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The book’s apt portrayal of a world Bach would have known about, perhaps even been active in, will be of interest to Bach scholars. As such, it invites further scrutiny by all contextual Bach studies focused on the composer’s formative early years, especially those influenced by the devotional world surrounding him.

Judith Aikin’s book *A Ruler’s Consort in Early Modern Germany: Aemilia Juliana of Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt*, concerns the little known Landesmutter (mother of the people) who played a crucial role in the establishment of devotional writings in the late seventeenth century. Through careful documentation Aikin explores the role of the noblewoman, her contribution to Lutheran theology, the dissemination of her writings and books, the advancement of metaphorical art and the religious care of the people in the Thuringian principality in which she lived. Aikin’s work, begun in 1979, was put on hold for many years, until the political situation in East Germany shifted and stabilised following the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, and the Historische Bibliothek (Historical Library), Schloßbibliothek (Palace Library) and Thüringisches Staatsarchiv (Thuringian State Archive) made its resources available to the public.

Studying Aemelia Juliana’s commissioned works (both musical and visual art) Aikin describes devotional literature as the overriding form of self-expression in the seventeenth century, especially for women. This literature offers a commentary on the social history of the ruler’s consort and a new look at sources available to composers and poets during this period. Aikin’s work provides an insight into the Rudolstadt milieu that has previously not been visible—one that is rich in information about courtly life, the habits of artistic patronage and the dissemination of ideas through devotional materials that travelled throughout the land.

http://www.music.qub.ac.uk/tomita/bachbib/review/9781472423849.pdf
Aikin documents the courtship and marriage of Aemilia Juliana to Albert Anton of the Court of Schwartzburg-Rudolstadt, and reveals the consort’s importance, not only as mother to the future heir, but as mother of the dynasty, spiritual mediator and cultural ambassador for her people. Aikin also discusses the consort’s great responsibility to make her court a *Musenhof*, a court where the nine muses could flourish. She examines the Rudolstadt artists and musicians in Aemelia Juliana’s employ, including kapellmeister Philip Heinrich Erlebach and painter Seivert Lammers.

Since the products of Aemelia Juliana’s patronage include family icons found in the Passion paintings *Kreuzigung mit der gräflichen Familie* (Crucifixion with the Count and his Family), *Aemelia Juliana as Bride of Christ*, *Aemelia Juliana as Friend of the Lamb*, and are among other paintings that were inspired by Heinrich Müller’s *Himmlischer Liebes Küß* (Heavenly Kiss of Love), Aikin’s synopsis of the metaphorical art produced in Rudolstadt is an important contribution. Aemelia Juliana’s frequent reliance on illustrations from devotional writings may reflect the *Neue Frommigkeit* (New Piety), thus providing the perspective of a woman during this important theological movement.

Aikin examines the frontispieces from Aemelia Juliana’s writings and also those of her sister-in-law Ludaemilia Elisabeth. The writings examined include the 1683 *Geistliches-Weiher-Aqua-Vit* (Spiritual Women’s Aquavit), the 1685 *Tägliches Morgen-Mittags-und AbendOpffer* (Daily Morning, Midday and Evening Devotional Offerings), the 1685 *Kühlwasser des Creutzes* (Cooling Waters of the Cross), and the 1699 *Allerley Specerey* (Assorted Spices) among others. Since women have long been overshadowed in the theological world, Aikin’s presentation of Aemelia Juliana as a writer in her own right is a stepping stone for further studies of women devotional writers. It is hoped that Aiken will publish the second volume on Aemelia Juliana and Ludaemilia Elisabeth, as has been rumoured.

Aemelia Juliana is also known for attracting musicians such as Erlebach to her court and for her vital role in establishing the oratorio genre in Rudolstadt. Erlebach’s *Die Hochtröstliche Geschicht des bittern Leidens und Sterbens unsers Herrn und Heilandes Jesu Christi* (The highly consolatory story of the bitter suffering and death of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ) was first published in 1688. It was divided into six acts so that it could be performed during Passion Week. The establishment of this Passion tradition in Rudolstadt may have influenced countless other musicians and poets who travelled through Rudolstadt. Erlebach’s 1689 Christmas Oratorio as well as his 1690 Easter and Pentecost Oratorios are also known to have been greatly influenced by the consort and her writings. Aikin brings to attention the creation of Rudolstadt’s first hymnal of 1682 and the devotional/hymn texts written by the consort that found their way into many future hymnals after this time. She discusses Erlebach’s Cantatas and, although few original copies survive due to a fire that tore through Rudolstadt in 1735, copies preserved elsewhere demonstrate the transmission of music and art outside of the small Thuringian court to a variety of other well-known locations, especially through the friendship between Erlebach and Weißenfels composer Phillip Krieger. Despite the scant overt references to J. S. Bach (there are only two), the book’s apt portrayal of a world Bach would have known about, perhaps even been active in, will be of interest to Bach scholars. As such, it invites further scrutiny by all contextual Bach studies focused on the composer’s formative early years, especially those influenced by the devotional world surrounding him. The appendix includes a very useful map of Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt and its neighbours around 1690, commissioned by the author.
Aikin introduces to the reader a noblewoman who was an advocate for women, a talented writer and devout believer, whose song texts dealing with life’s challenges such as the death of a child, illness, plague or war provided great comfort for her people and inspiration for musical meditation. The book represents an important source for many contextual studies that opens a door into the lives of composers active in the courtly world in or around seventeenth-century Rudolstadt, such as young J. S. Bach.

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