

Dynastic Marriages 1612/1615: A Celebration of the Habsburg and Bourbon Unions

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Dynastic marriages were of crucial importance in early modern Europe. Looking at the international scenario, the consequences of a marriage agreement between European ruling houses could be compared to those generated by the outbreak of a war or the signing of a peace treaty. This collection edited by Margaret McGowan results from a conference sponsored by the Society for European Festival held at the Warburg Institute in 2011, and the essays focus on the double marriage agreements between Spain and France in the early 17th century. By bringing together 14 different contributions that analyse the Habsburgs and Bourbons unions from different disciplines, the editor proves that it is essential to discuss dynastic marriages from an interdisciplinary perspective. Only such an approach allows the reader to grasp the diplomatic reasons for the unions, the political and economic consequences of such marriages, along with the popular celebrations that accompanied the events and the theatrical and literary works that followed them.

In the introduction, McGowan deals with the importance of festivals in the double marriage alliance between the Habsburgs and the Bourbons in 1612–15 and provides a brief overview of each contribution. The author's words in the introduction are revisited in the epilogue where McGowan takes the reader back to the *leitmotif* of the collection. Given the importance of the Franco-Spanish marriages, considered by contemporaries to be comparable to that of Alexander the Great and Roxane, Princess of Persia (p. 244), the volume successfully investigates the reasons why the responses to the news of the marriages were different in different European countries and so were the celebrations.

In the first chapter of the collection, Sir John H. Elliott begins with the choreographic exchange of brides – the Infanta Ana, daughter of Philip III of Spain and Madame Elizabeth, daughter of Henry IV of France – that took place on 9 November 1615 at the Bidasoa river, which divides Spain and France. The rest of his essay is devoted to the analysis of the diplomatic concerns and the *realpolitik* which led to this exchange at the river and therefore to the alliance between Habsburgs and Bourbons. The historical context outlined by Elliott starts with the French civil wars in the 16th century, and with a short outline of French policy towards Spain before and after the accession to the throne and the religious conversion of Henry IV. The author recognises the peace treaty between Spain and France signed at Vervins in 1598 and the peace treaty between Spain and England decided in London in 1604 as two crucial moments. At the time in which Spain decreased its involvement in European conflicts, an intense season of marriage agreements opened, encouraged, for the Spanish-French part, by Pope Clement VIII. Professor Elliott continues by sketching an interesting picture of the concerns of the Spanish State Council in Madrid, which were mainly related to the 'reputation' of the country on the European chessboard (p. 7). The same kind of concerns were shared by King James I in England, who also sought a match with Spain, in order to rebalance his daughter Elizabeth's marriage to Frederick, the Elector Palatine. Elliott's major contribution is precisely in inserting the 1612–15 celebrations in the wider European context by drawing broader conclusions on the involvement of the two parties in the Thirty Years' War and on the reasons for the eventual outbreak of a French-Spanish conflict in 1635.

Nicolas Le Roux's essay is concerned with placing the marriage agreements in the complex scenario of French politics and of the religious tensions that followed the assassination of King Henry IV. Great attention is given to the figure of Maria de Medici and to her choices in pursuing a Spanish alliance (p. 26). In the second part of his paper, by looking at parliamentary politics, Le Roux focuses on Condé's rebellion against the government of the Queen Mother and against the marriage alliance with Spain, which threatened the very existence of the Protestant religion (p. 34). The author's important conclusion is that the position of Condé and other key members of the French political system was not only an antagonistic position towards the Spanish, but also a way of protesting against 'the weak government of a foreign woman' (p. 38).

David Sánchez Cano's contribution discusses how in Spain there are fewer descriptions of the marriages than in France, although the Habsburgs formally supported the unions with the Bourbons. The author focuses his attention on the journey of Elizabeth I of Bourbon and her entry in Madrid. ⁽¹⁾Philip III, who did not want to meet the delegation of the French authorities, decided to send Lerma in his place but the king watched the exchange on the river Bidasoa from a secret location. After a brief overview of the celebrations in Burgos and Segovia, Sánchez Cano then devotes his attention to the situation in Madrid. The princess' entrance and the costs associated with the celebrations offer an excellent case study that illustrates the tensions between the court, the favourite Duke of Lerma, the city council, and the merchants (p. 46). These tensions manifested themselves most obviously in the masquerade and in the complex iconography of the triumphal wagons: Madrid was a witness to the problematic situation of 1615 when the power of Lerma was still almost absolute and the city feared to lose again her primacy to Valladolid, where the court had been moved from 1601 to 1606.

In the fourth chapter, Maria Inès Aliverti draws a broad overview of the extent to which marriages were considered and celebrated in Italy as a result of the peace signed at Vervins in 1598. Regarding the Italian states, the celebrations of 1612–15 must be placed in the context of other celebrations, in the same decade, that had a fundamental impact in the evolution of the genre of the spectacle and the opera: the wedding

celebrations of Francesco Gonzaga with Margaret of Savoy and those of Cosimo de' Medici with Maria Magdalena d' Austria. The author uses a solid corpus of primary sources – dividing the festivities' accounts into three groups, depending on the topic and the country in which they were published – to demonstrate how the marriages of 1612–15 were celebrated differently within each of the Italian states. In Rome, given the busy schedule of liturgical and religious celebrations, the only event of great splendor was the entrance of the Prince of Royal Blood Chevalier Vendôme in 1615. There were not many celebrations in Northern Italy: neither the Duchy of Savoy nor Venice hosted grand events, and the Duchy of Padua was still isolated following the plot against Ranuccio Farnese. But, if in the North the main reason for the scarce celebrations was largely political, due to the delicate relationship between the French and the Spanish ambassador, in the south of Italy the situation was much more heterogeneous. In Messina money for the celebrations were collected and subsequently used for other purposes in an attempt to show contempt for these celebratory occasions in which so much money was being used (pp. 72–3). On the contrary, the festivities in Naples – ruled by the seventh Count of Lemos – were grand and the climax was a foot tournament staged in May 1612 and followed by other celebrations in February 1616.

In the following chapter 'The carrousel of 1612 and the festival book', Marie Baudière deals with the differences between France, Germany and Italy in the publication of what can be termed as 'book festival'. She discusses the case of the equestrian spectacle that depicted the French court around the king and his mother and the rights of publication who were firstly given to Honoré de Laugier Porchères and then to Francois de Rosset (who published respectively *Le camp de la place Royale* and *Le carrousel des pompes et magnificences*). The author argues that the fact that French texts had no (or only very few) illustrations was part of a long tradition at the French court that differed greatly from what was happening at the same time in Germany and Italy where the images of each festival were numerous, and contributed, with the text, 'in recording ... those ephemeral spectacles' (p. 85). The reason for this difference lies in the fact that part of the court was against the pro-Spanish policy of Maria de Médicis. However, there are some French illustrated accounts, but those are mainly concerned with royal entries, including those of Henry II, Charles IX, Henry III, Henri IV, and Louis XIII. In those, the images seem to accompany the text only when the main purpose of the publication is to praise the power of the sovereign.

As the previous essay, the contribution written by Monique Chatenet also discusses the carrousel on the Place Royale. The author, however, focuses more on the material aspect of the carrousel, than on the importance of the occasion *per se* or on the accounts published following the event. Chatenet considers the construction of the Royal Palace – just completed in 1612 – and the large size of the square to explain the construction of wooden structures for spectators and the pavilion of the king. To support her reconstruction, the author uses the engravings of Claude Chastillon (whose view is from east) and Jan Ziarnko (from south). The author continues by describing the machines, the colours, the fabrics, and the characters depicted in the engravings but recognises that any scene we recreate today is extremely approximate (p.110). The conclusions drawn by Chatenet, in line with those of Baudière, downplay the direct influence of Italian precedents on the 1612 carrousel, while re-evaluating instead the legacy of Valois festivals (see chapter eight, p. 153).

Chapter seven, by Patrice Franchet d'Espèrey, is concerned with the horse ballet staged by Antoine de Pluvinel for the festivities on the Place Royal in April 1612 and with Pluvinel's posthumous work, *Maneige Royal*, which was published in Paris in 1626, three years after the death of its author. Franchet d'Esperey stresses that we cannot think about horses and equestrian knowledge unless one takes into account on one hand Pluvinel's political role in the court and, on the other hand, the broader context of equestrian art in the 16th and 17th century. Pluvinel had a prominent position at court and was one of the few courtiers who could enter the king's bedchamber. His equestrian knowledge stemmed mainly from Italian masters, being the Academy of Naples the most advanced institution whose reputation was famous throughout Europe. The *Maneige Royal* is therefore to be read in the wider context of its political and pedagogical value and not only as a mere account of the Carrousel of 1612.

Iain Fenlon's contribution firstly considers the figure of Maria de Medici and the opinion that contemporaries had of her. Many of her subjects considered her policy of alliance with Spain as a betrayal of

the 'Gallic' project of Henry IV while the queen considered the Franco-Spanish marriages and the subsequent peace as the greatest diplomatic success of her regency. To testify to the importance of this new alliance after the hostilities between the two countries that had characterised Henry IV's reign, the representations of the French and Spanish monarchies were placed in the parade at the Place Royal. Secondly, the author discusses the close link between royal patronage and Pierre Ballard as a printer, once he obtained a virtual monopoly as the royal music printer (p. 144). As with other contributions in this edited collection, the conclusions of this chapter go well beyond the celebrations of 1612–15: Fenlon refers to the concepts of 'consumption' and 'magnificence' as mechanisms to transform power into wealth and status.

Chapter nine, by Paulette Choné, studies very briefly the reaction of the Catholic faction as soon as the news of the Franco-Spanish marriage project arrived at the French court. The Guise and Epernon decided to prepare a carrousel; Choné analyses the various entries of this Carrousel by reconstructing the people and the devices involved as described in the newspaper *Le Mercure François* (Paris, 1615) (see chapter ten) and Rosset's *Le Romant des chevaliers de la Gloire* (Paris, 1612). The author argues that the use of pagan myths and emblems appears to be a means of self-promotion for the nobles as well as a means of propagation of the strategies of the crown.

The following essay, by the editor of the collection Margaret M. McGowan, examines the two most significant forms of festivals organised in France to celebrate the marriages in 1612–15: the carrousel (already discussed previous contributions) and the *Ballet de cour*. The latter, similar in many respects to the Carrousel in terms of entries, mythological themes, and music, has, however, a different audience as it was a private event and not a public celebration as the carrousel in Place Royal in 1612. In the first part of the essay, McGowan reconstructs the carrousel starting from Rosset's account which the author considers to be the most comprehensive and detailed (see chapter nine). The way in which McGowan goes a step further than the previous essays in the collection is in her emphasis on Maria de Medici's desire to impress Europe with a carrousel that would exceed the festivities of Florence and Turin in 1608. The regent was very aware of the importance of using public celebrations for political purposes. In the second part of the essay, McGowan deals with the *Ballet de cour* danced in March 1615 in the Salle de Bourbon of the Louvre. This private occasion was the time when the court greeted Princess Elizabeth, who was leaving for Spain, as the symbol of a new dawn brought by the alliance between the Habsburgs and Bourbons. As suggested by the title of this essay, the celebrations of 1612–15 had a much longer life than contemporaries could have imagined and were already recalled, ten years later, during the celebrations of the marriage between Henrietta Maria and Charles.⁽²⁾

Marie-Claude Canova Green explains the extent to which the iconographic vocabulary used during the festivals of 1612–15 and the entry in Bordeaux on 29 November 1615 was the bearer of a double agenda. On the one hand, the events depicted the ideals of peace, love and prosperity through, for example, the allegory of the two countries kissing each other on the Palace of Felicity or the providential character Jean Le Clerc's engraving. On the other hand, the stability brought by the union of the houses of Habsburgs and Bourbons was seen in France as instrumental to French hegemony over Europe, as exemplified by the imperial eagle adorning one of the gates at the time of the king's entry in Bordeaux and by references to Roman emperors. This essay, one of the best of the collection, successfully asserts the political and diplomatic ambiguity behind the scenes of any public celebration or royal exhibition of power.

In a comparative effort that takes into account fireworks displays in Paris, London, and Heidelberg, Paulette Choné (3) argues that it is crucial to notice the impact of such displays as printed sheets with illustrations and explanations concerning the fireworks were widely available. Whether on the occasion of the celebrations of 1612 in France, or in the case of the 1613 celebrations in London for the wedding of Elizabeth, daughter of King James Stuart, with Frederick V, the Elector Palatine, or in Heidelberg, when Elizabeth and Frederick were welcomed by the city, fireworks performed a central role and can be analysed on different levels. Most interestingly the author discusses not only the technical knowledge (i.e. John Babington's *Pyrotechnia*) which was transferable and shared by French, English and German gunners, but also the ultimate goal of such fireworks displays, which is to say the self-promotion as the sovereign as ruler of the elements with the 'power to destroy and to illuminate' (p. 211).

Chantal Grell's contribution, titled 'The fêtes of 1612-1615 in history and historiography', gives a historiographical sketch of Maria de Medici. Historians often have an unfavourable opinion on her ability to govern, her negative characteristics being mostly her *hispanophilia* and her gender. Her contemporaries accused the Queen of following the Pope and the Jesuits to the detriment of France as the Huguenots feared that the Franco-Spanish marriages would put at risk the Edict of Nantes, leaving France into the hands of the Spanish Inquisition. The second part of this essay is devoted to one of the artistic representations of marriage – the Rubens cycle – which was to be completed by 1625, at the time of Henrietta Maria's marriage with Charles. The author shows that the primary purpose of Maria de Medici's actions as well as the artistic works produced under her patronage, was the need for peace (as it was for James I of England when pursuing a Spanish match) and the affirmation of her royal authority. Authority was in fact strongly 'legitimized through the apotheosis of the marriages' (p. 222).

In the last essay of the collection, J.R. Mulryne, enlarges the historical and political context in which the marriage agreements were signed in 1612–15 by referring to the festivals celebrated in the late 16th and early 17th century in the two European courts, that of the Medici in Florence and the Stuarts in England. In 1589, a spectacular array of festivities was offered for the wedding of the Grand Duke Ferdinand with Princess Christine of Lorraine. The meaning of these festivities is to be found – according to the author – in the difficult situation of Ferdinand's succession in a period in which the 'Medici primacy in Florence was itself far from secure' (p. 228). Precisely for this reason, many references to Ferdinand's parents, Cosimo and Eleonora di Toledo, were used in the hope of keeping alive the memory of the last Medici's powerful ruler. Florentine cultural life was well known at the court of Prince Henry, heir of King James I, and he even sent an intimate, John Harington, to the Medici court to observe the festivals of 1608. These connections between Florence and England at the court of Henry were mainly due to the influence of Queen Anne of Denmark and the creative work of artists such as Inigo Jones and Ben Jonson.

As it is clear from the volume's introduction and from my brief summary of each essay, the book intentionally concentrates more on popular culture and festivals than on diplomatic or political history, on which only John Elliott's and Nicolas Le Roux's essays focus. In all likelihood, more essays focusing on the historical background *per se* would have helped the less experienced reader to contextualise more effectively the popular culture surrounding the dynastic marriages within the European context of the early 17th century.

Even if the essays are slightly unbalanced towards France, and there is some overlap in that chapters five to nine all describe the carousel of 1612, generally the contributions complement each other in the overall scheme of the volume and the large number of black and white images make the collection even more complete and interesting. This book is and will remain a crucial contribution to the field and something that anybody working on dynastic marriages, early modern diplomacy, and popular culture should take into account.

Notes

1. For a comparison with the entry of Prince Charles in Madrid in 1623, see David Sánchez Cano,

'Entertainments in Madrid for the Prince of Wales: political function of festivals', in *The Spanish Match. Prince Charles' Journey to Madrid, 1623*, ed. by Alexander Samson (Aldershot, 2006), pp. 51–74.[Back to \(1\)](#)

2. On the life and afterlife of celebration at James's court in England, see Kevin Curran, *Marriage, Performance, and Politics at the Jacobean Court* (Farnham, 2009).[Back to \(2\)](#)
 3. Also author of chapter nine (pp. 155–63) in this collection.[Back to \(3\)](#)
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