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ARTICLE

Hidden Figures: The Holy Roman Empire as a "Realm of Ladies"

Katrin Keller

Institute for Habsburg and Balkan Studies, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna, Austria
katrin.keller@oeaw.ac.at

Abstract

The aim of this article is to make clear that, although men largely dominated the institutions of the Holy Roman Empire, beyond these constitutional institutions we can find many examples of women's agency. In particular, women of noble and princely families assumed political roles, both in relation to territories and to the empire as a whole. While it would not be correct to reinterpret the Holy Roman Empire as a "realm of ladies," it seems clear that the empire, as a communicative context and dynastic network, was constituted with the participation of elite women, and that women were important for the ritual perpetuation of the constitution of the empire. In short, it was not only law and the constitution and the actions of men that held the empire together, but also the actions of women, who helped shape networks and politics just as they influenced the transfer of knowledge and culture.

Keywords: Holy Roman Empire; gender; early modern Germany; dynastic women

Allusions to a "realm of ladies" are probably immediately associated with Christine de Pizan's *Book of the City of Ladies* (*Le Livre de la cité de Dames*) of 1405. In contrast to the work of this French lady with close ties to courtly society, this article offers neither a defense of the empire's aristocratic-princely ladies against misogynist attacks nor a portrait of an idealized society of virtuous women. Nor is the aim to fundamentally reinterpret the Holy Roman Empire of the early modern period as an "empire of women." After spending a long time examining various dynastic women of the empire, their networks, their scope for agency, and their role in court ceremonial, however, I feel it is appropriate to contribute another facet to a picture of the empire's political history that hitherto has been almost exclusively dominated by men.

This might sound like a somewhat antiquated approach from the early days of women's history, which initially sought to "write women back into history." And in many respects it may be taken for granted that women played a role in economic, cultural, and intellectual developments. For the historiography of the empire, however, this remains anything but commonplace, insofar as the intensive study of the political and constitutional history of the early modern Holy Roman Empire in recent decades[1] has rarely considered both men *and* women, let alone gender-historical approaches.

[1] For an overview, see Robert J. W. Evans and Peter H. Wilson, eds., *The Holy Roman Empire, 1495–1806: A European Perspective* (Leyden: Brill, 2012); Joachim Whaley, *Germany and the Holy Roman Empire*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Peter H. Wilson, *Heart of Europe: A History of the Holy Roman Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016); for the most recent study in German, see Matthias Schnettger, *Kaiser und Reich.*

This article seeks to demonstrate that the early modern empire was neither a "realm of ladies" nor a "realm of men." While men largely dominated the institutions of the Holy Roman Empire with their actions, women's institutional agency remained severely restricted following the fall of the empire and well into the twentieth century. At the same time, society was strongly structured according to the principles of social rank. A relevant factor in this context was certainly the subordination of women to men rooted in Christian anthropology. However, the differences between genders were modified by several other distinctions of legal significance.[2] By no means did all men in early modern society have access to the actions of rulers through institutions; such access was regulated by factors such as origin, rank, office, and education. In contrast, women, especially married women of the nobility and princely families, were of course authorized to actively rule, both due to their rank and, more particularly, to their membership in a given dynasty. It is this group of women and their scope for agency within the framework of the empire that form the focus of this study.

It is particularly illuminating for our search for women's spheres of agency within the framework of the empire to consider what constituted this empire beyond the constitutional institutions that are so often the focus of historical studies. We can find indications in older examinations of the empire's history, in particular in the works of Volker Press.[3] For the empire was much more than a legal system, of course; three decades ago, Volker Press pointed out that patron–client relationships played a considerable role in the cohesion and workings of the empire.[4] He underlined that there was a broad spectrum of institutionalizations that underpinned the position of the emperor,[5] for instance, without necessarily being institutions in the classical sense. These included, for example, bestowing princely status on individuals, influencing the election of bishops, the emergence of an internal system of envoys, the attractiveness of the Vienna court to an imperial court society,[6] installing representatives of the imperial aristocracy in military positions, but also, for instance, successes in the imperial war against France and the Ottomans. Most recently, Peter Wilson has examined such institutionalizations in his history of the Holy Roman Empire, and Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger has focused on ritual and ceremonial.[7]

In the intervening decades, a cultural-historical approach to political history has prevailed, and it should be more extensively utilized for the history of the Holy Roman Empire. Here it is important to bear in mind that the structure of the political in the

Eine Verfassungsgeschichte (1500–1800) (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2020); this also contains detailed notes and lists of literature for the research of previous decades.

[2] Heide Wunder, "Herrschaft und öffentliches Handeln von Frauen in der Gesellschaft der Frühen Neuzeit," in *Frauen in der Geschichte des Rechts. Von der Frühen Neuzeit bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Ute Gerhard (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1997), 27–54; Andrea Griesebner and Christina Lutter, "Mehrfach relational. Geschlecht als soziale und analytische Kategorie," in *Die Macht der Kategorien. Perspektiven historischer Geschlechterforschung*, ed. Andrea Griesebner and Christina Lutter (Innsbruck and Vienna: Studienverlag, 2002), 3–5; Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, "Nur die Frau des Kaisers? Kommentar," in *Nur die Frau des Kaisers? Kaiserinnen in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Bettina Braun, Katrin Keller, and Matthias Schnettger (Vienna: Böhlau, 2016), 247.

[3] Wilson, *Heart of Europe*, 9; on the works of Volker Press, see, for instance, Johannes Kunisch and Stephanie Blankenhorn, eds., *Das Alte Reich. Ausgewählte Aufsätze von Volker Press* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1997).

[4] Volker Press, "Patronat und Klientel im Heiligen Römischen Reich," in *Klientelsysteme im Europa der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Antoni Maczak (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1988), 19–46; on the early modern state in general, see, for instance, Wolfgang Reinhard, *Geschichte der Staatsgewalt. Eine vergleichende Verfassungsgeschichte Europas von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1999), 133–39.

[5] Volker Press, "Die kaiserliche Stellung im Reich zwischen 1648 und 1740—Versuch einer Neubewertung," in *Das Alte Reich*, 210.

[6] Jeroen Frans Jozef Duindam, "The Habsburg Court in Vienna: Kaiserhof or Reichshof?," in *The Holy Roman Empire, 1495–1806*, 91–120.

[7] Wilson, *Heart of Europe*, 283–85, 558–67; Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, *Des Kaisers alte Kleider. Verfassungsgeschichte und Symbolsprache des Alten Reiches* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2008), English edition: *The Emperor's Old Clothes: Constitutional History and the Symbolic Language of the Holy Roman Empire* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015).

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early modern period was significantly different from that of the modern state, being fundamentally shaped by dynastic rule and hence by personal and family structures.[8] A dichotomy of "public" and "private" spheres of agency had yet to exist. Political practice was dominated by dynastic thinking, and this thinking influenced many fields, including institutional agency. For the actors in politics and diplomacy as well as those involved in the domestic affairs of the early modern state, patronage and clientelist relations with the princes and dynasties were of central importance because positions of office and honors were dependent on the princely ruler. The prosperity of the dynasty was by no means identical to that of the states,[9] but it was closely connected to it, and acting in the interests of the family or house was also a political act. Princely women functioned as one-half of a princely working couple[10] in the exercise of rule within the individual smaller or larger territories, for instance in their capacities as intercessors, by shaping patronage networks, via their role in ceremonial and symbolic representation, or as political advisers. Dynastic women were also active beyond the boundaries of their respective territories as letter writers and mediators, developing and cultivating "good correspondence"—that is, political and dynastic contacts between neighboring princely houses.[11]

A growing number of studies on dynastic women of the Holy Roman Empire[12] now provide many examples of how these fields of agency were exploited, demonstrating how misleading it is to think that princely and high aristocratic wives' agency was restricted merely to the narrowly private and familial sphere, as was long the perspective. Rather, in the early modern period, the majority of women belonging to the "ruling class"—that is, aristocratic and princely families—took on political tasks, enjoying opportunities for agency in respect to both territories and the Holy Roman Empire as a whole. It seems it is time to offer a new perspective on dynastic women's agency in the context of the empire. Although there is no doubt that the empire was not a "realm of ladies" in Pizan's sense of the term, there were nevertheless spheres of agency that reveal women's involvement in its ceremonial

[8] Stollberg-Rilinger, "Nur die Frau des Kaisers? Kommentar," 246; Katrin Keller, "Frauen und dynastische Herrschaft. Eine Einführung," in *Nur die Frau des Kaisers?*, 18–20; Jeroen Frans Jozef Duindam, *Dynasties: A Global History of Power, 1300–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 60.

[9] Andreas Pečar, "Dynastien—Träger der Staatsbildung? Überlegungen zu Herrschaft und Staatsbildung in kulturvergleichender Perspektive anlässlich einer prominenten Neuerscheinung," *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung* 44 (2017): 51–67.

[10] Wunder, "Herrschaft und öffentliches Handeln von Frauen in der Gesellschaft der Frühen Neuzeit"; Pernille Arenfeldt, "The Political Role of the Female Consort in Protestant Germany, 1550–1585: Anna of Saxony as 'Mater Patriae'" (PhD diss., European University Institute Florence, 2005), 103–6. Olwen Hufton coined the term *complementarity* to describe this combined effect; see Olwen Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe,* vol. 1, *1500–1800* (London: Fontana Press, 1997), 151–52.

[11] Keller, "Frauen und dynastische Herrschaft. Eine Einführung," 21n; James Daybell and Svante Norrhem, "Introduction: Rethinking Gender and Political Culture in Early Modern Europe," in *Gender and Political Culture in Early Modern Europe, 1400–1800*, ed. James Daybell and Svante Norrhem (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2016), 9; Sophie Ruppel, "Das 'stillose Zeitalter.' Realität und Rezeption weiblicher Briefkultur an frühneuzeitlichen deutschen Fürstenhöfen im 17. Jahrhundert," *Historische Mitteilungen der Ranke-Gesellschaft* 19 (2006): 67–82; Susan Broomhall, "Letters Make the Family: Nassau Family Correspondence at the Turn of the Seventeenth Century," in *Early Modern Women and Transnational Communities of Letters*, ed. Julie D. Campbell and Anne R. Larsen (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 25–44; Caroline Dunn and Elizabeth Carney, eds., *Royal Women and Dynastic Loyalty* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 5–6.

[12] Andrea Lilienthal, *Die Fürstin und die Macht. Welfische Herzoginnen im 16. Jahrhundert: Elisabeth, Sidonia, Sophia* (Hanover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2007); Julia Schwarz, "Weibliche Handlungsräume in transdynastischen Beziehungen. Kurfürstin Henriette Adelaide von Savoyen und die bayerischen Außenbeziehungen," in *Das Geschlecht der Diplomatie. Geschlechterrollen in den Außenbeziehungen vom Spätmittelalter bis zum 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Corina Bastian, Eva Kathrin Dade, Hillard von Thiessen, and Christian Windler (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2014), 69–85; Monika Schneikart and Dirk Schleinert, eds., *Zwischen Thronsaal und Frawenzimmer. Handlungsfelder pommerscher Fürstinnen um 1600* (Cologne, Weimar and Vienna: Böhlau, 2016); Braun, Keller, and Schnettger, *Nur die Frau des Kaisers?*; Charlotte Backerra, "For Empire or Dynasty? Empress Elisabeth Christine and the Brunswicks," in *Royal Women and Dynastic Loyalty*, 165–80.

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and communicative framework and constitution—some of which will be outlined in the following.

The Legal Conditions

It is beyond doubt that women were largely barred from participating in those institutions of the Holy Roman Empire that formed the focus of most research on imperial history, as they were from all other forms of formalized rule in the early modern period.[13] Women, irrespective of their rank, were not permitted to play a role in imperial courts of law or the imperial diets; the norms of the day excluded them on the basis of their gender. However, it has recently been demonstrated that women of various backgrounds and ranks successfully exploited the Imperial Chamber Court (*Reichskammergericht*) and the Aulic Council (*Reichshofrat*), the two most important legal institutions of the empire, in order to protect or push through their interests in legal conflicts.[14] Although they were not able to dispense justice themselves, they were able to use institutionalized legal rulings to their own or to their families' advantage.

Additionally, in the Holy Roman Empire, there were always a few women who had imperial status due to their positions—that is, who were rulers in their own right. Such figures included the abbesses at abbeys enjoying imperial immediacy, such as Quedlinburg, Essen, Herford, or Nieder- and Obermünster in Regensburg.[15] They were not only active in areas of secular rule, including preserving the supreme jurisdiction of the (usually very limited) territory of the abbey, but were also integrated into the constitutional structures of the empire. From the sixteenth century onward, the abbesses, together with sixty-five prelates of the Rhenish and Swabian Bench of Imperial Prelates (*Rheinische* and *Schwäbische Prälatenbank*), formed the Ecclesiastical Bench (*Geistliche Bank*) in the Council of Princes, entitled to two Curia votes. However, unlike many of the abbots, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the abbesses, as imperial rulers, did not attend the imperial diet themselves; rather, they regularly sent representatives in their place.[16] This phenomenon of the ecclesiastical imperial princesses has long been considered as one of the many curiosities of the "monstrosity" that was the empire; their history has largely been researched with respect to medieval ecclesiastical history. It is only recently that greater attention has been devoted to early modern female rulers' involvement in the politics of the empire, in a comparative study examining the abbesses of Essen, Herford, and Quedlinburg.[17]

There were also women with rulers' rights within the Holy Roman Empire derived from or conferred by their dynastic positions as princely widows serving as regents for underage sons.[18] In this capacity, they sent representatives to imperial diets and could influence the politics of the empire by various means. A well-known example would be Amalie Elisabeth of Hessen-Kassel, who successfully represented the interests of her son and her house in the

[13] Wunder, "Herrschaft und öffentliches Handeln von Frauen in der Gesellschaft der Frühen Neuzeit," 50–54.

[14] Siegrid Westphal, ed., *In eigener Sache. Frauen vor den höchsten Gerichten des Alten Reiches* (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2005).

[15] Ute Küppers-Braun, "Dynastisches Handeln von Frauen in der Frühen Neuzeit," in *Dynastie und Herrschaftssicherung in der Frühen Neuzeit. Geschlechter und Geschlecht*, ed. Heide Wunder (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2002), 221–38; Wunder, "Herrschaft und öffentliches Handeln von Frauen in der Gesellschaft der Frühen Neuzeit," 44n; Merry E. Wiesner, "Gender and Power in Early Modern Europe: The Empire Strikes Back," in *The Graph of Sex and the German Text: Gendered Culture in Early Modern Germany 1500–1700*, ed. Lynne Tatlock (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Brill, 1994), 203–10.

[16] Teresa Schröder-Stapper, *Fürstäbtissinnen. Frühneuzeitliche Stiftsherrschaften zwischen Verwandtschaft, Lokalgewalten und Reichsverband* (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2015), 400n.

[17] Schröder-Stapper, *Fürstäbtissinnen*, 387–504; for the history of research on the subject, see pages 6–11.

[18] On regency in the empire, see Pauline Puppel, *Die Regentin. Vormundschaftliche Herrschaft in Hessen 1500–1700* (Frankfurt/Main and New York: Campus, 2004); see too the observation in Wilson, *Heart of Europe*, 317.

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peace negotiations at Münster and Osnabrück.[19] In conjunction with Sweden and France, she first pushed through her claim to be allowed to send envoys to the peace conference, and then fought for the limitation of the emperor's power over the imperial states. In the case of smaller princely houses, imperial counts, and imperial knights, it was usually the mother who was the children's custodian, and hence she usually served as regent for the underage successor; there were many such figures. Research on the early modern legal debate concerning female custodianship in princely families has demonstrated that such positions were not always uncontested and that they must be considered a recognized instrument of securing dynastic rule.[20] Women's roles as deputy rulers thus remained a relevant factor throughout the entire early modern period. To date, however, little has been known about the regularity of such cases in general or the relevance and agency of female custodians or regents in the sphere of imperial politics.

In addition to this form of regency, there were other situations in which dynastic women took on the role of regents in individual territories on behalf of fathers or brothers and thereby enjoyed the rights of rulers. The Habsburg women who governed in the Low Countries for decades from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries are a well-known example.[21] But there were other territories in which female regency was legitimized by the will of male rulers: in Bavaria from 1704, for instance, when the elector was forced to flee following military defeat, Electress Theresia Kunigunde served as a regent for several months. Also, imperial countesses repeatedly acted as their husbands' representatives, as when the latter were unable to govern due to engagement on the battlefield or other official duties.[22] And when a ruler was unfit to rule, as in the case of Duke Johann Wilhelm of Jülich-Cleve or Duke Friedrich Albrecht of Prussia, both of whom suffered from mental illness, around 1600 their wives more or less informally took on the role of (co-)regent in times of dynastic crises.[23]

Finally, we must also consider princely and high-aristocratic heiresses: although noble and princely women usually had limited rights of inheritance, particularly since they normally had to renounce such claims upon marrying,[24] there were nevertheless cases in which "only" a woman could secure the continuity of a ruling house or legitimize a change of rule and personal unions within territories of the empire. The most prominent example was certainly the Habsburg Maria Theresa, ruler in her own right over Hungary, Bohemia, and the Habsburgs' German hereditary lands following the Pragmatic Sanction.[25] De jure, an heiress had to leave ruling to her husband or son; de facto, however, many of them secured considerable lifelong influence this way. This was the case not only for Maria Theresa, but especially for imperial countesses, such as Anna von Bentheim, who as heiress of the County of Tecklenburg was largely independent in administering the inherited territories until her son came of age, followed by another ten years until her death in 1582. A

[19] Puppel, *Die Regentin*, 190–236; Tryntje Helfferich, *The Iron Princess: Amalia Elisabeth and the Thirty Years War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

[20] On the legal debate, see Puppel, *Die Regentin*, 42–57.

[21] See, for instance, Louise-Marie Libert, *Dames de Pouvoir. Régentes et gouvernantes des anciens Pays-Bas* (Bruxelles: Racine, 2005).

[22] Britta Kägler, "Weibliche Regentschaft in Krisenzeiten. Zur Interimsregierung der bayerischen Kurfürstin Therese Kunigunde (1704/05)," in *Gynäkokratie. Frauen und Politik in der höfischen Gesellschaft der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Katrin Keller (http://www.zeitenblicke.de/2009/2/kaegler); Johannes Arndt, *Das niederrheinisch-westfälische Reichsgrafenkollegium und seine Mitglieder (1653–1806)* (Mainz: von Zabern, 1991), 248–56, 265–330.

[23] Z. B. Michael Kaiser, "Die Tochter ihrer Mutter. Anna von Preußen und das politische Erbe der Maria Leonora," in *Kulturgeschichte Preußens—Colloquien* 2 (2016) (https://perspectivia.net/receive/ploneimport_mods_00010412).

[24] Lennart Pieper, *Einheit im Konflikt. Dynastiebildung in den Grafenhäusern Lippe und Waldeck in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit* (Cologne, Weimar and Vienna: Böhlau, 2019), 243, 357n; Michaela Hohkamp, "Do Sisters Have Brothers? The Search for the 'rechte Schwester': Brothers and Sisters in Aristocratic Society at the Turn of the Sixteenth Century," in *Sibling Relations and the Transformations of European Kinship, 1300–1900*, ed. Christopher H. Johnson and David Warren Sabean (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 65–83.

[25] Wunder, "Herrschaft und öffentliches Handeln von Frauen in der Gesellschaft der Frühen Neuzeit," 47.

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well-known example of another such heiress is "Maid" Maria of Jever, who as an unwedded dynastic woman independently ruled over Jever for almost fifty years in the sixteenth century.[26]

The Empire as a Dynastic Space

It is virtually a historical truism that dynasties secured ties via marriage and that such marriages could be part of peace treaties and hereditary alliances. In his well-respected study, Lucien Bély, for instance, has described dynastic ties as an element of a Europe-wide "société des princes" and thus as an important aspect of politics and diplomacy, not only in the early modern period. Dynastic relations and patron–client arrangements beyond territorial borders also represented important elements for the cohesion and long-term functioning of the empire. The same holds, of course, within the Holy Roman Empire, where many of the princely dynasties formed genuine marriage circles producing ever-new ties for generations.[27]

With respect to the dynasty's women, this aspect is often associated with the topos of the "sold daughter,"[28] due to the fact that the girls of aristocratic and princely families usually had no say in the marriage plans. Although this was essentially in line with the norms of the age[29] and equally applied to young men, particularly for the presumptive heir who would go on to rule, in our connection this topos must be qualified because in many cases it was older female relatives who initiated dynastic marriages: mothers, grandmothers, aunts, or sisters regularly acted as go-betweens and negotiators.[30] They thus helped shape dynastic networks within the empire or beyond, even if their activities were closely tied to dynastic interests and general political considerations.

A prime example is Electress Anna of Saxony. The eldest daughter of Christian III of Denmark, in 1548, she had married Duke August, who became elector of Saxony in 1553. She created a number of marriage projects[31] for her younger brother, Friedrich II, king of Denmark from 1559 onward: for instance, at the imperial diet of 1566, which she attended with her husband, she inspected a bride for Friedrich. Maria, the eldest daughter of Duke Albrecht V of Bavaria, was from a Catholic dynasty, but being of a different confession was not an obstacle to marriage for Anna or the girl's parents. The electress sent her brother a portrait of the candidate from Augsburg and assured him she was also "busily working and hoping to ensure things are brought to a conclusion, subject to Your Royal Honor's willing and liking."[32]

[26] Stephanie Marra, *Allianzen des Adels. Dynastisches Handeln im Grafenhaus Bentheim im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert* (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2007), 26–28; Antje Sander, ed., *Das Fräulein und die Renaissance. Maria von Jever 1500–1575. Herrschaft und Kultur in einer friesischen Residenz des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Oldenburg: Isensee, 2000).

[27] Lucien Bély, *La société des princes, XVIe–XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 1999); Daniel Schönpflug, *Die Heiraten der Hohenzollern. Verwandtschaft, Politik und Ritual in Europa 1640–1918* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013); Philip Haas, "Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der 'Traditionsehe.' Die gemeinsame Ehepolitik und das politisch-dynastische Verhältnis Hessen-Kassels und Brandenburg-Preußens (1645–1715)," *Jahrbuch für die Geschichte Mittel— und Ostdeutschlands* 62 (2016): 159–89; Daybell and Norrhem, "Introduction," 9; Dunn and Carney, *Royal Women and Dynastic Loyalty*, 5n.

[28] For a critical appraisal as early as 2002, see Jörg Rogge, "Nur verkaufte Töchter? Überlegungen zu Aufgaben, Quellen, Methoden und Perspektiven einer Sozial- und Kulturgeschichte hochadeliger Frauen und Fürstinnen im deutschen Reich während des späten Mittelalters und am Beginn der Neuzeit," in *Principes: Dynastien und Höfe im späten Mittelalter*, ed. Cordula Nolte, Karl-Heinz Spieß, and Ralf-Gunnar Werlich (Stuttgart: Thorbecke, 2002), 235–76.

[29] Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her*, 99–103.

[30] Duindam, *Dynasties*, 89; Bengt Büttner and Philip Haas, "Geheim—Öffentlich—Sicher. Der Ablauf von Verhandlungen und die Funktion der Öffentlichkeit bei dynastischen Ehen der Frühen Neuzeit," *Historisches Jahrbuch* 137 (2017): 224n, 245.

[31] Katrin Keller, *Kurfürstin Anna von Sachsen (1532–1585)* (Regensburg: Pustet, 2010), 85–90.

[32] Sächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden (SHStaD), Geheimer Rat, Kopial 512, fol. 113v, Anna of Saxony to Frederik of Denmark, 26.04.1566.

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There followed months of negotiations between Munich and Copenhagen, with debates arising from the confession issue and debts due to Friedrich's military campaigns. While Anna was still working on securing discussions, however, the king was already showing conspicuous interest in Juliane of Nassau-Dillenburg. The electress was immediately alarmed at this looming misalliance, considering it unthinkable that an imperial countess should become queen of Denmark. She expressed her concern, for instance in a long missive to Danish state councilors explaining that she had always encouraged her brother the king to marry someone from the electoral and princely dynasties of the Holy Roman Empire "who is not insulting to his royal standing and origins, but might [see them] thrive with glory, flourishing, and every prosperity. We learn from public rumor, however, that there are said to be other suggestions and marriage negotiations that not only displease us, but may also be to the detriment of your Royal Honor and the realm of Denmark and not so much beneficial as an impediment."[33]

Here we can clearly see her objective of acting in the interests of her dynasty of origin and using the marriage to raise the standing of the House of Oldenburg—and her displeasure that her brother wasn't taking her advice. It was only after concerted efforts with her aunt, Elisabeth von Mecklenburg-Güstrow, with whom she discussed the next steps during a meeting in Dresden in late 1568, that she was able to persuade the king to choose a bride befitting his status. In September 1571, she announced to the state councilors Peder Oxe and Holger Rosenkrantz that the duchess of Mecklenburg was prepared to travel to Denmark and introduce two marriage candidates to the king. In November of the same year, the duchess, her husband, her daughter Sophie, and two other princesses arrived in Nyköping, where King Friedrich finally consented to marrying Sophie von Mecklenburg-Güstrow, his niece. Hence, although the king certainly pursued his own projects, two dynastic women were able to push through a marriage that not only corresponded to their ideas of social rank, but also secured dynastic networks—and met with the groom's approval.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the marriage of Charles III of Spain, the younger brother of Emperor Joseph I, posed a considerable problem––not only due to the high rank of the groom, but above all due to the lack of princesses of the Catholic faith in the great princely houses of the empire. Thus, finally, in 1708, the only marriage in the House of Habsburg with a convert took place:[34] Elisabeth Christine of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel converted to Catholicism in Bamberg in 1707, became queen in Spain through her marriage to Charles in 1708, and empress in 1711, when the king was elected emperor as Charles IV.

Many people had been involved in the negotiations leading up to the marriage: the bride's grandfather, Duke Anton Ulrich of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, and Emperor Joseph I, but also his uncle Johann Wilhelm of the Palatinate, the ducal librarian Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz––and two empresses. For the bridegroom's mother, Empress Dowager Eleonore Magdalena, was just as involved as his sister-in-law, Amalie Wilhelmine, of the Brunswick-Celle-Hanover line of the Guelph dynasty. In 1706, Amalie Wilhelmine assured Duke Anton Ulrich "how much I am interested in everything that concerns you and your house, which is my own, and I assure you that I will try to show these sentiments not only with simple expressions but also with deeds."[35] Later letters also show that the empress considered the marriage to be her own work; she believed she had served the interests of the imperial house as well as those of the House of Brunswick. This episode shows that Amalie

[33] SHStaD, Geheimer Rat, Kopial 513, fol. 135r, Anna of Saxony to the Danish Reichsräte, 25.11.1568.

[34] For this conversion, see Ines Peper, *Konversionen im Umkreis des Wiener Hofes um 1700* (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2010).

[35] Niedersächsisches Staatsarchiv Wolfenbüttel, 1 Alt 24 Nr. 254, fol. 4r, Empress Amalie Wilhelmine to Duke Anton Ulrich, 17.07.1706; see also 1 Alt 24 Nr. 276, fol. 51, Empress Amalie Wilhelmine to Duchess Christine Louise of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, 2.08.1713.

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Wilhelmine had a similar understanding of responsibility toward her "house," her dynasty of origin, as Electress Anna had.

Further examples could be listed. It remains to be said that a new examination of princely marriage arrangements and negotiations, including the correspondence of princesses, would undoubtedly paint a different picture to the one that has often prevailed: mothers, grandmothers, aunts, sisters played a major role, even if the final decision concerning the establishment of a dynastic alliance usually lay with the male head of the dynasty. A dynastic bride's movement, leaving one dynasty for another, was not only the basis for renunciation of inheritance and separation from her family of origin,[36] as is often the focus. In many cases, this switch gave rise to the permanent role of a mediator with respect to political affairs, cultural standards, property, and individuals. This holds not only for Electress Anna but also for the empresses of Italian origin in the seventeenth century. This role of cultural mediator played by dynastic and high-aristocratic ladies has generally received more attention in recent studies, latterly in several comprehensive publications.[37] As a result this aspect does not require further discussion here.

The Empire as a Communicative Network

Most early modern dynastic women of the Holy Roman Empire probably maintained extensive correspondence networks.[38] Admittedly, there is often little evidence for these connections, and even less research on the subject, given that older scholarship dismissed the missives of dynastic women as "private letters."[39] And the idea of women's subordinate status, of the (political) insignificance of dynastic women, is manifested to this day in the precarious preservation of their written legacies. This particularly applies to correspondence by women of the House of Habsburg. As a result, only one such collection shall serve as an example here: an inventory of letters belonging to Eleonora Magdalena of Palatinate-Neuburg, the third wife of Emperor Leopold I, from around 1700.[40] Although it is certain that only a selection of her letters was documented by copies, the surviving collection offers a compact insight into the expansion and structure of the correspondence of one of the high-ranking dynastic women of the empire.

The collection contains hundreds of letters written between 1697 and 1705 to well over two hundred different people. They included dozens of cardinals of the Church of Rome, and

[36] Lennart Pieper, *Einheit im Konflikt*, 243, 357n; Rogge, "Nur verkaufte Töchter?"

[37] On the Gonzaga empresses, see Matthias Schnettger, "Kaiserinnen und Kardinäle. Wissensbroker(innen) zwischen dem Kaiserhof und Italien im 17. Jahrhundert," in *Transferprozesse zwischen dem Alten Reich und Italien im 17. Jahrhundert. Wissenskonfigurationen-Akteure—Netzwerke*, ed. Sabina Brevaglieri and Matthias Schnettger (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 2017), 127–60. For a general overview, see, for instance, Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly, "Cultural Transfer and the Eighteenth-Century Queen Consort," *German History* 34 (2016): 279–92; Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly and Adam Morton, eds., *Queens Consort, Cultural Transfer and European Politics, c. 1500–1800* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017); Jill Bepler and Svante Norrhem, eds., *Telling Objects. Contextualizing the Role of the Consort in Early Modern Europe* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 2018).

[38] Katrin Keller, "Kommunikationsraum Altes Reich. Zur Funktionalität der Korrespondenznetze von Fürstinnen im 16. Jahrhundert," *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung* 31 (2004): 205–30; Ute Essegern, "Die Kanzlei liest mit. Familiäre Netzwerke von Fürstinnen am Beispiel der Kopialbuchüberlieferung Sophias von Brandenburg (1568–1622)," in *Zwischen Thronsaal und Frawenzimmer. Handlungsfelder pommerscher Fürstinnen um 1600*, 271–94; Ruppel, "Das 'stillose Zeitalter'"; Broomhall, "Letters Make the Family."

[39] Monika Schneikart, "Briefe pommerscher Fürstinnen zwischen 1600 und 1633. Privatbriefe oder 'geringe Haußbrieflein'?," in *Zwischen Thronsaal und Frawenzimmer*, 236n; Gerhard Fouquet, "Fürsten unter sich—Privatheit und Öffentlichkeit, Emotionalität und Zeremoniell im Medium des Briefes," in *Principes: Dynastien und Höfe im späten Mittelalter*, ed. Cordula Nolte, Karl-Heinz Spieß, and Ralf-Gunnar Werlich (Stuttgart: Thorbecke, 2002), 172n. On the problems of sources, see James Daybell, "Gender, Politics and Archives in Early Modern England," in *Gender and Political Culture in Early Modern Europe, 1400-1800*, 26–28.

[40] Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv (HHStA) Wien, Hausarchive, Familienkorrespondenz 32/3: Register of correspondence of Empress Eleonora Magdalena 1697–1705; on this collection, see Katrin Keller, *Die Kaiserin. Reich, Ritual und Dynastie* (Vienna and Cologne: Böhlau, 2021), 271–73, 279–84.

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several men and women belonging to Rome's city nobility, most of whom mainly exchanged New Year's greetings with the empress. She also wrote to members of European ruling houses such as the kings of Denmark, Queen Anne of England and Scotland, Pope Innocent XII, the duke and duchess of Savoy, and members of the grand ducal family of Tuscany in Florence. Correspondents also included some imperial diplomats and officials.

More than eighty of Eleonora Magdalena's addressees lived in the Holy Roman Empire and included, firstly, various groups of the empress's relatives: several siblings, but also members of the Bavarian branch of the Wittelsbachs, who were related to both the Habsburgs and the Palatinate Wittelsbachs, as well as members of the House of Lorraine as nephews of Emperor Leopold I. The list also includes several cousins of Eleonora Magdalena from the House of Hessen-Darmstadt, her mother's family of origin. Members of other lineages of the Palatinate line of the Wittelsbachs, of which there were still several branches around 1700, constituted a third group of correspondents. Almost fifty of the correspondents from the Holy Roman Empire were without direct dynastic ties, however. Besides the conspicuous electoral houses, there were both secular and ecclesiastical imperial princes, including several abbesses of abbeys with imperial immediacy, some representatives of lower-ranking imperial states (such as the Councils of Aachen and Cologne), and ten clergy of various orders.

A little more than half of the documented chancellery letters were New Year's wishes and other greetings and felicitations: for instance, in late 1699, Eleonora Magdalena informed some nineteen dynastic women of the Holy Roman Empire and various Italian princes of the birth of her first grandchild, Archduchess Maria Josepha. In May 1705, she announced the death of Emperor Leopold I to princes and dynastic women of the empire.[41] Their replies and other items of correspondence were delivered to her by envoys, whom she issued with letters of credence and recredentials.

Such greetings or "letters of social courtesy," as James Daybell calls them, were not particularly original in terms of their content,[42] largely containing formulaic greetings, congratulations, or condolences. However, the relatively large number of such missives and their regularity points to a kind of dynastic basic communication, and they could be used as a point of departure for direct requests and inquiries when necessary. The greetings to Eleonora Magdalena documented in her collection allow us to at least trace the contours of a regular correspondence network. Firstly, this had European dimensions, in that connections with Italy and the Curia and with European ruling houses in France and England can be observed. Due to the empress's extended family ties resulting from the marriages of her sisters, she also had closer involvement with Spain (where of course the traditions of the House of Habsburg played a role), as well as Poland, Portugal, and Parma.

Secondly, ties with the Holy Roman Empire were particularly closely entwined. On the one hand, these were based on dynastic networks of the House of Palatinate-Neuburg, but on the other, they clearly represent one of the forms taken by relations between the imperial house and the empire: regular greetings were a means of documenting the status of electoral and imperial princely houses. It was probably this function of the greetings to which Elector Joseph Clemens of Cologne referred in his 1696 New Year's letter to Empress Eleonora Magdalena, when he wrote that he wished her happiness for the New Year in a "fashion customary to the empire."[43] The number and spatial and dynastic distribution of

[41] Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, HHStA Wien, Hausarchive, Familienkorrespondenz A 32/3: Register of correspondence of Empress Eleonora Magdalena 1697–1705, fol. 110v–111r, fol. 134r–138r, December 1699; fol. 211r–213v, 8.05.1705.

[42] James Daybell, "Letters," in *The Cambridge Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing*, ed. Laura Lunger Knoppers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 187; Sophie Ruppel, *Verbündete Rivalen. Geschwisterbeziehungen im Hochadel des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2006), 305–7.

[43] Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, HHStA Wien, Hausarchive, Familienkorrespondenz B 8, unpag.: Joseph Clemens, Elector of Cologne, to Empress Eleonora Magdalens, 15.12.1696.

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the empress's correspondents also demonstrate women's involvement in perpetuating an empire-wide princely society.

The collection contains a second category of letters that are best described as recommendations and intercessions and were produced in only slightly lower quantity than the greetings letters. The empress sent intercessions either at the instigation of others or on her own initiative to dynastic rulers and high-ranking figures in the secular and ecclesiastical spheres. She thus acted in a field that Amalie Fößel has already emphasized in her studies on the empire's queens in the Middle Ages. Certainly, many other dynastic women served as intercessors, which aligns with the normative concepts of how aristocratic and dynastic women had to act.[44]

In function, the empress took on the role of patron to those on whose behalf she interceded, and indeed patronage represented a very important element of the entanglement and hence the shaping of networks.[45] Such requests, intercessions, and recommendations were instruments employed by both men and women. However, whereas princes and aristocratic or bourgeois office-holders could also exploit their institutional positions to build and make use of networks, for women requests were the only opportunity to act as patrons or mediators. They were only in a position to act independently in this respect if they could exploit financial or legal scope for agency. There are, however, several indications that dynastic women were requested to intercede beyond the borders of their respective territories—and Empress Eleonora Magdalena was clearly no exception.

The empress's interventions in the form of requests or recommendations can be divided into several thematic categories: the majority of intercessions (around a third) were related to appointments in the secular and ecclesiastical spheres, from sinecures to military command, in a space ranging from Breslau to Spain. Approximately one-quarter of the letters, the second largest group, were general recommendations and expressions of favor without further specifics—that is, they manifested patronage for certain individuals. A much smaller but nevertheless significant number of interventions concerned legal matters or were recommendations for membership of monasteries, each area amounting to about a tenth. The remaining quarter comprised intercessions requesting payments, intercessions by others, support for the construction or foundation of monasteries, and other affairs.

In legal matters, Empress Eleonora Magdalena received particularly frequent requests to send intercessions to her brothers Johann Wilhelm of the Palatinate and Franz Ludwig, the bishop of Breslau. Issues included cases under the jurisdiction of the empire, such as the conflict between the imperial general Philipp Ludwig of Leiningen-Westerburg and the count of Hohenlohe-Neuenstein over their claims to the county of Leiningen. Here the empress requested both brothers to delay the verdict's execution until the count of Leiningen had produced further proof of his rights.[46] In 1697, the empress also supported the Council of Aachen in its claims against a debtor, the elector of the Palatinate. She would later request the council's support for nuns of the Order of the Discalced Carmelites and the Dominican Order.[47]

[44] Amalie Fößel, *Die Königin im mittelalterlichen Reich. Herrschaftsausübung, Herrschaftsrechte, Handlungsspielräume* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2000), 123–50; Amalie Fößel, "The Political Traditions of Female Rulership in Medieval Europe," in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, ed. Judith M. Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 68–83; Pernille Arenfeldt, "The Female Consort as Intercessor in Sixteenth-Century Saxony," in *Less Favored—More Favored: Proceedings from a Conference on Gender in European Legal History, 12th–19th Centuries*, ed. Grethe Jacobsen, Helle Vogt, Inger Dübeck, and Heide Wunder (Copenhagen: The Royal Library, 2005) (http://www5.kb.dk/da/nb/publikationer/fundogforskning-online/less_more/).

[45] Sharon Kettering, "The Patronage Power of Early Modern French Noblewomen" *Historical Journal* 32 (1989): 817–41.

[46] Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, HHStA Wien, Hausarchive, Familienkorrespondenz A 32/3: Register of correspondence of Empress Eleonora Magdalena 1697–1705, fol. 53r–54r, Eleonora Magdalena to Johann Wilhelm of the Palatinate respectively to Franz Ludwig, Bishop of Breslau, 24.08.1698.

[47] Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, HHStA Wien, Hausarchive, Familienkorrespondenz A 32/3: Register of correspondence of Empress Eleonora Magdalena 1697–1705, fol. 19r–20r, Empress Eleonora Magdalena to Johann Wilhelm of

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Almost half of all interventions were addressed to closely related princes and dynastic women, both within and beyond the Holy Roman Empire: to the duchess of Parma and the queen of Spain, both of whom were sisters of the empress, or, albeit much less frequently—to their husbands and her four brothers in Düsseldorf, Augsburg, Breslau, and Heidelberg. Obviously, dynastic relations usually made intercessions easier,[48] but there were other people within the empire and beyond in whose affairs the empress intervened. Such figures included the elector and electress of Brandenburg, the elector of Mainz, the bishop of Passau, the bishop of Trient, and the grand prior of the Order of Saint John, and, beyond the empire, Pope Innocent XII and the imperial envoys in Rome and the grand duke of Tuscany.

The empress's role as a mediator and intercessor was thus by no means limited to close family; rather, it represented a structural component of dynastic rule. Her communications between the dynasties and in imperial princely society at large demonstrate dynastic women's capacity to act beyond the borders of their respective territories, a capacity that must also have benefited the activities of their husbands.

Correspondence, as the basis and medium of intercession and mediation, was by no means limited to empresses or electresses. As far as studies that have been undertaken so far goes,[49] it can be said that writing and receiving letters, intercession and mediation, were part of the "everyday business" of all princely and noble women. The extent of their scope for agency depended, of course, on many factors. These included a functioning relationship with their husbands or sons as well as individual negotiating skills, but above all their position in the princely hierarchy of the empire. The resources of an electress as an intercessor were undoubtedly greater than those of a lady from the house of an imperial count.

In the case of Empress Eleonora, in addition to the relevance of her own dynastic relations, we can observe that she was more frequently and more broadly requested to act in the interests of the empire in certain spheres, including, and indeed especially, by imperial dynastic women of varying social rank. For instance, she was evidently considered a protector of princely marriages, as the repeated requests concerning dynastic marriage conflicts demonstrate.[50] There were also relatively frequent requests for intervention on behalf of convents and monasteries. As a protector of marriage and family as well as an intercessor for the clergy, the empress assumed a role in relation to the empire that has also been attributed to noble and princely women in relation to their respective territories. This is evidenced, for example, by statements in funeral sermons and memorial writings[51] that focus on the princess as a role model and intercessor in these contexts.

In a conflict in Quedlinburg Abbey in the late seventeenth century, a supplication by the provost Magdalena Sophie of Holstein-Sonderburg-Wiesenburg summed up the empress's

the Palatinate, 19.11.1697; fol. 168v–169r, Empress Eleonora Magdalena to the Council of the Imperial City of Aachen, 10.07.1702; fol. 192v–193r, Empress Eleonora Magdalena to the Council of the Imperial City of Aachen, 24.10.1703.

[48] Ruppel, *Verbündete Rivalen*, 65n, 198–202.

[49] For example Melanie Greinert, *Zwischen Unterordnung und Selbstbehauptung. Handlungsspielräume Gottorfer Fürstinnen (1564–1721)* (Kiel: Wachholtz Verlag 2018), 286–306; Gabriele Ball, "Fürstinnen in Korrespondenz. Gräfin Anna Sophia von Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt und die 'Tugendliche Gesellschaft,'" *WerkstattGeschichte* 60 (2012): 7–22; Keller, *Frauen und dynastische Herrschaft*, 21n; Daybell and Norrhem, "Introduction," 9.

[50] See, for instance, the conflict in the House of Württemberg: Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, HHStA Wien, Hausarchive Familienkorrespondenz A 33/1 und 2: Auguste Maria of Baden to Empress Amalie Wilhelmine, 24.12.1707 and 5.06.1708; Familienkorrespondenz A 33/30/6, fol. 13r, Empress Amalie Wilhelmine to the Margrave of Baden, 9.01.1708, fol. 23r/v and 45r/v, Empress Amalie Wilhelmine to Auguste Maria of Baden, 9.01.1708 and 21.07.1708; Heinrich August Krippendorf, *Anekdoten vom württembergischen Hof. Memoiren des Privatsekretärs der herzoglichen Mätresse Christina Wilhelmina von Grävenitz (1714–1738)*, ed. Joachim Brüser (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2015), 17, 231.

[51] Jill Bepler, "Enduring Loss and Memoralizing Women: The Cultural Role of Dynastic Women in Early Modern Germany," in *Enduring Loss in Early Modern Germany*, ed. Lynne Tatlock (Leiden: Brill 2010), 133–60; Judith P. Aikin, *A Ruler's Consort in Early Modern Germany: Aemilia Juliana of Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt* (Burlington: Ashgate 2014), 107–30.

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position in particularly vivid terms. Along with her supplication to the emperor, the provost permitted herself to remark:

> At the same time to most humbly beseech your Imperial Majesty as our most gracious empress and generally most benevolent mother of the German Empire and all its embattled members to take to heart the delicate distress in correspondence with her world-renowned love for God and His honor and also salutary justice, and in order to multiply her immortal posthumous glory, to also allow a beam of her imperial grace to shine upon our poor convent and take us into her most gracious protection and intercede with his Imperial Majesty that this embattled convent's chapter may be most graciously heard in its entire plea and that the most obediently requested order … may be executed most propitiously.[52]

The Empire in Ritual and Ceremonial

The specific constellations and connections between the ladies of imperial princely houses or imperial countesses to which the provost of Quedlinburg referred are not only demonstrated by intercessions and demarches, but were also communicated via rituals within the framework of the empress's coronation.[53] Like the coronation of queens in many European countries, the empress's crowning was also marked as a female ritual.[54]

When the emperor was crowned, his wife and her ladies entered the church before the procession and remained incognito on a stand on the periphery of events. Even the empress herself did not attend her husband's or her son's coronation feasts.[55] In contrast, when the empress was crowned, several ladies participated in the ceremonial procession to the church: imperial dynastic ladies carried her train, her *Obersthofmeisterin* (a role equivalent to mistress of the robes) assisted with the anointment, and the ladies in waiting and imperial countesses formed her entourage in the procession. Inside the church, the ladies usually sat right next to the empress; others took their seats as spectators in the gallery. At the feast concluding the event, a table or several tables were reserved for imperial countesses and imperial princesses, but also for the ladies in waiting and the wives of men in high positions of office. Admittedly, the ladies appeared primarily as the empress's entourage; it would appear that it was only in Bohemia that women participated in the coronation act directly.[56] However, the decidedly female entourage and the female spectators at the empress's crowning reinforced the gender-specific character of the ritual. This practice went beyond the visual presence of women: coronations of empresses and queens always involved the performative staging of female participation in dynastic rule.

It should be noted that this element noticeably declined between the first early modern coronation of an empress in 1612 and the last in 1742. Although arrangements were always made to ensure that the empress's coronation procession featured as extensive and high-ranking a female entourage as possible, these efforts met with different levels of success. At least five imperial dynastic ladies, eight princesses, and ten imperial countesses took part in the coronation of 1612, while only six imperial countesses could be drummed up

[52] On this conflict lasting many years, see Schröder-Stapper, *Fürstäbtissinnen*, 41, 477n. Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, HHStA Wien, Kleinere Reichsstände 415, fol. 188r: Magdalena Sophie of Holstein-Sonderburg-Wiesenburg to Empress Eleonora Magdalena, 1.06.1697.

[53] Katrin Keller, "Gender and Ritual: Crowning Empresses of the Holy Roman Empire," *German History* 37 (2019): 2, 172–85.

[54] Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, *Rituale* (Frankfurt/Main and New York: Campus, 2013). For the Holy Roman Empire, see Stollberg-Rilinger, *The Emperor's Old Clothes*.

[55] On the ritual significance of the coronation feast, see: Stollberg-Rilinger, *Rituale*, 105.

[56] Keller, "Gender and Ritual," 179.

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in 1742.[57] What did remain, however, was a second form of ceremonial, displaying the connection between the empress and the dynastic ladies, a component of a comprehensive ceremonial performance of the relationship between the imperial house and the empire or between the imperial territories: the ceremonial of the female audience in the Holy Roman Empire.

Audiences as communicative constellations where rank, esteem, and ceremonial order could be enacted have been the focus of many recent studies, particularly in the field of diplomatic relations.[58] Acts referred to as audiences ranged from formal inaugural visits by a member of a dynastic house, to inaugural audiences for ambassadors, to audiences with court dignitaries upon their taking up office to merely hearing a request. Up to now, the fact that dynastic women were also involved in this system of competing for status on both the imperial and European levels has received marginal attention at best.[59] Yet granting or receiving an audience was an important aspect of a dynastic woman's representative tasks, and like audiences with princes, those with women also became the scene of conflicts over rank. Granting an audience on various levels was an important element of dynastic women's and their household's involvement in the network of performative court communication within the empire and in Europe in general. The rules-based nature of audiences, both with persons of aristocratic-dynastic standing and with diplomatic representatives, ultimately demonstrates that the prince and his consort represented the dynasty as a ruling couple.

This practice is well illustrated by the long series of audiences Empress Eleonora Gonzaga-Nevers granted visiting male and female dynastic rulers during the Regensburg diet of 1653.[60] An audience with both the emperor and the empress was obligatory for all imperial princes who traveled to Regensburg for the diet. In contrast, ladies—both electresses and imperial princely consorts—were to attend an inaugural audience only with the empress. These audiences (like the coronation) played a special role for dynastic women's involvement in the courtly society of the empire.

The series of audiences in Regensburg was opened by Electress Charlotte of the Palatinate on January 14, 1653.[61] Accompanied by two of her husband's sisters, she was received by a court official deputizing in the absence of the empress's *Obersthofmeister*. He escorted the ladies into the antechamber of the empress's audience chamber, where the empress greeted the electress. In the audience chamber itself, the imperial *Obersthofmeisterin* and the ladies in waiting were present. The electress and the two princesses were seated, with the chairs being moved into position as they sat down. After a brief conversation, the electress said her good-byes and was escorted out by the empress.

The hierarchy between the women took various forms, but it was particularly visible in the difference between sitting or standing. The empress sat in an armchair, and the electress and the princesses were also allowed to sit down, while the ladies in waiting and the *Obersthofmeisterin* remained standing. A hierarchy was also conveyed by the furniture, to which the most precise attention was paid in all written sources concerning audiences

[57] Keller, *Die Kaiserin*, 86–153.

[58] Peter Burschel and Christine Vogel, eds., *Die Audienz. Ritualisierter Kulturkontakt in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2014). On diplomatic ceremonial, see, for instance, Lucien Bély, "Das Wissen über das diplomatische Zeremoniell in der Frühen Neuzeit," in *Alles nur symbolisch? Bilanz und Perspektiven der Erforschung symbolischer Kommunikation*, ed. Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, Tim Neu, and Christina Brauner (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2013), 141–59.

[59] Leopold Auer, "Diplomatisches Zeremoniell am Kaiserhof der Frühen Neuzeit. Perspektiven eines Forschungsthemas," in *Diplomatisches Zeremoniell in Europa und im Mittleren Osten in der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Ralph Kauz, Giorgio Rota, and Jan-Paul Niederkorn (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009), 45n; Mark Hengerer, *Kaiserhof und Adel in der Mitte des 17. Jahrhunderts. Eine Kommunikationsgeschichte der Macht in der Vormoderne* (Constance: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft, 2004), 266–73.

[60] Stollberg-Rilinger, *Des Kaisers alte Kleider*, 148–65; English edition, 134–42.

[61] The description of these audiences is based on Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, HHStA Wien, Hofarchive, Zeremonialprotokoll 1, pp. 109–12, 140, 166, 280.

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with the empress. The empress always sat in a chair with arm- and back rests and gold brocade upholstery, positioned beneath a baldachin, thus using exactly the same setting as the emperor himself. Although the electress was entitled to the same type of chair, hers was only upholstered with red satin, indicating a step down from the empress's gold. The unmarried princesses Sophie and Elisabeth of the Palatinate, on the other hand, were allowed to sit on red upholstered seats without armrests into which they were also helped by imperial chamberlains, while the *Oberhofmeister* performed this service for the electress. This allocation clearly signaled the empress's primacy, but also the high status of the electress.

In this specific case, the status of such an audience in general and the furniture in particular is evidenced not least by the fact that Sophie of the Palatinate, who married Duke Ernst August of Brunswick-Lüneburg in 1658, wrote about this audience in her memoirs in 1680: "Et après quelques jours de repos M. l'electeur eut audience de l'empereur et Mad. l'electrice de l'imperatrice, qui luy fit l'honneur de la recevoir au degré au travers de plusieurs antichambres, et nous donna la main à l'allemande. Nous la suivismes jusque dans sa chambre d'audiance, oû elle prit sa place sur un fauteuil qui estoit devant une table sur un grand dais. On donna vis-à-vis d'elle un fauteil aussi à Mad. l'electrice et des chaises à dos à ma soeur et à moy."[62]

Only one day after Electress Charlotte in 1653, Duchess Anna von Württemberg, the wife of Duke Eberhard III, also had an audience with the empress in Regensburg. She too was accompanied by several female relatives.[63] The empress received the Württembergians standing under a baldachin; she did not approach them. Instead, she returned to sitting on her gold brocade armchair as soon as the ladies had entered the room. The duchess was given a red satin chair without armrests, while the other ladies sat to her left on slightly lower chairs. This audience served as a model for a later visit by Countess Palatine Marie Eleonore of Simmern and her daughter, Elisabeth Marie, and for audiences for Margravine Magdalena of Baden-Baden and Landgravine Sophie Eleonore of Hessen-Darmstadt.[64] The audiences for the empire's princes followed the same pattern, every effort being made to reflect those audiences with the emperor himself.[65] The empress approached the electors as far as the door, and they received armchairs with red upholstery; reigning imperial princes were allowed to keep their heads covered, and so forth.

On various levels, audiences involved the empire's empresses and dynastic ladies in a system of imperial representation communicated via ceremonial. The diet of 1653–54, whose importance for the development of ceremonial within the empire has been well demonstrated by Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger,[66] would have a long-term impact in this respect too. The empress played a significant role in the system of courtly audiences, although the first visit by every imperial prince and every envoy had to be to the emperor. However, the empress was usually sought out immediately or at least shortly afterward. That they were granted an audience and received gifts was understood as a sign of esteem on the part of the imperial rulers. This is evident from a number of examples.[67] Such visits were a prerequisite for further appearances at the court, and one particularly crucial for ladies of imperial princely standing, who were received only by the empress (and not by the emperor).

Conclusion

The examples given here demonstrate that aristocratic and dynastic women played a role in shaping the empire as a communicative complex and a dynastic structure and shows their

[62] Adolf Köcher, ed., *Memoiren der Herzogin Sophie, nachmals Kurfürstin von Hannover* (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1879), 51.

[63] Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, HHStA Wien, Hofarchive, Zeremonialprotokoll 1, pp. 109–112, 15.01.1653.

[64] Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, HHStA Wien, Hofarchive, Zeremonialprotokoll 1, pp. 140, 166, 280, 3.03., 5.05. und 28.06.1653.

[65] Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, HHStA Wien, Hofarchive, Zeremonialprotokoll 1, pp. 9–10, 12–13, 82–83.

[66] Stollberg-Rilinger, *Des Kaisers alte Kleider*, 137–226; English edition, 121–202.

[67] Keller, *Die Kaiserin*, 260n, 266n.

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significance in the ceremonial implementation and perpetuation of the imperial constitution. The same undoubtedly holds for many bourgeois women with respect to economic networks; there is evidence of female merchants and entrepreneurs in the large and small cities throughout the entire early modern period.[68] And it would also be rewarding to take a closer look at and revise existing interpretations of the relevance of women in, for instance, literary circles and correspondence, where they became particularly prolific in the eighteenth century.[69]

For the women of princely status considered here, it should be noted that their scope for agency differed not only from that of their husbands, fathers, or sons; there were also considerable differences between the levels of agency enjoyed by different women. As was true of their political scope within the Holy Roman Empire, they were also graded accordingly: dynastic rank and the political importance of the individual dynasty were relevant factors for both men and women. The same applies to marital status, for unmarried members of princely houses were generally far more restricted in their agency than married or widowed ones. As a result, empresses and probably also electresses were able to act quite comprehensively within the framework of the empire, making use of their dynastic connections as well as their rank in imperial politics. Their rank in court ceremonial was presented to the public accordingly, and the ladies were thus integrated into the structure of the empire.

In part, however, their role as intercessors and mediators extended beyond the territories of the empire. In particular, the political status of the imperial house in Europe resulted in far-reaching contacts based not only on dynastic connections but also on diplomats and political allies on all levels up to the Curia. In contrast, the scope of the imperial princesses, as far as is evident to date, was probably more limited to the empire or the respective territories because both their dynastic networks in the background and their political resources were more limited. A further gradation can be assumed with regard to ruling houses of a count's rank. The hierarchies constituted by the imperial constitution and the princely hierarchy also manifested themselves in the expansion of women's scope for agency. On the other hand, women's general fields of agency, as enumerated in the introduction, remained accessible to all (married or widowed) women of the ruling rank.

There are manifold reasons why scholars have largely overlooked the participation that gave many dynastic women in particular their own scope for agency. One factor behind older research's "missing" dynastic and aristocratic women and their relevance for the workings of the empire was contemporary biases concerning the relationship between politics and gender; in the bourgeois era, state and public life were normatively marked as "male" preserves, private life on the other hand as "female." From this perspective, older research was only able to countenance the idea of women playing some sort of significant role as an exception to the rule.

And yet the investigation here has revealed that in the sphere of ritual and ceremonial, there were certainly signs of a "realm of ladies." Around the empress, rule was also staged as a female space. Given more recent studies on the field of politics in the early modern era and on aspects pertaining to the history of communication and ritual in the development of the empire, it is even more important to provide a more precise examination of the role played in these spheres by women of different social ranks. For the Holy Roman Empire, this would mean fulfilling an aim of feminist research that is by no means obsolete: shifting the focus to

[68] Natalie Zemon Davis, *Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth-Century-Lives* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Mark Häberlein, "Zwischen Vormundschaft und Risiko. Ökonomische Handlungsspielräume und Investitionen Augsburger Patrizier- und Kaufmannsfrauen des 16. und frühen 17. Jahrhunderts," in *Prekäre Ökonomien. Schulden in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, ed. Gabriela Signori (Constance and Munich: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft, 2014), 139–58.

[69] For example, Kerstin Merkel and Heide Wunder, eds., *Deutsche Frauen der Frühen Neuzeit. Dichterinnen, Malerinnen, Mäzeninnen* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2000); Bärbel Raschke, ed., *Der Briefwechsel zwischen Luise Dorothée von Sachsen-Gotha und Voltaire 1751–1767* (Leipzig: Universitätsverlag, 1998); Lisa Shapiro, ed., *The Correspondence between Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

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the "hidden"—or rather overlooked—role women played in historical developments. Taking up this viewpoint would also allow us to take a step toward providing both a more precise and a more nuanced perspective on the workings of as complex a phenomenon as the Holy Roman Empire. Studying the entanglement of the institutional and the informal spheres will create a more precise picture of how the empire held together for so long. This cohesion undoubtedly owed not only to law, the constitution, and the actions of men, but also to the agency of women, who shaped networks and politics as well as influencing the transfer of knowledge and culture.

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Katrin Keller is scientific director of the Institute for Habsburg and Balkan Studies of the Austrian Academy of Sciences (Hollandstraße 11-13, 1020 Wien, Austria; email: katrin.keller@oeaw.ac.at). She is author of *Die Kaiserin: Reich, Ritual und Dynastie* (2021) and co-editor of *Die Habsburgermonarchie im Dreißigjährigen Krieg* (2019). She is currently working on an edition of the correspondence of Empress Eleonora Magdalena of Pfalz-Neuburg.

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