



# **Luxury and Power: The Material World of the Stuart Diplomat, 1660-1714 (Oxford Historical Monographs)**

*Helen Jacobsen*

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*Luxury and Power* examines the material world of English ambassadors at the end of the seventeenth century, and illustrates the way in which architecture and the arts played an important role in diplomatic life. It positions luxury consumption firmly in the political domain and demonstrates the significance of diplomats as cultural intermediaries, highlighting the importance of the material world to politicians and the role that diplomats played in the evolution of artistic appreciation in England.

Split into two parts, the first half covers the life of diplomats abroad: where they lived, what they took with them, and the style in which they lived when away from home. It investigates the ambassadorial household and the role of wives in embassy life, and positions women at the centre of the diplomatic world. Within the wider context of artistic patronage, not just fine art, Helen Jacobsen assesses their impact as conduits for the arts, examining their own collecting and the acquisitions they made for their friends and patrons back home.

Through case studies, part two examines how cultural politics drove the luxury consumption in which so many diplomats indulged. Such expenditure was not random, but was informed by diplomatic activity and was affected by the evolution in European diplomacy during these years. Importantly, it reveals that far from being the magpies satirised by eighteenth-century commentators, many of these patrons displayed a knowledge and understanding of many areas of artistic endeavour that made them indubitable connoisseurs of architecture, painting, furniture, textiles, silver, and coaches. Helen Jacobsen re-evaluates the reputation for artistic patronage of the later Stuart years and finds that the contribution by English diplomats has been sorely neglected.

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