The true solution for every difficulty: Maria of Austria, Spanish patroness in the Empire, Imperial patroness in Spain

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ABSTRACT

A close relative and counsellor of five emperors and two kings of Spain, Maria of Austria (1528–1603) symbolised the personal union of the House of Austria during the second half of the sixteenth century. She acted as regent of Spain, consort queen of Bohemia, empress, and as dowager empress continued her political activities while ostensibly secluded in a convent. Mainly through non-institutional channels, Maria was the spinal column of the dynasty. Her active role shows the real nature of Renaissance diplomacy and international relations which was much more based on personal and informal contacts than on formal embassies. The successive Spanish and Imperial ambassadors she dealt with were considered her de facto personal servants. Reconstructing diplomacy as a family business carried out through informal agents and networks prompts new questions on political goals and programmes as well as on decision-making and soft-power strategies.

The abdication of Emperor Charles V in 1556 sanctioned the division of the House of Habsburg—or House of Austria as it was frequently referred to—as into two branches.1 From that point on, scholarship has tended to analyse the Spanish and Austrian monarchies as separate entities. Yet the dynastic entente remained intact post 1556 and was reinforced through marriages until the extinction of the Spanish branch in 1700. The strategies for conserving that dynastic tie transcended ordinary diplomacy and cannot be solely explained by studying formal ambassadorial channels. The agency of intermediaries with solid bonds in both the Spanish and Austrian court constituted the core of the system. After Charles V’s abdication and until her death in 1603, the key figure unifying the dynasties was his daughter and later empress, Maria of Austria. Her household at the Imperial Court was the focal point for Spanish patronage and faction-building, while the Spanish ambassador there was not so much acting as the intermediary between the king and the emperor, but rather as an authorised official of Empress Maria.

In spite of Maria’s crucial role, we still lack a comprehensive study of her activities over the course of her entire life. Empress Maria has been largely neglected by scholars of Iberia and of the Holy Roman Empire.2 In both cases, more attention has been devoted to medieval queenship rather than to the early modern period. The German gynaecocracy, triumphant during the High Middle Ages, declined throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, becoming more constrained and playing a more discreet role thereafter.3 On the Iberian side, medieval queenship has been studied as part of the model of Mediterranean queenship based on partnership with the king and a greater access to government and power.4 This model culminates with the exceptional and thoroughly-researched case of Isabel I of Castile (1474–
1504), who has overshadowed her descendants by virtue of being both a proprietary queen and later a central figure of Spanish nation-building.

By contrast, Isabel I’s descendants of the House of Austria rarely held direct power as proprietary queens or even as regents, so they are mostly included in the category of ‘political consorts’. A more accurate picture of their role is emerging from recent research on some of Maria’s closest female relatives, in line with the flourishing Anglophone scholarship on early modern queenship. They were mostly confined to the traditional spaces of motherhood and piety, in which Maria of Austria fulfilled her part. Her two most lasting legacies are the foundation of the Jesuit Imperial College of Madrid and her extensive offspring of sixteen children, including two emperors and two queens. She also deserves a distinguished mention in the Spanish history of art for her ability to choose for her retinue the most skilful and gifted artists, including the poets Bartolomé and Lupercio Argensola, and specially the composers Mateo Flecha Jr. and Tomás Luis de Victoria.

The domestic realm was where these queens obtained the political and ideological tools to succeed in European courts. Maria of Austria is Schnettger’s example of a successful ‘political consort’, who operated through discreet recourse to intercession, mediation and negotiation with the male members of her family, while building her own network. Maria’s case is unique in two aspects: on the one hand, she built an extensive and long-standing dynastic network which later historians have defined as a ‘Spanish faction’ in the Imperial Court. On the other hand, she returned to her native Castile in her widowhood, adapting her role to a very different court. There was a clear and legitimate goal underpinning her actions: the advancement of her family in general and of her children in particular. This accredited her as a caring mother and empowered her as a patroness in a male-dominated political sphere, both in Spain and in Austria. Through Maria’s interaction with her children and servants (including the ambassadors), the broad political style she was raised in –based on familiar loyalty in the Castilian tradition and obedience to the pope– was translated from the domestic sphere to European politics, not least because her children travelled and settled in different courts during the transition from the sixteenth to the seventeenth century.

It is necessary therefore, to transcend a narrow idea of early-modern politics and go beyond councils and representative assemblies, and to follow Theresa Earenfight’s notion of fluid and non-institutionalised power to analyse alternative spaces and their possibilities and strategies of political communication. Mariás political activities were neither formal nor informal in that they contained elements of both: her role was informal in the sense that it was not based on a state paradigm, yet she acted within a formal and legal institution, her household. As such, there were clear instructions to define roles and functions, and its members received written appointments, had to take an oath, and were included in the official records with their regular emoluments. It was a domestic institution, but one where political discussion and intervention were easily developed.

The creation and survival of a Spanish household in Vienna

Maria received her own household in 1548, when she married her cousin Maximilian II, the new king of Bohemia, in Valladolid. This was the first of many dynastic weddings among the members of the House of Austria to reinforce dynastic solidarity. The new couple governed the Spanish kingdoms for almost three years as regents in the absence of both Charles V and crown prince Philip. Maximilian II was the son of Ferdinand I, who was born in Spain but grew
up in the cosmopolitan court of Vienna. The household he brought to Valladolid was a mix of Iberian and Central European servants, but he failed to ‘acclimatise’ to Spain. Maximilian II did not connect with his Spanish heritage for political and confessional reasons: his ambiguous pro-Lutheran position did not fit in with increasingly radical Spanish Catholicism. Moreover, Ferdinand I acted as a follower of the Spanish branch of the dynasty and was heavily influenced by the few Spaniards in his retinue. Maximilian II reacted against this form of control and equated his independence as a ruler with the exclusion of Spaniards in his entourage. But he honoured other subjects of Philip II, mainly from the Netherlands.12

In 1551, Maria and Maximilian II moved definitively from Spain to Central Europe. He dismissed almost every Spaniard in his household. By contrast, Maria did not choose German or Bohemian servants. Her household was smaller than in Valladolid (reduced from 133 to 108 individuals) because many of her courtiers preferred to remain in their motherland, but their substitutes were, in many cases, the Spaniards expelled from the service of Maximilian II.13 In this context, Maria’s reluctance to become fully integrated in the Imperial Court was not a caprice but a conscious political decision supported by Charles V and Philip II. Maria’s household in Vienna remained an isolated Spanish microcosm where she could maintain rigid Catholic morality and the Burgundian-Castilian style of service of her mother Isabel of Portugal. This also reflected her sense of the superiority of the Spanish nation and her confessional mistrust of Central European courtiers.14 Linked to this mindset there was also a problem of authority. Who had the power to decide over the composition of Maria’s household after 1556: her husband Maximilian II, her father-in-law Ferdinand I or her brother Philip II?

The resulting situation was ambiguous: the Spaniards serving Maria were part of a broader patronage network and showed more loyalty to Philip II, who had been instrumental in their appointment, than to Maximilian II. In response, Maximilian II tried to expel most of them back to Spain but was opposed by Ferdinand I, whose relations to the Spanish branch of the dynasty were more submissive. This domestic issue escalated to a diplomatic crisis and two successive official negotiators were sent to resolve it: Pedro Laso in 1554 and Venegas de Figueroa in 1555. In 1557 Philip II decided to reinforce Maria’s household with more Spaniards and to appoint a resident ambassador to assist them.17 This move made clear that the Spanish ambassador was a complement to, and an assistant in Maria’s household, and not the centre of a separate, diplomatic system. The first ambassador, the Count of Luna, was instructed to negotiate the reform of Maria’s household with Maximilian II.18 Ultimately, Maximilian II had to give up and accept that the household of his wife was under the protection of the Spanish king.

Two sections of Maria’s household were especially significant in terms of social influence: her chapel and her chamber. The influence of the clergymen supported by Maria transcended the limits of the Imperial Court. This, added to her support of the activities of the Jesuits, and the
development of Catholic brotherhoods in Prague, led Koller to state that Maria helped to sow the seeds of the Catholic Reformation in the Habsburg Monarchy. The situation in mid-sixteenth century Vienna was quite unfavourable to Catholics, who were a minority there, and where the quality and activity of the remaining clergy was poor.

By contrast, Maria was served by top Spanish theologians, beginning with her confessors, who were carefully selected by a committee of theologians appointed by Philip II. These confessors were Franciscans, as was the custom for Castilian princesses. Choosing and monitoring confessors was regarded as a matter of State in the Spanish Monarchy, because they were expected to be proactive and take a leading role at the Imperial Court. When her first confessor in Vienna, Fernando Cano, died in 1553, the Spanish committee of theologians recommended Pedro Maldonado. However, Maldonado did not prove to be efficient enough for this mission and the Spanish authorities reacted with impatience and authority: in 1558, after only four years of service, Philip II allowed Maldonado to take his leave of Maria. However, as his services in the Empire were considered comparable to a top ecclesiastical position, he was rewarded with the Galician bishopric of Mondoñedo.

His successor as Maria’s confessor, Francisco de Córdoba, did fit the desired profile and rapidly gained authority at the court. Ferdinand I relied on him as his trusted religious advisor and even sent him to the final phase of the Council of Trent. There, as it was expected from Spain, Father Córdoba acted more as an advocate of Philip II’s interests among the Imperial representatives.

Beyond her chapel, Maria protected and funded the Jesuits whom she encouraged to settle in Vienna, where they reached a position of high influence in the following decades. After Rudolf II moved the Imperial Court to Prague in 1578, the Corpus Christi Brotherhood was established in the new capital in 1580—an initiative born in Maria’s entourage. There was already a Catholic congregation in Prague, the Congregazione della Beata Vergine Maria Assunta in Cielo, founded by the Jesuits in 1573 and identified with the Italian community. The new Corpus Christi Brotherhood fitted better the cosmopolitan and courtly outlook of the Imperial Court: it included representatives from the four main Catholic nations (Spain, Italy, Germany and the Netherlands). It was attached to the church of Saint Thomas (the other court church beside the cathedral of St. Vitus), and soon known as the Brotherhood of Saint Thomas of the Spaniards. Many Catholic courtiers were members and both the resident population and visitors were attracted by its famous musical performances, the most outstanding in Rudolf II’s Prague.

If her chapel was socially influential, so was her chamber. It was crucial that Maria be surrounded by Spanish ladies-in-waiting of high aristocratic origin. They guaranteed the conservation of a proper Spanish entourage to raise her children. The daughters in particular lived their youth almost as if they were in a Spanish island in the middle of the Holy Roman Empire, to the point that neither Ana nor Isabel of Austria were proficient in German. Moreover, four of Maria and Maximilian II’s six male children spent most of their childhood at the Spanish Court to guarantee their closeness to the other branch of the dynasty, which had emerged as the more powerful of the two.

Maria’s ladies-in-waiting also had a more concrete role as prized pieces in the ‘court bride market’. Maria took full advantage of her domestic sphere of influence, arranging weddings and paying the dowries of her servants’ marriages with Imperial noblemen. These men valued the access such marriages provided to the high levels of the court as well as Maria’s generous patronage. This was something that the two seventeenth-century Spanish empresses (Maria
Anna and Margaret Theresa of Austria) were unable to do. In this respect, Maria was an exceptional case and her frequent and fruitful interventions followed a clear strategy.\(^{25}\) The political success of the marriages that she sponsored is undeniable, but it was to be especially appreciated one generation later: in 1576, three out of the four top officers of Rudolf II’s Imperial household (Dietrichstein, Rumpf, and Trivulzio) and his chancellor of Bohemia (Wratislaw von Pernstein) were married to ladies-in-waiting of Empress Maria. These ties enabled these families to gain access to the patronage of the Spanish king and to act as representatives of the so-called ‘Spanish faction’ in the Imperial Court.\(^{26}\)

According to Spanish court regulations, ladies-in-waiting were not allowed to take part in political negotiations or to act as conduits for political documents. However, the frequent reiteration of these principles shows that they were persistently ignored and the Imperial Court was no exception.\(^{27}\) Maria’s apologists paint an unconvincing picture of domestic harmony in a cosmopolitan household which does not match actual facts.\(^{28}\) By contrast, the acutest observers (such as the ambassadors Chantonnay and Khevenhüller) depicted a household characterised by uncontrolled spending and luxury. There, Maria appeared isolated and dominated by her Spaniard ladies-in-waiting, who antagonised the German members of the household to the point of provoking the anger of Maximilian II and Rudolf II.\(^{29}\)

### Functioning: domestic diplomacy

The need for a formal and permanent ambassador at the Imperial Court was to a large extent due to the independent and resistant attitude of Maximilian II towards the Spanish—and dominant—branch of the House of Austria. Ferdinand I had normally been more conciliatory so that Philip II resorted to several agents and ad hoc envoys but did not immediately feel the necessity to open a permanent embassy. In the second half of the sixteenth century, and especially while Maria resided at the Imperial Court, the successive Spanish ambassadors had an ambiguous role: as we shall see, they acted as household officials and ministers of the dynasty rather than foreign representatives.

The success of Spanish diplomacy, therefore, relied in the ambassadors functioning differently from professional diplomats. The ambassadors of Philip II obtained precedence over the French delegates in Vienna without historical rights but as a result of the decision of Ferdinand I and his successors, who argued that these diplomats should be especially honoured as representatives of the House of Austria.\(^{30}\) In the courtier’s configuration of power, access to the ruler was the key for success. Consequently, as long as Maximilian II was the emperor and Maria the empress, the Spanish ambassadors enjoyed the highest position at the Imperial Court.

According to royal instructions, the first task of the three ambassadors (Chantonnay, Monteagudo and Borja) who served while Maria was at the Imperial Court was to assist her and follow her advice.\(^{31}\) This was not exceptional: the remark was included in the instructions to ambassadors at the courts where other Spanish princesses resided, such as Juana of Austria in Portugal\(^{32}\) and Catalina Micaela of Austria in Savoy,\(^{33}\) but in this case the statement was more than a formal declaration of respect for rank. The ambassadors’ correspondence shows
that Maria actually acted as a dynamic political agent. Without competing influences of relatives and favourites, Maria had a privileged access to Maximilian II, his decisions and his favour. Despite Maximilian II’s mistrust towards Spaniards in general, different sources agree on the love and respect that the emperor and empress always showed each other.34 Moreover, the wives of Chantonnay, Monteagudo, and Borja were accepted in the elite group of the empress ladies-in-waiting, so they were able to complement the services of their husbands and report on the inner life of the Palace.35

This privileged situation contrasted with the courts of London or Paris, where Spanish ambassadors complained of the extreme limitations they faced in communicating with Spanish-born queens.36 The court of Madrid also constrained queens to prevent them building networks beyond the king’s control. For example, Philip II organised the household of his last wife, Ana of Austria (daughter of the Empress Maria) without accepting external influences although he allowed her a minor political role; the Duke of Lerma, favourite of Philip III, struggled to limit the communications and patronage of Queen Margarita of Austria, as Olivares did with Queen Isabel of Bourbon, the wife of his master Philip IV.37

In this world of micropolitics the personal ingredient was crucial, and an ambassador who was incapable of gaining the Imperial couple’s trust was bound to fail. This was the case for Chantonnay (1565–70), who Maximilian II had known (and hated) since at least 1547. Chantonnay’s appointment was a total mistake on Philip II’s part, because his ambassador never reached a powerful position in Vienna, forcing the king to send special envoys to deal with the most delicate negotiations.38 Maria nevertheless continued to act as a loyal ally to her brother Philip II of Spain and passed on secret information to Chantonnay about several topics, such as Maximilian II’s war plans against the Turks.39

The situation improved greatly after 1570 with the arrival of the refined Count of Monteagudo. The new ambassador also benefited greatly from the more fluid situation at court after the death of the dominant Imperial Vice-Chancellor Johann Ulrich Zasius in April 1570. In the same year, Philip II married Ana of Austria, the eldest daughter of Maria and Maximilian II: the dynastic links got tighter and the contacts between both courts became more frequent.40 Thanks to the continuous support of Maria of Austria, Monteagudo was not treated as a foreign minister but as a household official. The ambassador dined often with the Imperial couple and had open access to the Imperial chamber. He spoke to Maximilian II almost every day, even when Maximilian II was ill and did not grant audiences.41

The modus operandi of Monteagudo was very clear: once he received Philip II’s orders, he always consulted Maria first and followed her advice and recommendations. Thanks to her accurate knowledge of the Imperial Court, Maria knew who the most appropriate ministers were to negotiate every issue. In those cases where they were not part of her trusted circle, Maria proposed bribing them to secure their cooperation in a particular negotiation: for example, to the High Steward Trautson and the Imperial Secretary Weber for considering the League of Landsberg, a Spanish initiative to win German allies against the rebels in Flanders.42

Nonetheless, Maria’s most valued service to Philip II was her personal influence over Maximilian II, with whom she spoke openly on diverse political topics, beginning with Italian affairs. Throughout the 1570s, two of the most delicate issues, and sources of friction, between Philip II and Maximilian II were about the possession of the fief of Finale and the concession of the title of Grand Duke of Tuscany to the Medici. Maria took to heart the negotiation of Finale and acted as the mediator between the Spanish ambassador and the
emperor. Despite Maximilian II’s anger towards the Spanish after they occupied Finale without waiting for the Imperial investiture, relations were never broken and Maria played a crucial role in softening the crisis. By contrast, Ana of Austria was incapable of mediating as efficiently from Madrid.43

The crisis in Tuscany is a good example of Maria’s style of negotiation, which was discreet and conciliatory. In 1569, Pope Pius V declared Cosimo I Grand Duke of Tuscany, thus elevating him from his title of Duke of Florence to the highest rank of non-royal Italian princes. With this act, the pope and the new grand duke challenged both the Imperial rights over the northern half of the Italian peninsula and Spanish pretensions of hegemony and arbitration. Facing this defiance to the Habsburg’s position in Italy, Maria advocated an agreement between the Grand Duke of Tuscany and the two branches of the House of Austria, in line with Italy’s need for peace. In 1575, she put forward a positive solution for the crisis in a friendly, dynastic agreement: in response to Maria’s petition, the grand ducal title should be presented as a grant from Maximilian II to the new Grand Duchess of Tuscany, his sister Juana of Austria. The Spanish representatives considered it a wise plan; soon thereafter Maximilian II arranged an entente with Tuscany that was not dissimilar.44

Maria was neither Philip II’s puppet nor a Spanish Trojan horse at the Imperial Court: she followed her own line, which was the advancement of her children as pious Catholics and powerful rulers. Maria authorised ambassador Monteagudo to meet often with her two elder sons, Rudolf (II) and Ernest, in order to warn them about the confessional situation at court and help them to identify heretics and react to them appropriately.45 When there was an opportunity for promoting her children, she could be straightforward and independent of her husband, as in Ernest’s candidacy to the kingdom of Poland (1573).46 In many cases, she understood these as strictly reserved issues and only communicated them to Philip II, not to the ambassadors.

The return to Madrid: a female network

However, it appears that her most stubborn and definite decision, to retire to Spain as empress dowager, was of a more selfish nature. Maximilian II died in 1576 and was succeeded by Rudolf II, educated in Spain as a Castilian infante and surrounded by loyal Catholics close to the Spanish alliance. The new Spanish ambassador, Juan de Borja, found a positive environment to carry out his duties, but Maria insisted on returning to Madrid and retiring to the monastery of the Descalzas Reales. Finally, Philip II and Rudolf II agreed and authorised her journey in 1581.47

As a proof of the domestic nature of diplomacy, the ambassador Juan de Borja also returned to Spain, as head of Maria’s household and he remained in that position until her death. Simultaneously, the Imperial ambassador in Madrid, Hans Khevenhüller, served primarily as Maria’s chamberlain.48 Meanwhile, Borja’s successor at the Imperial Court, Guillén de San Clemente, found himself in a desperate situation: according to him, ‘I am the most confused man in the world […] without the empress, who was here the true solution for every difficulty.’49 Clearly, at least until that moment, the Spanish diplomatic infrastructure in the Empire was not merely based on the embassy but on its interaction with the empress and her household.
Maria arrived in Madrid in 1582, but her later image as a humble, secluded nun is erroneous: although she spent most of her time in the monastery of Las Descalzas Reales, she never took the veil and lived in a palace annex with her household, a small and competing Imperial household in Madrid. She kept up a royal standard of living, but without a matching level of influence. According to Venetian ambassadors (who in this case seemed accurate), in Madrid Maria appeared to be a bitter old lady who had been expelled from the circuits of power and who failed to become a Spanish version of Catherine of Medici.

The situation was partly of her own making. Philip II tried to appoint her viceroy of Portugal, but Maria refused. She did not desire a demanding political role out of Madrid but rather to have discreet influence from her quiet retirement. However, Philip II did not allow the women of his family residing in the court to share in government affairs: neither his sister Juana of Austria nor his last wife Ana of Austria enjoyed much access to the decision-making process. Dowager Empress Maria of Austria inherited the political space of both women, a space she expanded with her recommendations and letters from Vienna. Maria had left Spain in the 1550s, when the court was divided by factions led by the Duke of Alba and the Prince of Eboli. Both Juana and Maria had an excellent relationship with Eboli and supported his party. During the 1570s, after Juana’s death, Ana of Austria took over that role, guided from Vienna by Maria of Austria. Ana supported courtiers of the faction of Eboli and was favourable to the alliance with the emperor and the pope. In that sense, she added an Imperial element to the confessional and ‘Romanist’ traits which had characterised Juana of Austria’s political capital. After 1580, Maria of Austria occupied the void left by Ana. Moreover, Maria followed her sister Juana’s footsteps and reinforced the position of the monastery of Las Descalzas Reales as an alternative centre of power. The Spanish ambassadors of these decades (the aforementioned Monteagudo, Vélez, and Juan de Borja) were also part of this group sympathetic to Imperial interests, over which Maria exerted her influence.

While Philip II was alive, this was an opposition group with limited power. The ‘Ebolist-Popish group’ so successful in the second half of the 1570s gave way, after 1579, to the so-called ‘Castilian Party’ who almost monopolised the government. Jesuits and discalced orders were also marginalised, but found support in Maria of Austria. Philip II only consulted her for dynastic wedding negotiations due to her undeniable expertise and knowledge of Austrian princes. Her biggest failure was her inability to persuade her eldest son, the Emperor Rudolf II, to marry Philip II’s eldest daughter, Isabel Clara Eugenia, after a decade of inconclusive talks. Isabel eventually married Archduke Albert, another son of Empress Maria, and the couple became sovereigns of the Habsburg Netherlands.

Maria played a part in arranging the marriage between her eldest grandson, the future Philip III of Spain, to the Archduchess Margaret of Austria. During the new reign, from 1598 onwards, Maria recovered part of her lost influence thanks to the trust of the new royal couple. Philip III developed a more cooperative attitude towards his uncle Emperor Rudolf II, for example, actively supporting Rudolf II in the Hungary’s Long War against the Turks, a change of policy attributed to Maria’s influence.

**Conclusion**

To conclude, researching political women broadens the meaning of policy-making and forces us to pay attention to soft power factors and the dynastic context, in order to appreciate that politics were more efficiently achieved through œconomy (the rules for managing the shared
home). Maria was not a member of formal government institutions such as the councils but resorted to her personal ascendancy over her male relatives and developed an intense and lavish policy of patronage to exert political influence. Her stubborn refusal to renounce her Spanish culture led her household in the Imperial Court to become a Spanish alternative centre of power. Her Spanish relatives secured funding and favours to attract leading Imperial courtiers to what later on was called the ‘Spanish faction’. Her assets in Madrid were Juana and Ana, supported by the ‘Ebolist faction’. On her return, her consistent patronage made possible the emergence of an Imperial-Popish network at the Spanish court headed by female members of the dynasty. This proves that, in the early-modern period, it is unwise to separate domestic and foreign affairs, formal and informal politics, and patronage and politics.

Notes

1 Abbreviations: AGS (Archivo General de Simancas); CODOIN, 113 vols. (Colección de Documentos inéditos para la historia de España, Madrid: 1842–95); CSR (Casas y Sitios Reales); E (Estado); HHStA (Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Vienna); IVDJ (Instituto Valencia de Don Juan, Madrid); NBD (Nuntiaturberichte aus Deutschland, 42 vols, München et al.: 1892–2013); OMeA (Obersthofmeisteramt); SDK (Spanien, Diplomatische Korrespondenz).

2 There is a detailed but conventional doctoral thesis by Rafael Ceñal, which covers up to 1576, and the suggestive essay of Sánchez, which sadly only includes Maria’s last lustrum: R. Ceñal, ‘La emperatriz María de Austria. Su personalidad política y religiosa’ (PhD thesis, University Complutense of Madrid, 1990); M.S. Sánchez, The Empress, The Queen, and The Nun. Women and Power at the Court of Philip III of Spain (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1998).


8 A. de Vicente, ‘El entorno femenino de la dinastía: el complejo conventual de las Descalzas Reales (1574-1633)’, in Tomás Luis de Victoria y la cultura musical en la España de Felipe III, eds. A. de Vicente and P. Tomás (Boadilla del Monte: CEEH, 2012), 199.


10 Faction is not understood as an all-encompassing label referring to static binary groups, but as a loose source of patronage and authority activated at thorny circumstances, where the alignments changed swiftly and the factionaries had varying levels of compromise. R. González Cuerva, ‘From the Empress to the Ambassador: the “Spanish Faction” and the Labyrinths of the Imperial Court of Prague, 1575–1585’, Libros de la Corte.es Extra 2 (2015): 11–25.


13 Dynastic service was predominantly male: María’s household comprised less than 25% of women and her high steward Pedro Laso de Castilla was dexterous enough to immediately hire the fired courtiers. The available lists of her household to be compared are from 1548 and 1560, in AGS, CSR, 96, no. 182–9 (1548) and HHStA, OMeA/SR, 182/40 (1560), published in: La corte de Carlos V, eds. J. Martínez Millán and C.J. de Carlos Morales, 3 vols. (Madrid: Sociedad Estatal para la Conmemoración de los Centenarios de Felipe II y Carlos V, 2000), IV: 127–30; La monarquía de Felipe II: la casa del rey, eds. J. Martínez Millán and S. Fernández Conti (Madrid: Mapfre, 2005), II: 699–703.

15 Ferdinand I agreed to deliver her 25,000 escudos (23,333 ducats) a year, while Charles V augmented in 1551 his initial ayuda de costa from 25,000 to 40,000 ducats: R. Rodríguez Raso, Maximiliano de Austria gobernador de Carlos V en España: cartas al emperador (Madrid: CSIC, 1963), 30, 115–16, 138–9, 170, 273–6; Charles V to Pedro Laso de Castilla, Augsburg, 16 May 1551, HHStA, SDK, 4/4, f. 61; Pedro Laso de Castilla to Ferdinand I, Mühldorf, 19 February 1552, HHStA, SDK, 4/10, f. 325.


18 Cabrera de Córdoba, Historia de Felipe II, I: 194; the Count of Luna to Philip II, Vienna, 24 November 1559, AGS, E, 650, n. 69.


21 Maria of Austria to Charles V, Vienna, 18 July 1553, AGS, E, 649, n. 68; Ceñal, La emperatriz María, I: 416–9, 484–503.


25 B.M. Lindorfer, ‘Las redes familiares de la aristocracia austriaca y los procesos de transferencia cultural entre Madrid y Viena, 1550–1700’, in Las redes del imperio: élites

26 González Cuerva, ‘From the Empress to the Ambassador’, 11–25. Among the 28 cases of María’s ladies-in-waiting in the Empire, 15 married imperial noblemen and 7 Spanish aristocrats.

27 Cédulas reales sobre el gobierno y etiqueta de la Casa de la Reina ... (Valladolid, 1603), reprinted in José Martínez Millán, La Monarquía de Felipe III: La Casa del Rey, 4 vols. (Madrid: Mapfre, 2008), II: 951; Mateo Vázquez to Jerónimo Gasol, Madrid, ca 1580, IVDJ, envío 57, carp. IV, nos. 96–7.

28 R. Mendes Silva, Admirable vida, y heroycas virtudes de ... la esclarecida emperatriz María (Madrid: por Diego Díaz de la Carrera, 1655), ff. 33r–33v.

29 ‘Mary n’a compagnie que de ces peu d’Espagnoles pour ne savoir que ce langage elles la tiennent subiecte que c’est pitié.’ Chantonnay to Cardinal Granvelle, Vienna, 17 November 1565, Bibliothèque municipale du Béarn, MS. Granvelle 21, f. 65r; Johann Christoph Khevenhüller to the Countess of Olivares, Madrid, 30 April 1628, HHStA, SDK, 20/375, n. 9, cit. in V. de Cruz Medina, “In service to my Lady, the Empress, as I have done every other day of my life”: Margarita of Cardona, Baroness of Dietrichstein and Lady-in-Waiting of María of Austria, in The Politics of Female Households, (Akkerman and Houben), 119.

30 The Count of Luna to Philip II, Vienna, 8 October 1560, AGS, E, 650, n. 82.

31 Instructions to Chantonnay, Madrid, 6 September 1564, AGS, E, 652, n. 205; instructions to Monteagudo, Madrid, 12 January 1570, in CODOIN, CX: 8–9.

32 In 1552–3, Luis Sarmiento de Acuña escorted Princess Juana of Austria to Portugal as her high steward and performed simultaneously the office of Charles V’s ambassador in Lisbon. Luis Sarmiento de Acuña to Charles V, Elvas, 24 November 1552, in CODOIN, XXVI: 392–4.

33 At the court of Savoy, the ambassador José Vázquez de Acuña (1588–95) was also appointed high steward of the Duchess Catalina Micaela of Austria (1585–97), daughter of Philip II. However, Vázquez de Acuña complained repeatedly that court ceremonial severely limited his possibilities of communication. M. J. del Río Barredo, ‘De Madrid a Turín: el ceremonial de las reinas españolas en la corte ducal de Catalina Micaela de Saboya’, Cuadernos de Historia Moderna, Anejo II (2003), 119–21. By contrast, Maria Anna of Austria, Queen of Hungary (1631–7) and empress (1637–47), offered the most similar case to that of María of Austria but she was not regarded as a political agent to be assisted by Spanish ambassadors, who resorted to the mediation of her confessor Diego de Quiroga. See the instructions of ambassadors Cadreita, Tursi, Castañeda and Villani in H. Günter, Die Habsburger-Liga 1625–1635. Briefe und Akten aus dem General-Archiv zu Simancas (Berlin: Emil Ebering, 1908), 242–3 (instruction to Cadreita, Madrid, 10 January 1630); Q. Aldea Vaquero, Española y Europa en el siglo XVII. Correspondencia de Saavedra Fajardo, 2 vols. (Madrid: CSIC, 1986), I: 349–58 (instruction to Tursi, 1 February 1630); II: xxvii–cviii (instructions to Castañeda and Villani).

34 Cardinal Borromeo to nuncio Delfino, Rome, 15–30 August 1560, NBD, II/1, 100.
35 Borja’s wife Francisca de Aragón was even known as ‘l’ambasciatrice’ by Venetian diplomats. W. Telfer, The Treasure of São Roque: A Sidelight on the Counter-Reformation (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1932), 145.

36 Isabel of Austria, queen of France (1570–1572) and daughter of Maximilian II and Maria of Austria, was strictly monitored to prevent her from freely interacting with the Spanish ambassador or other Spaniards in Paris. See P. Rodríguez and J. Rodríguez, ‘La Corte de Carlos IX de Francia. Los «Advertimientos» de D. Francés de Álava, Embajador de Felipe II’, Espacio, Tiempo y Forma, Serie IV, H. Moderna 11 (1998): 122–4. Even worse, Anne of Austria, queen of France (1615–1666), was increasingly limited from communicating with the Spanish ambassador after 1624 and humilitatingly banned from writing to the Spanish ambassadors and her relatives after 1637. See A. Hugon, Au service du Roi Catholique : « Honorables ambassadeurs » et « divins espions ». Représentation diplomatique et service secret dans les relations hispano-françaises de 1598 à 1635 (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2004), 196; O. Chaline, ‘Anne of Austria, founder of the Val-de-Grâce in Paris’, in A Constellation of Courts: The Courts and Households of Habsburg Europe, 1555–1665, eds. R. Vermeir, D. Raeymaekers and J. Eloy Hortal Muñoz (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2014), 257–8 and 266. For Catherine of Aragon, queen of England (1509–1533), the formation of a Spanish household was rejected and she was progressively isolated at the English court until being repudiated and banished by her husband Henry VIII in 1531. See P. Williams, Catherine of Aragon (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Amberley, 2013), chaps. 5 and 14.


38 P. Marek, La embajada española en la corte imperial (1558-1641). Figuras de los embajadores y estrategias clientelares (Praga: Karolinum, 2013), 81.

39 Maria of Austria to Chantonnay, 17 December 1566, AGS, E, 654, n. 22; Chantonnay to Philip II, Vienna, 8 January 1567, AGS, E, 654, n. 92.


42 The Count of Monteagudo to Philip II, Vienna, 22 July 1570 and 19 January 1572, AGS, E, 664, n. 9 and CODOIN, CX: 346.

44 The Marquis of Vélez to Philip II, ca summer 1575, AGS, E, 653, n. 57.


46 The Count of Monteagudo to Philip II, Vienna, 31 July 1573, in CODOIN, CXI: 286; Ceñal, La emperatriz María, 966–77.


50 J. de Palma, Vida de la serenissima infanta Sor Margarita de la Cruz (Madrid: Inprenta Real, 1636), 91–2; Sánchez, The Empress, the Queen, and the Nun, 45–9, 145–6.

51 See the Relatione by the Venetian ambassador Zuan Michiel, 24 November 1571, in Fiedler, Relationen venetianischer Botschafter, 282–3; Zuan Michiel et al., 18 November 1581, in ibid., 394–5; Matteo Zane, 1584, in E. Alberi, Le relazioni degli Ambasciatori Veneti al Senato durante il secolo decimosesto (Firenze: Società editrice fiorentina, 1862), serie I, V: 366–7; Tommaso Contarini, April 1593, in ibid., 421, 426; Francesco Vendramino, 1595, in ibid., 465; and Agostino Nani, 22 December 1598, in ibid., 489. Sánchez, The Empress, the Queen, and the Nun, 86–8.

52 E. García Prieto, La infanta Isabel Clara Eugenia de Austria, la formación de una princesa europea y su entorno cortesano (PhD thesis, University Complutense of Madrid, 2013), 300–1; Guillén de San Clemente to Philip II, Prague, 2 August 1588, AGS, E, 694, n. 46.

53 Cardinal Gallio, the papal secretary of state in 1580, acknowledged that the pope considered her services essential for the ‘servitio di Dio e le cose publiche’ in the imperial court. Koller, ‘Maria von Spanien’, 93. For her role in the court of Madrid, see J. Martínez Millán, ‘La emperatriz María y las pugnas cortesanas en tiempos de Felipe II’, in Felipe II y el Mediterráneo, ed. E. Belenguer Cebrià, 4 vols. (Madrid: Sociedad Estatal para la Conmemoración de los Centenarios de Felipe II y Carlos V, 1999), III: 143–62.

54 García Prieto, La infanta Isabel Clara Eugenia de Austria, 243–4, 302–6; M. José Rodríguez Salgado, “I Love him as a Father Loves a Son … Europe, Damn Me then, but I Deserve his Thanks”: Philip II’s Relations with Rudolf II’, in La Dinastía de los Austria. Las relaciones entre la Monarquía Católica y el Imperio, eds. J. Martínez Millán and R. González Cuerva (Madrid: Polifemo, 2011), 347–9, 384–7.

55 Palma, Vida de la serenissima infanta Sor Margarita de la Cruz, ff. 99v–100v.
56 R. González Cuerva, ‘Cruzada y dinastía: Las mujeres de la Casa de Austria ante la larga guerra de Hungría, in Martínez Millán and Marçal Lourenço’, in Las relaciones discretas, eds. Martínez Millán and Marçal Lourenço, II: 1149–86.