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Marriage Politics of the European Royal Dynasties in the Early Modern Period

Global European politics in the Early Modern Age largely depended on the policies of its leading countries or, more precisely, on the policies of their royal houses. Marital alliances represented a very important factor in creation of both foreign and national politics. Royal intermarriages helped royal dynasties from different countries to reinforce their status on the European political scene and create possibilities for further expansion at the expense of other dynasties. Moreover, intermarriages enabled them to ensure peace and stability by ending long-term conflicts, which were a common feature in Europe from the second half of the 17th century onwards, thus achieving balance of powers. It is important to notice that the "female" side was almost always considered inferior in royal intermarriage negotiations and that both negotiating parties knew that well. Marriages contracted in this manner were viewed primarily as business agreements. It was not even necessary for both the bride and groom to be present at the wedding ceremony and, on occasions, marriages were contracted in the absence of both spouses. In such cases, the bride and groom were represented by their proxies, who were usually their respective countries' ambassadors.

Apart from representing the interests of her homeland within the marriage agreement, the main task of a newlywed princess or a queen was to provide the king and his dynasty with an heir to the throne and, consequently, dedicate herself to bringing up the royal offspring. If the king or the prince passed away before producing an heir, the marriage agreement would become invalid and the widowed queen dismissed and forced to return to her country of birth. The fate of Mary Stuart is perhaps the most vivid example of such policy. Mary was crowned the Queen of Scotland only six days after her birth, following the death of her father, King James V of Scotland. In 1547, at the age of five, she was sent to live in France where she would eventually marry Francis, the Dauphin of France and future King Francis II, who was,

on top of everything, one year her junior[1]. During her childhood absence Scotland was ruled by regents. She was married to Francis in the middle of 1558. A year later, at the age of sixteen, she became the queen consort after Francis ascended to the throne in the place of his tragically deceased father, Henry II of France. However, her husband's death forced Mary to leave France in the late 1560 and return to Scotland. Mary's example shows that the spouses' age was of little or no importance for royal intermarriages and that both spouses were often underage at the time a marriage was concluded.

Analysis of the most distinguished royal dynasties in Europe during the early modern period points to the fact that kings very often outlived their wives. At the time, all women, including queens, were perceived primarily as baby-making machines. They would often become pregnant before they got the chance to recover from a previous childbirth or pregnancy. Numerous childbirths very often proved fatal for women. In addition, very high infant mortality rates, inadequate hygiene, and lack of health education resulted in the fact that even ten or more childbirths could not guarantee that at least one child would survive until adolescence. To illustrate, Queen Anne of England (1702–1714), the younger daughter of King James II, was married to her cousin Prince George of Denmark and the marriage resulted in a total of seventeen pregnancies. Nevertheless, only five children survived past their first year and all of them passed away by the year 1700[2]. Consequently, this led to the 1701 Act of Settlement, according to which the English crown was passed on to Sophia, Electress of Hannover and a granddaughter of James I of England, and her issue after her death. This resulted in the accession of a new royal dynasty, the House of Hanover, to the throne of England, their first representative being King George I (1714–1727).

Queens frequently died in childbirth and succumbed to fatal illnesses and accidents or, if accused of adultery or treason, they were executed. For instance, King Henry VIII of England had two of his wives sent to the scaffold: Anne Boleyn in the year 1536 and Catherine Howard in 1542[3].

A royal marriage did not necessarily end with death of one of the spouses. The aforementioned King Henry VIII had divorced his first wife Catherine of Aragon so he could marry his second wife Anne Boleyn, which led to a permanent conflict between him and the Pope and eventually triggered the Reformation in England. He dismissed his fourth wife,

[1] M. Farquhar, *Five Centuries of Sex, Adventure, Vice, Treachery, and Folly from Royal Britain*, New York 2011, p. 53.

[2] A. Weir, *Britain's Royal Families: The Complete Genealogy*, London 2011, pp. 258–269.

[3] Among the monarchs of Western Europe example of Henry VIII was an exception, but he had his counterpart in the Russian tsar Ivan the Terrible. *Cf.*: R. E. Martin, *A Bride for the Tsar: Bride-Shows and Marriage politics in Early Modern Russia*, De Kalb 2012, pp. 130–166.

Anne of Cleves, under the pretext that the marriage had never been consummated, which is not that hard to believe since the King did not hide his dissatisfaction with his wife's physical appearance[4]. Similarly, King Henry IV of France had his marriage to Margaret Valois annulled because their union failed to produce a child. This particular case is all the more interesting since Henry's claim of the French throne was based on his marriage to Margaret. However, in the negotiations following dissolution of the marriage Margaret had managed to keep her right to bear the title "Queen and Duchess of Valoise" [5]. Henry IV married Marie de' Medici the next year.

Intermarriages that definitely left mark on overall European politics of the early modern period were those between the members of the Habsburg dynasty and the French royal house. The Peace of Cateau-Cambrésis, signed in the year 1559, marked the end of the Italian Wars and long-term conflicts that had lasted intermittently for 65 years, ever since the year 1494 and the Italian adventure of the King Charles III of France. Marriage between King Philip II of Spain and French princess Elisabeth Valois was arranged as a warranty of peace. Apart from being a confirmation of Spanish dominance in Europe that would last for a longer period, this alliance enabled Philip II to interfere in French internal affairs precisely at the time the country was affected by religious wars.

The Treaty of the Pyrenees was signed exactly one hundred years after the Peace of Cateau-Cambrésis. However, this Treaty had a completely opposite outcome. After Spain had lost the Thirty Years' War and was defeated by France and England in its aftermath, it became a second-grade force on the European scene. The Treaty led to the arrangement of marriage between Louis XIV of France and Maria Theresa of Spain, which was contracted a year later, in 1660. According to the marriage agreement, Spain had to pay France 500,000 golden crowns in dowry and Maria Theresa was obliged to waive her rights to the throne of Spain[6]. The marriage was arranged by Jules Mazarin, the Chief Minister of the French King, who was also an intimate of the King Louis XIV and had great influence over him. However, the marriage that was supposed to serve as a warranty of peace eventually only generated more conflicts because of breeches of the marriage agreement[7]. Perhaps the best example of the latter is the War of Devolution (1667–1668) between Louis XIV and the Spanish

[4] M. Farquhar, *op. cit.*, pp. 9–10.
[5] K. Wellman, *Queens and Mistresses of Renaissance France*, New Haven 2013, p. 306.
[6] W. Durant, A. Durant, *The Age of Louis XIV*, New York 2011, pp. 36–41.
[7] G. Treasure, *The Making of Modern Europe 1648–1780*, London–New York 2003, p. 221.

Netherlands. Of course, both examples of the arranged royal intermarriages clearly show that the bridesmaid's side was the defeated (or the inferior) one[8].

French-Habsburg intermarriages were inconsistent with the ingrained European political paradigm until the mid-16th century. Specifically, since both English royalty and the Habsburgs perceived France as their greatest adversary, they often forged alliances confirmed by marital bonds between the two royal houses. The examples of such alliances are the marriage between Catherine of Aragon and Prince Arthur, the older brother of the future King of England Henry VIII, as well as the marriage of Catherine's daughter Mary I of England to her close cousin Philip, who was eventually crowned the King of Spain. The circumstances radically changed upon Elizabeth I's accession to the throne of England. The relationship between the English royal dynasty and the Habsburgs significantly deteriorated after the Act of Uniformity, which excluded Catholics from political life in England, was passed in 1558, at the very beginning of Elizabeth's reign. On the other hand, the French saw Scotland as their ally against England and the marriage of Mary I of England (1558–1560) had such a political background.

Royal marriage strategy was one of the main political guidelines followed and implemented by the leading European countries of the time. Some of those strategies were such an integral part of their foreign policy that they eventually became proverbial, such as the famous Habsburg motto: *Bella gerantalii, tu felix Austria nube*[9]**.** Numerous other European courts led similar marital policies. Members of royal families in French, English, Italian kingdoms, and the Holy Roman Empire were also united with other royal houses through marriages. France used royal marriages to reinforce its bonds with the lands and territories within its realm and sphere of influence, such as the Kingdoms of Navarre, Savoy, and Lorraine.

Although all the leading political forces in Europe used more or less similar strategies in their royal intermarriage policies, the Habsburgs have developed dynastic unions that were far more elaborate and timely than any others.

The key moment in which the Habsburg dynasty gained significant power in Europe was the 1477 wedding of Prince Maximilian, the son of the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick

[8] Firstly, if we take into consideration the efforts of the entire Habsburg dynasty, we can qualify their success in negotiations as partial. Specifically, the fully integrated area of the Holy Roman Empire was divided a few years earlier, in 1556, into Spanish and German lands with Austria. Moreover, the Empire's influence and importance additionally decreased due to its territorial losses in the conflicts with France during the middle of the 16th century. On the other hand, if we take Spain, we can see that it had won its conflicts with France, managed to strengthen its positions in Italy as well as reinforce its realms in French Comte and the Netherlands, which enabled the country to impose its own conditions and create provisions of the Peace of Cateau-Cambrésis.

[9] "Let others make war, you, fortunate Austria, marry!"

III, to Princess Mary of Burgundy. After the death of Mary's father Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, her husband Maximilian became the ruler of almost the whole of Burgundy, which placed the Habsburg Monarchy in the French sphere of influence for the entire early modern period. Of course, the background of the endeavour was to gain control over the rich Rhine Valley, the main European trade route. Further course of events led to a number of conflicts, at first only in the border areas, which later turned into genuine wars between fierce rivals that continued throughout the following two decades. The engagement of a three-year-old Maximilian's daughter Margaret to the French Dauphin Charles[10], was supposed to serve as an act of reconciliation because, following their wedding, Burgundy would become a part of France once again. However, the Habsburgs fell out with France once more as a result of the wedding of Prince Maximilian to Anne of Brittany in 1490, after the death of his first wife Mary. The marriage revealed Maximilian territorial pretensions towards that part of France. After losing Burgundy, the King of France could not afford to lose another portion of his kingdom in the same manner. Taking advantage of the fact that Maximilian and Anne of Brittany had been married via proxy and their marriage was never consummated, Charles had the marriage annulled by the Pope and pressured Anne to marry him instead.

Maximilian I (1508–1519)[11] sought a powerful ally to help him resist French attacks and he found one in the United Kingdom of Spain. After the *Reconquista*, Spain became a very powerful and respectable kingdom on the European scene, ruled by a Catholic couple Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile. The Spanish dynasty of Aragon also ruled the Kingdom of Sicily and Kingdom of Naples. Since King Charles VIII of France laid claim to the Kingdom of Naples and eventually conquered it in 1495 during his military campaign in Italy, Spain was thus "pushed" into alliance with the Habsburgs against their common enemy – France. The event posed an opportunity Maximilian would not waist. He entered negotiations with Ferdinand II of Aragon about an alliance between them and a warranty of the alliance would be two marriages between their royal houses. In 1496, Maximilian had his son Philip the Handsome married to Princess Joanna of Castile and his daughter Margaret to the heir apparent John, Prince of Asturias[12]. The Habsburgs did not have any great expectations of Philip's marriage since Joanna of Castile was only third in line of succession, following her brother Prince John of Asturias and her sister Princess Isabella. However, as

[10] B. Curtis, *The Habsburg: The History of a Dynasty*, London 2013, p. 49.

[11] Maximilian I became the ruler of all Austrian lands and the Holy Roman Empire immediately after the death of his father Friedrich III in 1493. However, he did not wear his royal crown because, at the time, it was customary for an Emperor to be crowned by the Pope. He was eventually crowned in 1508 by Pope Julius II, his ally in the War of the League of Cambrai. Maximilian was the last Emperor crowned by the Pope.

[12] B. Curtis, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

chance would have it, her brother died suddenly the following year, 1497, and a year after that, her sister died, too. The course of events made Joanna of Castile heir apparent to the Spanish throne. However, Prince Philip the Handsome or, since 1506, Philip I of Castile did not enjoy his reign as a king for long because he died that same year. He left his wife Joanna and their six children behind him: sons Charles and Ferdinand and daughters Eleanor, Isabella, Mary, and Catherine. After his son's death, Maximilian became the guardian of Philip's children, which enabled him not only to interfere with Spanish internal and external affairs but to continue his marriage policy with his grandchildren. To terminate the animosity between himself and the Hungarian king Vladislaus II, in 1515 Maximilian made a mutual succession pact with him and arranged a double marriage alliance accordingly[13]. His ten-year-old granddaughter Mary was married to Vladislaus' son Prince Louis II of Bohemia and Hungary and, a few years later, his grandson Ferdinand married Princess Anne of Bohemia and Hungary. Maximilian's eldest granddaughter Eleanor was first married to the Portuguese King Manuel I. After his death, in 1530 she married King Francis I of France. Judging by the events that followed, the marriage did not prevent Francis I from leading a war against his brother-in-law Charles V. The remaining two of Charles' sisters, Isabella and Catherine, were married to King Christian of Denmark and King John III of Portugal, respectively. As a result of this marital strategy, the descendants of the Habsburg dynasty ruled the entire 1730s Europe, either as regnant kings and queens or as consorts. Their realm spread over the Holy Roman Empire, Spain, the Netherlands, Austria, Hungary, Bohemia, France, Portugal, Denmark, and Norway, which made the Habsburgs omnipresent and exceedingly powerful. Such power and influence enabled the dynasty to practically model the overall European politics of the 16th century. It seems that Maximilian's policy of royal intermarriages had fully justified the proverb cited at the beginning of this chapter.

Very often the goals of a royal house called for inner-dynastic marriage unions, sometimes between the closest of relatives. However, even such unions could sometimes not guarantee long-term peace and stability. The Habsburg dynasty blazed the trail in the number of inner-dynastic marriages although other royal families were also very familiar with the practice. Inner-dynastic marriages between first cousins were rather common at the time. Emperor Charles V had married his maternal first cousin from the Portuguese royal family. His sister Catherine was also married to their first cousin, which makes it a case of a double marriage alliance between first cousins. Charles' son, King Philip II of Spain was married

[13] *Ibidem*, p. 48.

four times, of which three times to his first cousins. His first marriage (1543–1545) was to his first cousin from both maternal and paternal line, Maria Manuela, Princess of Portugal. His second wife (1554–1558) was Queen Mary Tudor of England, who was his first cousin once removed since Mary's mother, Catherine of Aragon, was Philip's great-aunt. His third marriage (1559–1568) to Elisabeth of Valois was the result of the aforementioned Peace of Cateau-Cambrésis, while his fourth wife was Princess Anna of Austria, his niece and the daughter of his first cousin Emperor Maximilian II. Philip was married to Anna between 1570 and her death in 1580, after which he remained a widower for the following eighteen years. It should be pointed out that Anna of Austria was also his double first cousin since she was the daughter of Philip's sister Mary and Maximilian II. The aim of inner-dynastic marriages between Austrian and Spanish branch of the Habsburg was to confirm and reinforce Habsburg dominance in Europe and the pattern proved to be very efficient and thus completely justified. The two royal houses continued the practice of inner-marriage after Philip II, although marriages between first cousins became less likely due to generation gap. Philip's daughter Isabella was also married to an Austrian cousin as was his son and heir Philip III. Similarly, his grandson, Philip IV, also married his close blood relative from Austria. The last descendant of the lineage was Charles II, who was infertile, and his infertility was probably a consequence of generations of inbreeding within the family – his parents were cousins and all his grandparents were from the House of Habsburg[14]. After Charles' death, the Bourbons took over the rule of Spain, which ended the pattern of Austrian-Spanish dynastic liaisons that had lasted for a century and a half. Consequently, Spain began to direct its external affairs more and more towards France and became its ally throughout all the 18th-century conflicts.

The Habsburgs' inner-dynastic marriages negatively affected both their Spanish lineage and the Austrian part of the dynasty. Austria was victorious in the War of Spanish Succession (1700–1714), which provided it with new territories and strengthened its political reputation. However, Emperor Joseph I had died and was succeeded by his brother Charles VI, who was unmarried and had no issue at the time, while late Emperor Joseph I had two daughters, which left Austria without a male heir to the throne. In the course of events, Charles VI attempted to transfer the line of succession to his future issue, both male and female, and degrade his nieces Maria Josepha and Maria Amalia downwards on the line of

[14] A. Wheatcroft, *The Habsburgs: Embodying Empire*, London 1996, pp. 166–167.

succession[15]. He promulgated the Pragmatic Sanction, a document through which he attempted to have his claim acknowledged by other European countries and all the lands within the Monarchy[16]. Austria paid a high price for his claim in the War of Polish Succession and, later on, the War of Austrian Succession (1740–1748)[17].

In the end, the Pragmatic Sanction enabled Maria Theresa to succeed her father Charles VI after all and rule Austria for forty years. However, in accordance with the Salic Law, she could reign only as a co-ruler, first of her husband Francis I Stephen from 1740 until his death in 1765, and then her son Joseph II from 1765 to 1780.

When it comes to the English court, marital politics also played a very important role and was specific in many ways. It was the marriage of Henry VII of the Tudor dynasty to Elizabeth of York that brought an end to three decades of conflict and hostility between the houses of York and Lancaster. Termination of the conflict which shook the country from 1455 to 1485 finally consolidated internal political situation in England[18]. In order to strengthen England's position in Europe, Henry VII arranged his children's marriages with members of Scottish and Spanish royal houses, as well as with the Habsburgs. His eldest son, Arthur, married Catherine of Aragon, his elder daughter Margaret married King James IV of Scotland, and in 1507 he betrothed his younger daughter Mary to the future Emperor Charles V, then still a minor[19]. However, after his father's death, in 1514, Mary's brother Henry VIII forced her to marry against her will to Louis XIII of France, who was 34 years her senior, to ensure and strengthen his position towards France[20]. Louis XII was a widower and had no issue to succeed him, which Henry VIII saw as an opportunity for himself and the England. To Henry's great dismay, Louis XIII died after only three months of marriage. Mary returned to England and married her old friend and Henry's associate, the Duke of Suffolk. She was very determined in her intention to marry Suffolk, notifying her brother of her decision rather soon after the death of her husband Louis XIII, in spite of his disapproval of her interfering with his plans regarding her future marital status. "[...] remembering the great virtues which I

[15] To this end, the Emperor Charles VI referred to the Salic Law, which prohibited female successors to inherit land properties, despite the fact that the law was never applied in practice in Austrian lands. A. Wheatcroft, *op. cit.*, pp. 122–123.

[16] *Ibidem*, pp. 214–215.

[17] C. A. Corcos, *From Agnatic Succession to Absolute Primogeniture: The Shift to Equal Rights of Succession to Thrones and Titles in the Modern European Constitutional Monarchy*, "Michigan State Law Review" vol. 2012, 2012, no. 4, pp. 1606–1607.

[18] D. Loades, *The Tudor Queens of England*, London–New York 2009, pp. 75–76.

[19] L. Carroll, *Notorious Royal Marriages: A Juicy Journey Through Nine Centuries of Dynasty, Destiny, and Desire*, New York 2010, p. 92.

[20] E. A. Sadlack, *The French Queen's Letters. Mary Tudor Brandon and the Politics of Marriage in Sixteenth-Century Europe*, New York 2011, pp. 43–53.

have seen and perceived heretofore in my Lord of Suffolk, to whom I have always been of good mind, as ye well know, I have affixed and clearly determined to marry with him [...]"[21].

Henry VII was succeeded by his son Henry VIII, who has already been mentioned in previous paragraphs. Capable and intelligent and, at the same time, self-centred, smug, and rather whimsical, Henry VIII is remembered as one of the most controversial European rulers, especially with regards to his numerous marriages. He was a very defiant and authoritative ruler who did not allow anybody to contradict him. Moreover, he was obsessed with the desire to have a male heir, and his personality made it quite easy for him to discard the women he had once claimed to adore simply because they failed to provide him with an heir. He engaged in numerous extramarital affairs and repeatedly declared his own children bastards excluding them from the line of succession. When destiny finally smiled on him and his wife Jane Seymour gave birth to a boy, his happiness did not last for long since Jane, his third wife, died twelve days after childbirth. Henry's fickleness towards his wives gained him a bad reputation in European royal courts and he began to face rejection. Being the wife of Henry VIII was quite a dangerous occupation. "Gorgeous sixteen-year-old Christina, the Danish-descended Duchess of Milan, wittily insisted that if God had given her two heads she would willingly risk one to marry the King of England, but as she only had *one*..."[22]. His whimsicality was a prominent feature in his other three marriages. His marriage to Anne of Cleaves was his only politically influenced marriage, which he entered at the urging of his chief minister Thomas Cromwell in order to gain support of the Holy Roman Empire's duchies for his protestant reformation politics[23]. Catherine Howard, his sixteen-year-old bride, who entered the marriage at the urging of her power-hungry parents[24], paid her transgressions with her life. However, the aged king, who was merely a shadow of himself at the time, had refused to doubt her fidelity for a long time. His final marriage to Katherine Parr was probably the result of his coming to terms with his condition and accepting the situation in which he basically only needed somebody who would take care of him.

Henry's much desired son and heir, King Edward VI, neither left an heir nor did his reign (1547–1553) leave a particular mark in English history, considering he died at the age of sixteen after a lifetime of malaise. However, his regents Duke of Somerset and Duke of Northumberland had managed to cause significant complications, particularly with regards to religious politics. His successors and older half-sisters Mary and Elisabeth, who ruled

[21] L. Carroll, *op. cit.*, p. 92.
[22] *Ibidem*, p. 160.
[23] M. Farquhar, *op. cit.*, pp. 9–10.
[24] D. Loades, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

England over the following half a century, had yet to deal with the aftermath of the regents' decisions. Mary's and Elisabeth's reign demonstrated that women were not merely objects in European politics. Mary I of England ruled completely autonomously and with full support of the Parliament, which decided to overlook her restoration of Catholicism in England provided she did not raise the issue of the estates of the Catholic Church which had been confiscated during Reformation. Mary I (or "Bloody" Mary) was married to her cousin, Prince Philip II of Spain, who was eleven years her junior. However, after becoming the King of Spain, her husband left England to completely dedicate himself to ruling Spain. He returned to England only once after that and that was not to see his wife but to seek military assistance in his conflict with France. As it turned out, his visit would not be remembered as a favourable one since shortly after it, England would lose its final stronghold on the European mainland, the city and port of Calais[25].

Philip's accession to the throne of Spain made Mary I the queen consort of Spain but, *de facto*, it only caused her losses. She failed to produce a child, her husband left her, her subjects hated her, and she was in constant fear that everything she had fought for would be destroyed after her death. She sank deep into sorrow and despair that lasted until the end of her life in 1558, which was met with relief by her subjects.

Mary's half-sister, Elizabeth I, also ruled autonomously and for a long period of 45 years (1558–1603). The very beginning of her reign confirmed that Queen Mary's fears regarding the legacy of Catholic restoration in England had been justified. Elizabeth's promulgation of the Act of Supremacy and Act of Uniformity made her the archenemy of the Catholic Church, the Pope, and numerous Catholic countries. She had received numerous marriage proposals during her reign, one of which was from Philip II of Spain, her late sister's husband, but she chose not to marry. Her reluctance to enter marriage probably had origins in traumas and horrors she had experienced as a child, particularly the execution of her mother Anne Boleyn and poor treatment she had received from her father. However, she was probably not willing to share the power and influence she had for herself as a queen with a husband[26].

Elizabeth was the last ruler of the Tudor dynasty. It is a paradox that a king who had desired and eventually got a male heir had his true successor in his daughter Elizabeth, a remarkable woman who marked an entire era and brought England at the peak of its glory.

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[25] M. Farquhar, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
[26] *Ibidem*, pp. 56–57.

The Tudors were succeeded by the House of Stuart in 1603, their first ruler being King James I of England. He was the son of Mary I of England who was beheaded at the order of her half-sister Elizabeth I sixteen years earlier. James I (1603–1625) came from Scotland, which, in the meantime, had become predominately Presbyterian and, despite being a son of a devout Catholic, he supported the Church of England. His successors would not follow in his footsteps although all of them would face the same problem: conflicts with the Parliament, which repeatedly refused monarchs' attempts of absolutism and defended parliamentary rights established in the 1215 Magna Carta. His constant disapproval of the Parliament's requests, resulted in his inability to impose new taxes and pushed England's foreign policy in isolation. Therefore, he was not able to provide military assistance for his daughter Elizabeth who was married to Frederick V, Elector Palatine[27]. At the beginning of the Thirty Years' War, Frederick was crowned King of Bohemia, which, for a brief period, made Elizabeth the queen consort. Wartime developments caused the couple to flee Bohemia. However, their daughter Sophia, who eventually married the Elector of Hanover, became the initiator of a new royal house after the House of Stuart had ended.

As far as religious affiliations of spouses in the West are concerned, it is important to point out that royal intermarriages in the 16th and 17th centuries were contracted mainly between spouses of the same denomination. Royal intermarriages between spouses of different religious affiliation were extremely rare and, in such cases, the bride was expected to convert to her husband's religion. With regards to that, it was quite humiliating for Prince Charles (future King Charles I of England) and his entourage led by the Lord of Buckingham when, during their official visit to the Spanish court in 1623 regarding his betrothal to Infanta Maria Anna of Spain[28], he was asked to renounce his denomination to the Church of England and convert to Roman Catholicism in order to proceed with the marriage. Despite dire financial straits England had found itself in at the time (due to the conflict between the King and the Parliament), the English delegation in Spain refused to consent to such coercion and withdrew from the marriage agreement[29]. Spanish demand is quite understandable if we take into consideration that it happened amidst the Thirty Years' War, in which Spain, Austria and Bavaria had been the main forces in the fight against Protestantism. Anyway, soon after a marriage agreement between Charles, Prince of Wales, and Princess Maria Henrietta of

[27] K. Curran, *Marriage, Performance, and Politics at the Jacobean Court*, Farnham–Burlington 2008, pp. 4–5, 43.

[28] G. Redworth, *The Prince and the Infanta. The Cultural Politics of the Spanish Match*, New Haven–London 2003, pp. 1–2.

[29] B. R. Peters, *Marriage in Seventeenth-Century English Political Thought*, New York 2004, pp. 149–150.

France was reached. Maria Henrietta had not only kept her Roman Catholic faith but she also raised their children, Royal Princes Charles and James in the spirit of Catholicism. Their upbringing had severe repercussions for English politics because both princes, who eventually succeeded as kings, tolerated Catholicism during their respective reigns. Moreover, James II (1685–1688) had converted to Roman Catholicism well before became a king. The birth of James Francis Edward from James II's second marriage to Mary of Modena alerted the Parliament because it meant that the king's Catholic son was the legal heir apparent to the throne, which, again, presented a threat of a new catholic restoration in England. Therefore, the Parliament illegally invited William of Orange, Stadtholder[30] in the Netherlands and husband of James II's elder daughter Mary, to take over the throne of England. The Parliament's disrespect of the line of succession eventually led to the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and faced England with the threat of Jacobitism[31], which would continue until 1746. The Stuarts, like their predecessors the Tudors, ended their rule of England with a queen. However, Queen Anne (1702–1714), the first ruler of Great Britain, could not measure up to her glorious predecessor Elizabeth I.

The demise of the House of Stuarts resulted in the accession of a new dynasty to the British throne. The first representative of the Hanoverian dynasty (1714–1727) was George I of England (1714–1727). The first Hanoverians were not particularly popular among the British for several reasons. Specifically, the rulers from the House of Hanover were also Electors of Hanover in the Holy Roman Empire and they used to spend most of their time on the European continent in order to deal with the politics of Hanover, leaving their ministers and the Parliament to tailor the politics of Great Britain[32]. Furthermore, neither George I nor other five rulers from the House of Hanover, Queen Victoria included, married a member of the British nobility. Instead, they picked their spouses exclusively from German dukedoms. In addition, George I could not speak English and, even when he was in England, he spent time with his German mistress who bore him three illegitimate children. He had divorced his only legitimate wife Sophia Dorothea of Celle as early as 1694 because of her alleged adultery and had her put under house arrest in the castle of Ahlden until her death in 1726[33]. His son and Successor George II (1727–1760) was married to Caroline of Ansbach and fathered nine

[30] A title similar to that of a king, used by the head of United Provinces in the Netherlands.

[31] This refers to the attempts of James' male heirs to become rulers of England, which legitimately belonged to them in the first place. James Francis Edward Stuart was the first who attempted to become king in 1714, followed by his son, Charles Edward Stuart in 1745.

[32] G. M. Trevelyan, *A Shortened History of England*, London 1988, p. 381.

[33] L. Carrol, *op. cit*., pp. 236–247; E. Herman, *Sex with the Queen: 900 Years of Vile Kings, Virile Lovers, and Passionate Politics*, New York 2007, pp. 97–128.

children by her, seven of which reached adulthood. George II was not particularly faithful to his wife but he respected her and valued her advice since she turned out to be very capable and of great assistance to both the king and Prime Minister Walpole, with whom she coordinated British politics[34].

The last ruler of Great Britain in the Early Modern Age was King George III (1760–1820). Unlike his two predecessors, George III devoted himself to politics much more and used to often exceed his authority, which got him into conflicts with the Parliament. He fathered fifteen children with his wife Charlotte, daughter of the Duke of Mecklenburg, thirteen of whom reached adulthood[35]. King George III took his roles of the ruler and head of the Church of England very seriously and behaved accordingly. He advocated high moral standards in marriage and family life. Disappointed with debauchery of certain members of the royal family, in 1772 he passed the Royal Marriages Act. The Act, which has been in force to this day, provided that all royal marriages, beginning with marriages of his father George II's issue, are to be deemed invalid and be annulled if they were not contracted with the consent of the reigning monarch. Princes and Princesses who had been refused the sovereign's consent to marry have to wait until they are twenty-five years of age, when they are allowed to give notice to the Privy Council of their intention to marry[36]. According to several testimonies, there is a reasonable doubt that George III had been secretly married to a Quaker named Hannah Lightfood and had three illegitimate children with her, which would have rendered his marriage to Charlotte invalid and all their issue usurpers of the throne of Great Britain[37].

Application of the Salic Law in France prevented women from inheriting the throne or ruling autonomously[38]. However, the law did not prevent dowager queens of France to rule as regents of their underage sons until they come of age. As chance would have it, all three dowager queens of France between 1560s and the middle of the 17th century (1653) who had issue had ruled as regents: Catarina de Medici in the name of her son Charles, Marie de Medici, the second wife of Henry IV, in the name of her son Lois XIII from 1610 to 1617, and the latter's wife and widow Anna of Austria, daughter of Philip III of Spain, in the name of her son Louis XIV from 1643 to 1653. During the entire Early Modern period, male

[34] A. Hanham, *Caroline of Brandenburg-Ansbach and the 'Anglicisation' of the House of Hanover*, in: *Queenship in Europe, 1660–1815. The Role of the Consort*, ed. C. C. Orr, Cambridge 2004, p. 276; A. C. Thompson, *Britain, Hanover and the Protestant Interest, 1688–1756*, Woodbridge–Rochester 2006, pp. 168–170.

[35] A. Weir, *op. cit.*, p. 286; M. Farquhar, *op. cit.*, p. 215.

[36] A. Weir, *op. cit.*, pp. 286–299.

[37] *Ibidem*, p. 286.

[38] C. A. Corcos, *op. cit.*, pp. 1602–1603.

members of the French royal house entered marriages with members of Roman Catholic royal houses of Europe. Only two marriages of the period were inconsistent with the usual paradigm. The first was the marriage between Philip Duke of Orleans, brother of Louis IV, and his first cousin Princess Henrietta Anna, daughter of Henrietta Maria of France, queen consort of England. The second case was the marriage of Louis Dauphin of France to Maria Josepha, daughter of Prince-Elector of Saxony, contracted in 1747. The Dauphin entered the marriage at the urging of his father, Louis XV, and his father's mistress Madame de Pompadour for achievement of strategic interests. Neither of the aforementioned Princes had the fortune to become the King of France.

Love life in strategically arranged royal marriages is perhaps best described by Eleanor Herman, a journalist and women's history author, at the beginning of the first chapter of her book *Sex with Kings*: "»When there's marriage without love, there will be love without marriage« – Benjamin Franklin"[39].

Royal spouses, males in particular, regularly compensated their dissatisfactory marital lives with extramarital affairs. At the time, all women, including queens, were primarily entrusted with the upbringing of children. Royal mistresses were more of a rule than an exception at the majority of European courts. King Louis XIV of France took the institution of a royal mistress one step further and introduced the category of official royal mistresses. Perhaps the most famous royal mistress was his official mistress, Marquise of Montespan, with whom he had seven children. Madame de Pompadour, the famous mistress of Louis XV of France, succeeded in exploiting her love affair with the King to strengthen her own political influence and become one of the most influential person at the French court and the King's most trusted confidant[40]. Royal counsellors had to watch over all the King's decisions carefully to prevent him to enable one of his illegitimate children to ascend to the throne in a moment of weakness.

The English court was also not spared of extramarital affairs. Charles II of England was notorious for his transgressions. He did not father any children with his wife Catherine of Braganza but had as many as fourteen children with his numerous mistresses. One of those children, Lord of Monmouth, had the full support of the Protestant faction in the Parliament to inherit the throne after his father's death. The faction saw his illegitimate accession to the

[39] E. Herman, *Sex with Kings: Five Hundred Years of Adultery, Power, Rivalry, and Revenge*, New York 2004, p. 13.

[40] K. Norberg, *Women of Versailles*, in: *Servants of the Dynasty. Palace Women in World History*, ed. A. Walthall, Berkeley–Los Angeles–London 2008, pp. 191–213.

throne as a much less threat to the monarchy as the accession of his pro-Catholic brother James II.

Streszczenie

Polityka małżeńska europejskich dynastii królewskich w okresie wczesnonowożytnym

Polityka małżeńska w Europie wczesnonowożytnej stanowiła ważny składnik ogólnej polityki czołowych monarchii europejskich, do której często odwoływano się, aby zrealizować cele polityczne. Polityka małżeńska prowadziła do zawarcia sojuszy, finalizowała negocjacje pokojowe oraz kończyła długotrwałe konflikty. Małżeństwa między przedstawicielami tej samej dynastii, nawet między bliskimi kuzynami, były niejednokrotnie aranżowane z tych samych powodów, bowiem królewska sukcesja stanowiła najważniejszy aspekt polityki małżeńskiej. Niepowodzenie w zapewnieniu dziedzica tronu, zwłaszcza męskiego, prowadziło do kryzysów dynastycznych, które często przekształcały się w konflikty zbrojne. Chociaż w działaniach politycznych tego rodzaju kobiety były z reguły traktowane jedynie jako przedmiot, to liczne przykłady pomyślnych rządów monarchiń w Anglii, Rosji czy Monarchii Habsburskiej przeczą takim poglądom i udowadniają, że królowe te rządziły swoimi krajami i przyczyniały się do ich świetności z takimi samymi sukcesami, jak ich męscy odpowiednicy.

Słowa kluczowe: polityka małżeńska, aranżowanie małżeństw, dynastie królewskie, Europa wczesnonowożytna, Habsburgowie

Key words: marriage politics, marriage arrangements, royal dynasties, Early Modern Europe, the Habsburgs

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