



*Elizabeth I's Foreign  
Correspondence: Letters,  
Rhetoric and Politics,*

**Carlo M. Bajetta, Guillaume  
Coatalen, and Jonathan Gibson eds.,  
(London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014).**

**Reviewed by: Jutta Schwarzkopf**

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Correspondence was crucial to the running of early modern government, and Elizabeth I's is no exception. Nevertheless, for the queen's foreign correspondence, fundamental to establishing and maintaining diplomatic relations, historians have largely relied on the summaries and partial transcriptions readily available in printed sources. George B. Harrison included in his *Letters of Queen Elizabeth* (1935) translations, though no originals, mainly of the queen's letters in French. Conversely, *Elizabeth I: Autographs* (2003) contains a number of letters by the queen in the original French, though no translations were provided. In her *A Monarchy of Letters* (2012), Rayne Allinson has been the first seriously to engage with the queen's foreign correspondence by analysing the letters exchanged between Elizabeth and a range of foreign rulers in the early years of her reign. Her research is now complemented by the present volume, the contributions to which deal with Elizabeth's letters to Francis, Duke of Anjou, Emperor Maximilian II, the Protestant princes of the Holy Roman Empire, the Emperor of China, and, for an Anglophone perspective, the Earl of Essex in Ireland, thus spanning her entire reign.

Angela Andreani analyses the collaborative process and the personnel involved in producing Elizabeth's foreign correspondence. She has compiled a list of seven stages a letter would pass through from draft to final version. Guillaume Coatalen and Jonathan Gibson analyse six letters to the Duke of Anjou, written during the marriage negotiations with Elizabeth. All in the queen's hand, i.e. composed without the interference of any court official, their particular quality lies in their making accessible the queen's intimate, though not necessarily genuine, voice. The letters are reproduced in the French original, followed by English translations, indicating the many changes and corrections Elizabeth made to each, which testifies to the extreme care she took over their wording. They reveal the queen struggling to make up her own mind about the match. Jonathan Gibson then analyses the physical features of the same set of letters, exploring their material textual practices to which specific meanings were attached, such as the type of paper or the particular handwriting style used. The letters belong to the early modern genre of familiar letters, always handwritten by its author, expressing affect and intimacy, a genre often used by Elizabeth in her foreign correspondence, in which she transposed the personal onto the political. Letters employing affective rhetoric and circulating in political circles, while meeting recipients' expectations of this kind of rhetorical engagement, were simultaneously understood to contain a certain degree of hypocrisy.

This made the use of the genre in letters to Anjou problematic, because Elizabeth's genuineness in the marriage negotiations was questionable.

In the next chapter, Alessandra Petrina finds her doubts about the praise heaped upon Elizabeth's command of foreign languages, coming as it did from interested parties, such as her tutors, refuted by more independent witnesses. Elizabeth's uncommon ability to learn and speak foreign languages shows in the high standard of her Italian. An important element in her self-representation was her use of foreign languages, which was intended to buttress her supreme authority, making up for the drawbacks of her gender (109). Then, Carlo Bajetta analyses Elizabeth's holographs to Emperor Maximilian with a particular view to her linguistic proficiency and her practice of composition. Her choice of Italian rather than standard diplomatic Latin or Spanish, the language Maximilian used in his letters to her, indicates her wish to establish an intimate rapport with him. The three letters are reproduced in the different stages in which they have been preserved, followed by translations into English. In another chapter, Gianmario Raimondi assesses the quality of the Italian in Elizabeth's letters to Maximilian. It conforms to the principal model of sixteenth-century Italian as well as showing a number of features consistent with the interlanguage anyone forms in the process of learning a foreign language. The Italian rhetoric of the letters to Maximilian is the focus of Giuliana Iannacaro's contribution. As an accomplished letter writer, the queen was able to choose from a wide range of letter writing modes as well as languages, making her foreign correspondence particularly effective. While the first two letters were written during the negotiations about a possible marriage with Charles, Archduke of Austria, in the third letter the queen had rejected the match. In the first two, Elizabeth trod a fine line between asserting herself as queen regnant of a country that was important and not to be belittled as Maximilian had done, and trying not to affront him. In the final letter, she rejected Maximilian's condition to the match, while trying to maintain friendly relations with Austria.

David Scott Gehring analyses Elizabeth's correspondence with the Protestant princes of the Empire, written in Latin and not reproduced in the volume, by setting them in their historical politico-religious context. The queen's language of religious diplomacy suggests that she was genuinely pan-Protestant. Yet Elizabeth's foreign correspondence was not confined to the Christian world. She is known to have addressed three letters to the emperor of China as part of her unprecedented attempts to establish diplomatic relations with non-Christian rulers. None of the letters to China reached its addressee, and Rayne Allinson analyses the only surviving one, which is reproduced in English in full. It emphasises commercial interests over any ideological imperatives and shows Elizabeth's fascination with a culture so different from her own.

The material textual practices demonstrate that the letter was intended to make a powerful visual statement about the magnificence and hence the political importance of the queen and her island kingdom. Finally, Monica Santini deals with the letters Elizabeth sent to the Earl of Essex during his Irish campaign. They are seen by the author as instances of the public-cum-private character many of her letters shared. They not only were official personal letters and tools of government, but also expressions of Elizabeth's political attitude, rhetorical skill and personal temper.

This volume renders historians of the Elizabethan period an important service by making available, both in the original and in translation, some of her foreign correspondence, which is carefully reproduced, including different versions as well as the corrections made by the queen in the course of writing them. Furthermore, some of the contributions shed interesting light both on the process of producing her foreign correspondence and the variety of means by which their message was conveyed, well beyond the assemblage of words.

JUTTA SCHWARZKOPF  
Bielefeld University