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# Dynastic Identity in Early Modern Europe

## Rulers, Aristocrats and the Formation of Identities

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Edited by Liesbeth Geervers and Mirella Marini

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Chapter 4

The Chièvres Legacy, the Croÿ Family  
and Litigation in Paris. Dynastic  
Identities between the Low Countries and  
France (1519–1559)

Violet Soen

Guillaume de Croÿ, Lord of Chièvres, passed away at the renowned Diet of Worms in 1521. The marriage of this chief councillor to Emperor Charles V had remained childless. In early modern noble families, this generally proved to be a good guarantee for endless legal proceedings on inheritance.<sup>1</sup> In the case of Chièvres, the dispute on his legacy would end up even more hazardous than usual. About two years before his death, the Habsburg advisor had purchased and received a significant series of lands in the enemy Kingdom of France. These lordships were scattered over regions as varied as Champagne, Normandy, Gascony and Languedoc. The other contractor in this noteworthy deal was none other than Germaine de Foix, then widow of the King of Aragon. Sixty years later, this particular heritage of French lordships by the Croÿ family still caused legal proceedings before the Parliament of Paris. In one of the many state-of-affairs made at that occasion, a councillor remarked that Chièvres himself probably thought to have acquired *‘deux belles et notables acquisitions ... de fait toutes ces terres sont de grande et immense valeur, mais le malheur a voulu qu'en lieu de terres, il acquist des procès a lui et a sa posterité’* [two beautiful and noteworthy acquisitions ... In fact, all of this land is of great and immense value, but unfortunately, instead of land, he acquired troubles for himself and for his posterity].<sup>2</sup> The observer might not have foreseen that legal actions in Paris would continue for almost another 80 years, as the lawsuits constantly followed the tide of the wars between the rulers of France and the Low Countries. Meanwhile, members of the Croÿ family and their noble opponents used their loyalties to the respective rulers in order to force the heritage claims to their benefit. As such, not only war, but litigation as well, provided a locus for identity formation of noble families.

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Nassiet, *Parenté, noblesse et états dynastiques XVe-XVIe siècles* (Paris: Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales, 2000), 24.

<sup>2</sup> *Mémoire sur tout l'ensemble du procès, concluant aux revendications précédentes*, 1581: Archives Nationales Série J (henceforth ANF J) 768 52/13.

Hence, through the lens of litigation, this chapter seeks to unravel the impact of geographical anchorage and territorial war on identity formation among noble dynasties in Early Modern Europe. In the Ancien Régime, ‘the nobility’ was continuously shaped and reshaped around lordships (and accordingly, a *savoir-vivre noblement*<sup>3</sup>), but what happened when these lordships were located in areas where the rulers were at war? For too long, the early modern nobility has been studied within one state and within the borders of that state.<sup>4</sup> Yet early modern grandees often owned possessions spread across political borders, as was apparently the case of Chièvres’s legacy. So members of the House of Croÿ have been linked too exclusively to the Burgundian-Habsburg state formation, through which they indeed received many outstanding offices, titles and honours.<sup>5</sup> Still,

<sup>3</sup> Violet Soen, “Nobility”, in *Oxford Bibliographies in Renaissance and Reformation*, (ed) Margaret King, (New York: Oxford University Press), online since January 2015, DOI: 10.1093/OBO/9780195399301-028; Robert Descimon, “*Nobles de lignage et Noblesse de service*. Sociogenèses comparées de l’épée et de la robe (XVe–XVIIIe siècle)”, in *Épreuves de noblesse. Les expériences nobiliaires de la haute robe parisienne (XVIe–XVIIIe siècle)*, (eds) Robert Descimon and Élie Haddad (Paris: Les Belles lettres, 2010), 279–287; Élie Haddad, “La ‘maison’ noble: pistes de recherches concernant les contraintes de la transmission dans la noblesse française des XVIe et XVIIe siècles”, in *Mobilité et transmission dans les sociétés de l’Europe moderne*, (eds) Anna Bellavitis, Laurence Croq and Monica Martinat (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2009); Paul Janssens was guest editor for a thematic issue on ‘Vivre Noblement. The Changing Lifestyle of the Belgian Nobility’ of the *Revue belge d’Histoire et de Philologie* 88, no.2 (2010); Jelle Haemers, Wim De Clercq and Jan Dumolyn, “Sumptuary Legislation, Material Culture and the Semiotics of ‘Vivre Noblement’ in the County of Flanders (14<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> centuries)”, *Social History* 36 (2011).

<sup>4</sup> Rees Davis, “The Medieval State: The Tyranny of a Concept?” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 16 (2003); for the historiography of the nobility in the late medieval and early modern Low Countries: Frederik Buylaert and Jan Dumolyn, “L’importance sociale, politique et culturelle de la haute noblesse dans les Pays-Bas Bourguignons et Habsbourgeois (1475–1525): un état de la question”, in *Entre la ville, la noblesse et l’état: Philippe de Clèves (1456–1528), homme politique et bibliophile*, (eds) Jelle Haemers, Céline Van Hoorebeeck and Hanno Wijsman (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008); Thérèse de Hemptinne and Jan Dumolyn, “Historisch adelsonderzoek over de late middeleeuwen en de vroegmoderne periode in België en Nederland: een momentopname”, *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 103 (2008).

<sup>5</sup> Marie-Rose Thielemans, “Les Croy, conseillers des ducs de Bourgogne. Documents extraits de leurs archives familiales, 1357–1487”, *Bulletin de la Commission Royale d’Histoire* 124 (1959); Robert Born, *Les Croÿ, une grande lignée hennuyère d’hommes de guerre, de diplomates, de conseillers secrets, dans les coulisses du pouvoir, sous les ducs de Bourgogne et la Maison d’Autriche (1390–1612)* (Brussels: Editeurs d’art associés, 1981) and George Martin, *Histoire et généalogie de la maison de Croÿ* (Lyon 2001: s.n., 1981), both to be consulted with caution; Jan Roegiers et al. (eds), *Arenberg in de Lage Landen. Een hoogadelijk huis in Vlaanderen & Nederland* (Louvain: Universitaire Pers, 2002) situates the history of the Croÿ within the larger history of the House of Arenberg; see now

throughout the sixteenth century, the family tried to manage estates in the Low Countries and France alike, despite the enduring conflicts between Habsburg and Valois. This could expose them to accusations of treason and lese-majesty on both sides of the border, so that confiscation and litigation were always to be expected. Whereas the larger dynastic transregional identity of the family inspired the line of action of the individuals concerned, claims of loyalty and service towards each prince had to be pursued with great care at every occasion, and especially in lawsuits.<sup>6</sup>

As Jonathan Spangler has remarked on an earlier occasion, some early modern transregional families simply defied state formation by their functioning across states and borders alike, while they also contributed to sustaining state power by accumulating offices in border provinces. At that same time, Spangler cited the House of Croÿ as being one of those pan-European ‘families in between’, demonstrating how in politics, religion and war, family members could choose opposite sides, while simultaneously reiterating the dynastic identity of being a transregional family that was ‘hedging the bets’.<sup>7</sup> This chapter observes this apparent conundrum within the juridical sphere. More specifically, it examines the legal proceedings concerning the abovementioned French properties within the Chièvres legacy. As such, it focuses on the area of tension between France and the Low Countries (omitting undeservedly the Holy Roman Empire). The story will be unravelled in three sections. The first will outline how in 1519 the Habsburg councillor Chièvres embodied the dynastic identity of his family by purchasing

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Violet Soen and Hans Cools, “L’aristocratie transrégionale et les frontières: les processus d’identification politique dans les maisons de Luxembourg-Saint-Pol et de Croÿ (1470-1530)” in *L’identité au pluriel. Jeux et enjeux des appartenances autour des anciens Pays-Bas, XIV<sup>e</sup>-XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles. Identity and Identities. Belonging at Stake in the Low Countries 14th-18th Centuries*, (eds.) Violet Soen, Yves Junot and Florian Mariage (Villeneuve d’Ascq: Revue du Nord, Hors série, collection Histoire 30), 2014, 209-28.

<sup>6</sup> David Potter, “A Treason Trial in Sixteenth-Century France: the Fall of Marshal du Biez, 1549–1551”, *English Historical Review* 105 (1990); Simon Hodson, “Politics of the Frontier: Henri IV, the Maréchal-Duc de Bouillon and the Sovereignty of Sedan”, *French History* 19 (2005); Kathryn Edwards, *Families and Frontiers. Recreating Communities and Boundaries in the Early Modern Burgundies* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); cf. our project’s website [www.transregionalhistory.eu](http://www.transregionalhistory.eu).

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Spangler, “Those in Between: Princely Families on the Margins of the Great Powers – The Franco-German Frontier, 1477–1830”, in *Transregional and Transnational Families in Europe and Beyond: Experiences since the Middle Ages*, (eds) Christopher H. Johnson, David Warren Sabean, Simon Teuscher and Francesca Trivellato (New York/Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011); see also the introduction by the editors and Charles Lipp, “Being Noble in the Borderlands: The Family de Mahuet of Lorraine, 1599–1737”, *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History* 29 (2001), 75. A methodological plea to use the term ‘transnational history’ for the early modern period is provided by Bartolomé Yun Casalilla, “Localism, Global History and Transnational History. A Reflection from the Historian of Early Modern Europe”, *Historisk Tidskrift* 127 (2007).

lands in France, and particularly in the province of Champagne. In the second section, it will become clear how the Foix family intentionally challenged the dynastic transregional identity of the Croÿs until the Peace of Cambrai in 1529. The third section will finally reveal how members of the Croÿ clan eventually used litigation in Paris to reconfigure their transregional identity within the House itself. Even so, as mentioned, these episodes running up to the Peace of Le Cateau-Cambrésis in 1559 present only a distinct part of a much larger story, as the lawsuits over the Chièvres legacy continued well into the seventeenth century.<sup>8</sup>

### Chièvres in Champagne

Chièvres has gained fame as close councillor to Charles V, which makes it somehow redundant to point out that he was foremost a wealthy aristocrat.<sup>9</sup> At his birth in 1458, though, he was not particularly favoured, being born only as the second son of Philippe de Croÿ and Jacqueline de Luxembourg. Nevertheless, Chièvres did rather well due to the rather common practice of organising and reorganising patrimony among children and siblings, which will be the connecting thread in this story as well.<sup>10</sup> By 1485, the nobleman managed to buy from his father the important lordships of Beaumont and Chièvres in Hainaut, a region where the Croÿ clan had thrived as a very active land purchaser. About a decade later, he received the lordships of Heverlee and Aarschot in Brabant as an advance on his

<sup>8</sup> In fact, indirect information about the sixteenth century can be found in later documents: *Mémoire pour prouver que le roi Henri IV et la maison de Navarre n'ont aucun droit sur les biens provenant de Germaine de Foix, reine d'Aragon, et vendus en 1519 à Guillaume de Croÿ, seigneur de Chièvres*: Bibliothèque Nationale de France (henceforth BNF) Ms. Fr. 2910 fol. 113; *Pour montrer que le roi ne peut, sous correction, prétendre aucun droit de propriété à Beaufort, Colommières ... et autres terres qui furent acquises par le sieur de Chièvres de la reine Germaine de Foix. (Pour Pierre Courtillier, demandeur, cousin germain maternel des derniers acquéreurs)*, Paris, 1662, sine nome: BNF FOL-FM-4275; *Eclaircissement du bon droit de messire Philippe Croÿ-Chimay d'Aremberg, prince ... dudit Chimay, et réfutation des poursuites injustes et imaginaires que font contre lui le sieur de Bercy-Màlon, ... et le sieur René d'Espinoy-Louny*, Paris, 1669, sine nome: BNF FOL-FM-4275 (1). When not cited otherwise, information was deduced from a critical evaluation of these sources.

<sup>9</sup> Guillaume de Croÿ, lord of Chièvres (1458–27/28 May 1521): Georges Dansaert and Thierry de Limburg-Stirum, *Guillaume de Croÿ-Chièvres* (Kortrijk: J. Vermaut, 1942), to be supplemented with the more recent biographical entry in Hans Cools, *Mannen met Macht. Edellieden en de Moderne Staat in de Bourgondisch-Habsburgse landen (1475–1530)* (Zutphen: Walburg, 2001), 200–201.

<sup>10</sup> See the already mentioned study by Michel Nassiet, more recently described for the late medieval County of Flanders by Frederik Buylaert, *Eeuwen van ambitie. De adel in laatmiddeleeuws Vlaanderen* (Brussels: Paleis der Academiën, 2010), 61–4.

share of the legacy among the siblings.<sup>11</sup> So Chièvres obtained, with the lands of Aarschot, one of the *banyeryen* of the duchy of Brabant, which were prestigious lordships that included the rights of high justice and coinage, and foremost enough income to finance private militias and a luxurious lifestyle.<sup>12</sup> As such, Chièvres could easily prosper in Hainaut and Brabant alike. Through his marriage with Marie de Hamal, he then also enjoyed the usufruct of the patrimony in the prince-bishopric of Liège held by her first husband. Finally, for his tutoring of the young prince Charles, he received the duchies of Soria and Archi and the barony of Roccacitta, all in Naples, in 1516. So within one life and career, Chièvres not only managed to adopt a supra-provincial ‘Burgundian outlook’, as coined by Hans Cools, but also a more imperial one, as conceived by Bartolomé Yun-Casalilla and others.<sup>13</sup> At first glance, his noble identity seemed in tune with the emergence of more delineated composite monarchies at the beginning of the sixteenth century.

What has gone largely unnoticed in traditional historiography, then, is that these wealthy aristocrats easily purchased lands outside the sphere of influence of their rulers. At the age of 61, Chièvres obtained an impressive series of lands in France. First, on 27 July 1519, he bought the county of Beaufort (with the properties of Soulaines and Larzicourt, the viscounty of Saint-Florentin, and the *châtellenies* of Dannemoine and Villers and so forth) in Champagne and the barony of Saint-Pierre de Rudepont in Normandy. He obtained these lands through a *contrat de vendition* [vendition contract] with the already mentioned Germaine de Foix.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, one day later, he received from her the baronies of Coulommiers in Brie-Champagne, Haulterive in Languedoc and Aspet in Gascony, amid many other lands and dependencies. In this instance, Chièvres was the beneficiary of a *contrat de donation* [gift contract] from Germaine de Foix. For many reasons, the double transaction was remarkable, not only because it consisted of a considerable gift, but also because 50,000 ducats of the purchase price of 125,000 ducats were discharged as another donation. Rumours that the rogue Chièvres had forced the widow-queen to these transactions never disappeared. It is more likely that Charles V had a hand in this deal with his step-grandmother, in return for his interventions to wed her to Marquis Johann of Brandenburg. So, comparable to what Frederik Buylaert recently concluded after looking into the marriage patterns of the late

<sup>11</sup> Cools, *Mannen met macht*, 200.

<sup>12</sup> Mario Damen, “Heren met banieren. De baanrotsen van Brabant in de vijftiende eeuw”, in *Bourgondië voorbij. De Nederlanden 1250–1650*, (eds) Mario Damen and Louis Sicking (Hilversum: Verloren, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Bartolomé Yun Casalilla, “Introducción. Entre el imperio colonial y la monarquía compuesta. Élités y territorios en la Monarquía Hispánica (ss. XVI y XVII)”, in *Las redes del Imperio. Élités sociales en la articulación de la Monarquía Hispánica, 1492–1714*, (ed.) idem (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> *Contrat de vente par Germaine de Foix, veuve du roi Ferdinand le Catholique, et Jean, marquis de Brandebourg, actuellement son époux (seconde noce), à Guillaume de Croÿ, marquis d’Aerschot, seigneur de Chièvres, 27 July 1519, Copie coll. en Parlement le 5 août 1550: ANF J 768 52/12.*

medieval Flemish nobility, grand aristocrats in the Low Countries easily looked outside the Habsburg-Burgundian territories.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, at this juncture, the Habsburg connection even seemed to have facilitated this purchase in the adjacent territory. This was less of a puzzle in the sixteenth century than historiography often seems to hint at.

Actually, Chièvres was acting in line with the dynastic identity of his family, originating from Picardy, a rather loose term for the region around the city of Amiens and considered as *terre de frontière* [borderland]. The noble house of Croÿ took its name after Crouy-Saint-Pierre there, a lordship on the left bank of the Somme, northwest of Picquigny. As such, every genealogy of the family would claim an ancient ancestry from the King of Hungary, as well as a more immediate one from Picardy.<sup>16</sup> Primogenitor Jean de Croÿ had been governor there, before dying heroically at the Battle of Agincourt in 1415. Ever since then, the family had an *hôtel* in Amiens, which served its repeated governmental shares in the region. Gradually, the Croÿ family adhered to the category of Picardian nobles that Werner Paravicini identified as the aristocratic pillars of the Burgundian dynasty in the second half of the fifteenth century.<sup>17</sup> Hans Cools and Mario Damen also unravelled how these kind of Picardian nobles held a relatively greater share of functions and titles at the Burgundian-Habsburg court.<sup>18</sup> The Burgundian-Habsburg dynasty needed noblemen from the frontier, in order to defend, control and extend it. But it is precisely this that ended up being the complicating factor: the King of France obviously thought exactly the same. In this perspective, David Potter showed how Picardian noblemen were attracted by inducements from both the French King and the Burgundian-Habsburg rulers, and how families could be suddenly split in their loyalties as a consequence, or conversely, combine multiple loyalties without problems.<sup>19</sup> The Croÿ family was no exception to this rule of multiple loyalties within a family. With permission from the Dukes of Burgundy

<sup>15</sup> Frederik Buylaert, "La noblesse et l'unification des Pays-Bas. Naissance d'une noblesse bourguignonne à la fin du Moyen Âge?" *Revue historique* 653 (2010).

<sup>16</sup> For example, Jean Scohier, *La généalogie et descende de la très illustre maison de Croÿ* (Douai, Jean Bogard, 1596; anastatic reprint Brussels, 1996).

<sup>17</sup> Werner Paravicini, "Moers, Croy, Burgund. Eine Studie über den Niedergang des Hauses Moers in den zweiten Hälfte des 15. Jahrhunderts", *Annalen des Historischen Vereins für den Niederrhein* 179 (1978).

<sup>18</sup> Hans Cools, "Noblemen on the Borderline: the Nobility of Picardy, Artois and Walloon Flanders and the Habsburg-Valois Conflict, 1477–1529", in *Secretum Scriptorum. Liber alumnorum Walter Prevenier*, (eds.) Wim Blockmans, Marc Boone and Thérèse de Hemptinne (Louvain and Apeldoorn: Garant, 1999); Mario Damen, "Rivalité nobiliaire et succession princière: La lutte pour le pouvoir à la cour de Bavière et à la cour de Bourgogne", *Revue du Nord* 91 (2009). For the Dutch Revolt, see: *Het verdeelde huis: De Nederlandse adel tussen opstand en reconciliatie*, (eds) Luc Duerloo and Liesbeth De Fremme (Maastricht: Shaker, 2011).

<sup>19</sup> David Potter, *War and Government in the French Provinces, Picardy 1470–1560* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 47–8.

and the Emperor, Chièvres joined the French King Charles VIII in 1494 in his campaign against Naples and he accompanied Louis XII against Milan in 1499.

Given this Picardian background – both real and imagined within the lineage – it might come as a surprise that Chièvres also purchased properties in the adjacent region of Champagne in 1519: the sale primarily included the county of Beaufort and the gift of the barony of Coulommiers in Brie. Yet by the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Croÿ family had been slightly more present in Champagne than in Picardy, where it had lost some of its lands in the wars between Charles the Bold and Louis XI. In Champagne, the House held lands in Tours-sur-Marne, Gandelu, Beaurain and Bar-sur-Aube. In addition, the impressive lordship of Château-Porcien, situated on the Aisne River at the border of the Rethelois, was by far their most important seigniorial estate in the province of Champagne. In the High Middle Ages, it provided one of the seven *pairs* of the Counts of Champagne. Chièvres's grandfather, Antoine le Grand, bought it in 1437–1438; later on he also acquired the adjacent lordship of Montcornet.<sup>20</sup> Less than 20 years later, the lordship was elevated to county by King Charles VII.<sup>21</sup> The castle served as a refuge when Antoine was expelled from the Burgundian court for his francophilia. Although later accepted back into the Burgundian good graces, Antoine preferred to be buried in the chapel of Château-Porcien (which after all provided his highest title). Chièvres's father had also taken refuge there, later on widely refurbishing the castle; he would be buried there too. Within this family context, it is thus less surprising that Chièvres chose territories close to the family patrimony in which his grandfather and father had taken such pride. Still, where Château-Porcien, and especially Montcornet, were lordships on the unstable border between France and the Burgundian-Habsburg territories, this was no longer the case for Beaufort and Coulommiers. As an ambassador of Spain would remark much later: '*Et fait a penser que les terres dont est question sont assizes au milieu du Royaulme de France et ne sont point limitrophes*' [And leads one to think that the lands in question are established in the middle of the Kingdom of France and do not touch borders].<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Antoine de Croÿ (ca. 1402–1475): Albert Châtelet, "Antoine de Croÿ et Hugo van der Goes", in *Der Fall des Günstlings. Hofparteien in Europa vom 13. Bis zum 17. Jahrhundert*, (eds) Jan Hirschbiegel and Werner Paravicini (Stuttgart: Thorbecke, 2004); Paul de Win, "Antoine de Croÿ, seigneur de Crouy, comte de Porcien", in *Les chevaliers de l'Ordre de la Toison d'or au XV<sup>e</sup> siècles. Notice bio-bibliographique*, (ed.) Ralph De Smedt (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000), 34–6 and Violet Soen, "La Causa Croÿ et les limites du mythe bourguignon: la frontière, le lignage et la mémoire (1465-1475)" in *Mémoires conflictuelles et mythes concurrents dans les pays bourguignons (ca. 1380-1580)*, (eds) Jean-Marie Cauchies and Petit Peporte (Neuchâtel: Publications du Centre d'études bourguignonnes, 2012), 81–97.

<sup>21</sup> Jean-Baptiste Lépine, *Histoire de Château-Portien (Ardennes)* (Vouziers: s.n., 1858), 155–60 (facsimile reprint Paris, 1989).

<sup>22</sup> *Protestation de l'ambassadeur d'Espagne auprès du roi contre l'appui que celui-ci donne aux revendications du duc et de la duchesse de Guise, au mépris des traités conclus,*



Even if his new lands were purchased at the end of his life, Chièvres seemed to have been particularly concerned about a good destiny for them. Whereas he had originally bequeathed all his properties to his nephew Philippe II de Croÿ, the new Count of Château-Porcien,<sup>23</sup> he changed his opinion some days before his death in his last testament in Worms, dated 21 May 1521. Chièvres then stipulated that only half of the lands acquired from Germaine de Foix would go to his *heritier universel* [universal heir]. The other half of these lands ‘situated in the Kingdom of France’ would go to his youngest nephew Charles de Croÿ. This new stipulation was remarkable to say the least. Most probably, Chièvres came to this decision as this nephew was already ‘currently residing in France’.<sup>24</sup> Charles de Croÿ had indeed continued living in Montcornet after the death of his father in 1514, while his elder brothers had all taken up functions and titles in the Burgundian Low Countries. The legacy of half of the lands that Chièvres acquired *par don et achat* [by gift and purchase] could thus provide a comfortable position for the young Charles in France, as he was not the privileged first-born out of eight children. At the same time, it was a variation in the dynastic theme of reorganising and maintaining property on both sides of the borders, by spreading the risks and bets among different family members. As such, Chièvres’s testament stipulated how the family would continue within its dynastic identity of being a transregional family, with a special relevance for the borderlands between France and the Low Countries in Hainaut, Picardy and Champagne alike.<sup>25</sup>

### Croÿ versus Foix

Immediately, Chièvres’s transactions and his testament were challenged by the Foix clan, eager to regain territories once belonging to their lineage. More captivating though in this legal dispute, is that the dynastic and transregional identity of the Croÿ was clearly challenged. Thomas de Foix, Lord of Lescun, instantly protested Chièvres’s gift and purchase. As a collateral relative of Germaine de Foix’s, he insisted on claiming the grounds by *retrait lignager* [the heir’s preferential right of purchase], which was the customary civil law procedure enabling family members in the closest lines to claim the lands by paying the due price. The Marshal of France alleged that those important lands across France should remain in the hands of nobles who unquestionably served the French king, not in the hands of those serving other rulers. Lescun must have had an impact on his king (if not, his sister

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s.d.: ANF J 768 52/9.

<sup>23</sup> Philippe II de Croÿ, Marquis and first Duke of Aarschot (1496–1549): Michel Baelde, *De collaterale raden onder Karel V en Filips II (1531–1578). Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis van de centrale instellingen in de zestiende eeuw* (Brussels: Paleis der Academiën, 1965), 252; Cools, *Mannen met macht*, 196–97.

<sup>24</sup> ‘à présent résident en France’: Dansaert and de Limburg-Stirum, *Chièvres*, 291.

<sup>25</sup> Spangler, “Princely Families”, 134.

had one as the royal mistress). He soon received the then confiscated lands that Chièvres had obtained from Germaine de Foix, yet without any definitive property rights. For the Croÿs, this was a novel situation. Previously, their multiple loyalties had exposed them to confiscation in times of war, but this was the first time that standard inheritance turned into sequestration, and its impact on the transregional identity of the Croÿs remained to be seen.<sup>26</sup>

In any case, during the renewed Franco-Habsburg War at the end of 1521 onwards, all the lands of the Croÿ were being confiscated, along the more traditional schemes of forcing the enemy's hand. Indeed, as bailiff of Hainaut, Aarschot tried to keep the French army out of Valenciennes and Tournai. As a consequence, both brothers Croÿ seemed not only to have had problems enjoying the lands that they were bequeathed by their uncle, but also those bequeathed by their parents, such as Château-Porcien and Montcornet.<sup>27</sup> As before, peace treaties eventually offered the opportunity to negotiate the mutual release of these confiscations. For Philippe de Croÿ, the new Count of Château-Porcien and Marquis of Aarschot, the death of Lescun in Pavia in 1525 and the subsequent capture of Francis I in Madrid provided welcome incentives to sort things out. He was successful in getting the Emperor to defend his rights and properties in France. According to the 38th article of the Treaty of Madrid of 14 January 1526, Aarschot would henceforth be 'reintegrated and restituted, including all of its counties, baronies, land and seigniories, to the Kingdom of France', so both those inherited from his parents and those inherited from his uncle. The treaty could have been the end of the affair, formally reiterating that the Croÿ family held properties across borders and that this should be respected by both rulers.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> *Transaction et achapt fait de la conté de Beaufort. Pour Mrs de Lautrec, 07/08/1529*: BNF Ms. Fr. 4651 fol. 24–28, reveals part of the litigation before in the form of the introduction 'Sur le differend qui s'est mehu et offert en proceddant par nous au traicté de la paix en la ville de Cambray, en ce present mois de juilhet 1529, entre messire Philippes de Croy, duc de Sorre et d'Arcy, marquis d'Arset, d'une part, et messire Jehan de Laval, chevalier, baron de Chasteaubriant, et messire Menault de Martory, evesque de Conserans, tuteurs et curateurs des enfans myneurs d'ans de feu messire Odet de Foix, en son vivant seigneur de Laultret, d'aultre part, touchant les terres acquises par le feu seigneur de Chevres de Mme Germaine de Foix, royné douairiere d'Arragon, situées au royaume de France ...'.

<sup>27</sup> Is to be deducted from the negotiation for the peace Treaty of Madrid in 1526. See also the ensuing *Requête au roi par le duc d'Aerschot, comte de Porcien, pour obtenir l'abréviation des procédures qui doivent suivre la mainlevée de la saisie faite sur son dit comté, faite d'aveu et dénombrement, foi et hommage*: ANF J 768 45/4 holds a whole series of documents on this procedure, which are not dated but cover a later period 1530–1533.

<sup>28</sup> 'reintegré et restituté en toutes ses contes, baronnies, terres et seigneuries estans au royaume de France', also the Chièvres' legacy and the Lescun plea is mentioned: Treaty of Madrid, 14 January 1526, in *Corps universel diplomatique ...*, (ed.) Henri Dumont (Amsterdam 1739), vol. 4, t. 1, 408.

However, theory differed from practice. Upon the release of Francis I, Aarschot sent envoys to Paris in order to have the treaty implemented. In the capital, they were to find out that the King did not show any willingness to execute the stipulations of the treaty regarding the Croÿ property. The treaty itself soon became highly precarious when Pope Clement VII gave the King of France permission not to comply with the treaty by March 1526 since it had been signed 'under coercion'. As such, the king felt that he was not bound by the treaty whatsoever, by either its general terms or its particular provisions. Instead, Francis I maintained a *saisie féodale* [feudal seizure] of the Croÿ lands. This time, the confiscation was in favour of the dead Lescun's brother, Odet de Foix, Viscount of Lautrec and replacement for his brother as Marshal of France. Nevertheless, Aarschot remained backed by the emperor in order to pursue his claims against Lautrec now. The emperor sent his viceroy of Naples, Charles de Lannoy, and his secretary, Jean Lallemand, to urge for the implementation of the peace treaty, albeit to no avail.<sup>29</sup> Lautrec maintained the incomes from the lands, but he caught an infection during the French military campaigns in Italy and died on 15 August 1528. As such, the Treaty of Madrid remained a dead letter, and the Croÿ brothers encountered further obstructions to their enjoyment of their land and income in France.

Hence, in 1528, Aarschot decided as head of the House to reorganise the lands of his lineage.<sup>30</sup> As mentioned, this was standard procedure within the lineage, but this time the incentive was most probably provided by the multiplying problems with the Chièvres legacy and other lordships in France. A new *partage* [division] was thus concluded in Beaumont, the main family castle in Hainaut, which served as Aarschot's residence when carrying out his tasks as bailiff of the region. The outcome of this division was surprising to say the least: Aarschot had now obtained all the lands of Chièvres's transactions with Germaine de Foix, although his uncle had left half of it to the younger Charles in his last testament. In return for this loss, Charles received the County of Seninghem in Artois and the barony of Montcornet, part of the County of Porcien, and *limitrophe & sises sur les limites & frontières du Royaume* [on the limits and borders of the kingdom].<sup>31</sup> Once more, this division did not take place without accompanying rumours. Some thought that the younger Charles had been forced into a disadvantageous settlement by his brother, while others believed that he indeed preferred to have Seninghem and

<sup>29</sup> Cf. footnote 27.

<sup>30</sup> In fact, also Robert de Croÿ, bishop of Cambrai was included in this division of patrimony. So far, I have not been able to reconstruct his part of the deal.

<sup>31</sup> *Factum. Pour Madame la Duchesse de Guyse ayant les droitets cedez de defunct monsieur le Prince de Portien son premier mary, demanderesse au principe & defenderesse à l'entherinement d'unes lettres royaux de rescision, d'une part contre Messire Philippes de Croy Duc d'Ascot defendeur au principal & demandeur à l'entherinement desdictes lettres Royaux de rescision, d'autre, s.d.: BNF 4-FM-14869; other typeprint kept under BNF 4-FM-14870.*

Montcornet right away, instead of waiting until the Foix stopped litigating and he could enjoy the income of the lands bequeathed in the testament. In any case, Charles now held the title of Count in Artois, while being able to continue to reside in Montcornet in France.

Additionally, the reorganisation left Aarschot free to decide upon the Chièvres legacy in France, without interference from his younger brother. Again, the ongoing peace negotiations between the Habsburg and Valois dynasty for the Treaty of Cambrai in 1529 provided the context for making more definitive settlements. So the mediating ladies not only decided on matters of bilateral peace, but also on the continuing conflict between Aarschot and the tutors of Lautrec's children. The bottom line of the settlement was that the noblemen could not let 'suffer so many nations and persons', and that a *paix universelle* [universal peace] was also to the benefit of '*deux grandes maisons comme celles de Croÿ et de Lautrec*' [two great houses such as those of de Croÿ and Lautrec]. So prior to the general peace treaty, Aarschot agreed to sell the lands to the Lautrec family, but at the goodly price of 60,000 gold écus (which could be paid in shares).<sup>32</sup> According to some observers, Aarschot had preferred this settlement, knowing that he had chosen to side with the Emperor anyway. Others alleged that he felt forced by the fact that he had not been able to pay the sums for the *relief* of the lands. Maybe the transaction was facilitated by a probable marriage between his niece and Lautrec?<sup>33</sup> Whatever the case, Aarschot would never go back on his decision to sell the lands that Chièvres purchased two years before his death. Again, everything seemed to be sorted out reasonably with the Treaty of Cambrai. Aarschot had sold the most recent acquisitions in France at a reasonable price, avoiding further conflicts and confiscations. Meanwhile, he maintained the traditional family property in Château-Porcien, while his younger brother had been content with taking the adjacent barony of Montcornet and receiving the title of Count of Seninghem in Artois. This seemed as though the Count of Château-Porcien now moved to a more Habsburg profile, while maintaining the ancient family assets still in France. Soon after, he would be honoured by Emperor Charles V as first Duke of Aarschot, the first ducal title granted in the Low Countries.

<sup>32</sup> *Transaction et achapt faict de la conté de Beaufort. Pour Mrs de Lautrec, 07/08/1529*: BNF Ms. Fr. 4651 fol. 24–28. A transaction of 3 August before the *Eschevins de Cambrai* is mentioned in the 41st article of the Treaty of Cambrai, 5 August 1529: Dumont, *Corps universel*, vol. 4, t. 2, 14.

<sup>33</sup> There is a marriage between Odet de Foix, lord of Lautrec and Jeanne de Croÿ, of the branch of Chimay mentioned by Scohier, *Généalogie*, 50; this must have taken place between the death of his first wife Charlotte d'Albret in 1527 and his own death in 1528; Jean-Baptiste de Courcelles, *Histoire généalogique et héraldique des pairs de France ... et maisons princières de l'Europe* (Paris: s.n., 1822–1833), 1: 57–8, equally mentions that the marriage is stated in family chronicles without being verified by other documents. I have not found other evidence for this marriage, and I do not take it for granted that it took place.

**Croÿ versus Croÿ**

Although the Treaty of Cambrai seemed to definitively confirm the sale of the Chièvres's legacy to the Foix, this agreement, too, would soon be disputed. This time, things became more interesting. After all, the fight between the Croÿ and the Foix presented a very classic chapter in the book of noble dynasties trying to have their service rewarded, to the detriment of families serving other rulers. After 1529, however, the dispute transformed into an argument within the House of Croÿ itself, during which the transregional identity and its multiple loyalties would eventually be reconfigured. Within this particular episode of the affair, Charles de Croÿ, the new Count of Seninghem, directly confronted his elder brother Aarschot. By then, he had married Renée de la Marck, Countess-Dowager of La Braine and Roucy, daughter of a correspondingly transregional family from the Ardennes. The Count did not particularly gain anything from the marriage contract, but it did establish him as a nobleman in his own right, no longer one by the grace of his elder brother.<sup>34</sup> Soon, Seninghem appealed to Francis I. Most surprisingly, he would (at least partially) be supported in his endeavours by the French king, who played upon the old francophile positions of the lineage. This was no longer the king of France against the 'foreign Croÿ' as had been the case throughout the previous decade. Instead, Francis I favoured the division in the family and tried to influence loyalties by recognising the service of the Croÿ ancestors to the French Crown.

In 1532, Seninghem started legal proceedings in Paris. His main objective was to undo the family division of Beaumont. First, the Count asked for 'his part and portion of the price' of the sale to the Foix family. By July, he had already received royal permission to pursue half of the price. By December of the same year (1532), he also obtained *lettres de annulation* [letters of annulment], which enabled him to petition for half of the lands, so no longer half the price. To cut a long story short, Seninghem henceforth aimed for his share based on Chièvres's testament, which was the only document he recognised. Later on, he started a procedure of rescission before the Parliament of Paris in order to unmake the sale contract preceding the Cambrai Treaty. The judgement forced Aarschot to show the testaments, codicils and division contracts, while requiring an inventory of all goods concerned before the division. Aarschot failed to do so, probably because he was not interested in another procedure in Paris.<sup>35</sup> It was the first time that members of the Croÿ family tried to enforce the inheritance claims through litigation in Paris and by seeking support from different rulers; the lawsuit could have been introduced to the Grand Council in Malines as well, since it was launched by an Artesian Count (through the Treaty of Cambrai, Artois was no longer subject to Parliament's jurisdiction)

<sup>34</sup> *Contrat de mariage de Charles de Croÿ-Senighien avec Renée de la Marche, comtesse douairière de la Braine*, 13 May 1529: BNF Ms. Fr. 4330 fol. 57–72. She was married to Amadeus III de Saarbrücken before.

<sup>35</sup> See the report on this part of the episode in the *Factum* mentioned in footnote 31.

on a division that took place in Hainaut. Yet the procedure concerned lands in Champagne, and the Count of Seninghem now appealed to his sovereign for these lordships, playing upon the rivalry with the emperor to win his cause against his brother.

As before, a new cycle of the Habsburg-French War would complicate the legal proceedings. The old device of transregional families was now set in practice: two sons, two armies. Aarschot continued in the imperial party, but in the heyday of the wars in 1536, Seninghem led 100 French soldiers (with whom he mainly defended his own Montcornet). The Count then cleverly started a new procedure of rescission, only this time with the King's procurator-general and in absence of Aarschot *à l'occasion des guerres étrangères* [during the foreign wars]. The verdict reinstated the annulment of the division (although it accorded some rights to the Foix). The Emperor reacted with a confiscation of the Seninghem lands under Habsburg control. The ensuing truce of La Fère of October 1538 between Mary of Hungary and Francis I (which was the implementation of the truce signed in July in Nice) obviously had to deal with the affair. The clause concerning the conflict between Aarschot and Seninghem reflected the status quo in the Habsburg-French conflict. Aarschot was assured that the arrangement in the Treaty of Cambrai would take full effect and that all procedures against this sale should stop immediately. Seninghem was assured that he could still appeal at the Court of the Parliament of Paris, and that his demand for a remuneration of this sale was valid. However, he could only initiate procedures for the money; the option of doing this for the lands was no longer possible. The final verdict on this financial compensation would be issued before the Parliament of Paris. So at least Seninghem had reached the conclusion that Paris remained the centre of litigation.<sup>36</sup>

Meanwhile, Seninghem had proceeded to a second marriage, this time with Françoise d'Amboise, Lady of Reynel. By 1541, that marriage had produced a son and heir, not coincidentally named Antoine, after the abovementioned Antoine le Grand, one of the founding fathers of the lineage, the first Croÿ to purchase Château-Porcien and Montcornet. Most likely encouraged by these circumstances of a foreseeable dynastic continuity, Seninghem felt eager to turn the clause of the Treaty of La Fère to his benefit. In his request to the king in 1541, he again solicited the possibility of initiating legal proceedings, notwithstanding the royal letters of 1538. Aarschot vainly protested to Francis I, but the king answered that his brother's request did not intervene with what was concluded in Cambrai and La Fère.<sup>37</sup> Afterwards, Francis I redirected the petition from the *conseil privé* [Privy Council] to the Parliament of Paris.<sup>38</sup> In this new procedure before Parliament,

<sup>36</sup> Treaty of La Fère, 23 October 1538: Dumont, *Corps universel*, vol. 4, t. 3, 171.

<sup>37</sup> *Lettres de François Ier audit duc d'Aerschot, lui disant que, ledit procès ne touchant pas aux traités conclus entre la France et l'empereur, il ne peut dénier audit Charles de Croÿ, son frère, le droit de le poursuivre*, 7 January 1541; ANF J 768 52/3/11.

<sup>38</sup> *Extrait des registres du Conseil privé, portant renvoi au Parlement du procès relatif à l'entérinement de la requête présentée au roi par Charles de Croÿ, à laquelle s'oppose*

Aarschot was not even consulted, but after his protest, his representative was heard in the *conseil privé*. The procedure stuck in the renewed war between Francis I and Charles V from 1542 onwards. Aarschot tried to end the conflict with his younger brother by adding a clause in his favour to the peace Treaty of Crépy in 1544.<sup>39</sup> Apparently Aarschot also obtained *lettres patentes en forme de requête civile* [letters patent in the form of a civil action], including a cassation of previous settlements, from the Parliament of Paris.<sup>40</sup>

Surprisingly, by 1549 this agreement had been turned upside down. Most probably the death of Aarschot was then taken as new impetus to act quickly in Paris. Once again, Parliament ruled in favour of Seningham, yet this time he got some exceptional compensation. First of all, the division in Beaumont was annulled yet again, so that the whole division was to be done over again. In the meantime, Seningham could enjoy the title of Count of Château-Porcien by appointment. Two years later he would also receive the lands of Montcornet as compensation by royal letters patent. Seningham soon used the title of Count of Château-Porcien with great eagerness, although the donation was contested by Philip III de Croÿ, the new Duke of Aarschot. Through his endless legal proceedings in Paris, Seningham had not only obtained a share of the Chièvres legacy, but also the main property of the whole family in France. All the procedures had made him both Count of Seningham and Château-Porcien, holding the main family assets in France. In the end, this reconfiguration eventually facilitated family relations within the House of Croÿ, in which the dynastic transregional identity now held a more Habsburg and a more French branch together. When the new Duke of Aarschot was taken prisoner in August 1553 by the French after the battle in Dourlens, his uncle Seningham and aunt Françoise regularly visited him in the Château de Vincennes. Three years later, Aarschot escaped from his captors, and remarkably, Françoise d'Amboise, Seningham's wife was suspected for having a hand in it.<sup>41</sup> She was arrested, sent to a Parisian prison but was released in the end.<sup>42</sup> The legal proceedings had thus not excluded reciprocity within the House itself.

Five months after his escape from the Château de Vincennes, Aarschot conceded to a new division arranged in the city of Cambrai. This division was probably a result of the mutual assistance during Aarschot's imprisonment in

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*Philippe de Croÿ, duc d'Aerschot*, 16 March 1541: ANF J 769 52/12.

<sup>39</sup> Treaty of Crépy, 18 September 1544, Dumont, *Corps universel*, 4:280.

<sup>40</sup> See for other contemporary pending issues also Jean de Saint-Mauris to Charles V, 12/12/1548: Archivo General de Simancas, Série K 1488, doc. 157.

<sup>41</sup> Letter of Simon Renard to Philip II, 21/05/1556: *Papiers d'État du Cardinal de Granvelle d'après les manuscrits de la bibliothèque de Besançon*, (ed.) M. Weiss (9 vols, Paris: Imprimerie Royale/Imprimerie Nationale, 1843), 4: 561–5; Bertand Haan, *Une paix pour l'éternité. La négociation du traité du Cateau-Cambrésis* (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2010), 54.

<sup>42</sup> Jules Delaborde, "Antoine de Croy, Prince de Porcien", *Bulletin de la société de l'histoire du protestantisme français* 18 (1896).

Paris, and the new Duke now understood the advantages of having a French branch of the family more than his father ever had. The county of Château-Porcien could now remain in Seningham's hands, while it was recognised that Seningham had always rightfully enjoyed the title of Montcornet. Château-Porcien would also go to Seningham's son, but after his death, it was to return to the Duke of Aarschot. Meanwhile, Aarschot would continue as *seigneur de la titre de Croy en Picardie*, holding the name, title and property as the core of the family identity.<sup>43</sup> As a result, the unilateral appointment, done at the instigation of the French King in 1549, was now being arranged and confirmed by a settlement among family members in 1556, and as such it became more authoritative. So with the Peace of Cateau-Cambrésis, Aarschot only asked that everything within the previous treaties be respected and that everything he claimed in justice would be granted to him properly and promptly so that within reason, he could not complain about it.<sup>44</sup> Just as Cateau-Cambrésis meant a standstill in the Franco-Habsburg War, it was also a temporary end to the family strife. The House of Croÿ was now formally divided into a more Habsburg and a more French branch. Seningham and particularly his son Antoine would gradually behave and present themselves as French nobles, seeking patronage from the French court. By 1561, the county of Château-Porcien was even elevated to a principality, and Antoine also received the title of *pair de France*, exceptional favours for this young branch of the House of Croÿ. Nevertheless, the two branches still remained in contact and exchanged gifts and favours, while Croÿ and Picardy remained vectors of the dynastic identity of the House. The unexpected death of the young Antoine prematurely aborted the experiment of a French branch in 1567. His marriage to Catherine de Clèves, issue of the House of Nevers, meant that the strife over Beaufort and Coulommiers would evolve first into a conflict between the Croÿ and Nevers family. The subsequent marriage of Catherine de Clèves to Henri de Lorraine, Duke of Guise, transformed it into a battle between the Croÿs and the Guises, but these conflicts are another story.

## Conclusion

Throughout the Ancien Régime, lordships and landed property offered nobles clear markers to define their identity, whether on the level of individuals or families. The seigniorial estates provided the social capital for their claim to form a privileged order of society. Still, for many grand aristocrats, these lordships gradually became scattered over regions with different rulers. This evolution triggered a very

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<sup>43</sup> *Par partage fait à Cambrai, le 26 octobre 1556, entre messire Phelippes de Croy, duc d'Arschot, d'une part, et messire Charles de Croy, comte de Senighem, d'autre, les terres qui s'ensuivent demeurent aud. comte de Senighem*, 26 October 1556: BNF Ms. Fr. 4727 fol. 108.

<sup>44</sup> Edited by Haan, *Une paix pour l'éternité*, 220–21.



composite identification process in which a dynastic transregional identity came into being in some cases, as was the situation of the Croÿ family. In this identity, elements of geographical embedment and its intrinsic princely service were easily reinterpreted according to the circumstances of territorial wars and litigation. In the long term, a transregional dynastic identity was certainly a strategy of risk management within the family, which tried to maintain as much property together across borders and to accumulate power across states. In the short term, though, it could turn into a bitter strife between family members, as it did within the family of Croÿ between the Treaty of Cambrai and Cateau-Cambrésis.

Litigation could pay off within the context of the larger identification process of transregional families. The gentlemen's sport (or on other occasions, ladies' sport) could turn into a means of reshaping the loyalty claims surrounding the family and its lordships. As such, litigation in competing centres of political power such as French Paris and Habsburg Malines created opportunities of which the outcome was never to be foreseen, since it depended on the proceedings themselves, the caprices of the rulers and the circumstances of international war. As such, in less than one generation, a 'French' branch was born within the same House of Croÿ due to legal proceedings in Paris, even if the chances of these procedures seemed very precarious at the outset. Paradoxically, or perhaps not, this process was backed and eventually even precipitated by the French king. So litigation was not only the outcome of a process of identity formation, but it could also turn into a constitutive means of that process. The French branch used the same Picardian background as their ancestors to show that they were loyal servants to the French Crown. Still, they remained part of the House of Croÿ, which remained the chief identity marker for the family. Still, the evolution in the first half of the sixteenth century remained very undecided, as the premature death of Antoine de Croÿ demonstrated. After all, the ensuing reorganisation and re-identification across borders was the connecting thread of these kinds of transregional families in the early modern era.

## Chapter 5

# From Arenberg to Aarschot and Back Again: Female Inheritance and the Disputed ‘Merger’ of Two Aristocratic Identities

Mirella Marini

### The Mighty Widow’s Legacy

‘We recommend to all our children and grandchildren three things. The first and most important that they always try to have and live by the fear of God and to imitate the good and virtuous life of their late lord and father, without ever doing wrong to the Catholic faith no more than he did, and rather for the defence of it to give up their goods and life. The second that they will always remain good and loyal vassals to their King and Prince his Catholic Majesty, without ever extracting themselves from his obedience. The third that they are careful to guard amongst themselves a true peace, concord and union and to imprint these three points on their children and their subjects, recommending them all to remember us in their prayers and to have others pray to God for us’.<sup>1</sup>

With these well-chosen words Anne of Croy, duchess of Aarschot (1564–1635) and princely countess of Arenberg concluded her last will and testament. She was adamant in the way she wanted those three points to be imprinted on the minds of all of her descendants. Using religion as her medium she wanted to preserve for all eternity the exemplary and pious lifestyle of her husband, the loyalty and obedience to the Spanish king as well as the absolute unity of the family. Religion,

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Nous recommandons à tous noz enfans grands et petits trois choses. La première et principale qu’ils tachent toujours d’avoir et de vivre en la crainte de Dieu et d’imiter la bonne et vertueuse vie de feu leur Seigneur et Père sans jamais manquer en aucune chose de la loys Catholique non plus qu’il n’a fait, plustost pour sa déffence de prendre leur biens et exposer leur propre vie. La deuxième qu’ils ayent toujours à demeurer bons et fidelz vassaux de leur Roy et Prince sa Majesté Catholique sans jamais se denoyer de son obéissance. La troisième qu’ils soyent soigneux de maintenir entre eux tous une vraye paix concorde et union et d’imprimer ces trois point en l’esprits de leurs enfans et subjects, leurs recommandans à tous de se resouvenir de nous en leur prièrs et de faire prier Dieu pour nous’: Archives Arenberg Enghien (AAE), Testaments (T) 1, fol. 319r–320v.

of the prince of Orange became one: the hereditary sovereign ruler of a French principality who was the symbolic leader of the Dutch Revolt.

# Conclusion

## ‘The Line of Descent of Nobles is from the Blood of Kings’: Reflections on Dynastic Identity

Hamish Scott

### I

Two episodes together provide the starting point for these concluding remarks. The first concerns the duc de Saint-Simon, the celebrated chronicler of Louis XIV’s fabled court at Versailles. Saint-Simon, as is well known, devoted his voluminous *Memoirs* to providing an enormously detailed account of the rivalries among the court aristocracy and the rise – and fall – of families in the entourage of the Sun King. But another aspect of the duc’s life has not attracted the attention it merits: he also drew up detailed tables setting out which aristocratic lineages had in the past married a member of the French royal family. These lists survive primarily in manuscript.<sup>1</sup> Saint-Simon’s obsessive interest in genealogy is well known, and this was a practical expression of it. He compiled these lists for one very simple reason: his conviction that such marriages added enormous and enduring lustre to the lineage in question, enhancing its prestige and boosting its status at court. Louis XIV certainly seems to have shown particular regard for these families in his treatment of them at Versailles. Between the eleventh and the sixteenth century such marriages had been concluded periodically in France.<sup>2</sup> After the accession of the Bourbons in 1589, however, they had all but ceased; those that did take place were mostly in unusual circumstances and attracted strong criticism at the time. The new ruling family was determined to emphasise the importance of royal blood in order to assert the dignity of the dynasty and to distance the Bourbons from even the greatest of their subjects. They therefore viewed such marriages as *mésalliances*, something which Saint-Simon clearly regretted.

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<sup>1</sup> François Formel, *Alliances et Généalogie à la Cour du Grand Roi: Le souci généalogique chez Saint-Simon* (Paris: Éditions Contrepoint, 1983), 2: 1165–66, 1177–78; see also André Devyer, *Le Sang Épuré: Les préjugés de race chez les gentilshommes français de l’Ancien Régime (1560–1720)* (Brussels: Éditions de l’Université de Bruxelles, 1973), 325–52, on Saint-Simon and the ‘royal blood’.

<sup>2</sup> Formel, *Alliances et Généalogie*, 2: 1167ff, and Arlette Jouanna, “Les Guises et le Sang de France”, in *Le mécénat et l’influence des Guises*, (ed.) Yvonne Bellenger (Paris: Champion, 1997), 31, list such marriages.

The second episode is a central set piece in that great novel of aristocratic nostalgia, Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*.<sup>3</sup> In it the narrator, together with his school-friend Albert Bloch, now a rising playwright, attend an afternoon reception given by Madame de Villeparisis, a member of the aristocratic *beau-monde* of late-nineteenth-century Paris. There the two men encounter a historian, who is writing a book on the *Fronde* and is shown a celebrated portrait of the duchesse de Montmorency. The duchesse, after the execution of her husband following the great Montmorency rising in southern France in the early 1630s, had withdrawn to one of the exclusive religious houses for aristocratic women in the country's eastern regions, eventually becoming its abbess.<sup>4</sup> When Mme de Villeparisis is standing in front of the portrait, she notes complacently how extraordinary it is to think that the daughters of a king of France, whether Valois or Bourbon, would have been refused entry to this and similar establishments, so uncompromising were their rules governing admittance. When Bloch falls into the trap and expresses his puzzlement, she explains that this exclusion was because the ruling family lacked sufficient quarterings – that is to say, their pedigree had been compromised. This was due to their marriages into the Medici family, unions which true aristocrats – such as Mme de Villeparisis and the circles in which she moved – viewed as a *mésalliance*!

The perspective provided by these two episodes provides a very good starting point for an attempt to identify the wider themes which emerge from this volume. The point which Proust and, in a different way, Saint-Simon were making is central to all the chapters: the essential inter-connectedness of ruling and aristocratic families. Magnates inhabited the same social and political *milieu* as monarchs, to whom they were often related by ties of blood and marriage. France was unusual in the existence of the 'Princes of the Blood' (*princes du sang*) at the head of the secular aristocracy. There was no equivalent in England, with the extinction of the Tudors and the fact that James VI and I was an only son, while in Scotland a distant relationship with the Stuart monarchy did not give either the Hamiltons or the Lennoxes an exalted standing beyond their status as peers.<sup>5</sup> In many countries, however, the high nobility contained lineages which had begun as bastard or junior lines of a ruling dynasty. Illegitimate descent could, in certain circumstances, be circumvented and provide a route to inheritance. Theoretically, it precluded succession to titles and lands, unless removed by a subsequent act of legitimation or other legal arrangement. In practice, however, where an obvious heir or heiress was lacking, illegitimate descent would become part of the equation. In the case

<sup>3</sup> Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time: The Guermantes Way*, transl. Mark Treharne (London: Allen Lane, 2002), 195 and 185–291 *passim*; cf. William D. Godsey, Jr., *Nobles and Nation in Central Europe: Free Imperial Knights in the Age of Revolution 1750–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 48–9.

<sup>4</sup> Michel Parisse and Pierre Heili (eds), *Les chapitres de dames nobles entre France et Empire* (Paris: Éditions Messene, 1998) is an informative introduction.

<sup>5</sup> Above, Chapter 2.

of the Guise inheritance, links through bastard lines back to both the French king Henry IV (1589–1610) and to the main branch of the House of Lorraine were influential.<sup>6</sup>

Inter-marriage had been common in earlier times and still took place in many European countries.<sup>7</sup> Such links were to be found everywhere, to a greater or lesser extent. One foundation of the spectacular rise of the De la Gardie in mid-seventeenth century Sweden (above, chapter 5) was Magnus Gabriel's marriage to a cousin of Queen Christina (1632–54), whose favourite he was. This made him the brother-in-law of the next ruler, Charles X (1654–60).<sup>8</sup> Within a country such as Sweden, thinly populated and with an aristocracy still in the process of consolidation, the links between the ruling family and the most prominent lineages could be especially close, with the Brahe also being cousins of a sixteenth-century king, Erik XIV (1560–68), as a result of an earlier marriage between a head of the family and Gustav Vasa's sister. Indeed, the first Swedish king after the break-up of the late medieval Union of Kalmar, Gustav I Vasa (1523–60), had married as his second and third wives, prominent noblewomen.<sup>9</sup> Muscovy/Russia was another country where rulers intermarried with members of the social elite, though unions with leading boyar or princely families appear to have been deliberately shunned out of a fear of destabilising court politics.<sup>10</sup>

Where there was an established connection of this kind, it was normally incorporated into a family's coat of arms and so emphasised in the all-important visual dimension. One theme to emerge from the volume as a whole is the considerable and enduring role of heraldry in creating and highlighting identity. Marriage alliances could be celebrated, distinguished ancestry recalled and claims advertised by means of adjustments to coats of arms, which were a fluid medium. Jane Ohlmeyer's account of the remaking of Ireland's aristocracy during the tumultuous seventeenth century (Chapter 1) provides an excellent example of the importance of heraldry and, closely linked to it, genealogy within a society in which distinguished ancestry was increasingly important: whether it was genuine or, more often, problematical.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Cf. above, Chapter 6; Jouanna, 'Les Guises et le sang de France'; cf. Jean-Paul Desprat, *Les bâtards d'Henri IV: L'épée des Vendômes 1594–1727* (Paris: Perrin, 1994), a lively study of one notable group of a King's natural offspring.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Oresko, "Bastards as Clients: The House of Savoy and its Illegitimate Children", in *Patronages et Clientélismes 1550–1700 (France, Angleterre, Espagne, Italie)*, (eds) Charles Giry-DeLoison and Roger Mettam (Lille: Villeneuve d'Ascq, 1996), has some interesting reflections from a Savoyard perspective.

<sup>8</sup> Göran Rystad, "Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie", in *Sweden's Age of Greatness 1632–1718*, (ed.) Michael Roberts (London: Macmillan, 1973), 204, 206.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. above, Chapter 8.

<sup>10</sup> Russell E. Martin, *A Bride for the Tsar: Bride-shows and Marriage Politics in Early Modern Russia* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2012).

<sup>11</sup> See now Jane Ohlmeyer, *Making Ireland English: The Irish Aristocracy in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), 73–5; cf.

Rulers and aristocrats viewed this world in similar ways, employed an identical vocabulary – that of House, lineage, and kin – and embraced the same priorities: those of conserving and, if possible, increasing their family status and building up the resources which sustained this position. Dynasticism, as Jeroen Duindam rightly notes, was an extension of the centrality of kinship to all political authority in the pre-modern world and to the importance of patriarchy and even matriarchy for this.<sup>12</sup> Magnates took their cue from the monarchs whom they served where succession and inheritance were concerned, often adopting primogeniture shortly after ruling dynasties had done so. Their families – exactly like those of Europe’s rulers – were not compact groups of blood relatives but large and wide-ranging family complexes: as Jonathan Spangler rightly emphasises, ‘A great aristocratic or princely *Maison* is an entire enterprise’.<sup>13</sup>

One common theme of the essays is just how wide these connections of blood and kinship – real and presumed – were in the estimation of contemporaries. Later notions of the nuclear family are of little use in understanding early modern aristocratic lineages, created and continually reinforced by marriages within a surprisingly narrow degree of kinship which could frequently exceed what was strictly permissible in canon law and were facilitated by dispensations from a complaisant Roman Catholic Church. These exemptions were often facilitated by ecclesiastical figures who were also cadets or relatives of the family in question, as younger sons followed ecclesiastical careers. The crucial importance of marriage in creating and cementing these wide family connections, and building new ones, is confirmed by many of the articles and is an established emphasis of scholarship on Europe’s higher nobilities. These individual studies collectively provide further evidence for suggesting that, within the world of aristocratic and ruling lineages, ‘family’ could be a constructed identity, with a plasticine-like quality which made it capable of frequent refashioning. Mirella Marini’s study (Chapter 5) of the various dynastic permutations supervised by Anne of Croÿ (1564–1635), duchess of Aarschot and princely countess of Arenberg during the final two decades of her life, provides an illuminating demonstration of how an aristocratic identity could be continually re-made in this way.

Within Europe’s monarchies leading magnates regarded rulers as their near-equals in status. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the gulf between the greatest lord and his royal master had still been relatively narrow and, though it subsequently widened as monarchy became a more exalted status during the early modern period, the sense of common values and membership of the same social and political community persisted, particularly in the perspective of a nobleman and his extended family. This was a long-established emphasis: as long ago as the

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below, Section IV.

<sup>12</sup> Above, Chapter 3. Professor Duindam has now renewed the study of dynastic power with his *Dynasties* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), which I was fortunate to read in typescript.

<sup>13</sup> Above, Chapter 6.

early-eleventh century, Adalbero, the bishop of Laon, had proclaimed in a famous sentence that ‘The line of descent of nobles is from the blood of kings’, and this remained a widespread and enduring aristocratic assumption well into the early modern period.<sup>14</sup> Analysing the French monarchy in the earlier-sixteenth century, Claude de Seyssel was clear that ‘Chief among the nobility are the great princes, those of the royal blood’.<sup>15</sup> One of the most striking illustrations of this was the plaque referred to by Fabian Persson and put up outside the burial vault in the family church of Östra Ryd, declaring it was the last resting place of ‘the following Brahes of royal blood’.<sup>16</sup>

Historians can all-too-easily overlook this simple point, because ‘monarchy’ and ‘nobility’ have often appeared separate elements in Europe’s past. Previous historiography has contributed to this, with its emphasis on how the nobility was ‘tamed’ by centralising absolute monarchy during the early modern centuries and so suffered an eclipse, with the traditional social elite losing out to a rising middle class.<sup>17</sup> Such simplicities have long been abandoned: Ronald Asch’s contribution (Chapter 2) is a fine demonstration of the prism through which crown-noble relations are now viewed, with its twin emphases on the importance of co-operation and shared interests, and its revelation of the weakness and vulnerability of two new monarchs.<sup>18</sup> In Europe’s monarchies – as in Imperial China to a significant extent – rulers depended upon co-operation with local social élites in government.<sup>19</sup> Yet it is all too easy to continue to view the monarchy and the higher nobility as essentially separate subjects. The essays in this volume are an important reminder that they inter-connected frequently and in significant ways, and that we should view them together, as dimensions of a larger whole.

Jeroen Duindam (Chapter 3) provides an intriguing comparative confirmation with his demonstration of the remarkable number and enduring importance of the fief-holding Imperial princes in China, particularly in the western provinces under the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), whose status derived entirely from their links with the ruling family, from which they also secured a regular income.<sup>20</sup> Other chapters reinforce the same point. One of the new rulers discussed by Ronald Asch came

<sup>14</sup> Quoted by Raluca L. Radulescu and Edward Donald Kennedy (eds), *Broken Lines: Genealogical Literature in Medieval Britain and France* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 1; cf. Formel, *Alliances et Généalogie*, 2: 1165–66, for the case of France.

<sup>15</sup> Claude de Seyssel, *The Monarchy of France*, (eds) J.H. Hexter and Donald R. Kelley (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 175.

<sup>16</sup> Above, Chapter 8.

<sup>17</sup> See the comments by Jeroen Duindam, above, Chapter 3.

<sup>18</sup> The best introductions to the early modern nobility are the two overlapping syntheses by Ronald G. Asch, *Nobilities in Transition 1550–1700: Courtiers and Rebels in Britain and Europe* (London: Arnold, 2003) and *Europäischer Adel in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2008).

<sup>19</sup> Above, Chapter 3.

<sup>20</sup> Though in Imperial China hereditary status was less important than in Europe: above, chapter 3.



from the prominent French magnate family of Bourbon; another such lineage, its rival the House of Guise, had come close to securing the French crown at the end of the 1580s, as Jonathan Spangler notes (Chapter 6); while Liesbeth Geever examines a transnational lineage, the House of Orange, which became rulers of the Dutch Republic (Chapter 9), and Sebastiaan Derks (Chapter 7) a Roman noble and then papal lineage which evolved into an Italian ruling dynasty, the Farnese, who were dukes of Parma and Piacenza and would eventually provide a Queen for Spain: Elisabeth Farnese, the formidable second wife of the first Bourbon ruler, Philip V (1700–46).

Looking further east, the Appanage Princes in Muscovy headed that country's protean aristocracy. These families were the descendants of the formerly independent rulers of small principalities which had become part of the Muscovite realm as it expanded through annexations and incorporations during the Later Middle Ages.<sup>21</sup> All were descended from a branch of the Russian or Lithuanian ruling houses, and alone enjoyed the title of prince. Everywhere, aristocrats clustered around thrones. A wish to highlight nearness to rulers of England, as well as secure status and prestige, may well have been an additional reason for the 10 Irish aristocrats buried in London's Westminster Abbey, the traditional resting place of kings, to which Jane Ohlmeyer refers; it certainly was for Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie who opted to be buried in Varnhem, alongside the remains of Sweden's twelfth- and thirteenth-century kings, even though this involved creating a new family church *ab initio*.<sup>22</sup> An earlier Swedish dynast – the sixteenth-century magnate Per Brahe – buried his son Joakim in the Vadstena convent church in order to highlight and reinforce the family's supposed links with the iconic St Bridget of Sweden.<sup>23</sup> We are used to emphasising how 'absolute' monarchs such as Louis XIV surrounded themselves with aristocrats in order to enhance their own majesty, but we need to remember that leading nobles themselves felt they secured prestige and status – as well, of course, as opportunities for income, advancement and access to patronage of all kinds – from their attendance at court and their interaction with the ruler.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> The consequences are set out in the illuminating study by Nancy Shields Kollmann, *Kinship and Politics: The Making of the Muscovite Political System, 1345–1547* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987).

<sup>22</sup> Above, Chapters 1 and 8.

<sup>23</sup> Above, Chapter 8.

<sup>24</sup> See in particular Jeroen Duindam, *Vienna and Versailles: The Courts of Europe's Dynastic Rivals 1550–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) and the collections of essays edited by Ronald G. Asch and Adolf M. Birke, *Princes, Patronage and the Nobility: The Court at the Beginning of the Modern Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), and by John Adamson, *The Princely Courts of Europe 1500–1750* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999). A wider perspective is provided by Jeroen Duindam, Tülay Artan and Metin Kunt (eds), *Royal Courts in Dynastic States and Empires: A Global Perspective* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

A number of prominent noble lineages actually became ruling families and established themselves upon European thrones during the early modern period. Sweden's ruling Vasa family were originally long-established members of the lesser nobility, and had been elevated to the throne in the desperate circumstances of the early 1520s, as Sweden broke free from Danish rule and established a precarious independence. Initially the crown was not even hereditary, and did not become so until 1544. During the domestic political conflicts of the second half of the sixteenth century and the first decade of the seventeenth century, there were Swedish aristocratic voices ready and willing to remind the Vasas of their modest origins. In another polity where an elective system of monarchy prevailed for much longer, that of Poland-Lithuania (which had been consolidated by the Union of Lublin in 1569), no fewer than four prominent families – Wisniowiecki, Sobieski, Leszczyński and Poniatowski – temporarily provided a king, though none was allowed to secure their family upon the throne by establishing the principle of hereditary succession. Far more enduring were the Bourbons in France (as we have seen), the Romanovs in Muscovy and the Braganças in Portugal. The Romanov family became Muscovite rulers at the end of the 'Time of Troubles' (1598–1613), while when Portugal revolted successfully in 1640 and ended the 60-year rule by Madrid, the plutocratic Bragança duke became king, successfully establishing his family on the throne.

Historians of the European nobility now agree that there was a clearly defined hierarchy within the Second Estate. It stretched up from the usually numerous and impoverished lesser nobility through more prosperous families in the middle ranks whose horizons were provincial rather than national – the *noblesse seconde* of French scholars<sup>25</sup> – to the great lineages, or would-be great lineages, who are the subjects of this volume: the Brahe and the Ormond, the Croÿ, the Guise and the Arenberg. But it is important to remember that the hierarchy did not stop with the magnates: it continued on upwards to reach the crown itself. France's king was seen – and, to a significant extent, saw himself, as Ronald Asch explains so clearly in the case of Henry IV<sup>26</sup> – as the first nobleman in the realm, able and willing to lead his armies in person on the battlefield. Many aristocrats, for their part, continued to view the king as simply *primus inter pares*, first among equals, asserting a claim to near-equality which seventeenth-century rulers were at pains to limit and even reject.<sup>27</sup> Sixteenth-century France contained several aristocratic lineages related to the ruling Valois family, though any claim to the throne was impossible because of the Salic Law, which precluded succession through the female line.<sup>28</sup> This was one reason why successive French monarchs, beginning with the first Bourbon Henry IV, particularly emphasised the sacral nature of their

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<sup>25</sup> For which see Laurent Bourquin, *Noblesse seconde et pouvoir en Champagne aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1994).

<sup>26</sup> Above, Chapter 2.

<sup>27</sup> Formel, *Alliances et Généalogie*, 2:1155–56, emphasises this for France.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. above, Chapter 2.

kingship, intending thereby to accentuate the gulf between the ruler and even the greatest aristocrat in the realm.<sup>29</sup>

Behind this set of mental attitudes lay a conviction on the part of magnates that, in the past, their own predecessors had been the equals or near-equals of kings. Indeed, they had played a part in confirming rulers on the throne and even in selecting them. Whatever the truth of this – and it was idealised and exaggerated, though with some basis in past history when the gulf between rulers and their secular elites had been less than it would become by the seventeenth century – it was deeply cherished among leading families. In France it had been strengthened by the generation of intense religious and political conflict after 1562. The Valois monarchy had been at a low ebb, both in terms of prestige and of actual authority, during the later-sixteenth century Wars of Religion, at a time when magnate power had increased spectacularly, strengthening ideas of near-equality on the part of leading lineages. During the early part of the seventeenth century, noble propagandists had seriously advanced the idea that the French crown should cede more authority to aristocrats and weaken its own power. It would transform the country into a Gallic version of the *Reich* or Holy Roman Empire in which leading aristocrats enjoyed quasi-sovereign status, leaving the French king with only a position of overlordship and sharply reducing his rights. Such notions made little headway, as a stronger monarchy was created by the first Bourbon King; that they could even be advanced revealed the self-confidence and power of the leading families, after half a century of royal weakness.

The same point can be made in a rather different way. Historians of the nobility frequently emphasise how middle-ranking and especially higher nobles were accustomed to look both sideways and downwards: to the side, to scrutinise the actions of rivals and to check that they were not getting ahead in the permanent competition for status and the accompanying rewards; they also looked down, watching anxiously for the rise of a rival House which might one day threaten their own position. But the great lineages also looked upwards, modelling their lifestyles on Europe's monarchies. They created councils to advise the head of the family about dynastic strategy and to govern during any minority or the temporary absence of the head of the lineage, and administrations to supervise the collection of their revenues and the running of their estates.<sup>30</sup> They maintained their own courts – exactly as the Imperial princes did in China<sup>31</sup> – and undertook artistic and literary patronage of all kinds, creating a representational culture which, by

<sup>29</sup> Above, Chapter 2. See the suggestive studies by Paul Kléber Monod, *The Power of Kings: Monarchy and Religion in Europe, 1589–1715* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), and by Ronald G. Asch, *Sacral Kingship Between Disenchantment and Re-Enchantment: The French and English Monarchies, 1587–1688* (New York: Berghahn, 2014).

<sup>30</sup> See, e.g., the study by Adolfo Carrasco Martínez, *El Poder de la Sangre: Los duques del Infantado 1601–1841* (Madrid: Actas, 2010), esp. part III, for a notable example.

<sup>31</sup> Above, Chapter 3.

the early modern period, could rival that of crowned heads.<sup>32</sup> The duc d'Alençon, whose early death in 1675 created the problem of the Guise succession, had an orchestra to rival that of Louis XIV together with his 'own personal composer'.<sup>33</sup>

Aristocrats, often accustomed to life at royal and princely courts, emulated monarchical splendour in their own extended households, which flourished particularly during the early modern centuries. One outstanding example was the court maintained by the Hungarian magnate family of Eszterházy, initially at Eisenstadt and in Vienna, and then at the fabled palace of Eszterháza – built at enormous cost on the shore of the Neusiedler See – during the reign of the celebrated Maecenas, Prince Nikolaus the Magnificent (1762–90).<sup>34</sup> Adorned for a generation by the noted composer Joseph Haydn as *Kapellmeister*, it rivalled the imperial court at Vienna in distinction and display, if not in size. All over Europe, leading aristocrats modelled their lifestyles and their aspirations on the rulers whom they served, to the point of adopting numerals to distinguish different members of the family with the same name and so describing themselves as 'Henri II Condé' or 'Nikolaus I Eszterházy'. Even more striking is the action of the seventeenth-century Swedish aristocrat, Per Brahe the Younger, aspiring to be a semi-sovereign ruler in his county of Visingsborg around Lake Vättern in central Sweden, which was as large as the north German Duchy of Mecklenburg-Schwerin. Brahe erected at least 16 memorial stones throughout Visingsborg, recording the length of the 'reigns' of various Brahe counts, something that is as remarkable as it is instructive.<sup>35</sup>

Leading nobles had always been aware of the actions of rulers, and to a significant extent copied them. One example was the way in which magnates viewed themselves in self-consciously dynastic terms: as the families studied in this volume so obviously did.<sup>36</sup> The sense of dynasty which is evident in all the

<sup>32</sup> Two good examples are the lavishly illustrated volume edited by Marika Koblussek and Jori Zijlmans, *Princely Display: The Court of Frederik Henrik of Orange and Amalia von Solms* (The Hague and Zwolle: Waanders, 1997) and the range of cultural patronage of the sixteenth-century Guise which is made clear by the essays in Bellenger, *Le mécénat*.

<sup>33</sup> Above, Chapter 6.

<sup>34</sup> The articles in the 1995 exhibition catalogue *Die Fürsten Esterházy: Magnaten, Diplomaten und Mäzene*, (eds) Jakob Perschy and Harald Prickler (Eisenstadt: Amt der Burgenländischen Landesregierung, 1995) provide a helpful introduction to the family's fortunes, while its eighteenth-century ascendancy is the subject of Rebecca Gates-Coon, *The Landed Estates of the Esterházy Princes: Hungary during the Reforms of Maria Theresia and Joseph II* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).

<sup>35</sup> Above, Chapter 8.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Oresko, "The Marriages of the nieces of Cardinal Mazarin: Public Policy and Private Strategy in Seventeenth-century Europe", in *Frankreich im Europäischen Staatensystem der Frühen Neuzeit*, (ed.) Rainer Babel (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1995) is an illuminating examination of the Cardinal's use of dynastic marriages and a case study with wide implications; cf. *ibid.*, 150–51, for some interesting reflections on what the author styles the 'new dynastic history' and an emphasis upon the crucial importance of female

articles first developed among ruling families and then spread downwards among the aristocrats who served them. The nobility, after all, had originated in service – mostly on the battlefield or in the council chamber – to kings and other rulers, and in the grants of land, titles and privileges which it received in return. It was perfectly natural that aristocrats should emulate the source of their own distinction. This is the first wider conclusion to emerge from the articles in this volume. Four other broad themes running through the individual essays can be identified: the importance of transnational families; the significant role of women within aristocratic lineages; the crucial importance of succession and inheritance and of arrangements to provide for these; and the numerous ways in which aristocratic identity could be represented and, more importantly, manufactured.

## II

The importance of transnational families is highlighted by several articles: notably Jane Ohlmeyer's demonstration of the ways in which the Ormonds established a secure bridgehead in England while upholding their position in Ireland,<sup>37</sup> Violet Soen's exploration of the Croÿs poised between northern France and the Southern Netherlands, and Liesbeth Geevers's account of the way in which the House of Orange gradually withdrew from the territory in southern France which provided the very name of the dynasty and instead focused on its German lands and increasingly on the Dutch Republic, where it was intermittently Stadholder (respectively Chapters 1, 4, and 9). International marriages conferred enhanced prestige, in addition to contributing to the emergence and solidification of transnational aristocratic families, as several chapters make clear. Many aristocratic lineages acquired significant international connections, created by such marriages or by earlier service abroad, with important implications for the study of noble families. For far too long, as Violet Soen shrewdly remarks, the history of Europe's nobilities has been written almost exclusively within a national perspective, and this can easily become self-limiting.<sup>38</sup> Several chapters demonstrate the importance of escaping from such a restrictive framework. Living in two or more social and political worlds had obvious implications for dynastic identities, as several authors make clear. Happily, this topic is now beginning to attract the scholarly attention it merits.<sup>39</sup>

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lines. See also Barbara Stephenson, "Maintaining the Antiquity of the House: Marguerite de Navarre, Noble Marriage and Dynastic Culture in early-sixteenth century France", *The Court Historian* 10 (2005), 15–24.

<sup>37</sup> See also her major study: Ohlmeyer, *Making Ireland English*.

<sup>38</sup> Above, Chapter 4.

<sup>39</sup> Jonathan Spangler, "Those In Between: Princely Families on the Margins of the Great Powers – The Franco-German Frontier, 1477–1830", in, *Transregional and Transnational Families in Europe and Beyond: Experiences since the Middle Ages*, (eds)

Several chapters focus on what were clearly frontier zones: areas located between the powerful monarchies which increasingly dominated early modern Europe's political landscape.<sup>40</sup> Two such regions were of particular significance: the northern sector of the Italian Peninsula, and the extended arc of territory which stretched from the Southern Netherlands through Alsace, Lorraine, Western Switzerland and Dauphiné, into Provence, Savoy and Piedmont – the 'Middle Kingdom' first created by the division of Charlemagne's inheritance in 843 and, in its northern components, subsequently the lands of the dukes of Burgundy.

The context of Sebastiaan Derks's study (Chapter 7) is the complex political geography and territorial status of northern Italy, which remained part of *Reichsitalien*, though the precise extent and the nature of the Holy Roman Empire's authority were ambiguous and contested.<sup>41</sup> The Farnese were one of a number of families whose possessions lay within this zone of intense political rivalry, where Spanish and, subsequently, Austrian Habsburg interests collided with those of Valois and then Bourbon France. Its vulnerability, together with the need to pursue a balancing policy, rather than committing exclusively to one side or the other, underlay the ambiguities in political positioning skilfully detected by Derks.

The second border zone, a broad swathe of territory which bisected the emerging French monarchy to the west, and the Holy Roman Empire to the east, contained as many as 30 princely families with aspirations to independent or semi-sovereign status. It is brought into focus by three chapters: those by Mirella Marini on the Arenbergs, by Violet Soen on the Croÿs and by Jonathan Spangler on the Guises/Lorraine (Chapters 5, 4, 6). The first two, together with the Salm lineage, were the most prominent of these families, while the third was much more heavily involved within France's domestic politics in addition to its position as dukes of

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Christopher H. Johnson, David Warren Sabean, Simon Teuscher and Francesca Trivellato (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2011), 130–54, is a helpful introduction to the situation in the borderlands between France and the Reich; I am grateful to Dr Spangler for allowing me to read this article in advance of its publication. Cf. the same author's book: *The Society of Princes: The Lorraine-Guise and the Conservation of Power and Wealth in seventeenth-century France* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

<sup>40</sup> The discussion which follows owes much to the "Introduction", in *Royal and Republican Sovereignty in Early Modern Europe: Essays in Memory of Ragnhild Hatton*, (eds) Robert Oresko, G.C. Gibbs and H.M. Scott (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>41</sup> Marina Cavallera, "Les fiefs impériaux dans l'Italie nord-occidentale au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle", in *Les enclaves territoriales aux Temps Modernes (XVI<sup>e</sup>-XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, (eds) Paul Delsalle and André Ferrer (Besançon: Presses Universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2000) and Blythe Alice Raviola, "The Imperial System in Early Modern Northern Italy: A Web of Dukedoms, Fiefs and Enclaves along the Po", in *The Holy Roman Empire, 1495–1806: A European Perspective*, (eds) R.J.W. Evans and Peter H. Wilson (Leiden: Brill, 2012) provide helpful discussions.

Lorraine.<sup>42</sup> During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as ‘national’ nobilities solidified within Europe’s emerging monarchical states, families in this zone had evolved into transnational lineages and had also frequently intermarried. The Croÿs, by origin a family of modest status in the nobility of Picardy, had gravitated northwards and prospered by playing off the French King against the Burgundian ruler and, subsequently, his Austrian Habsburg and Spanish counterparts, who successively attempted to rule the Southern Netherlands from a considerable distance. The limited authority which the Austrian Habsburg Emperor, the Spanish King and the King of France were all able to exert in an area of strategic and economic importance allowed transnational lineages such as the Croÿs to prosper by playing one side off against another, thereby gaining in resources and authority.

The growing wealth and power of France’s Valois and then Bourbon monarchy, however, came to set limits to this independence. As early as the reign of Francis I (1515–47), efforts had been made to extend France’s influence into the eastern and south-eastern frontier zones by marrying the younger sons of the ruling dynasties of Lorraine, Clèves and Savoy to Valois heiresses, with the intention of drawing these polities into Paris’s political orbit. With the seventeenth-century recovery of France as a European power, this objective also came to be pursued by more direct, and often violent, means. One by-product of these initiatives had been the creation of a group of foreign princes – *princes étrangers* – at the French court: families who enjoyed dual status and who, through membership of sovereign ruling dynasties outside France, could and did claim precedence over the *ducs-et-pairs* and even the ‘*princes légitimés*’.<sup>43</sup> Under the Bourbon monarchy this group had grown both in size and in importance, and during a more hierarchical and status-conscious century had been a fertile source of disputes over precedence.

These clashes had revolved around the claims of such families to be considered semi-sovereign princes, and so entitled to special treatment at court due to their status as rulers of an independent territory beyond France. Such efforts naturally inspired rival claims, among a competitive and status-conscious higher nobility. During the first decade of the seventeenth century the maréchal-duc de Bouillon sought to claim this status for his possession of Sedan, which lay on the edge of the border zone along France’s north-eastern frontier.<sup>44</sup> Such disputes were not

<sup>42</sup> See Jean-Marie Constant, *Les Guise* (Paris: Hachette, 1984) and, for the family’s remarkable sixteenth-century trajectory, Stuart Carroll, *Martyrs and Murderers: The Guise Family and the Making of Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>43</sup> Robert Oresko, “Princes étrangers”, in *Dictionnaire de l’Ancien Régime*, (ed.) Lucien Bély (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2003), and Guy Antonetti, “Les princes étrangers”, in *État et société en France aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles: Mélanges offerts à Yves Durand*, (eds) Jean-Pierre Bardet, Dominique Dinet, Jean-Pierre Poussou and Marie-Catherine Vignal (Paris: Presses de l’Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2000) are helpful introductions, though the latter is not without shortcomings.

<sup>44</sup> Simon Hodson, “Politics of the Frontier: Henri IV, the Maréchal-Duc de Bouillon and the sovereignty of Sedan”, *French History* 19 (2005).

confined to France. The appearance of native ‘princes’ in the Habsburg-governed Kingdom of Bohemia – due to the noted inflation of titles during the seventeenth century – caused similar problems in the eastern lands of the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>45</sup> Princely rank and the semi-sovereign status which it justified were integral to the identity of an elite group of aristocratic families scattered all across Europe, to be defended and perpetuated at all costs.

Mirella Marini’s study (Chapter 5) reveals how one formidable female dynast, Anne of Croÿ, strove to perpetuate the identity and, with it, the survival of the Houses of Arenberg and Aarschot. Central to her efforts was a deliberate re-ordering of the family archives, carried out with the intention of buttressing the dynastic claims being advanced and the accompanying family realignment which she was supervising. Scholars researching the aristocracy and nobility – exactly like early modern specialists more generally – are increasingly aware that the archives they exploit are not neutral collections of documents, but were assembled and continually re-organised with distinct purposes in mind.<sup>46</sup> Another example of the importance of a family’s archives for its identity is provided by Sebastiaan Derks, who demonstrates the importance of the consolidation of the Farnese muniments carried out by Duke Ranuccio I of Parma.<sup>47</sup>

The importance of sovereignty for early modern historians has usually been viewed in terms of the strengthening of monarchical authority at this time. Sovereign power has been seen as one of the essential attributes of the modern state, which was believed to have had its origins in these developments. Here there is an obvious link between the world of politics and government, and that of ideas and philosophy. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, would-be absolute monarchs were quick to borrow from political theory and to support their own authority by employing the doctrine that sovereignty was complete and indivisible. This derived from the well-known writings of the sixteenth-century theorist, Jean Bodin, encapsulated in his *Six livres de la République* (1576), drawn up under the shadow of the collapse of royal authority and civil war in later-sixteenth century France. Bodin’s assertion that sovereignty was complete and indivisible was seized upon by rulers, seeking a theoretical justification for efforts to increase their own authority, and employed in monarchical propaganda.

The exaggerated claims advanced on their behalf were in turn taken at face value by historians of earlier generations, particular those nineteenth- and early-twentieth century scholars searching for the origins of the homogenised ‘nation-state’. They were also inspired by the writings of the German sociologist Max

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<sup>45</sup> There is a valuable survey by Petr Mat’á, “Bohemia, Silesia and the Empire: Negotiating Princely Dignity on the Eastern Periphery”, in *The Holy Roman Empire*, (eds) Evans and Wilson. I am grateful to Dr Mat’á for allowing me to read this article before its publication.

<sup>46</sup> Markus Friedrich, *Die Geburt des Archivs: Eine Wissensgeschichte* (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2013) is a good introduction to the wider issues involved.

<sup>47</sup> Above, Chapter 7.



Weber, who credited the institutions of the state with possessing ‘the monopoly of legitimate force and regularly, normally and effectively exercising domination’ within a defined territorial area.<sup>48</sup> Such a definition assumed that sovereignty was the preserve of the ruler and, by extension, of what came to be perceived as a ‘government’, the existence of which derived directly from princely validation and attribution of responsibility. Though this approach was widely influential, it obscured two crucial facts. Firstly, many of what have been taken to be the attributes of the modern state – the administration of justice, the authority to tax, even the right to conduct a separate foreign policy – were at this period not the monopoly of the ruler alone, but were shared with other individuals, groups and territories within the frequently disparate lands over which the prince claimed sovereign power.<sup>49</sup>

In second place, the composite nature of most early modern polities has become fully apparent to historians. The debate over what came to be called ‘composite monarchy’ here made a major contribution. It underlined that all early modern kingdoms were collections of separate territories and provinces, each with their own distinctive constitutions, laws, political traditions and sometimes even languages. Each component part defended its own way of life and especially its fiscal, legal and (sometimes) religious privileges against central encroachment. This struggle was aided by the small size of the state apparatus and by the difficulties posed by slow and unreliable communications, highlighted by Jeroen Duindam for the very different case of China, where authority had to be exercised over a vastly greater geographical area (Chapter 3). Within every polity there were numerous smaller jurisdictional and territorial units, all anxious to retain such independence as remained. Efforts to promote greater internal cohesion could only make slow progress in the face of the enormous strength of traditional structures and established patterns of life.

<sup>48</sup> Quoted by Howard Kaminsky and James Van Horn Melton (eds), *Land and Lordship: Structures of Governance in Medieval Austria* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), xxiii.

<sup>49</sup> For its origins, see H.G. Koenigsberger, “*Dominium Regale or dominium politicum et regale: monarchies and parliaments in early modern Europe*” (originally an inaugural lecture delivered in 1975 and subsequently printed in the same author’s *Politicians and Virtuosi: Essays in Early Modern European History* (London: Hambledon, 1986) together with the important discussion by J.H. Elliott, “A Europe of Composite Monarchies”, *Past and Present* 137 (1992); see also the collection of essays edited by Mark Greengrass, *Conquest and Coalescence: The Shaping of the State in Early Modern Europe* (London: Arbold, 1991), by Petr Mat’ a and Thomas Winkelbauer, *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1620 bis 1740: Leistungen und Grenzen des Absolutismusparadigmas* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2006), and by Jon Arrieta and John H. Elliott, *Forms of Union: The British and Spanish Monarchies in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Donostia: Eusko Ikaskuntza, 2009), which was published as RIEV Cuadernos 5; and Harald Gustafsson, “The Conglomerate State: A Reflection on State Formation in Early Modern Europe”, *Scandinavian Journal of History* 23 (1998).

The old world of lordship thus persisted long into the early modern period, when competing jurisdictions jostled for sovereignty.<sup>50</sup> Powerful aristocratic dynasties were in the forefront of this struggle, sometimes acting as the agents of centralisation but more often rallying provincial resistance and in this way benefitting from the inability of dynastic monarchy to extend its authority to the extent that it wished. During the past half century, the traditional emphasis upon the emergence of a Leviathan state during the early modern period has been replaced by a recognition of the real practical limitations upon central government authority. There is now a recognition that there were a number of institutions and individuals who were attempting to establish their pre-eminence, in the process contributing to a redefinition of the idea of 'sovereignty', now seen as less a matter of legislative authority – the power to command – and more in terms of territorial, personal and practical elements rather than purely philosophical notions. Sovereignty, in other words, has ceased to be viewed through the prism provided by Bodin and, following the writings of a theorist such as the German Protestant philosopher Henning Arnisaeus (1576/79–1673), is now seen in terms of bundles of rights which might be held to a greater or lesser extent.<sup>51</sup> This accords with the development of ideas of sovereignty at the time. For half a century after the publication of *Six livres de la République* Bodin's theories held sway, but from the mid 1620s a view of sovereignty as something which might be divided and which accorded more with contemporary reality, was gaining ground especially within the *Reich*.

This shift in emphasis has contributed to – and been accompanied by – a recognition that many of the families discussed in this book themselves possessed a measure of sovereignty and that this was fundamental to their self-identification and self-representation. The Arenbergs, Orange and Guises-Lorraine (Chapters 5, 9 and 6) clearly were all semi-sovereign. In a similar way, early modern France contained a number of individuals, behind whom stood great family complexes, who claimed to be sovereigns in their own right. They were not the King's subjects but the juridical equals of the monarch, whom they might agree to serve.

One of the best known of these was Charles, duc de Nevers, who is most familiar for his efforts to secure the succession to the Italian duchies of Mantua and Monferrato at the end of the 1620s, which gave rise to a well-known international

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<sup>50</sup> Otto Brunner, *Land und Herrschaft: Grundfragen der territorialen Verfassungsgeschichte Österreichs im Mittelalter* (Baden-bei-Wien: Rohrer, 1939 and subsequent editions), remains a classic study of the world of lordship; there is a notable English translation, cited in n. 48.

<sup>51</sup> Julian H. Franklin, "Sovereignty and the Mixed Constitution: Bodin and his Critics", in *The Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450–1700*, (eds) J.H. Burns with Mark Goldie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); for Arnisaeus, see *ibid.*, 314, 320–23, 659.

crisis.<sup>52</sup> Nevers had a contractual view of his relationship with Louis XIII, the French King. He might and did enter French service, but he was clear that he retained his sovereign status. He always thought and acted not like a royal subject but as an independent ruler – which he was twice over, through his possession of the sovereign principalities of Bois-Belle-en-Berry, in central France, and Arches, on the north-eastern frontier. He also held and administered directly the duchies of Nevers, Rethel and (from 1621) Mayenne. The duc de Nevers's sovereignty was apparent in his ability to mint coins and to dispense justice (with no appeal to another, higher jurisdiction), and it was manifest in his resplendent court and independent military forces. This was the nub of the problem for the French crown: the existence and dual status of a number of powerful families who held ducal titles and rank, but came from sovereign princely houses and had a status which eclipsed that of most *grands*.

### III

The central role which women played within these aristocratic dynasties is a further conclusion of more general importance to emerge. For far too long, female family members have been written out of the history of Europe's nobilities, in the same way that early modern and nineteenth-century genealogists and historians often omitted them, or at least many of them, from the family trees which they so laboriously constructed and the narrative histories they produced in order to create and sustain dynastic identity. Nobility was an essentially masculine status and adhered primarily in the male line, and these considerations appeared to validate the neglect of noblewomen. Where they were studied – in keeping with the approach of some early historians of gender – the emphasis was on women who substituted for men: during a husband's absence at court, on military campaign or after his death, during the minority of a child. The role they discharged was either restricted in time or essentially passive in nature.

This neglect is beginning to be remedied, as historians begin to recover the active role and central importance of the forgotten half of aristocratic lineages, and the studies in this volume advance this process.<sup>53</sup> They demonstrate the agency

<sup>52</sup> David Parrott, "A *prince étranger* and the French crown: Charles de Nevers, 1580–1637", in *Royal and Republican Sovereignty*, (eds) Oresko et al.; idem, "The Mantuan Succession, 1627–31: A Sovereignty Dispute in Early Modern Europe", *English Historical Review* 112 (1997); see also Ariane Boltanski, *Les ducs de Nevers et l'état royal: Genèse d'un compromis (ca. 1550- ca. 1600)* (Geneva: Droz, 2006), for the establishment of the family's power in the previous generations.

<sup>53</sup> By studies such as Grace E. Coolidge, *Guardianship, Gender and the Nobility in Early Modern Spain* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011); Helen Nader (ed.), *Power and Gender in Renaissance Spain: Eight women of the Mendoza Family, 1450–1650* (Urbana: Illinois University Press, 2004); Rosine A. Lambin, *Femmes de Paix: La coexistence religieuse*

which aristocratic women possessed and exercised. An outstanding example is Jonathan Spangler's account (Chapter 6) of Mademoiselle de Guise, in the final two years of her life, so meticulously and tenaciously arranging the details of her family's succession. Another is Mirella Marini's demonstration (Chapter 5) of the key role of Anne of Croÿ in adjusting, maintaining, transmitting and so perpetuating the family identity of the Arenbergs in particular. Few lineages are as fortunate in this respect as the House of Arenberg, with a handsome and informative illustrated survey devoted to its female side, but the studies in this present volume contribute to the re-assessment which is under way and mark a further significant stage in that process.<sup>54</sup>

The fourth thread running through the individual chapters is the over-riding importance of succession and inheritance, which was usually a time of danger but could also be an opportunity. This is obviously central to any dynastic system, which depends upon the transmission of the human and, to a lesser extent, material resources between generations. Three articles explicitly consider this theme – those by Mirella Marini, Violet Soen and Jonathan Spangler – while others touch upon it tangentially. Its central importance is obvious: without continuity there was and, indeed, could be no dynasty, though imagined continuities could exist as well as real ones. Aristocrats – exactly like monarchs – to an extent depended upon a glorious past: one important element in a noble family's claim to high status in the present was its public contribution in former times, however idealised a version of this it cherished and presented. The renown which this conferred upon a lineage was enduring, and it was enhanced during the early modern period by the way in which noble propagandists came to embrace the notion of a noble race, which made dynastic continuity all-important.<sup>55</sup>

At the same time, however, the simple facts of demography and the uncertainty these created within any system dependent upon hereditary succession, however well planned, could threaten this. Dr Soen's masterly article provides a particularly instructive demonstration of the repercussions of the death of duc Guillaume de Croÿ-Chièvres (1458–1521) without a male heir (Chapter 4). This complex dispute inaugurated eight decades of conflict, culminating in prolonged litigation within the Parlement of Paris, as rival branches contested the inheritance. The outcome was the emergence of a new – French – branch of the Croÿ (supported by the King of France) in addition to the established – Burgundian and then Habsburg – line.

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*et les dames de la noblesse en France, 1520–1630* (Paris: Harmattan, 2003); Michelle L. Marrese, *A Woman's Kingdom: Noblewomen and the Control of Property in Russia, 1700–1861* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); and Elaine Chalus, *Elite Women in English Political Life, c.1754–1790* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>54</sup> Peter Neu (ed.), *Arenberger Frauen: Fürstinnen, Herzoginnen, Ratgeberinnen, Mütter* (Koblenz: Verlag der Landesarchivverwaltung Rheinland-Pfalz, 2006).

<sup>55</sup> Devyer, *Le sang épuré*; Arlette Jouanna, *L'idée de race en France au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle et au début du XVII<sup>e</sup>* (revised edition; Montpellier: Service des Publications de l'Université Paul Valéry, 1981).

Similar themes emerge from Mirella Marini's study of the Arenberg family during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Chapter 5). Divisions of the family lands were often – as in the case of the Croÿs – driven by external political pressures and were a form of insurance policy. Dr Soen's article possesses a second and wider significance. It is an essential reminder of the importance of the legal context and of juridical factors, significant when present-day historians, both of the aristocracy and more generally, are prone to underestimate the importance of law. Both themes recur in Dr Spangler's revealing demonstration of Mademoiselle de Guise's preoccupation with the Guise succession and her efforts to promote dynastic continuity in the final years of her own life (Chapter 6).

Early modern aristocrats viewed the problem of succession through the prism of a demographic system which could periodically and quite unexpectedly deprive a family of the all-important male heir and sometimes of any heir at all, as in the cases of the Guise where the death of the duc d'Alençon in 1675 created the acute problems with which the last female head of the lineage struggled during the later 1680s (Chapter 6). Within a relatively stable population – as was, broadly speaking, the case in Europe until the mid-eighteenth century – the chances of any marriage producing a son who survived into adolescence have been calculated to have been no more than 60 per cent – that is to say, three out of five.<sup>56</sup> The likelihood of a female heir who survived, or of no children at all being born, were in each case around 20 per cent, or one in five. These figures appear to exclude deaths in warfare or from epidemic disease. Even within a society where both husbands and wives frequently remarried after they had been widowed, the permanent threat which this posed to aristocratic lineages was obvious: it is to be seen most clearly in the cases of the Croÿ (Chapter 4), Guise (Chapter 6) and the Arenberg (Chapter 5). In this latter case, Mirella Marini demonstrates the contrasting pressures arising both from the lack of a male heir and from too many children, male and female, for whom provision had to be made. Her study provides a striking reminder of the way in which family identities were fashioned and refashioned to fit the changing – and wholly unpredictable – demographic realities of an aristocratic dynasty.

In order to deal with this ever-present danger, the majority of leading families across much of Europe, in the course of the later medieval and early modern centuries, had first adopted primogeniture and then created family agreements regulating succession to the title and resources, and protecting the all-important

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<sup>56</sup> See the comments of Michel Nassiet, "Parenté et Successions dynastiques au 14e et 15e siècles", *Annales Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 50 (1995), 621; for the original calculation, E.A. Wrigley, "Fertility Strategy for the Individual and the Group", in *Historical Studies of Changing Fertility*, (ed.) Charles Tilly (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 139ff; cf. Jack Goody, "Strategies of Heirship", *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 15 (1973) for a rather different method of calculating such probabilities which yields broadly similar results.

family patrimony at the same time.<sup>57</sup> Here they had been following in the footsteps of ruling dynasties: a further illustration of the diffusion downwards which took place and of the essential unity of the world of rulers and magnates. This is one of the most important categories of dynastic document for early modern aristocratic families: the family trusts which were known in England as entails and, after 1660, as strict settlements, and on the continent variously as *Fideikommiss* (German), *substitutions fidéicommissaires* or sometimes *majorats* (French), *mayorazgos* (Castilian), and *fedecommissi* (Italian). These were usually concluded upon the marriage of the eldest son, though they might also be drawn up prior to the death of the previous head of the family. Their importance within the Croÿ-Arenberg-Aarschot family complex is touched on by Mirella Marini.<sup>58</sup> Concentrating resources on one – usually male – heir was far from universal: Guillaume de Croÿ, for example, had initially intended to leave all his lands to one heir, but in the final days of his life divided them between two.<sup>59</sup> The granting of French properties to his younger nephew underlines the extent to which the succession arrangements of leading families were subject to constant revision and renegotiation, as circumstances changed and priorities evolved.

Broadly speaking – and any generalisation about what is an extremely complex subject is problematical – such agreements did three things: (1) they provided for the eldest son and his heirs to succeed to the bulk of their fathers' property, whom failing the second son and so on; (2) they placed a significant proportion of the family resources, above all the landed property, within a trust, guaranteeing to the heir in each generation a regular income but denying him or her access to the resources themselves, and in this way creating a secure material base for the family's survival through the generations; (3) they provided, sometimes in bewildering detail, for the succession if and when the direct line of the family became extinct, that is to say it failed to provide an heir. There was an analogous system of family trusts in China, as Jeroen Duindam makes clear, resembling the European entail or *Fideikommiss*.<sup>60</sup>

The first two of these factors – primogenitural succession and the creation of a trust – have attracted the bulk of attention from historians, and certainly the

<sup>57</sup> The one general study of this remains the remarkable essay by J.P. Cooper, "Patterns of inheritance by great landowners from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries", in *Family and Inheritance: Rural Society in Western Europe, 1200–1800*, (eds) Jack Goody, Joan Thirsk and E.P. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976); Bartolomé Clavero, *Mayorazgo; Propiedad feudal en Castilla (1369–1836)* (Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno, 1974; 2nd ed., 1989), is in a class of its own as a national study; while the recent collection of essays edited by Anne Bellavitis, Jean-François Chauvard and Paola Lanaro, "Fidéicommiss: Instruments juridiques et pratiques sociales (Italie/Europe, Bas Moyen Âge/XIXe siècle)", which was published in *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome: Italie et Méditerranée* 124, no. 2 (2012), provides a valuable Franco-Italian perspective on the subject.

<sup>58</sup> Above, Chapter 5.

<sup>59</sup> Above, Chapter 4.

<sup>60</sup> Above, Chapter 3.

importance attributed to these objectives is well-merited. But providing for a similar continuity in human resources was scarcely less important, particularly in view of the real demographic uncertainties. One reason for believing that entails were dynastic arrangements tailored to a family's particular circumstances and aiming to perpetuate its power, is a very simple one: that they usually declared their aim to be exactly this. A very good example would be the English peer, the third Earl of Westmorland who, when he established such a settlement in 1668, announced that his purpose was to ensure 'that the same might continue in his name and blood and may descend with the Earldom to the heirs male of the family'.<sup>61</sup> The importance which families gave to securing the inheritance emerges from several chapters, which underline just how important but also how precarious aristocratic successions could be. Dynastic identity hung on a fragile demographic thread, and magnates planned as well as they could to deal with the consequences of this.

#### IV

The final general theme to emerge is in many ways the most important. 'Dynastic identity', as contributors repeatedly make very clear, was a constructed, manufactured commodity and not a neutral, positivistic category. In its making, present realities and requirements were more important than past history, which could be manipulated or even ignored. One of the clearest examples is provided by Liesbeth Geever, who skilfully demonstrates (Chapter 9) the ways in which Orangist writers distorted the family's history in order to portray the House of Orange as 'a more or less hereditary ruling family'<sup>62</sup> and to present a record of unbroken service to the Dutch and Republican cause. Of course, history was an obvious – perhaps *the* best and most obvious – way of buttressing a family's standing in the present, by recording, creating, or improving a glorious past, as several essays underline.

Mirella Marini brings out the importance of the *Marques des Grands*, an early family history finalised in 1660, for the Arenbergs (Chapter 5), while Sebastiaan Derks (Chapter 7) provides one of the most striking examples, with his account of efforts to glorify the achievements of Duke Alexander [Alessandro] Farnese, the celebrated Spanish commander and governor-general of the Low Countries (1578–92). Farnese dynastic history was woven into Paolo Rinaldi's account of Spain's struggle to defeat the Dutch rebels. Though the duke of Parma had gained renown in Madrid's service, before eventually suffering dismissal, these narratives were more ambivalent about Spain's policy than might be anticipated. One objective was certainly to recover the family's political standing by highlighting its loyalty to the Spanish Monarchy, after Alexander Farnese's fall

<sup>61</sup> Quoted by Sir John Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt and the Estates System: English landownership, 1650–1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 52.

<sup>62</sup> Above, Chapter 9.

from grace, but these efforts also took account of the Farnese position in northern Italy where Madrid's influence, based upon its control over the neighbouring Duchy of Milan, was potentially threatening. Farnese control over the dukedoms of Parma and Piacenza rested upon an earlier usurpation, and remained controversial and vulnerable. A desire to uphold family dynastic interests gave this propaganda a subtle anti-Spanish dimension.

Dr Derks's study, together with other recent studies of the Farnese, also confirms the continuing importance of artistic decoration.<sup>63</sup> Early modern Europe was a society and culture where visual propaganda remained a significant medium, and indeed may have been more important than the literary mode as a way of glorifying ancestors. But there were many other ways of reinforcing this. One was the practice of always baptising the eldest son with the same Christian name, which thereby became associated with the family. Another was by naming and re-naming places and settlements after the family. Between the 1630s and the 1650s the indefatigable Per Brahe the Younger created not merely the castle of Brahehus, the manor of Braheberg and the hunting lodge of Brahehälla (all within the county of Visingsborg), but the town of Brahea in Swedish Finland.<sup>64</sup> Aristocratic names and titles usually commemorated a location of family influence and landholding in previous centuries, and in this perspective his actions possess an obvious importance.

Genealogies, viewed in the widest sense, provided an especially significant means of manufacturing dynastic identity, and one with which historians are increasingly familiar. During the Later Middle Ages and the early modern period, these became much more numerous and also more detailed in Europe; they existed in China too.<sup>65</sup> Once again, magnates were following in the footsteps of the rulers they served. An excellent example is that of the arch-dynast, Per Brahe the younger, who not only sponsored two detailed family genealogies (1647, 1673: the second printed on his own press on Visingsö in Lake Vättern) but actually paid for the inclusion of his lineage in a noted German genealogical work.<sup>66</sup>

The inclusion of a manufactured Brahe genealogy which went back to St Bridget underlines the problems presented by such sources. Here it is important to remember the conclusions of European social anthropologists, who in the 1960s and 1970s began to study societies in Africa and Polynesia in which such records were

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<sup>63</sup> See also Martine Boiteux, "Le palais Farnèse: La représentation et l'identité", *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome: Italie et Méditerranée* 122 (2010), one of a series of articles in that issue devoted to the Farnese palace; Gregory Hanlon, *The Hero of Italy: Odoardo Farnese, Duke of Parma, his Soldiers, and his Subjects in the Thirty Years' War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) is an informative study of a later Farnese duke.

<sup>64</sup> Above, Chapter 8.

<sup>65</sup> An informative study of developments in France, is Germain Butaud and Valérie Piétri, *Les enjeux de la généalogie XIIe-XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Autrement, 2006); cf. above, Chapter 3.

<sup>66</sup> Above, Chapter 8.



transmitted through a largely oral culture, rather than being written down.<sup>67</sup> They demonstrated how genealogies and lists of rulers essentially sought to support and justify existing social groupings and current political realities, and not to present a ‘true’ – and the question of authenticity will be examined shortly – version of previous events. The one group of historians who have incorporated this insight are specialists in early medieval history, obliged to work with fragmentary and imperfect sources: whether genealogies, regnal lists [lists of kings] or pedigrees of families who exercised authority.<sup>68</sup> It is true that early modern historians possess genealogical records which are – superficially – much better, being more detailed and seemingly more complete. But these sources are not as good, and certainly nowhere near as reliable, as we might like to think and need to be handled with considerable caution. The Italian scholar Roberto Bizzocchi who wrote a justly celebrated and quite fundamental study of this phenomenon significantly entitled his book, ‘Incredible Genealogies’ (*Genealogie Incredibili*).<sup>69</sup>

The problems which arise have recently been illuminated by Peter Mat’a in a remarkable study.<sup>70</sup> His subject is the way in which descent from the Orsini family was claimed by a succession of noble lineages during the Later Middle Ages and early modern period, primarily the Jouvenel des Ursins (France), the Counts of Blagaj (Croatia and Carniola, two constituent territories of the Austrian Habsburg Monarchy), the Lords of Rožmberk (Bohemia), the Counts Slavata (the successors to the social capital, though not the landed wealth of the Rožmberks when that family died out in 1611) and the Rosenbergs of Carinthia. The importance of his article lies, first of all, in its demonstration of how the quest for status drove the successive claims advanced to kinship with the celebrated Orsini family, which had provided Roman senators, cardinals in the Christian Church and even popes. The need to advance or defend a family’s position was central to the adoption

<sup>67</sup> David P. Henige, “Oral Tradition and Chronology”, *Journal of African History* 3 (1971) provides a helpful introduction.

<sup>68</sup> David Dumville, “Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal Lists”, in *Early Medieval Kingship*, (eds) P.H. Sawyer and I.N. Wood (Leeds: University of Leeds, 1977) is a classic examination of the problems involved; while Ian Wood, “Deconstructing the Merovingian family”, in *The Construction of Communities in the Early Middle Ages*, (eds) Richard Corradini, Max Diesenberger, and Helmut Reimitz (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003), provides an informative case study.

<sup>69</sup> Roberto Bizzocchi, *Genealogie incredibili* (Milan: Mulino, 1995; revised edition, 2009); Bizzocchi had earlier presented his more important conclusions in “La culture généalogique dans l’Italie du XVIe siècle”, *Annales Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 46 (1991). There is now a French translation of the revised edition: *Généalogies fabuleuses: Inventer et faire croire dans l’Europe moderne* (Paris: Rue d’Ulm, 2010).

<sup>70</sup> Peter Mat’a, “The false Orsini from over the Alps: Negotiating Aristocratic Identity in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe”, *Römische Historische Mitteilungen* 55 (2013). Dr Mat’a’s article originated as a paper given to the conference which was the origin of this present volume, but its length precluded its inclusion. I am grateful to him for sending me a copy.

and the pursuit of the Orsini claim, as Dr Mat'a demonstrates, in each of the interlocking cases he examines, while the identities constructed were unstable and dynamic, always likely to be amended and improved.

The modes employed were primarily the sponsoring of family histories, where he confirms the conclusions of the contributors concerning the importance of such dynastic narratives, the adoption of the Orsini name, the incorporation of its heraldic symbols of the rose and the bear into coats of arms, and the production of genealogies tracing descent in ways which indeed appear 'incredible'. Drawing on the notion of an 'imagined community' first advanced by Benedict Anderson, Dr Mat'a suggests that an aristocratic dynasty was in fact 'a constructed and reified idea which came to be perceived as the reality', a suggestion which is likely to be extremely influential.<sup>71</sup>

Dynastic identities were continually being constructed, defended, manipulated and even invented, as the chapters in this volume individually and collectively make clear. It would be all too easy to dismiss the undoubted distortion of past history, the improvement or invention of a genealogy, or the incorporation of another lineage's heraldic symbol into a family's coat of arms, as simple forgery. A simple 'true' or 'false' dichotomy, however, must be avoided. We need to be careful to discard twentieth-first century standards of what is authentic and can be validated historically, when considering genealogies, histories and coats of arms produced at this time, and instead see such productions through the eyes of the dynasties for whom they were intended. To view them as 'constructed' or even 'invented' would be much better than to consider them forgeries, since they blended what we would now consider fiction with fact.

Their purpose was to advance claims in the present by constructing and then drawing upon an idealised version of the dynasty's past. The Jouvenel des Ursins, Blagajs, Rožmberks, Slavatas and Rosenbergs all aspired to enhanced status, and sought to enlist real and imagined predecessors in their quest: this was an age when a lengthy and distinguished pedigree conferred status. The claim for descent from the Orsini – of which there are numerous counterparts in early modern Europe: the Hungarian House of Eszterházy, after all, claimed descent from no less a figure than Attila the Hun – should be viewed as an index of the status to which families were aspiring and believed they were entitled. Roman ancestors were particularly prized, claimed by the House of Orange and also by that of Arenberg, which improbably sought to base its claim to the title of duke not on an Imperial grant but on ducal status during the centuries of Rome's hegemony.<sup>72</sup> It was an important reminder of the enduring status of classical antiquity during the early modern centuries. The Guises, for their part, produced in the mid-sixteenth century a descent which extended back to Charlemagne, to the Capetians and

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<sup>71</sup> Mat'a, "False Orsini", 206; cf. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983; 2nd ed., 1991).

<sup>72</sup> Above, Chapter 5.

even to the Trojans.<sup>73</sup> A claim of descent from the Carolingians was especially common in the early modern continental aristocracy. Other locations had their own comparable figures. The earls of Thomond in Ireland commissioned a genealogy which traced their ancestry ‘to Brian boru, high king of Ireland, and Milo, the first Gaelic invader of Ireland and a descendant of the ancient Greeks’.<sup>74</sup> Such genealogical claims – and this is Bizzocchi’s central point – were not so ‘incredible’ as they might seem at first sight. They were a means of legitimating social and political eminence, whether desired or already secured. Present or future grandeur demanded a glorious past, and this was then assembled for the lineage.

Two further points require to be made about genealogies and family histories, which present very similar problems. The first is that critical historical scholarship lay some way in the future, its real origins being in the later-eighteenth century.<sup>75</sup> Throughout the early modern period, the past was not viewed as an objective field of study, but existed primarily in order to validate the present. Montaigne went so far as to declare that a good historian should give voice to widespread beliefs, rather than create a critical dialogue between the present and the past.<sup>76</sup> This point is quite fundamental. Secondly, the invention of ancestors was not confined to families of recent or dubious origins. The Brahe, for example, had undoubted links to the royal family, but still traced their descent first to that fourteenth-century icon, St Bridget of Sweden, and then even further back to a twelfth-century King.<sup>77</sup> Long established families with no need to improve their origins, which were sufficiently distinguished, did so just as willingly: the invention of this kind of origin myth was common to almost all aristocratic Houses. These genealogies created descents, and the legends which these incorporated and came to surround them, must be taken seriously but not literally. Royal or Roman origins were particularly prized, as they furnished lineages with enormous symbolic capital which could be deployed in the permanent struggle for status and advancement.<sup>78</sup> The Brahes’ claim that Charlemagne was one of their ancestors falls into this category.<sup>79</sup> By a final, delightful irony, one Italian family which created distinguished ancestors was none other than the Orsini itself!<sup>80</sup>

In *The Leopard*, Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa’s striking evocation of the twilight of Sicily’s aristocratic world in which he himself had grown to manhood, the ageing Prince of Salina meditates sombrely on the glue which he believed had held aristocratic lineages such as his own together over the centuries. ‘The

<sup>73</sup> Jouanna, “Les Guises et le sang de France”, 32ff.

<sup>74</sup> Above, Chapter 1.

<sup>75</sup> Anthony Grafton, *What was History? The Art of History in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>76</sup> Bizzocchi, “Culture généalogique”, 796.

<sup>77</sup> Above, Chapter 8.

<sup>78</sup> Luc Duerloo rightly highlighted this point during the conference discussions.

<sup>79</sup> Above, Chapter 8.

<sup>80</sup> Bizzocchi, “Culture généalogique”, 792.

significance of a noble family', Don Fabrizio concludes, 'lies entirely in its traditions, that is in its vital memories; and he was the last to have any unusual memories, anything different from those of other families'.<sup>81</sup> The individual elements which made up these memories and traditions, and the varied ways in which they were assembled, manipulated and transmitted down the generations, emerge in striking and persuasive detail from the studies in this volume, and are a final reminder of the central importance of dynastic identity in the history of the early modern higher nobility.

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<sup>81</sup> Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, *The Leopard*, transl. A. Colquhoun (London: Vintage, 2005 ed.), 197.