of Scots. Her marriage to Frederick, Elector Palatine (1596–1632), with whom she had thirteen children, won her the title of Queen Consort of Bohemia when he became Frederick V of Bohemia. However, that title was lost within a year, earning Elizabeth the nickname of the Winter Queen for that brief single season of rule. Of her children, four daughters survived and became involved in many important events in seventeenth century Europe. Elizabeth, her daughters, and their extended fam-

ily provide the subject of this sweeping, fascinating biography.

In order to explore this family and the world they faced, the author presents her work in three sections, the first focusing on the Winter Queen herself, who was not only the Scottish queen's granddaughter, but also the daughter of James I of England (VI of Scotland), and the sister of England's Charles I. Goldstone provides an extensive background for each of these players, their relationships with each other, and the political and religious climate in which they lived. The author portrays Elizabeth as charming, relentless in her pursuit of status and position for herself and her family, and a poignant survivor. Widowed in 1632, she spent the

remaining thirty years of her life trying without success to regain the Palatinate for her children.

In the second section, the author details the lives of each of Elizabeth's four surviving daughters, showcasing their talents, faults, strengths, and foibles through their own extensive correspondence and through the historical context of their marriages, children, extended family members, and friendships. She chronicles each sister, one by one, life phase by life phase. The oldest daughter, Elizabeth, whom Goldstone calls Princess Elizabeth (1618–1680) to avoid confusion with her mother, became close friends with the famed French philosopher, René Descartes. Her intellect clearly matched his, evident in their complex discussions and correspondence. Louisa Hollandine (1622–1709) was a talented artist. Neither she nor Princess Elizabeth married; both ended up as abbesses, the elder a Protestant, the younger converting to Catholicism. Henrietta Maria (1626–1651) married the prince of Transylvania, but died shortly thereafter. And Sophia (1630–1714), also an intellectual who sparred with the German polymath, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, married Ernst Augustus, Elector of Hanover. Sophia comes across as a forthright, spirited matriarch of common sense who lived into her eighties. Ironically, if she had lived 54 more days, she would have become England's first Hanoverian monarch instead of her son, George I. The timeline of this section does not always proceed in a linear order. The author occasionally backs up in time when moving from one sister to

the next within a specific phase of their lives. However, in the overall scheme of the book, this method does not confuse the reader.

Throughout this extensive family saga, the author returns to Elizabeth Stuart and her iron-willed efforts to regain the Bohemian throne, if not for herself, then at least for her surviving children. In the third section, "The Legacy of Mary, Queen of Scots," the author sees the Scottish queen's spirit carried on through Elizabeth and her four daughters. For clarity, Goldstone includes a selected genealogy and a map of Europe (*ca.* 1650) to help keep track of the branches of this broad family tree.

The heart of this book is Goldstone's extensive, painstaking research, mirrored in a long list of notes and a selected bibliography in which the reader will find a treasure trove of additional reading. Further, the Stuart family included numerous prolific letter writers, providing a fabulous array of primary sources. Louisa Hollandine's excellent paintings and Dutch painter Gerrit van Honthorst's portraits also provide a glimpse into their lives. Moreover, the author wades through the political, religious, and social intricacies of seventeenth century Europe with masterful ease, showing not only how this family fits into it, but also how they in turn drove it, even while facing enemies, impoverishment, and refuge in strange places. England's civil war, the Dutch Golden Age, German and French politics, and the battle between Catholicism and Protestantism are factors that

give this book much of its strength. Although history so often does not give attention to women, Goldstone is able to bring these four sisters and their mother into the light.

The other strength of this joint biography is Goldstone's engaging writing style. Her narrative is compelling, rich, and easy to read. Her "asides"—comments that give a bit of additional perspective—are often humorous and do not take away any of the seriousness of her work. For example, while comparing the heroic military prowess of Gustavus, King of Sweden (1594–1632), to the weakness of Elizabeth's brother, Charles I, and to a number of German leaders, Goldstone describes one of the latter, "The elector of Brandenburg, a

man who seemingly could be cowed by a strong breeze," then adds in a footnote remark about Gustavus, "And this was the prince Elizabeth's parents wouldn't let her marry! What a couple these two would have made." Indeed, the Swedish king had been one of Elizabeth's suitors prior to her marriage to Frederick.

Daughters of the Winter Queen is well worth reading. Goldstone holds degrees in History and International Affairs from Cornell University and Columbia University. She has written several other biographies on queens who reigned in the High Medieval, Renaissance, and Enlightenment periods, all of which have received high praise from reviewers and readers alike.