



*The Role of Modern Monarchy in
Modern Democracy: European
Monarchies Compared*

**Robert Hazell and
Bob Morris (eds.)**

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In his entertaining study, *On Royalty: A Very Polite Inquiry into Some Strangely Related Families* (2006), Jeremy Paxman relates that King Umberto I of Italy told his son: “Remember, to be a king all you need to know is how to sign your name, read a newspaper and mount a horse” (57). Yet, as the contributors to this comprehensive and well-edited essay collection reveal, rather more may be expected of modern monarchs than the gruff Savoyard imagined. Thus, the volume addresses a wide range of issues pertaining to monarchies, including their definition and regulation, their constitutional and political roles, and laws of succession.

In the opening chapter, the editors, Robert Hazell and Bob Morris, explain their reasons for embarking on the project, asserting that “no new political theory has been developed in the UK since [Walter] Bagehot wrote about the monarchy” in 1867 (4). 150 years on, they aim to investigate “what is the role of the modern monarchy in advanced democracies” (5). They are aided in their task by a rich line-up of specialists from all over Europe, including: Rudy Andeweg, Helle Krunke, Axel Calissendorff, Olivia Hepsworth, Eivind Smith, Philip Murphy, Bart van Poelgeest, Frank Prochaska, Roger Mortimore, Lennart Nilsson, Henrik Wenander, Charles Powell, and Jean Seaton. Of the twelve surviving European monarchies in 2021, the editors have consciously decided to ignore Andorra, Liechtenstein, Monaco, and the Vatican both because of their small size, and their not being constitutional monarchies “in the same sense as the eight” who occupy the main focus of this study (4). These are the monarchies of the United Kingdom, Spain, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. Hazell and Morris explain that it is “the strictly limited role of the monarch, either under the law and the constitution, or in political practice by the parliament and the government, which characterises the eight larger European monarchies” (4).

Although this volume covers a broad range of topics, it is sensibly structured and divided into four manageable sections. The first of these consists of the introductory chapter by Hazell and Morris, who have written several chapters of the book themselves, and informs the reader of the layout of the book. The second chapter of this section, also by Hazell, “summarises the main provisions about the monarchy in the constitutions of the eight countries surveyed” (9). Therein, he concisely considers the centrality of the monarchy in each country’s constitution, and charts, amongst other aspects, the powers of the monarch and restrictions of the monarchy. Additional details are provided, ranging from the respective age of the constitutions, which vary, and the level of detail in which the powers and functions of the monarchs are specified.

The second and third sections of the book form the backbone of this study. The second section explores the over-arching theme of monarchical functions and opens with Chapter 3 on the constitutional functions of the monarchy, followed by Chapter 4 on the day-to-day political functions. Chapter 5 examines the ceremonial, service and welfare

functions of the monarchy, and Chapter 6 focuses on the monarchy's international functions. Due to the multifaceted aspects of monarchical functions explored, only snapshots can be offered. For example, Wenander examines the intriguing case of Sweden, whose king, as a result of the 1974 Instrument of Government, has been left with "a purely symbolic and ceremonial role" (87). In contrast, the Dutch ruling house has been more assertive. Andeweg tells us that "In 1996, the ambassador to South Africa was transferred to another posting at the request of Queen Beatrix" (70). This is an example of but one royal interference. Even so, Andeweg stresses that "open attempts by the monarch to influence government policy are the exception rather than the rule" (70). Murphy devotes space to the role of ministerial advice in coordinating British inward and outward state visits, and details the complexity of planning state visits when the involvement of several main characters is required. These characters range from "the permanent under-secretary at the FCO" and the "private secretaries to the Queen, the Prince of Wales and the Duke of Cambridge" to the prime minister, the keeper of the privy purse, and others (138). A valuable counterbalance is provided by Powell's enthralling section on Spain, which highlights the political role that King Juan Carlos performed when conducting state visits. Unlike Elizabeth II, a more conventional parliamentary monarch, a unique feature of the Spanish king during the years 1976-1978 was the significant personal role played by Juan Carlos in Spain's foreign policy—a leftover circumstance inherited from Franco.

The third section begins with Chapter 7's examination of the sizes of the royal families, lines of succession, and finances. Chapter 8 then offers further analyses regarding the constraints on the monarchy, "finding that they are severely constrained in terms of their freedom of speech, freedom to travel, freedom to marry, freedom of religion, free choice of career, and the right to privacy and family life" (7). Hepsworth shines a light on the relevant issue of gender inequality and the line of succession. She reveals that the staggered process to absolute primogeniture has been spearheaded by the incompatibility of gender discrimination with twenty-first century beliefs and values. However, she reminds the reader that Spain remains the only European monarchy considered in this volume to retain male-preference primogeniture. Later, when discussing the constraints on the monarchy, Hepsworth examines the education, training, and career choices of Europe's heirs apparent. Detailing the three components behind moulding a successful future monarch she reveals the patterns that emerge: "All heirs apparent complete at the minimum an undergraduate degree, with many also holding postgraduate degrees. Military service is another crucial aspect to their training" (210). Furthermore, Hepsworth lists the intentions motivating these paths, namely, to prepare heirs apparent to "Increase their understanding of government and public services" and "Deputise for the sovereign when required" (210). Chapter 9 reveals the importance of the media and public opinion, and discusses the popularity of the monarchy, and its legitimacy as an institution.

The fourth and final section of the book concludes with Chapter 10, and regales the reader with an ambitious new theory of European monarchies. The editors carefully revisit the research questions running throughout the book, discussing the tight regulations of the monarchies, and their sizes and finances. For the occupants of Europe's thrones and

the advisors that surround them, Hazell and Morris conclude by reflecting what lessons may be distilled for the benefit of Europe's monarchies.

Criticisms of this volume are few. At times, the analysis could have been complemented by additional details. Murphy, for example, notes that only twice, in 2000 and 2012, did Queen Beatrix host more than the traditional two incoming state visits in a single year, yet the author did not reveal which third lucky country was afforded this privilege. Repetition of information occurs throughout; for instance, the reader is repeatedly informed that in Sweden the king has no formal powers due to the 1974 Instrument of Government that limited the role of the monarch. Such quibbles are inconsequential and can be forgiven in the light of the wealth of materials consulted. The contributors have availed themselves of reports, blogs, newspaper articles, government and parliamentary publications, legislation, and archival material. Interspersed are informative tables that, far from interrupting the flow, make the information easier to digest. In one chapter, Morris includes a table that highlights the size of the publicly active members of Europe's royal families. Interestingly, the eleven and a half million Belgians have a monarchy of twelve members serving their needs, in comparison to the forty-seven million Spanish subjects who must make do with a mere three. Hazell and Morris's project has produced a meticulously researched volume that furthers our understanding of monarchy in advanced democracies, at a time when four of the eight countries have monarchs that are advancing in age (Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and the UK). This volume is welcome for raising important questions concerning the feasibility of maintaining an institution which is often labelled backward and out of place in the modern world, but which is nonetheless sustained by more than its equestrian and literary skills.

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