



Margaret Beaufort: Mother of the Tudor Dynasty

Elizabeth Norton

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Divorced at ten, a mother at thirteen & three times a widow. The extraordinary true story of the 'Red Queen', Lady Margaret Beaufort, matriarch of the Tudors. Born in the midst of the Wars of the Roses, Margaret Beaufort became the greatest heiress of her time. She survived a turbulent life, marrying four times and enduring imprisonment before passing her claim to the crown of England to her son, Henry VII, the first of the Tudor monarchs. Margaret's royal blood placed her on the fringes of the Lancastrian royal dynasty. After divorcing her first husband at the age of ten, she married the king's half-brother, Edmund Tudor, becoming a widow and bearing her only child, the future Henry VII, before her fourteenth birthday. Margaret was always passionately devoted to the interests of her son who claimed the throne through her. She embroiled herself in both treason and conspiracy as she sought to promote his claims, allying herself with the Yorkist Queen, Elizabeth Woodville, in an attempt to depose Richard III. She was imprisoned by Richard and her lands confiscated, but she continued to work on her son's behalf, ultimately persuading her fourth husband, the powerful Lord Stanley, to abandon the king in favour of Henry on the eve of the decisive Battle of Bosworth. It was Lord Stanley himself who placed the crown on Henry's head on the battlefield. Henry VII gave his mother unparalleled prominence during his reign. She established herself as an independent woman and ended her life as regent of England, ruling on behalf of her seventeen-year-old grandson, Henry VIII.

Margaret Beaufort: Mother of the Tudor Dynasty Details

Date : Published September 15th 2010 by Amberley Publishing (first published September 1st 2010)

ISBN : 9781445601427

Author : Elizabeth Norton

Format : Hardcover 255 pages

Genre : History, Nonfiction, Biography, English History, Tudor Period, Historical, European Literature, British Literature

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Charity says

Fairly quick read about a woman intent on shaping her son's destiny. Margaret was married off much too young, "spoiled" quickly by her husband, and took matters into her own hands at fifteen when arranging a more advantageous match. The book painstakingly details all there is to know about her, which admittedly is not much -- her character is only fleetingly outlined by her contemporaries (primarily by the adoring Bishop Fisher), so most of what we are left with are the plain facts of her risks, rewards, and the cunning, skilled, and often dangerous maneuvers that eventually placed her son Henry VII on the throne.

L'aura says

You can't blame the lack of sources on biographers, but books on poorly documented figures get frustrating to read if their authors don't at least try to fill the gaps with something other than "may or may not". In Margaret Beaufort's case the context is so wide and fascinating any writer is spoiled for choices, so I can't help but think this book could have been far richer and incredibly more engrossing. Still, I quite enjoyed its first part.

Cynthia says

This was my favorite of hers so far. With only one queen to write about, and furthermore one she admired and who was not notoriously wicked or seductive, Ms Norton evidently felt no need to continually justify her actions by comparing the judgement on Margaret to judgements made on male rulers. As she did say, because Margaret was acting on behalf of her son, rather than herself, history did not make the harsh judgements it made on other women who had the nerve to be ambitious for their own selves. Not saying that any of that is wrong but I just really enjoyed this biography without the extraneous editorializing. It is fascinating how on occasion one person's lifetime will encompass sweeping societal changes, and Margaret Beaufort was at the center of history as England and Europe moved from the Medieval to the Renaissance. Highly recommend.

Iset says

Margaret Beaufort: Mother of the Tudor Dynasty reminds me a great deal of the non-fiction history I just finished; *Jane Boleyn: The Infamous Lady Rochford*. Both had as their subject an historical figure about whom only scraps of evidence survive to present day, and as a result have rather sparse material to work with. As a direct consequence, specific biographic detail on their chosen individuals is somewhat scarce and meagre fare. However, whilst Julia Fox padded out her work with vivid description and supposition – imaginatively engaging, however, questionably unacademic – Elizabeth Norton sticks to the known facts, and this is a rather short work by comparison. I would say it is a shade less engaging than Fox's biography, however its greater professionalism will please, and if you have an existing interest in Margaret Beaufort you

won't find it difficult to get through this, smoothly written and easily readable as it is.

Even more coincidentally, Norton, like Fox, makes but one single glaring error which unfortunately detracts from the work. On page 83 she makes the mistake of referring to Dominic Mancini as a "*contemporary*" of Edward IV's wedding to Elizabeth Woodville in 1464 CE and repeats as fact, without even attributing it as having come from Mancini, the tale of Cecily Neville being so outraged at the match that she threatened to declare that her son was illegitimate. Dominic Mancini was *not* a contemporary of that time and in fact visited England between 1482 and 1483 CE, around the time of Edward IV's death and Richard III's usurpation of the throne from his young nephews. Mancini was not admitted to the royal court, and relied on London street gossip and possibly some unknown sources within the court – possibly Dr John Argentine, physician to the princes in the Tower, who was known to speak Italian and who later joined the court of Henry VII. Mancini's command of English appears not to have been fluent, and it is not clear how much he actually understood and how much was translated to him – and may have got lost in translation. This mistake on Norton's part admittedly set me on my guard whilst reading the rest of her book.

However, Margaret Beaufort is reasonably well referenced, citing endnotes and a thorough bibliography, and as an added bonus Norton includes all known letters written by Margaret in an appendix at the end, allowing us to read Margaret's own words.

8 out of 10.

Jodi says

Already have a book on Margaret Beaufort (and have her covered via books on other Tudors) and find her a fascinating biography. Norton did a good job of laying out the bare bones of Margaret's life—using many primary sources and quoting from them extensively. Wouldn't say there was a great deal of analysis but there really isn't the need. Margaret managed to survive and formulate much of her life in an era when women had little power let alone rights. She did become a huge influence (not in any official capacity) to her son once he became Henry VII.

Have had my own mother-in-law issues over the years and can't imagine what poor Elizabeth of York had to go through with Margaret even ordering what cushions should be in Elizabeth's chambers. Certainly a formidable woman!

Mariana says

It was okay, a bit on the light side but for anyone with only the basic knowledge this would be a great bio to get to know Margaret Beaufort better.

Jemidar says

I really enjoyed this book and it was interesting to read about the real Margaret. As a secret long time fan of hers, I now feel justified in believing there was so much more to this woman than is usually presented by

(popular) historical fiction authors.

While this biography could probably be classed as 'history lite' it was accessible, readable and informative. While there are probably more thorough biographies out there, this is a great place start.

Kara says

While this could have been simply yet another re-telling of the War of the Roses, Norton really digs in deep to pull out every primary source she can get her hands on to try and shone a light on Margaret Beaufort, quite rightly given the title “Mother of the Tudor Dynasty.”

While I LOVED all the primary sources she quoted I think it wouldn't have hurt her historiography street cred to update the language to modern spelling – ye ole spelling maketh my eyes bleed'd.

Also, she keeps jumping forward in time, interrupting her own points about Margaret in the 15th century to jump ahead and throw in information about her role in the 16th century.

Considering how little she had to go on, it's very well done portrayal and a needed presentation of an important political figure who helped bring about a new dynasty.

Caidyn (SEMI-HIATUS; BW Reviews; he/him/his) says

And, now I'm back in my comfort zone. The Tudors, and Margaret Beaufort is one of the most important members of that family, even though she was only one by marriage for a short space of her life. She was absolutely interesting and amazing, the woman who certainly pioneered for her son throughout their whole lives. It never fails to amaze me that she had Henry VII at 13, then from that time and on, she was basically a power mom who seems way older than that.

The only downside to this is that there isn't a lot of information about her. She wasn't seen as very important because she was a woman, so I felt like I learned a lot about other people than her. So, that was annoying. But, that's how things are. I just wished that Norton drew in more primary source material with letters to or from Margaret, because I'm sure it's out there.

Shawn Thrasher says

Highly readable biography of one of the most underlooked but badass women from English history. Norton uses Lady Fortune and her wheel as a metaphor for Margaret's story, a woman who by all rights should have been queen (her son took half his right to inherit from her, the other from his wife). She was a behind the scenes agitator for her only child, a son who eventually (SPOILER alert) became King Henry VII, the first Tudor king; she was a spider who spun webs of intrigue and treason for her son against the ruling might of male power. Most especially these webs were woven to defeat Richard III, that most infamous of kings. Once her son gained the throne, she ruled almost jointly with him, and became one of his most trusted

advisors. Because of the times, because she was a woman, we know little about her (although thousands of times more than most women from the same time period). Norton takes the dots of her life that do show up in the record - her wills, the books she had published, her marriage records, the letters that survive - and connects them to create a highly readable and enjoyable biography of one of the major players in the Wars of the Roses.

Elizabeth says

A fascinating and detailed study of the life of Margaret Beaufort, mother of Henry VII, grandmother of Henry VIII.

Sara G says

Margaret Beaufort is one of those enigmatic figures from late medieval history. Obviously she was an important woman of her time, but we know little about her due to the lack of primary (and even secondary!) sources. This author does a great job of finding as much as she can about Margaret, and the conclusions she comes to absolutely make sense. For example, the idea that she cared deeply for her second husband (Stafford), due to the fact that they were known to celebrate their anniversary.

Also, the demand that Margaret and Queen Elizabeth made regarding her granddaughter and namesake Margaret to not be married off at a young age. Henry VII told the Spanish ambassador, "Beside my own doubts, the queen and my mother are very much against this marriage. They say if the marriage were concluded we should be obliged to send the Princess directly to Scotland, in which case they fear the King of Scots would not wait, but injure her, and endanger her health." Of course, Margaret herself notoriously had her son at the age of 13, so she would absolutely know about being injured. Heartbreaking. The author did a fabulous job with the sources she could find.

Victoria says

I enjoyed this biography of Margaret Beaufort very much. She was such an interesting woman with a passion for her family and a love of learning. It was good to read about her actual life rather than the usual panto bad guy you get in many works of fiction. It turns out that Margaret was an actual woman, a woman with beliefs and dreams, a pious, intelligent and brave woman. Not deserving of that Mag-The-Hag moniker that she seems to unfairly be given in recent times.

English says

I listened to the audio version of this book. Despite the somewhat monotonous tone of the narrator, which might be offputting for some, it is worth reading through. Not least because it serves to challenge a lot of popular misconceptions that have grown up around Lady Margaret recently- propagated by works of popular fiction like 'The White Queen' TV series and the novels it was based on.

Beaufort does not equal evil, or mother of Henry Tudor, super evil. Margeret was actually known as being a pious Lady- and does not seem to have been a natural schemer. During most of the period of the Wars of the Roses she seems to have kept her head down, and genuinely cared for her second, husband Henry Stafford.

Certainly she was dedicated to looking after the interests of her only son- whom she gave birth to at barely 14, but it is, in some sense, hard to condemn a woman for being a dedicated mother in such circumstances. Even in the midst of civil war, when her son, as rival claimant, was seen as an enemy of the state. She does seem to have made some attempt at rehabilitation, negotiating a marriage to Elizabeth of York even before her father Edward IV's death.

Most of all, this was an interesting appraisal of a life and career of a fascinating woman- a woman subject to many extreme and unenviable circumstances, who usually seems to have come out fighting. Also a useful counter to the popular 'Tudor evil, Yorkists good' conception of the period, providing a more nuanced view. I am very tempted to purchase the Kindle or Paperback edition to add to my library.

Erin says

Find the enhanced version of this and other reviews at: <http://flashlightcommentary.blogspot...>

The thing I appreciate most about this book is that Norton doesn't try to recreate Margaret's personality. She hints here and there but it is always based on Margaret's own words or actions. For example, Norton covers the intense feelings Margaret had regarding the early marriage of her granddaughter but she doesn't make assumptions about Margaret's emotions during her own early marriage to a man nearly twelve years her senior. It would be all too easy to say Margaret was a terrified bride, widow and mother by age thirteen but Norton resists temptation, restricting herself to the available facts and allowing the reader to come to their own conclusions. It is a style I personally appreciate as I like forming my own opinions rather than being told what to think, especially when it comes to nonfiction.

Factually this is a wonderful biography of Margaret Beaufort but it is a tough book to read. The spelling reverts to old English at random. Now I'm reasonably proficient in old English but I found myself stumbling more often than I care to admit. More than that, I found the formatting of the book difficult to absorb. Norton frequently starts a paragraph but follows her thoughts through years ahead of where she started only to backtrack again with the next paragraph. Again, I love that amount of information Norton compiled here but all the same, I found it hard to follow.

By and large I have few criticisms of the book beyond what I've already mentioned. Norton's work is wonderfully detailed in so much as the surviving records allow. Fact heavy but well researched. Recommended to fans of Elizabeth and Mary: Cousins, Rivals, Queens by Jane Dunn.
