

*Dynasty formation*  
THE DANISH OLDENBURGS 1536–1699

BY  
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While it might seem banal to state that kings of the Oldenburg dynasty ruled Denmark from 1448 to 1863, ‘dynasty’ is not an innocent word. In the early modern period, it was used only to describe Biblical and Oriental ruling families; the princely families of Europe called themselves ‘houses’. In this article, ‘dynasty’ is presented as an analytic concept in a study of how the Danish-Norwegian house of Oldenburg, in their assumed capacity as a kinship-based power group in the centre of the state, behaved and developed during the 16th and 17th centuries. I will show the usefulness of concepts like *dynasty formation*, *dynasty securing*, *dynastic inclusion or exclusion* and *dynastic centralization* as analytic tools that facilitate the understanding of *ancien-régime* Europe’s ruling houses. Use of these concepts will also throw an illuminating sidelight on the process of state formation.<sup>1</sup>

In a well-justified reaction against traditional political history and national narratives about the deeds of royal and princely great men, the interest in ruling families has long been low. But several scholars have recently noticed a renewed interest in the study of dynasties.<sup>2</sup> This is true not only about European history but also globally.<sup>3</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to my colleagues in Lund, David Larsson Heidenblad and Svanthe Norrhem, for the many valuable comments that emerged from their critical readings of the manuscript, and also to Gunner Lind and Sebastian Olden-Jørgensen of Copenhagen University, with whom I have on several occasions discussed my conclusions. Most of all, I am indebted to my project colleague Liesbeth Gevers for her enthusiasm, encouragement and critical comments at all stages of the research process.

<sup>2</sup> Norbert Haag: *Dynastie, Region, Konfession. Die Hochstifte des Heiligen Römischen Reiches Deutscher Nation zwischen Dynastisierung und Konfessionalisierung (1448–1648)*, Münster 2018, pp. 11–12; Liesbeth Gevers: ‘Dynasty and State Building in the Spanish Habsburg Monarchy: The Career of Emanuele Filiberto of Savoy (1588–1624)’, *Journal of Early Modern History*, vol. 20, 2016, pp. 268–269.

<sup>3</sup> Jeroen Duindam: *Dynasties. A Global History of Power, 1300–1800*, Cambridge

terms ‘dynasty’ and ‘dynastic’ are frequently used but seldom defined. Richard Bonney called his influential work on European history 1494–1660 *The European Dynastic States*, but only in the very end does he give a sort of definition that, somewhat surprisingly, turns out to be ‘a personal union of territories’, a definition that corresponds with what other scholars have dubbed a conglomerate (or composite) state.<sup>4</sup> This is symptomatic for a lot of literature in English, where the dynastic element is seldom defined or problematized.<sup>5</sup>

We have to turn to German historiography to find more elaborate discussions about early modern dynasties.<sup>6</sup> This is not surprising, given the fact that the Holy Roman (German) Empire included a great number of ruling, or wannabe-ruling, families. In a German scholarly tradition that sees princely absolutism as an important step in state development, the fact that the throne was hereditary within one family is regarded as one of the fundamentals of the early modern state.<sup>7</sup> I suppose most people think of a dynasty as a line of kings where son follows father, and it is the succession arrangements that Johannes Kunisch focuses on, in an anthology about ‘the dynastic princely state’.<sup>8</sup> In an often-quoted article, Wolfgang Weber gives a broader definition

2016; Macabe Keliher: ‘The Problem of Imperial Relatives in Early Modern Empires and the Making of Qing China’, *American Historical Review*, vol. 20, no. 4, 2016; Liesbeth Geevers, ‘Safavid Cousins on the Verge of Extinction. Dynastic Centralization in Central Asia and the Bahraṁī Collateral Line (1517–1593)’, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* vol. 58 no. 3, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Bonney: *The European Dynastic States 1494–1660*, Oxford 1991, p. 525. Cf. Harald Gustafsson: ‘The Conglomerate State. A Perspective on State Formation in Early Modern Europe’, *Scandinavian Journal of History*, vol. 23, no. 3–4, 1998. John Morrill has recently proposed the term ‘dynastic agglomerates’, knitting the conglomerate and the dynastic character of the early modern European state together: John Morrill: ‘Dynasties, Realms, Peoples and State Formation, 1500–1700’, in Robert von Friedeburg & John Morrill (eds.), *Monarchy Transformed. Princes and Their Elites in Early Modern Western Europe*, Cambridge 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Another example is Daniel H. Nexon: *The Struggle for Power in Early Modern Europe. Religious Conflict, Dynastic Empires and International Change*, Princeton 2009. This is also the case in Duindam 2016, which despite the title is a study of kingship.

<sup>6</sup> See the overview in Matthias Schnettger: ‘Dynastie’, in *Enzyklopädie der Neuzeit Online*, published online 2014 (2019-02-22).

<sup>7</sup> As in Johannes Kunisch: *Absolutismus. Europäische Geschichte vom Westfälischen Frieden bis zur Krise des Ancien Régime*, Göttingen 1986, p. 20.

<sup>8</sup> Johannes Kunisch (ed.): *Der dynastische Fürstenstaat. Zur Bedeutung von Sukzessionsordnungen für die Entstehung des frühmodernen Staates*, (Historische Forschungen vol. 21), Berlin 1982.



of 'dynasty': 'an optimised manifestation of the family' with 'a heightened sense of identity', a 'collection of assets', practices concerning marriage and inheritance that aim to keep the assets together, and 'an increased sense of historical continuity'.<sup>9</sup>

For Weber, it is thus not only the intergenerational continuance *per se* that makes a ruling family a dynasty, but also deliberate political, social and cultural efforts to promote 'dynasticness'. In the process of dynasty building (*Dynastiebildung*), or perhaps better dynasty formation, actions that facilitate the passing on of the family assets from a ruler to his son(s) are a top priority, regardless of the wishes of individual family members. Also, the rest of society must be made to accept the family's claim of inherited positions; all this Weber calls dynasty securing (*Dynastiesicherung*).<sup>10</sup>

While hereditary succession is thus seen as crucial, Matthias Schnettger remarks that houses in elective monarchies could also achieve a dynastic status. Schnettger mentions the Vasas in Poland as an example of 'quasi-dynastic' inheritance, and also the peculiar position of the house of Nassau-Orange in the Republic of the Netherlands.<sup>11</sup> Denmark is another example; although formally an elective monarchy until 1660, the habit of choosing a son of the former king, or a relative if no son was available, was firmly established long before the coming of the Oldenburgs to the throne, and they will here be regarded as a dynasty. They ruled Denmark and Norway, but will herein be called the Danish Oldenburgs, as a short form, or just the Oldenburgs, not to be confused with the counts of Oldenburg within the German Empire.

While Weber broadens the perspective on dynasties, his definition can give the impression that dynasty formation through dynasty securing is a process ending with the establishment of a full-fledged dynasty. I find it more fruitful to see dynasty formation, just like state formation, as an open process that in principle is always going on, and where kin groups continually try to monopolise important societal positions. What was 'dynastic' could have changed over time, and even at the same time, in different contexts. Rather than asking when a certain family had completed their dynasty formation, the more interest-

<sup>9</sup> Wolfgang Weber, 'Dynastiesicherung und Staatsbildung. Die Entfaltung des frühmodernen Fürstenstaates', in idem (ed.), *Der Fürst. Ideen und Wirklichkeiten in der europäischen Geschichte*, Köln 1998, p. 95; 'eine optimierte Erscheinungsform der Familie'; 'erhöhte Identität'; 'gemeinsam genutzten [...] Besitz'; 'gesteigerte historische Kontinuität'.

<sup>10</sup> Weber 1998, pp. 94-100.

<sup>11</sup> Schnettger op. cit.

ing questions revolve around if and especially in what way a dynasty formation process was going on.

Heide Wunder has taken the discussion further by criticising Weber for still being too interested in the dynasty as an agnatic line. She has instead fruitfully stressed the cognatic perspective, that is, the need to take both men and women, and their different roles within a dynasty, into account.<sup>12</sup> She sees a dynasty as ‘a complex web of relations and fields of action for the, at a given time, living men and women’ of the family.<sup>13</sup> This opens for a focus not on the vertical, lineal dynasty, but on what we might call the horizontal dynasty, the family members and relations existing at a given time. The sociologist Julia Adams underscores how authority in early modern Europe was permeated by family relations, where ‘gendered familial criteria’ were essential for the actions not only of the princely houses but also for the societal elites; she calls the early modern state a ‘familial state’.<sup>14</sup>

These new emphases form a background for the project ‘Rethinking Dynastic Rule’, to which this article contributes. My colleague Liesbeth Geevers and I are using a broad understanding of dynasty, which we study as a horizontal web of relations between men and women, instead of only a vertical line of (usually male) rulers.<sup>15</sup> Our intention is to shed new light on the process of dynasty formation and its relation to state formation in Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries. Many social groups have been discussed in connection with state formation, including the land-owning aristocracy, more or less capitalistic merchants, the bureaucracy of the fiscal-military states, or even people in general as a factor in politics. But the dynasty at the centre of the state has not yet been studied as a potential power group.

Within the project, Geevers studies the Spanish Habsburgs from Philipp II’s accession to the throne in 1555 to their extinction in 1700. As a point of comparison, the present article deals with the Danish Oldenburgs during roughly the same time span, from the final estab-

<sup>12</sup> Heide Wunder: ‘Einleitung: Dynastie und Herrschaftssicherung: Geschlechter und Geschlecht’, in idem (ed.), *Dynastie und Herrschaftssicherung in der Frühen Neuzeit. Geschlechter und Geschlecht*, (Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung Beiheft 28), Berlin 2002, p. 16–17.

<sup>13</sup> Wunder, p. 18: ‘komplexes Beziehungsgeflecht und Handlungsfeld der jeweils gleichzeitig lebenden Agnaten und Agnatinnen’.

<sup>14</sup> Julia Adams: *The Familial State. Ruling Families and Merchant Capitalism in Early Modern Europe*, Ithaca 2005; quotation p. 34.

<sup>15</sup> The project is funded by the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation (Riksbankens Jubileumsfond). A first publication of the project is an overview of recent trends in dynasty research: Liesbeth Geevers: ‘Ny dynastisk historia’, *Scandia. Tidskrift för historisk forskning* vol. 85:2, 2019.

lishment in 1536 of the new branch with Christian III's victory in the civil war to the death of Christian V in 1699. This period also offers the possibility of studying the Oldenburgs both before and after hereditary monarchy and absolutism were introduced in 1660, which could have brought changes in the position and organization of the dynasty.

Within our project, Geevers and I have developed a set of analytic concepts, partly building on the critical discussion of previous research summarised above, that we think can be used as tools to uncover important aspects of dynasties and their developments. *Dynasty* is here understood as a kinship group with a high sense of historical continuity, claiming with reasonable success the right to rule a certain territory, and manifesting this claim in political, social and cultural ways. A central element is that the kinship group have assets in common, which can be distributed among its members and are regarded as transgenerational.

This definition is similar to the descriptive, historical term 'house'; most, if not all, European princely families can be regarded as dynasties. In this sense, using 'dynasty' only gives a limited contribution to our understanding, the concepts associated with its adjectival forms are more fruitful. *Dynasty formation* will be used to describe acts and processes, conscious or unconscious, whereby a house achieves and upholds its position as a dynasty, and how that position developed and changed. Acts of *dynastic securing* are deliberately directed at safeguarding the position.

'Family' and 'familial' will here mean connections by blood or marriage that can concern internal relations within the house, as well as within the royal family in a narrow sense, or relations knitting together different houses in a dynastic web. Looking for the horizontal, rather than the vertical dynasty, it will be important to study the web created by marriages. This transnational web could potentially be used for pursuing dynastic politics, making it an active network. When studying the dynasty, both generation and gender are meaningful variables; legitimacy or illegitimacy of the offspring is a third variable to take into account.

These definitions deliberately avoid any attempt to pinpoint the extent of the house, dynasty or family. Who were seen as members, and who were not, was dependent on the context in each case. There could be different political, social or cultural concerns dictating the inclusion or exclusion of persons in the dynasty; *dynastic inclusion or exclusion* will be used as analytic concepts during the exploration of these

issues.<sup>16</sup> Both too many and too few children could be a problem during dynasty securing.<sup>17</sup> Looking at how the dynasty was constructed and used is an important empirical question.

It is also useful to see how the internal organisation of the house developed. In general, it has been assumed that European families in the late middle ages and early in the early modern period became more hierarchical, more patriarchal and more monocentric.<sup>18</sup> In terms of dynasty, this would mean more pronounced primogeniture and a more dominating position for the ruler, the male dynast. In the context of her study on the Safavid empire, Liesbeth Geever's has named such a development 'dynastic centralization'.<sup>19</sup> Was such *dynastic centralization* going on within the house of Oldenburg?

This study consists of three parts. It will start with a mapping of the period's marriages of royal offspring. This will uncover the Oldenburg marriage sphere as a transnational web of connections between houses. The extent to which this web was an active network also will be investigated: did the Oldenburgs use their foreign relatives? How far did the dynasty stretch in this respect? Further, the important role of daughters as connection-creating assets will be highlighted. After this mapping, the second part goes deeper into the placement and usage of the offspring, taking into account both married and unmarried children, not least the illegitimate ones. It will be an attempt to characterize the policy of the Oldenburgs in placing their children, both in marriages and at positions in the state. The inclusions and exclusions within the dynasty will be drawn into focus, and this will be of even greater interest in the third section, which deals with conflicts within the house. Can the Oldenburgs rightly be described as one power group in the state, or are they better described as conflicting individuals? The house governed the state, but who governed the house? By choosing these aspects, putting them together and being observant of changes over time, I hope to present the characteristics of Oldenburg dynasty formation during the period, and also to show how further dynasty studies can build on this exposition.

Previous scholarship has not dwelled extensively on the dynastic as-

<sup>16</sup> Wunder 2002, p. 18-19, stresses the importance of exclusions in favour of the main male stem of the house.

<sup>17</sup> Schnettger 2014.

<sup>18</sup> David Warren Sabean & Simon Teuscher: 'Kinship in Europe. A New Approach to Long Term Developments', in D.W. Warren, S. Teuscher & J. Mathieu (eds.), *Kinship in Europe. Approaches to Long Term Development*, New York & Oxford 2007, pp. 6-16.

<sup>19</sup> Geever's 2015.

pect of the Oldenburgs.<sup>20</sup> The kings, and occasionally the queens – especially the queen dowagers – have been treated in the extensive political narratives of older historiography. Of the kings in question, particularly Christian IV has received a good deal of attention, not least in the form of several modern biographies.<sup>21</sup> As far as I know, the only text where ‘dynastic policy’ is explicitly treated is an article by Troels Dahlerup on the dynastic element in the plans of the Danish kings, especially Christian IV, to place younger relatives as prince-bishops within the Empire. Although acknowledging that many other aspects than the dynastic one, such as the relation to Sweden and the Sound Toll, were important for the foreign policy of the early Oldenburg kings, Dahlerup states that the constant problem of what to do with the younger sons was an important factor behind the bishopric policy.<sup>22</sup>

Also important here is Gunner Lind’s observation: ‘foreign policy’ could mean both the relations between Denmark-Norway and other political units, and the relations of the Danish king to people who were not his subjects.<sup>23</sup> The king was not only king of Denmark-Norway, but also duke (or rather co-duke) of Schleswig-Holstein, a role that enabled him to act independently of the Danish Council of the Realm. Dynastic policy and Danish foreign policy could be two different things.

It is thus mainly within the field of foreign policy that the dynastic nature of the Oldenburgs has been noted, while the inner circumstances of the royal house, although present in all political histories, have not yet been treated systematically from the perspective of dynasty formation. This is what the present article aspires to do. I will use

<sup>20</sup> There is, to my knowledge, only one book explicitly focussing on the Oldenburgs as a dynasty, which also covers the German counts of Oldenburg: Gerd Steinwacher, *Die Oldenburger. Die Geschichte einer europäischen Dynastie*, Stuttgart 2011. It is, however, merely a descriptive narrative, even omitting important dynastic transitions such as the passing of the county of Oldenburg to the royal Oldenburgs, and is of little interest here.

<sup>21</sup> References will be given in the empirical sections below.

<sup>22</sup> Troels Dahlerup: ‘Christian IV’s udenrigspolitik. Set i lyset af de første oldenborgeres dynastipolitik’, in David Favrholt, Pia Grüner & Flemming Lundgreen-Nielsen (eds.), *Som kongerne bød. Fra trelleborge til enevælde. Festskrift til Hendes Majestæt Dronning Margrethe II i anledning af tresårsdagen 16. april 2000*, Copenhagen 2000.

<sup>23</sup> Gunner Lind, ‘1588-1648’, in Esben Albrechtsen, Karl-Erik Frandsen & Gunner Lind, *Dansk udenrigspolitik historie 1. Konger og krige 700-1648*, Copenhagen 2001, p. 349; p. 369 on ‘tensions between the interests of the dynasty and of the realm’.

existing historiography, approached with the above-presented questions and analytic concepts, and selected published sources, of which the voluminous edition of Christian IV's personal correspondence is the most important. Personal names will be spelled according to modern Danish and German practice, as will place names, except when there is a conventional English form of the place in question.

### *Family connections and dynastic networks*

Marriage was a crucial act for defining a dynasty and making it survive. Indeed, marriage was crucial to early modern society in general, since inheritance played such a big part in the intergenerational transfer of power and holdings. Great care was taken when selecting spouses for children and younger siblings. In this section, we will study the marriage strategy of the Oldenburgs in a transnational perspective. Whom did they marry, how did the connections form a web, and how was this web used as a network? This is important in order to highlight the horizontal aspect of dynasty – the relations between the, at a given time, living members of the family – and to find out to how princely houses pursued dynasty formation and dynasty securing by way of establishing and using mutual relations between houses.

### **25 royal weddings**

What was most important when choosing marriage partners for royal children? In family history, a distinction is usually made between marriages of inclination and marriages intended to further economic, social, or political agendas.<sup>24</sup> It is clear from the outset that in ruling houses, the feelings of the partners were of little importance, although there are rare occasions where inclination did play a part. Frederik II is an illuminating example.

For several years, Frederik II had been in love with a Danish noblewoman, but his desire to marry her met resistance from both the Council of the Realm and his mother, Queen Dowager Dorothea. He did not marry until after Dorothea's death, and then arrangements were made for him to marry a Pomeranian princess. He seems, however, to have fallen in love with a young girl in her entourage, a Mecklenburg princess who also was his cousin, Sophie. The two joined and it seems to have been a happy marriage. His personal choice was limited by political and family considerations, and when he made his choice, it was within a very limited circle of ruling houses.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Kate Gibson: 'Marriage Choices and Kinship among the English Protestant Elite, 1680-1730', *Journal of Family History* vol. 41 no. 2, 2016, pp. 146-147.

<sup>25</sup> Svend Cedergreen Bech: *Danmarks historie. Bind 6. Reformation og Renaissance*



Table 1. Marriages of Danish royal legitimate children 1536–1699

	Sons			Daughters			Total
	Princely	Noble	Unmarried	Princely	Noble	Unmarried	
Persons	10	1	4	12	0	1	28
Marriages	11	1	–	13	0	–	25

Source: Dansk biografisk leksikon ([http://denstoredanske.dk/Dansk\\_Biografisk\\_Leksikon](http://denstoredanske.dk/Dansk_Biografisk_Leksikon))

Practically all royal children married persons from other princely, ruling houses (see Table 1).<sup>26</sup> The only exception is Christian IV's brother Ulrik, who seems to have had difficulties finding a suitable position, had to be content with a very small German princely bishopric (Schwerin), and married a German noblewoman.<sup>27</sup>

During this period, most marriage partners were found within northern German, Protestant (overwhelmingly Lutheran) princely houses.<sup>28</sup> Most popular were the houses of Mecklenburg (five partners) and electoral (Albertine) Saxony (four partners). The Oldenburg branch of Holstein-Gottorp is registered for two marriages, as is Hesse (one from the undivided margravate in the 16th century and

1533–1596, Copenhagen 1977, pp. 451–454; Paul Douglas Lockhart: *Frederik II and the Protestant Cause. Denmark's Role in the Wars of Religion, 1559–1596*, Leiden-Boston 2004, pp. 101–104; Poul Grønder Hansen: *Frederik 2. Danmarks renaissancekonger*, Copenhagen 2013, *passim*, on Frederik's personal life.

<sup>26</sup> All biographical information about the members of the Oldenburg house from *Dansk Biografisk Leksikon*, used at [http://denstoredanske.dk/Dansk\\_Biografisk\\_Leksikon](http://denstoredanske.dk/Dansk_Biografisk_Leksikon) (visited at different occasions during 2019), unless otherwise stated. I follow *Dansk Biografisk Leksikon* in the spelling of Danish names. I only include children who reached at least 20 years of age, unless they married before.

<sup>27</sup> In the following, I distinguish between princely (belonging to a ruling house) and noble, although 'noble' (*Adel*) in German historiography often is used to describe both categories. Ulrik's marriage was possibly a morganatic one and thus not fully recognised; J.A. Fridericia, 'Ulrik, 1578–1624, Hertug', *Dansk Biografisk Leksikon*, ed. C.F. Bricka, vol. XVIII, Copenhagen 1904, pp. 74–75.

<sup>28</sup> This has also been underscored by Gunner Lind, Lind 2001, p. 346, p. 368.



one from the later Hesse-Kassel). The ducal family of Brunswick was also popular: two from Brunswick-Lüneburg and one each from Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel and Brunswick-Grubenhagen. Brandenburg, Anhalt and the Palatinate had one marriage each.

There seems to have been a web of connections among Lutheran German houses, including the Oldenburgs. But compared to, for instance, the houses of Mecklenburg and Electoral Saxony, which married within this web without any exceptions during the period, the somewhat higher status of the royal Oldenburgs is marked by a few marriages to royal partners. Two royal offspring went to the British Isles. Frederik II's daughter Anna married James VI of Scotland in 1589 (and became queen of England fifteen years later). In 1683, another Stuart marriage was concluded between Christian V's son Jørgen (known as George in England) and Princess Anne, later to become reigning queen. Three years earlier, Jørgen's sister Ulrikke Eleonore (known in Sweden as Ulrika Eleonora the Elder) had been married to Swedish King Karl XI.

In 1589, Scotland was a rather peripheral kingdom in Europe and might have held a status on a par with the major German principalities. The period's final two royal marriages, to more important partners, might indicate the Danish–Norwegian dynasty's rising status or ambition, or both, after the introduction of absolutism in 1660. The Swedish marriage, although planned earlier, was celebrated in the context of the just-concluded peace accord between the two states after the Scanian War. By contrast, the marriage of Frederik II's brother Magnus to a relative of the Russian tsar in 1573 was a part of neither dynastic nor Danish policy, since Magnus acted on his own, trying to carve out a position in the Baltic area among conflicting Danish, Swedish, Polish and Russian interests.

There is a clear gender dimension in the marriages. These marriage connections, as a rule, involved the 'export' of a Danish royal daughter, who moved to her husband's country, and the 'import' of a foreign princess, to be married to the Danish king or would-be king. Younger sons of the king often stayed unmarried, a familiar pattern from other princely houses. This dynasty-securing practice reduced the risk of conflicting heritage claims by preventing the creation of side lines.<sup>29</sup> This is obvious in the Oldenburg case: four sons out of ten, none of them first-born, stayed unmarried; but only one daughter out of twelve died a spinster. In terms of feelings and intimacy, this need not have been to the sons' great disadvantage, since they could

<sup>29</sup> Wunder 2002, p. 18; Duindam 2016, p. 88 on how the younger sons posed a problem for rulers all over the world.

exercise a prerogative unavailable to unmarried princesses: they could take concubines more or less openly. As the offspring of such relationships could never achieve princely status, the dynasty formation of the house was not threatened.<sup>30</sup> It should be noted that royal children for most of the period had the titles duchess and duke; only the elected heir was called prince. This was to change under Frederik III, as we shall see.

In a study of the marriages of the Hohenzollern, Daniel Schönplflug discusses criteria for the choice of partners. Religious accord was important in post-reformation Europe, as were the political interests of the house and the financial transactions involved in the marriage, but 'equality of birth (*Ebenbürtigkeit*) was perhaps the most important prerequisite'.<sup>31</sup> As we have seen, religion did play an important role, with only a few Reformed and Anglican exceptions to the Lutheran dominance and no connections to Catholic Europe.<sup>32</sup> This meant that the Oldenburgs never made connections with leading houses of Europe, such as the Valois or the Spanish or Austrian Habsburgs, and there are probably both religious and status-related reasons for this. Status-wise, their equals were the German princely houses (*Reichsfürsten*). The financial side was always important in marriage negotiations and regulated in detailed marriage contracts, but economic considerations are not known to have hindered an otherwise wished-for marriage.<sup>33</sup>

Perhaps it is not so much the equality of birth as such that is crucial, but the equality in status (which, admittedly, usually followed birth in pre-modern Europe). The will to let the children keep their social sta-

<sup>30</sup> Christian IV reacted very angrily upon learning of his son Christian Ulrik Gyldenløve's relations with Bente Luft, a Norwegian commoner. Bregnsbo argues that this is probably because Christian Ulrik planned to marry her; having mistresses was no problem for male members of the royal family, but marrying them could create complicated inheritance problems, and a commoner was not befitting for a son of the king. He was forced to give up the marriage. Bregnsbo 2010, pp. 82-83.

<sup>31</sup> Daniel Schönplflug: *Die Heiraten der Hohenzollern. Verwandtschaft, Politik und Ritual in Europa 1640-1918*, Göttingen 2013, p. 91.

<sup>32</sup> The exceptions were Anna's marriage to James VI of Scotland in 1589, Jørgen's to Anne of England in 1683, the future Christian V's to Charlotte Amalie from Hesse-Kassel in 1667 and his sister Vilhelmine Ernestine to the future Elector of the Palatinate Karl in 1671, the last two being at that time Calvinist. Magnus' unauthorised marriage into the Orthodox tsar family has been commented on above.

<sup>33</sup> All marriage contracts can be found in the *Danmark-Norges traktater med dertil hørende aktstykker* vol. I-X, ed. L. Laursen, Copenhagen 1907-1948 (quoted as *DNT*).

tus position seems to have been a strong force. Added in the marriage contracts to concrete financial measures, such as dowry and land that was to stand at the bride's disposal as a widow, there is the phrase, as in Elisabeth's contract from 1542, at her marriage to a duke of Mecklenburg, that she should have 'stately and princely jewellery, fine objects, clothes, silver tableware and others, as it a daughter of the king of Denmark and princess of Schleswig and Holstein etc. well befits and behoves'.<sup>34</sup> This phrase is kept almost word-for-word in all later marriage contracts.<sup>35</sup> This shows the importance of safeguarding the status position of the daughter, and thus also the status position of the house among other European houses. The equality of the spouses in terms of social status was a matter not only for them, it was also a part of dynasty formation. We will see that even clearer when looking at the illegitimate children in the second section of this article.

As we have now seen, the Danish royal family had many connections by marriage to other ruling houses. But were these dynastic connections used as a network? It is obvious that the ruling families kept contact with their relatives abroad, letting them know about child-births and other familial news, but the question here is whether this web of relations was used actively to promote the dynastic interests of the family. Was information exchanged, advice given and alliances forged, not only in purely familial questions? I will look at this during three periods: the reigns of Christian III and especially Frederik II in the 16th century; the times of Christian IV, which can be studied in some detail thanks to his published letters; and finally, to see if absolutism brought a change, Christian V's reign.

### 16th century family connections

It is often noted that relations with some German rulers played a great part for Christian III and Frederik II.<sup>36</sup> Frederik II's deep involvement

<sup>34</sup> *DNT* I, p. 424; 'mit städtlichem und fürstlichem geschmuck, cleinoten, kleidern, silbergeschirr und anderem, als eins konnigs zu Dennemarcken tochter und fürstin zu Schleswig und Holstein etc. wol gezymet und geburet'.

<sup>35</sup> As in the contract of Ulrikke Eleonore at her marriage to Karl XI of Sweden in 1679, *DNT* VIII, p. 408; the difference here is that she, after the introduction of absolutism, should get what befits 'a royal hereditary princess', 'en kongelig arfprinsesse', and there is thus no need to define what territories her father rules.

<sup>36</sup> V. Møllerup: *Danmarks riges historie 1536-1588*, (vol. III:2 of *Danmarks Riges Historie*), Copenhagen 1900-1906, pp. 147-150. On *Danmarks Riges Historie*, the first modern, scholarly work by experts on Danish history, see Henrik Dethlefsen: 'Omkring 'Danmarks Riges Historie'', *Historisk Tidsskrift* vol. 86 no 2, 1986. This older work is very valuable for our purposes, due to its focus on

in the religious-political conflicts on the continent and especially within the Empire has recently been underscored by Paul Lockhart.<sup>37</sup> But to what extent were those family contacts, and to what extent were they used for dynastic purposes?

During the first part of his reign, Christian III had a close relationship with his brother-in-law, Duke Albrecht of Prussia, who married his sister Dorothea in 1525.<sup>38</sup> The duke, the former high master of the Teutonic Order, had recast the Prussian territory of the Order into a secular, hereditary and Lutheran duchy. Christian's correspondence with Albrecht on political matters was open and forthright, demonstrating the strong ties between the two deeply Lutheran princes.<sup>39</sup> Albrecht's importance seems to have diminished after the marriage of Christian's daughter Anna to August of Saxony in 1548, after which August became the king's most important foreign contact.<sup>40</sup> A Danish delegation helped August to negotiate his way to the electorship after his brother's death in 1553.<sup>41</sup>

The relation to Saxony was vital both for the Danish-Norwegian state and for the king and his family. It is important to uphold this distinction between the interests of the state and the dynastic interests – which has not always been done<sup>42</sup> – even when they coincide, as they do in this case. Christian's father, Frederik I, was a usurper, and the Habsburgs were likely to support the children of the dethroned Christian II, married as he was to a sister of Emperor Karl V, and promote a re-Catholization of the North. Of course, Christian III wanted to safeguard his line of the house and, as early as in 1536, the Coun-

political history and the actions of the kings.

<sup>37</sup> Lockhart 2004. Frederik I had already been heavily involved in the cause of the Reformation in Germany and had many connections to the first generation of German Protestant princes. Thorkild C. Lyby, *Vi evangeliske. Studier over samspillet mellem udenrigspolitik og kirkepolitik på Frederik I's tid*, Aarhus 1993.

<sup>38</sup> Biographic information about Germans from <https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/> (visited on several occasions during 2019), unless otherwise stated.

<sup>39</sup> Møllerup 1900-1906, p. 36.

<sup>40</sup> Møllerup 1900-1906, pp. 99-100.

<sup>41</sup> Karl-Erik Frandsen: '1523-1533', in Esben Albrechtsen, Karl-Erik Frandsen & Gunner Lind, *Dansk udenrigspolitik historie 1. Konger og krige 700-1648*, Copenhagen 2001, pp. 290-292. See also Reiner Gross: *Geschichte Sachsens*, Leipzig 2001, pp. 70-73.

<sup>42</sup> See Frede P. Jensen: 'Frederik II og truslen fra de katolske magter. Linjer i dansk udenrigs- og sikkerhedspolitik 1571-88', *Historisk Tidsskrift* vol. 93 no. 2, 1993, for an example of traditional foreign political analysis, where Denmark-Norway is seen as an unproblematic actor in international relations with other states, and the dynastic perspective is lacking.

cil of the Realm on his request elected his two-year-old son Frederik as his successor; this was traditional Oldenburg dynasty securing policy. In 1544, Denmark made peace with the emperor in Speyer and subsequent Danish foreign policy aimed at a good relationship with the emperor. In this, Electoral Saxony, being a Protestant country but usually allied with the emperor, was an important link. As we have seen, several marriages to the Saxon electoral house were to follow. The close relations with Electoral Saxony 'became a cornerstone in [Danish] foreign policy towards Germany for the coming hundred years',<sup>43</sup> but can also be seen as a way of achieving dynasty securing.

August of Saxony held an important place personally for Frederik II, and also did him important political favours.<sup>44</sup> With his marriage to Sophie in 1572, he got a new friend and political correspondent in his father-in-law (also his uncle), Duke Ulrich of Mecklenburg-Güstrow. Together with August, Ulrich arbitrated a conflict between Frederik in his capacity as duke of Holstein and the town of Hamburg.<sup>45</sup> After Frederik's death, Ulrich came to Denmark to aid his daughter, now the queen dowager, in her conflicts with the Council of the Realm.<sup>46</sup>

Another important contact was the house of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel. Duke Heinrich was the maternal grandfather of Queen Dorothea, and it was through her contact with him that the negotiations leading to the peace of Speyer was initiated.<sup>47</sup> It shows that the queens, too, could use their familial relations for dynastic securing. Later on, Frederik II's daughter Elisabeth would marry Heinrich's grandson, Heinrich Julius.

It is thus obvious that the family relations with Prussia, Electoral Saxony, Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel and Mecklenburg were important for the Danish royal house. The contacts were used for diplomatic purposes of the Danish-Norwegian state, combined with dynastic interests, as the Speyer example shows, as well as for diplomatic purposes of the kings as dukes of Holstein (the Hamburg affair), and for resolving, or trying to resolve, family conflicts.

It should, however, be noted that close family relations were not a

<sup>43</sup> Frandsen 2001, p. 290. Also underscored by Jensen 1993, pp. 249-251.

<sup>44</sup> Grønder Hansen 2013, *passim*, on the friendship between Frederik and August; p. 129 about August's diplomatic help during the Nordic Seven Years' War; Møllerup 1900-1906, pp. 235-237 on his role as mediator between Frederik and his uncles in Schleswig-Holstein.

<sup>45</sup> Møllerup 1900-1906, p. 238. More examples of Ulrich's importance in Jensen 1993, pp. 270-271.

<sup>46</sup> Grønder-Hansen 2013, p. 316.

<sup>47</sup> Frandsen 2001, p. 286.

necessary condition for political cooperation. Another foreign prince who played an important part in royal and Danish diplomacy was Philipp, the landgrave of Hesse, an important adviser for Frederik I as well as for his son Christian III.<sup>48</sup> He was not a close relative of the Oldenburgs,<sup>49</sup> and more likely his importance rested on his position as one of the leaders of the Protestant princes in Germany (he was indeed one of the 'protesters' at the diet in 1529, where Protestantism got its name). Religious affinity was here the most important link. Family ties gave possibilities, but other factors could prove to be stronger in defining friend or foe.

### The dynastic network of Christian IV in the 1610s and 1620s

Here, Christian IV's foreign family contacts during the 1610s and 1620s will be examined. This was a period of high foreign political ambitions of the king, culminating in his crushing defeat in the Thirty Years' War. Christian's letters, published in eight volumes, is an important source to his contacts.<sup>50</sup> The publication contains all known letters written by the king's own hand, which is a somewhat dubious selection method, since many important letters were only dictated or approved by him. Probably, the idea at the time of the publication was that the *manu propria* letters were more personal and thus more valuable, but it is clear that he also sent secretary-written letters to the same recipients.<sup>51</sup> However, he seems to have limited the privilege of receiving hand-written letters to relatives, since there are no such letters to foreign princes who were not related to the king.

During the two decades in question, at least 74 letters to 14 relatives outside the realms and lands of the king have survived. Each of these includes a reference to familial connections, and subtle distinctions can be seen even in the choice of greeting phrase. In all letters to

<sup>48</sup> Frandsen 2001, p. 251-255. On the alliance of Frederik I with Philipp of Hesse, see Lyby 1993, pp. 259-271.

<sup>49</sup> They got a family connection when Christian III's daughter Anna in 1548 married August of Saxony, who was an uncle of Philipp's wife, but the political contact with Philipp was much older.

<sup>50</sup> *Kong Christian den fjerdes egenhændige breve*, vol. I-VII, eds. C.F. Bricka & J.A. Fridericia, Copenhagen 1886-1891; *Kong Christian den fjerdes egenhændige breve*, vol. VIII, ed. Johanne Skovgaard, Copenhagen 1947. Quoted as *Christian IVs breve* and volume number. Volume VIII is especially valuable, since it contains many letters found in German princely archives, see the editor's preface, *Christian IVs breve* VIII, p. xi.

<sup>51</sup> Some of the hand letters are actually drafts that were supposed to be written as official letters by the Chancery, see *Christian IVs breve* III, p. 143, p. 217-218, p. 299 note 1.



his sisters, they are addressed as ‘friendly, heartily loved sister’.<sup>52</sup> This token of highest affinity also was granted to his sister-in-law, Anna of Brandenburg, with whom he had an intense correspondence. The relation to the king’s brothers-in-law is always explicitly invoked.<sup>53</sup>

For more distant relatives, ‘sister’ is used for the females and ‘cousin’ for the males, often with the addition of ‘son-in-law’ even where, strictly speaking, they were not.<sup>54</sup> Some of them also get the title ‘brother’, which indicates an even closer relationship.<sup>55</sup> Younger relatives are often also greeted as ‘son’, for instance Johann Albrecht of Mecklenburg, second cousin to Christian IV, who was born in 1590 and thus 12 years younger than Christian.<sup>56</sup> The king’s brother-in-law Johann Sigismund, born five years before Christian, was called both brother and brother-in-law.<sup>57</sup> This difference in ages determined who would be called ‘brother’ and who ‘son’; generation mattered.

The familial greeting phrases were, thus, not chosen at random. They were part of a fine-tuned system of invoking relations, which would carry meaning for the recipient. The closeness of the relation, the age distance, even the adjectives used to express affection, all was important for the smooth functioning of the dynastic network.

Turning to the content of the letters, many of them show important political contacts. Several of the male recipients were among the king’s most important allies or political contacts in the preparations for and during the war in Germany. One example is elector Johann Georg of Saxony, son of the king’s cousin and called ‘brother-in-law’ in the letters, who was of great importance in the attempts to negotiate peace with the emperor.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>52</sup> E.g. *Christian IVs breve I*, p. 82; VIII, p. 86: ‘freundliche, hertzliebte Schwester’.

<sup>53</sup> As with Johann Sigismund of Brandenburg, *Christian IVs breve VIII*, p. 9.

<sup>54</sup> ‘Schwester’: *Christian IVs breve I*, p. 425 to Cristian’s father’s cousin Sophie of Mecklenburg. *Christian IVs breve VIII*, p. 58 to his brother-in-law’s son Georg Wilhelm of Brandenburg: ‘Freundtlicher vielgeliebter vetter vnd Schuager’.

<sup>55</sup> Georg Wilhem is in 1625 titled ‘vetter und Schuager’ (see the previous note) but in the next year ‘vetther, Schuager vnd Bruder’, *Christian IVs breve VIII*, p. 78. This indicates that he has moved a step upwards in the eyes of Christian IV.

<sup>56</sup> *Christian IVs breve VIII*, p. 62: ‘Freundlicher vielgeliebter Vetter vnd Sohn’.

<sup>57</sup> *Christian IVs breve VIII*, p. 9.

<sup>58</sup> E.g. *Christian IVs breve VIII*, pp. 91–92; Lind 2001, p. 421. Others are Duke Friedrich Ulrich of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, the king’s nephew (*Christian IVs breve VIII*, p. 65; Lind 2001, p. 418), and Christian Wilhelm, administrator of the bishopric of Magdeburg, who was Christian’s brother-in-law through the king’s marriage with his sister, Anna Cathrine of Brandenburg (*Christian IVs breve VIII*, pp. 60–62).



Christian IV fought the war not as the king of Denmark-Norway, since he could not get the Council of the Realm to commit to the war, but as duke of Holstein and *Kreisoberst* in the Lower Saxon *Kreis* of the Empire. In a way, he can be seen as the head of two separate states, although this subtlety was not respected by the Imperial side, Jutland was occupied and Denmark-Norway was *de facto* engaged in the war.<sup>59</sup> To forge a Lower Saxon coalition, Christian made great use of his dynastic connections. An important step was a meeting in Lauenburg in March 1625; it is worth looking closely at the participants.<sup>60</sup>

Present in Lauenburg were Christian Wilhelm of Magdeburg, brother-in-law of the king; Friedrich Wilhelm of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, nephew of the king; the 'duke of Mecklenburg', which might mean either Johann Albrecht or his brother Adolf Friedrich, both second cousins to the king; Duke Friedrich III of Holstein-Gottorp, the son of the king's second cousin Johann Adolf but also the king's nephew through his sister Augusta, married to the same Johann Adolf; further Prince-Archbishop Johann Friedrich of Bremen, brother of Johann Adolf and thus brother-in-law of the king; and finally August, the duke of Saxony-Lauenburg, who was a distant relation since the king's maternal grandmother Dorothea, the queen of Christian III, was a sister of August's paternal grandfather, but had recently gained a closer relation to both the Danish and the Gottorp Oldenburgs when his sister married Philipp of (Holstein-Sønderborg-)Glücksburg, cousin of the king, in 1624. The meeting in Lauenburg was thus both a summit of heads of state and a family get-together.

Christian IV's letters to his sister-in-law Anna, married to elector Johann Sigismund of Brandenburg, the brother of Queen Anna Catharine, deceased in 1612, show the full range of political, dynastic and private matters that could be treated. In 1612, he wrote to her from Norway with the latest news on the war with Sweden.<sup>61</sup> He comments on the complicated political situation created by Brandenburg's claim to inherit Jülich and other territories in the Rhineland, and gives advice on how Anna's son Georg Wilhelm should behave as governor of Jülich.<sup>62</sup> He shares Anna's worries about her husband's shift to Calvinism; he writes that he cannot understand God's meaning with it.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>59</sup> The peace treaty in 1629 was also concluded in the name of Christian as king of Denmark and Norway, duke of Schleswig and Holstein, etc. *DNT* IV pp. 77-83.

<sup>60</sup> J. A. Fridericia: *Danmarks Riges Historie 1588-1699* (vol. III of *Danmarks Riges Historie*), Copenhagen 1896-1902, p. 174. On this work, cf. note 36.

<sup>61</sup> *Christian IVs breve* VIII, p. 13-14.

<sup>62</sup> *Christian IVs breve* VIII, p. 33-35.

<sup>63</sup> *Christian IVs breve* VIII, pp. 20-25 (three letters).

Less political subjects are also treated, as when Christian asks Anna to send some vines to him and his brother Ulrik, or when he sends an apprentice to be educated at the court pharmacy in Brandenburg.<sup>64</sup> She also asks him for a big personal loan; Christian laments that he is out of money, but when she insists, he promises to talk to his mother about it (Queen Dowager Sophie, who was famous for her financial affairs).<sup>65</sup>

There are also interesting cases of cooperation between the related families. Anna once asked Christian to help arrange a marriage for one of her daughters, and he was willing to do so if she would send him a small painting of the bride-to-be. This is probably the prelude to the marriage in 1614 of Friedrich Ulrich of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, son of Christian's sister Elisabeth, to Anna Sophie of Brandenburg. Here, Christian agrees to act as a marriage broker 'because of the good *Affection* that I hold for the house of Brandenburg'.<sup>66</sup> It is a clear statement of solidarity between members of the dynastic network, but also shows that the network was perceived as consisting of separate houses. When Christian helped his sister-in-law, it was not only a personal favour; instead, all parties understood that the Oldenburg house was helping the Brandenburg house.

It is obvious that the dynastic connections were just as important for Christian IV as they had been under his father and grandfather. Did they retain their importance during the reign of his grandson, Christian V?

### **Familial connections in the late 17th century**

In contrast to earlier times, foreign dynastic connections of direct political importance are very rarely mentioned in the literature on Christian V's rule. The only exceptions in Fridericia's thorough treatment of the time are two mentions of family contacts, but in both cases it is the queens who try to use their family contacts for familial purposes.<sup>67</sup> In a recently published history of Danish foreign policy, many such

<sup>64</sup> *Christian IVs breve VIII*, pp. 25-27 (two letters).

<sup>65</sup> *Christian IVs breve VIII*, pp. 27-28, 33.

<sup>66</sup> *Christian IVs breve VIII*, pp. 15-17; on the persons, see editor's note p. 16. Quotation p. 17. 'aus guter *Affection*, die ich zu dem hause Brandenburg trage'.

<sup>67</sup> Fridericia 1896-1902, p. 529 (Charlotte Amalie tries to get her uncle, the 'Great Elector' of Brandenburg, to intervene on her behalf against the mistress of the king), and p. 552 (Queen Dowager Sophie Amalie engages her brother duke Johann Friedrich of Brunswick-Lüneburg in the failed attempts to put prince Jørgen on the Polish throne).

contacts are noted in the years of Frederik II and Christian IV, but no such connections at all are mentioned of Christian V's reign.<sup>68</sup>

In order to see if this impression from the literature is correct, I will study Christian V's so-called 'day registers', a sort of diary or minutes that the king kept day by day, at least for the years 1692–1694; I have taken the year 1692 as a sample.<sup>69</sup> The king's purpose with these notes must have been to register his actions mainly in the field of foreign policy. Letters to and from Danish representatives abroad, contacts with foreign diplomats in Denmark, and discussions on foreign policy with his councillors fill the bulk of the day registers. The second most frequent subject, closely related to foreign policy, is military issues. When internal matters are brought up, they get only general phrases like 'on the 8 [of April] we treated in the Council some domestic Danish and Norwegian issues',<sup>70</sup> while he sometimes dwells at length on the details of foreign political issues. But he also mentions when he has got letters from his relatives abroad or sent letters to them, usually saying something of the content.

The day registers record a total of about 30 letters to or from foreign family connections during 1692. That is very little compared to the correspondence with diplomats, foreign courts and dignitaries; there are at least 26 such contacts in the month of January alone.<sup>71</sup> Although there are no directly comparable sources from earlier kings, this very likely mirrors a proportional decline of the familial contacts, as compared to the diplomatic contacts. Before the 1650s, there were no permanent residents in foreign capitals, but a professional foreign service with permanent representations that brought Denmark-Norway firmly into the Westphalian system was built up during the 1650s, 60s and 70s. During these years, Denmark-Norway established a permanent diplomatic presence in Brandenburg, Electoral Saxony, at the Imperial court, in the Netherlands, Spain, England and Sweden.<sup>72</sup> The foreign political minutes of the Secret Council, preserved from

<sup>68</sup> Knud J.V. Jespersen: '1648-1720', in Knud J.V. Jespersen & Ole Feldbæk (eds.), *Dansk udenrigspolitik historie 2. Revanche og neutralitet 1648-1814*, Copenhagen 2002.

<sup>69</sup> 'Kong Christian Vs egenhændige Dagregistre for Aarene 1692, 1693 og 1694', ed. C.F. Wegener, in *Aarsberetninger fra Det Kongelige Geheimearchiv, indeholdende Bidrag til dansk Historie af utrykte Kilder*, vol. VI, ed. C.F. Wegener, Copenhagen 1876-1882. Quoted as *Aarsberetninger VI*.

<sup>70</sup> *Aarsberetninger VI*, p. 277: 'haffde vie for vdi conseillet naagele indlandiszke Danste [sic] og Nordiske sager'.

<sup>71</sup> *Aarsberetninger VI*, pp. 258-263.

<sup>72</sup> Emil Marquard: *Danske Gesandter og Gesandtskabspersonale indtil 1914*, Copenhagen 1952.

1670–1684, conveys the same impression of professionalization.<sup>73</sup> This probably diminished the need for using family contacts. Even more important, the family letters involved only family matters in the strict sense.

The king not infrequently corresponded with his sisters in Saxony and the Palatinate, Anna Sophie and Wilhelmine Ernestine. They sometimes visited each other and on January 4, Christian received letters from both of them via a courier from Dresden.<sup>74</sup> Anna Sophie, the most frequent correspondent among the family members, discussed family matters such as a present from her sister in the Palatinate to his daughter; she also mentioned the two sisters' visit to a spa.<sup>75</sup> Further, another letter informed Christian about the troubles Anna Sophie had with her son, elector Johann Georg IV, and his marriage.<sup>76</sup> There is also something about a disagreement between Christian V and his nephew, the elector, which Anna Sophie was supposed to mediate, but the conflict does not seem to touch any important political issue.<sup>77</sup> It seems to be a familial quarrel in which Anna Sophie has also herself felt insulted by her son – finally, she informs her royal brother that the elector, on his knees, has asked her pardon.<sup>78</sup>

There is little correspondence noted with the king's sister Ulrikke Eleonora in Sweden, but she is informed about the electress dowager's disagreement with her son.<sup>79</sup> There are no letters to or from his sister Frederikke Amalie in Holstein-Gottorp, but she and two of her sons dined with him in Rendsburg, in September.<sup>80</sup> Christian V mentions a handful of letters to and from his brother Jørgen (George), married in England to the later Queen Anne. Here, the possibilities of peace negotiations are mentioned (this is during the War of the Palatinate Succession), but otherwise it is about such family business as the pregnancy of his wife, and a disagreement with the court that does not seem to be of a political nature.<sup>81</sup>

It is telling that the family connections to the English and Swedish

<sup>73</sup> 'Geheimeraadets Protocol over Udenrigske Sager', ed. C.F. Wegener, in *Aarsberetninger fra Det Kongelige Geheimearchiv, indeholdende Bidrag til dansk Historie af utrykte Kilder*, vol. VI, ed. C.F. Wegener, Copenhagen 1876-1882.

<sup>74</sup> *Aarsberetninger* VI, p. 259.

<sup>75</sup> *Aarsberetninger* VI, p. 263; p. 286.

<sup>76</sup> *Aarsberetninger* VI, p. 281-282.

<sup>77</sup> *Aarsberetninger* VI, p. 295.

<sup>78</sup> *Aarsberetninger* VI, p. 339.

<sup>79</sup> *Aarsberetninger* VI, p. 271.

<sup>80</sup> *Aarsberetninger* VI, p. 312.

<sup>81</sup> *Aarsberetninger* VI, p. 309, 269-270.

courts are seemingly not used for political purposes. Letters to Karl XI in Sweden are mentioned without any statement of them being brothers-in-law. At the same time, there is an intense correspondence with the Danish representatives to foreign courts. People were still sent out to negotiate, but day-to-day business was increasingly run through modern diplomatic channels. Internally, after the introduction of absolutism in 1660, the kings had a limited circle of foreign political advisors who were regularly consulted.<sup>82</sup>

Absolutism had certainly centralised power to the monarch. He no longer had to compete with, and strive against, the Council in foreign political matters. But this centralization, in connection with professionalization and the development of the European state system, made the family contacts less important. The dynasty still mattered, as we see when the king of Denmark was involved in a disagreement between the electress dowager and the elector in Saxony, a matter he informed his sister in Sweden about. But the big issues, which fill the bulk of the minutes – such as the negotiations about creating new electorates in Germany or a possible alliance between Denmark and some German states – were run without reference to familial bonds. No foreign prince took the role August of Saxony had played for Frederik II and, unlike those of Christian IV, the sisters of Christian V were not important political correspondents.

### **Summing up: A marriage sphere and a dynastic network**

The Danish Oldenburgs clearly had their preferences concerning marriages. The spouses, to an overwhelming majority, came from the northern German, Lutheran sphere of reigning princely houses. The equality of status seems to have been the single most important factor in placing the offspring. As in other princely houses, it was mostly the daughters and the potential heir to the throne who married, while many of the younger men had to stay unmarried. The marriages were important tools in dynasty formation and a reasonable number of daughters to marry off was an important asset for the dynasty.

The marriage connections created a web which can be described as a dynastic, or perhaps more accurately inter-dynastic, network. The princess who went to a foreign court was now a member of another house, from where she could be an important link between the houses. The Oldenburgs frequently used their foreign relatives and in-laws during a large part of our period. Information, advice, servants

<sup>82</sup> Jespersen 2002, p. 49, 146-147; see Sebastian Olden-Jørgensen: *Kun navnet er tilbage – en biografi om Peter Griffenfeld*, Copenhagen 1999, pp. 173-205, on this way of conducting foreign policy decision making under Frederik III.

and gossip with both familial and, indeed, also political content, went through this network. There is, however, a marked change at the end of the period. In the late 17th century, Christian V seems not to have used his familial web for political purposes. It will be interesting to see if this change over time has its counterparts in other fields.

*The placing and usage of royal offspring*

In this section, we will broaden the perspective by studying how the royal children, legitimate and illegitimate, married or unmarried, were placed, and to what extent and how they were used in important positions within the lands of the Oldenburg kings. The male offspring are at the centre of this analysis, since the daughters were either placed abroad (treated above) or remained unmarried, with the important exception of the royal children born out of wedlock but recognised by the king, as we soon will see.

At least three components were involved in placing offspring: forging connections, avoiding conflicts, and retaining social position. The last goal could be furthered not only through marriage, but also via titles and important charges in service of the king and/or the state. We will see how dynasty formation was driven through these choices, often as a form of dynasty securing, and it will also be a contribution to explain the degree to which the royal house can be seen as a power group within the state, a question that will be further addressed in the third section of this article.

**Royal children under Christian III, Frederik II and Christian IV**

Before Christian III fathered any children of his own, he had to take responsibility for his younger half-siblings. The females were married into foreign houses in the usual way, but political challenges arose when it came to his three half-brothers Hans, Adolf and Frederik. There was an old tradition of supporting younger sons with duchies; in this way in the high middle ages, Schleswig (da. Slesvig or Sønderjylland) had come into being as a hereditary duchy under the Danish crown, and other outlying parts of Denmark, preferably Halland, had also been used in this way. But with a decision of the diet in 1494, the indivisibility of the kingdom was declared.<sup>83</sup>

Holstein, now with Schleswig firmly attached to it and outside the competence of the Danish Council, remained a fief of the German Empire, where all sons had inheritance rights and the habit of partitioning territories between the heirs was strong.<sup>84</sup> In this way,

<sup>83</sup> Dahlerup 2000, pp. 85.

<sup>84</sup> Paula Sutter Fichtner: *Protestantism and Primogeniture in Early Modern*



Schleswig-Holstein could be seen as an asset for the dynasty, making it possible to pay off younger sons. This was also what was done. In 1544, the duchies were divided between the king and his brothers Adolf and Hans (the elder). But this was mainly a division of incomes and not of political territory; the three dukes were to reign together, the diet of the duchies was still one and undivided, and the noble lands and the towns were ruled jointly. This undivided nature was also underscored by the fact that the dukes did not get one contiguous territory each, but several territories, mixed in a complicated manner.<sup>85</sup> The two dukes thus had their appropriate princely positions. At Hans' death in 1580, his share was divided between the king and Duke Adolf; Adolf's successors, residing at Gottorp Castle, was to be called the Holstein-Gottorp line of the Oldenburgs.

To avoid a further partition, Christian III's third half-brother, young Frederik, was promised the possibility of a princely bishopric in Germany. This had for centuries been a conventional way for German dynasties to place their younger sons. It had the triple advantage of giving them an appropriate position, enlarging the dynasty's sphere of influence, and preventing side branches that could complicate inheritance in the future, since the bishops were supposed to be unmarried, a praxis that was mostly continued when many bishoprics switched over to Lutheranism after the Reformation.<sup>86</sup> After some attempts, Frederik was installed as prince-bishop of Hildesheim in 1555, but died a year later.

Of Christian III's sons, Frederik (II) had been elected his successor as early as 1536. Several bishoprics in Germany were probed for his brother Magnus, but in the end, he received a part of the disintegrating Teutonic Order and in 1658, became prince-bishop of Ösel (Saaremaa), in exchange for renouncing his claims in Schleswig-Holstein. After the death of Christian III in 1559, Frederik II had to come to terms with the third brother, Hans (the younger). The nobility of the duchies protested against a further division and, as a result, in 1564,

*Germany*, New Haven 1989; according to Fichtner, this habit of partition was reinforced by Lutheranism. The Schleswig-Holstein nobility claimed the right to choose the duke at the diet, but the dukes insisted on their inheritance rights; finally, in 1616, the nobility gave in.

<sup>85</sup> Mikael Venge: 'Tiden fra 1523 til 1559', in Kaj Hørby & Mikael Venge: *Danmarks historie. Bind 2. Tiden 1340-1648. Første halvbind: 1340-1559*, Copenhagen 1980, pp. 332-337; Carsten Porskrog Rasmussen: 'Ét hertugdømme - mange herrer 1544-1720', in *Sønderjyllands historie 1. Indtil 1815*, Aabenraa 2008, pp. 189-200. Rasmussen also notes that this was a solution of the general problem of what to do with younger sons; p. 189.

<sup>86</sup> Haag 2018; Dahlerup 2000, pp. 85-86.



Hans was given small territories within the parts belonging to King Frederik, of which the area around Sønderborg was the most substantial. His descendants were to subdivide this small territory and form the so-called Sønderborg (Sonderburg) lines; more on them later.

Frederik II's oldest son Christian (IV) had been designated his successor at the age of three in 1580 and he became king as a minor in 1588. It fell to him, when reaching maturity in the mid-1590s, to find appropriate positions for his younger brothers, Ulrik and Hans. Ulrik had to be satisfied with the small princely bishopric of Schwerin in Mecklenburg, which he could get in 1603 since the house of Mecklenburg (from which came his mother, Sophie), which usually supplied the Schwerin bishops, did not have a suitable candidate.<sup>87</sup> Before Hans could become a problem, he died in 1602, only 19 years old.

It was to be around 20 years before the problem of placing younger sons once again surfaced. Christian IV's oldest son Christian had been elected as his successor in 1608. For the second oldest, Frederik, the bishopric path was tried at an early date. The attempts were crowned with success and Frederik got the bishoprics of Bremen and Verden, which was a blow to the Gottorps, who had hitherto dominated those territories. Frederik started his reign in Verden in 1623, but Bremen had to wait until the death of his forerunner, in 1634. Ulrik got the bishopric of Schwerin, succeeding his uncle of the same name, but the Thirty Years' War made it impossible for him to reside there, and he could not govern this tiny territory effectively. Ulrik later pursued a military career in mostly foreign (Saxon) service, which was also a conventional alternative for younger sons. He died in 1633 and, like many of his counterparts in the same position in Europe, he never married.

None of the brothers and sons treated so far were used in the running of the state. Although Frederik (II) had been elected successor and thus had the title of prince, he was kept out of the day-to-day business of governing. Christian IV had been only a minor when he ascended the throne in 1588. His designated successor, Prince Christian, got some ruling and commanding experience. When the king was at war in Germany in 1626–1627, Prince Christian acted as a sort of viceroy in Denmark, but obviously not to the satisfaction of his father, who did not give him any further important charges, except briefly. The king seems never to have trusted him, and his short charges do not diminish the impression that close family members were normally not used in the service of the state.

Due to unforeseen circumstances, Duke Frederik's trajectory

<sup>87</sup> Dahlerup 2000, p. 94.

proved to be somewhat of an exception. Although prince-bishop of Bremen and Verden, he married in 1643. The reason for this is that his brother Prince Christian and his spouse since 1634, Magdalena Sibylla of Saxony, had not produced any children and the prince's weak health was well known. Frederik's marriage in Copenhagen to Sophie Amalie of Brunswick-Lüneburg was thus a clear case of dynasty securing, as Christian IV wrote himself: the marriage took place 'on our fatherly gracious advice, to the conservation of our royal family and stem'.<sup>88</sup> Although Frederik had a ruling position in Bremen-Verden, he was obviously not satisfied with his declining inheritance in Schleswig-Holstein, and in the same year as he married, a settlement was negotiated between him, his brother and his father, giving him 300,000 dalers and a promise of small portions of the royal territories within the Duchies upon his father's death.<sup>89</sup> This proved good for him, since the Swedes captured his bishoprics in 1645. In 1647, he was made governor of the royal parts of the Duchies, but in the same year, his brother Prince Christian passed away. When his father Christian IV died in 1648, Frederik was elected king by the Council of the Realm and dubbed Frederik III.

As we have seen, trying to get control over northern German secularised bishoprics had been a cornerstone in the policy of the Danish-Norwegian kings for a hundred years. But to what extent was this Oldenburg dynastic policy, and to what extent Danish foreign policy? Svend Ellehøj, for example, remarks that dynastic interests in supporting the younger sons were involved, but mainly discusses other motives: control over the river mouths of Elbe and Weser in order to both strengthen the naval position and to take customs duties, while strategically securing Holstein from threats from the south. He summarises this as a 'Danish expansionist policy'.<sup>90</sup> Gamrath and Ladewig Petersen see the king's motive as to 'give Denmark authority over the mouths of Elbe and Weser and thereby considerable political and fiscal positions'; on the next page, however, they speak about the same policy as 'the interests of the king'.<sup>91</sup> Gunner Lind stresses that the motive to provide for the younger sons was also in the interest of the

<sup>88</sup> *Christian IVs breve* V, p. 224: 'auff vnsern väterlichen gnädigen anrath, zue conservation vnseren Konigl: Familie vndt Stammes'.

<sup>89</sup> Porskrog Rasmusen 2008, p. 196; *Christian IVs breve* IV, pp. 196-197, 205-206, 223-226, 378-379. According to the prince, the negotiations had been very hard; *ibid.* p. 378 footnote 1.

<sup>90</sup> Svend Ellehøj: *Danmarks historie. Bind 7. Christian 4:s Tidsalder 1596-1660*, Copenhagen 1977, pp. 248-249.

<sup>91</sup> Helge Gamrath & Erling Ladewig Petersen: *Danmarks historie. Bind 2. Tiden 1340-1648. Andet halvbind: 1559-1648*, Copenhagen 1980, pp. 492-493.

kingdom, which in the long run probably would have had to support them anyway.<sup>92</sup>

There was undoubtedly a mixture, probably not even sorted out by the king himself, between his interests as king of Denmark and Norway, as his own vassal as duke of Schleswig, as duke of Holstein in the Empire, and as head of the House of Oldenburg. Sometimes, these interests coincided. On other occasions, the king acted in only one, or some, of these capacities. An interesting example is when he, both in 1605 and in 1615, supported his brother-in-law in Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel in his military conflicts with the town of Brunswick. Christian seems to have personally taken part in the sieges with his own troops, but not in his capacity as territorial prince, neither of Schleswig-Holstein nor of Denmark-Norway; rather, as head of a house lending a hand to a related house.<sup>93</sup>

The dynastic interest, in turn, can be seen in three ways: it was a matter of enlarging the assets of the dynasty; it was about supporting the younger sons in a way that safeguarded the primogeniture line from inheritance claims (dynastic securing); and it was a matter of securing them an appropriate position, keeping them on a status level befitting them and the dynasty. The handling of royal children has often been interpreted as purely political, and without any consideration for the children as individuals. It has been said, for instance, that 'Christian IV had used his second oldest son [Frederik (III)] as a pawn in his policy in northern Germany'.<sup>94</sup> This perspective is too narrow; compared with the placement of daughters (above), the ideal of securing a certain status level, the level of a ruling family, seems to be an overriding motive. Gains in terms of power politics could then be a bonus. The children were not pawns used in a political game in the traditional sense, they were children of a family with a certain position, and retaining this position was perceived as being in the interest also of the children; it was dynastic policy. We will see this status aspect even more clearly now, as we turn to the fate of the children born out of wedlock, which deepens the story of dynastic inclusion and exclusion.

<sup>92</sup> Lind 2001, p. 400. Dahlerup also sees the dynastic motive as one among several, but underscores that the problem with the support for the younger sons was especially pressing in Denmark as long as it was an elective monarchy; Dahlerup 2000, p. 103.

<sup>93</sup> Fridericia 1896-1902, p. 141; *Christian IV's breve VIII*, pp. 27-38.

<sup>94</sup> Ellehøj 1977, p. 391.

### Less royal but maybe still royal children

Danish kings might have had any number of illegitimate children that we do not know of, but of interest here are the children recognized by the king. Such offspring was not uncommon in European princely houses and often got special names. The Austrian Habsburgs, for example, gave their bastards names like ‘de Austria’ or ‘von Österreich’.<sup>95</sup> In Denmark, Gyldenløve (‘Golden Lion’) came to be the noble-sounding surname of many of them.

The recognized children born out of wedlock by the Danish kings belong to a delimited period in time: they were fathered by Christian IV, Frederik III and Christian V (and, immediately after our period of study, by Frederik IV). Christian IV, especially active in this field, is the father of 12 of the 16 such children who reached at least the age of 20.<sup>96</sup> In Danish, these recognized bastards are called the king’s ‘natural’ children (*naturlige børn*). Christian IV’s relationship with noblewoman Kirsten Munk could be described as a morganatic marriage; at least the king himself regarded it as a marriage. Their children could, if this is accepted, be called legitimate. However, in this study, for analytic purposes, all children not born by the queens will be labelled ‘illegitimate’, as opposed to those whose royal position is unassailable.

Table 2. Marriages of illegitimate children of Danish kings 1536–1699

	Sons			Daughters			Total
	Princely	Noble	Unmarried	Princely	Noble	Unmarried	
Persons	0	4	3	0	7	2	16
Marriages	0	7	–	0	7	–	14

Source: Dansk biografisk leksikon ([http://denstoredanske.dk/Dansk\\_Biografisk\\_Leksikon](http://denstoredanske.dk/Dansk_Biografisk_Leksikon)).

<sup>95</sup> Karl Vocelka: *Die Familien Habsburg und Habsburg-Lothringen. Politik - Kultur - Mentalität*, Wien 2010, pp. 113–166.

<sup>96</sup> The one exception to this is Christian V’s daughter Christiane, who died only 17 years old, but is included here since she married at 14.

As we see in Table 2, five illegitimate children never married, which is a larger proportion when compared with legitimate children (Table 1). All of the unmarried ones can be found among Christian IV's children; with so many children, it must have been difficult to find suitable matches for them all, and it also involved considerable costs (gifts, marriage party, dowry etc.). As with the legitimate children, mostly the sons stayed unmarried; only two of Christian IV's daughters shared this fate, one being the last child with Kirsten Munk, Dorothea Elisabeth, whom the king later refused to recognize. Since three sons married twice, a total of 14 marriages were concluded.

Without exception, marriage partners came from high nobility within the king's domains, from Denmark proper and from Schleswig-Holstein. All children married into the high nobility, families closely attached to the crown and with members in the Council of the Realm. Among the spouses are families like Ulfeldt, Sehested, Grubbe and Ahlefeldt. The appropriate level of the recognized children born out of wedlock was obviously that of the high nobility.

We will here focus on the children of Christian IV and later come back to the offspring of his successors. There were status differences among the children of Christian IV.<sup>97</sup> The sons and daughters of Kirsten Madsdatter, Karen Andersdatter and Vibeke Kruse, all of them commoners, got the surname Gyldenløve and were treated as noble. The children of Kirsten Munk, herself a high noble, were instead given the titles of counts and countesses of Schleswig-Holstein, as indeed were also given to Kirsten herself. Although this was only a matter of titles, carrying no ruling positions, territories or incomes with them, it shows once again that the Duchies were an asset for the dynasty. It would have been politically impossible for Christian to give them such titles within Denmark or Norway, but Schleswig-Holstein was outside the control of the Council of the Realm.

The illegitimate children were used for political and administrative purposes to a greater extent than the legitimate children. The oldest son, Christian Ulrik Gyldenløve, received diplomatic and military charges at an early age. Like many princely and noble sons, he left his fatherland to gain experience at foreign courts and armies; he fell in Spanish service against the Dutch in 1640. Hans Ulrik Gyldenløve served as officer in the navy and as governor (*lensmand*) at Kronborg Castle until his death in 1645. Count Valdemar Christian was for some time in imperial service, and became an important brick in Christian

<sup>97</sup> Much has been written about Christian IV, his mistresses and children, and not least about his relation to Kirsten Munk. There are good accounts in e.g. Bregnsbo 2010, pp. 43-90, and Benito Scocozza: *Christian 4.*, Copenhagen 1987, pp. 220-235.

IV's attempts to forge an alliance with Russia against Sweden, but his marriage negotiations in Moscow failed and he never got any important charges in Denmark. Ulrik Christian Gyldenløve had important military posts in the war against Sweden in the early 1640s, but otherwise no important positions.

The illegitimate sons were easier to use than the legitimate ones; they could demand neither an appanage nor any positions at the very top. They were an asset to Christian IV, but could also be problematic when not meeting expectations, as is said to have been the case at least with Hans Ulrik and Ulrik Christian. The daughters were of even greater importance for the king. It is obvious and frequently noted in Danish historiography that Christian IV created a circle of sons-in-law, which he tried to use as a counterweight to the Council of the Realm.<sup>98</sup> It is worth looking closer at these sons-in-law.

The first intended marriage was to have taken place between Anna Cathrine and Frantz Rantzau, a young and promising man belonging to the foremost noble family of the Duchies.<sup>99</sup> He served in important military capacities, became member of the Council, and even got the prestigious position of Steward of the Realm (*rigshofmester*), but drowned in the moat of Rosenborg Castle in 1632, before the planned marriage. Anna Cathrine herself died the next year.

The marriage plans succeeded better for Anne Cathrine's sisters. First to marry was Sophie Elisabeth, who wed the Holstein nobleman Christian von Pentz. Pentz was initially highly esteemed by the king. He got the important charge of governor of Glückstadt, the king's new front position at the Elbe, and conducted diplomatic missions in Germany. Next, Leonora Christina married Corfitz Ulfeldt, a brilliant young nobleman who quickly became Christian IV's most important adviser. He was a member of the Council, governor at Copenhagen Castle, Steward of the Realm and in fact a sort of minister for finance; the king used him for a multitude of services, big and small, including important diplomatic negotiations. At times, there arose intense conflicts between Corfitz and the king, but he always managed to regain the king's trust.<sup>100</sup> His relative Ebbe Ulfeldt married Hedevig; he was governor (*lensmand*) in various places within Denmark and also a

<sup>98</sup> This has already been underscored by Fridericia 1896-1902, pp. 230-230. For modern treatments see e.g. Bregnsbo 2010, pp. 79-70, Steffen Heiberg: *Christian 4. – en europæisk statsmand*, Copenhagen 2009, pp. 252-260.

<sup>99</sup> On the close relations between the kings and the Rantzau family through many years, see Gunner Lind: 'Pyramiden ved Segeberg. Slægten Rantzau og dannelsen af staten Danmark-Slesvig-Holsten', in Erik Bodenstein *et al.* (eds.), *Nordens historiker. En vänbok till Harald Gustafsson*, Lund 2018.

<sup>100</sup> Steffen Heiberg: *Enhjørningen. Corfitz Ulfeldt*, Copenhagen 1993.

short while the last Danish governor of Ösel (but not a member of the Council).

Elisabeth Augusta wed Council member Hans Lindenov and Christine married Hannibal Sehested, another councillor who, together with Corfitz Ulfeldt, was one of the leading figures during the last years of Christian IV's regime. In 1642, Sehested became governor general (*statholder*) of Norway, reformed the Norwegian tax system, its administration and its army, and became a sort of viceroy of that kingdom. Finally, a few months after Christian's death, his youngest daughter Sophie Elisabeth married the Holstein nobleman Claus Ahlefeldt; the king must have been involved in this decision before he died, as he had already (in 1647) given Ahlefeldt Kalø Castle and district as a fief; this transaction was regarded as a provocation by the Danish nobility, as Ahlefeldt was a Holsteiner.<sup>101</sup>

It is interesting to note that Ahlefeldt, Penz and Rantzau all came from Schleswig-Holstein; this was not only a way of bypassing the Danish Council aristocracy, but also of having loyal persons in important positions in other parts of the monarchy.<sup>102</sup> Pentz got a leading position in the Duchies. Hannibal Sehested's position in Norway was even more important. Ebbe Ulfeldt served as governor of Ösel, albeit for only a short time. Such family connections could be used by the king to keep his conglomerate state together.

From the point of view of the involved noble families, a liaison with the royal house could be both an asset and a danger. The latter proved to be the case when 'the party of the sons-in-law' was overthrown after the death of Christian IV, an episode we will return to in the last section in the context of family conflicts and dynastic inclusion/exclusion.

### Christian IV's different levels of children

The published letters of Christian IV give us a unique possibility to look more closely at how a king could view the social position of his children. It has been said of Christian IV that 'he made no difference between his legitimate children and the others, except what followed from the order of precedence (*forskellene i rang*)'.<sup>103</sup> This is probably true on a personal level, but the qualification is consequential; there were important differences in rank.

The top positions of his sons with the queen are obvious, for exam-

<sup>101</sup> Fridericia 1896-1902, p. 284.

<sup>102</sup> It is thus slightly misleading to say that 'all the sons-in-law except Pentz came from the Danish high nobility'; Heiberg 2009, p. 258.

<sup>103</sup> Heiberg 2009, p. 251.



ple in the organisation of their court and the scheme for their daily life as children, listed in great detail by the king in 1610.<sup>104</sup> Especially the elected heir, Prince Christian, got special treatment. In 1628, 'our beloved, dear son the Prince' was given Malmöhus Castle and district as a fief of the crown, as the king let the Council know.<sup>105</sup> This is in slight contrast to the simpler wording 'my son count Valdemar Christian', when in 1632 he had to make do with a more humble income from an ecclesiastical position in Odense.<sup>106</sup> In 1642, Valdemar Christian, two of his sisters and some foreign guests were expected at Copenhagen Castle. The king ordered that not too many separate meals should be served to them, because there must be enough provisions left for the prince, who was expected to arrive somewhat later.<sup>107</sup>

Prince Christian's special position is also seen in his marriage in 1634, traditionally called *det store bilager* (the Great Marriage), which was marked with the most expensive festivities ever held in Denmark.<sup>108</sup> Duke Frederik's marriage in 1643 was less expensive but a certain equality was still present in the king's order that the carriage for the marriage should be of the same 'size and value' as the one for Christian's marriage; his marriage bed, made of ebony with ivory and silver, should be as 'the marriage bed of the young ladies'.<sup>109</sup> Christian IV here explicitly used comparisons between the children to get the right level. 'The young ladies' are the daughters of Kirsten Munk; this combination of a wagon like prince Christian's and a bed like the young ladies' seems to be a subtle way of placing Frederik in-between.

In other situations, Christian IV does not seem to have made any hierarchical distinction between his children. During the Danish phase of the Thirty Years' War, Imperial troops plundered the church in Skanderborg and obviously destroyed the coffin of the king's daughter Elisabeth (1606–1608). In response, the king ordered the coffin fittings to be made new in the same way 'as the other children have gotten'.<sup>110</sup> 'The children' collectively is a common phrase in his letters. He took a keen interest in the upbringing of all the children, and

<sup>104</sup> *Christian IVs breve I*, pp. 45–48.

<sup>105</sup> *Christian IVs breve II*, p. 169: 'uorriss elskeliige, keere Søn Prindtzen'.

<sup>106</sup> *Christian IVs breve III*, p. 68: 'myn Søn Greff woldemar Christian'.

<sup>107</sup> *Christian IVs breve VIII*, p. 168.

<sup>108</sup> 'A never before or after surpassed climax of splendour-showing at the Danish court' according to Ellehøj 1977, p. 318; see also Heiberg 2009, pp. 245–250.

<sup>109</sup> *Christian IVs breve VIII*, p. 242: 'aff liige størrelse og Valør'; 'ligesom frøckernis Brudeseng'.

<sup>110</sup> *Christian IVs breve III*, p. 221: 'som dii andre børn haffuer bekommid'.

his well-known desire to keep everything under his own control shows itself frequently, for instance in his care for socks for the children or rackets and balls for Valdemar Christian's exercises while he studied at the academy in Sorø.<sup>111</sup> He was upset to learn that Ellen Marsvin, the mother of Kirsten Munk, treated some of her grandchildren better than others.<sup>112</sup> It is mostly in less public situations that 'the children' were treated on the same level; in public, it was important to show a hierarchical order.

His daughters with Kirsten Munk seem to have had his special attention and affection, and they were often in his thoughts when they were not together, in his characteristic way mixing big and small issues. In 1633, he sent them an assortment of jams,<sup>113</sup> and a 1635 letter from Norway stresses how important it was for him that the daughters were well-cared-for in his absence.<sup>114</sup> In 1632, it came to his ears that young courtiers 'are walking up and down in the chamber' with the girls. He orders the castellan at Kronborg to tell the stewardess of the children to put a stop to this. The three oldest girls already had their fiancés (they are 'sold as expensively as they are valuable'), and did not need to meet other men. If the stewardess intended to teach the girls how to 'converse with all gentlemen', he (the king) could do that better himself, and if the stewardess herself wanted company, she could meet people while the girls were in school. So 'there is no need that gentlemen should run down to the children's chamber'.<sup>115</sup> This letter well reflects Christian IV's desire to control everyone and everything around him, his drastic language, and how valuable the daughters were to him as dynastic social capital that should not be allowed to fall in value.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>111</sup> *Christian IVs breve* VIII, p. 107, and IV, p. 27.

<sup>112</sup> *Christian IVs breve* III, p. 70; this is after the break between the king on one hand and Kirsten and her mother on the other.

<sup>113</sup> *Christian IVs breve* III, p. 114.

<sup>114</sup> *Christian IVs breve* III, p. 366.

<sup>115</sup> *Christian IVs breve* III, p. 26-27: 'de haffuer med børnene gaaet op och neder udi Stuffuen'; 'ere Solde saa dyre, som de kand gielde'; '*Discurrere* med huer herremand'; 'hon haffuer intett behoff att lade herremendene løbe neder udi børnenis Kammer'.

<sup>116</sup> It has often been assumed that Leonora Christina was the favourite child of Christian IV, but it has also been questioned resting only on her own autobiographic works (Heiberg 1993, p. 25). In my opinion, there is support for her claim in the king's letters, where she is more frequently mentioned than her sisters and sometimes gets special treatment, as when the king personally arranges the details of her marriage, which he does not do concerning other illegitimate children (*Christian IVs breve* IV, pp. 55-57) or

The position of his non-royal children is marked, for instance, by the king's order of a gold bracelet for Hans Ulrik Gyldenløve's fiancée, the noblewoman Regitze Grubbe. The bracelet was to be made 'in the way and of the same value, as the nobility here in the kingdom gives as engagement gift'. It was also to have 'a few diamonds on the ends, although not of the biggest ones'.<sup>117</sup> This is a very precise statement of Hans Ulrik's position between noble and princely status.

The king also cared much for his two children with Vibeke Kruse, but they were relegated to a somewhat inferior position. When a signet was to be made for Vibeke's daughter, Elisabeth Sofie, the mother's signet, with a lion motif, was to be used as the model.<sup>118</sup> The Gyldenløves were less princely, more noble. Animosity between the two groups of children was apparent. In 1641 Valdemar Christian, the only son of Kirsten Munk (a status that probably led him to feel like the head of the siblings) called Vibeke a 'whore' and her children '*horunger*' (children of a whore). The king ordered his chancellor and the court chaplain to teach him a lesson on his behaviour.<sup>119</sup>

In 1642, Christian IV gave instructions for the arrangements in the burial chapel he had started building within Roskilde Cathedral in 1613. His and the queen's coffins were to lay in the centre, with her to his right. The three of the queen's children who had died at a young age were to rest at the queen's feet; to her right would rest the king's two brothers and his son, Duke Ulrik; to his immediate left, the three of the king's children with Kirsten Munk who died as infants.<sup>120</sup> Here, the Munk children were treated as parts of the closest family circle, actually as close to the king as his queen's coffin. Compared with his instructions for Sophie Elisabeth's coffin (above), it seems as though the king's idea was that in the face of death and eternity, the differences in status were less important. It would have been interesting to see what he would have done with any dead children of Vibeke Kruse, had there been any.

An important reason for having the daughters married and to give positions to the sons was to reduce the king's expenses. In the financial crisis in the latter years of his reign, Christian IV repeatedly com-

trusts her to find out what is wrong in the marriage of her sister Hedevig and her husband (*Christian IVs breve V*, pp. 132-133).

<sup>117</sup> *Christian IVs breve IV*, p. 93: 'paa den maner och aff ded werdt, som Adelen her y Riigid vdgifffuer tiil festensgaffue'; 'paa Enderne skall komme Nogle demanter, dog inted aff dy Største'.

<sup>118</sup> *Christian IVs breve IV*, p. 20.

<sup>119</sup> *Christian IVs breve V*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>120</sup> *Christian IVs breve V*, pp. 219-220.

plained about the burden of supporting the children. This became a part of the eternal tug-of-war between the king and the Council over finances. In a letter to the Council in 1647, he writes that Prince Christian and Duke Frederik cost him more than 1000 dalers a year, 'for which I do not even get a thank you from them'. He also has to support Valdemar Christian and Ulrik Christian, 'if something eventually is to become' of them, but has sent the former to the Imperial court and is to send the latter.<sup>121</sup> Sending children into the service of foreign princes was also a way of reducing costs. It is noticeable that this option was open also for the sons of Kirsten Munk and Vibeke Kruse.

Christian IV's relations to his children show the necessity to operate with a flexible concept of dynasty, seeing dynastic inclusion and exclusion not as an absolute dichotomy, but as something that could exist at the same time in different contexts. In some respects, all his children belonged to the royal house, but there were also important differences in status. Christian was royal (prince), Frederik was princely (duke), the children of Kirsten Munk fell between the princely and the nobility (counts) and the Gyldenløves noble but slightly above the existing nobility. This was a society where everyone should have her or his appropriate place. The principle of equality, as we observed in the marriage studies, is a clear expression of this; equality within the layers in the hierarchy of early modern society is something quite different from what we tend to mean by the term today.

### **The usage and placement of children under absolutism**

Frederik III was elected king in 1648 under an election charter that bound him severely to the Council of the Realm, but in 1660, Denmark-Norway was declared a hereditary monarchy and royal absolutism meant the end of the Council (more on this below). This meant that when his children were of the age when he and the queen had to decide their future, the context was different. Not only the king and one elected heir but the whole royal family was attached to the state, and the state was to a great extent equal to the king. Did this change the placing and usage of the children?

Frederik recognized only one child born out of wedlock, Ulrik Frederik, who was born in 1638, before the king's marriage. His mother was Margrethe Pape from Holstein, a commoner or possibly from the lower nobility. Ulrik Frederik was handled according to the pattern set by Christian IV: he became noble and got the surname Gyldenløve. After travelling abroad for studies and service at the Spanish court,

<sup>121</sup> *Christian IV's breve* VI, p. 287: 'huorfor ieg haffuer icke engang tack aff dem'; 'Om der skal bliiffue nogit aff y lengden'.

in 1664 he became governor general of Norway, where he continued his half-uncle Hannibal Sehested's work in making the Danish rule of Norway work smoothly. He was trusted by his father and 'became a profiled political personality during the times of Frederik III and Christian V'.<sup>122</sup> In 1671, when titled nobility was introduced in Denmark, he was made count of Larvik (da. Laurvig) in Norway. He held the Norwegian governorship under his half-brother King Christian V and also held important positions in Copenhagen, including service as the head of the Board of Commerce. He continued to govern Norway until 1699, although he rarely travelled there in his later years.

Ulrik Frederik was also useful for the dynasty as a marriage partner. After two short-lived marriages to Danish noblewomen, his third marriage was of political significance. After the death of the last count of the county of Oldenburg, the Danish Oldenburgs took over this German county (more on this below) and, in 1677, Ulrik Frederik married Antoinette Augusta, the daughter of an illegitimate but ennobled son of the last count. The two bastard lines were joined to strengthen the ties between the royal Oldenburgs and the county of Oldenburg.<sup>123</sup> Their children got the noble name Danneskiöld.

Frederik's oldest legitimate son Christian was recognised in 1650 as his successor and received the upbringing of a coming king. In his teens, he took a long journey to important European courts, but he was not used in the governing of the realm. Even after 1660, when he became hereditary prince, he was kept outside day-to-day business. Neither was his younger brother Jørgen used for any administrative or political purposes. When Frederik III died, Jørgen got possessions in Denmark and a yearly rent to live on. There were attempts to place him on the Polish throne but instead, through French diplomacy, in 1683 he was married to Princess Anne of England, in due time Queen Anne, and left for England.

Christian V continued the tradition of keeping his legitimate sons out of government business. His eldest son Frederik was raised to become absolute ruler but did not have any governing experience whatsoever before the death of his father in 1699. The second son, Christian, died at the age of 20. The third son, Carl, was born in 1680 and it fell to his brother Frederik IV to care for him. The bishopric path was now almost closed; after the Peace of Westphalia, all Lutheran princely bishoprics had been taken over by neighbouring states.<sup>124</sup> There was

<sup>122</sup> Bregnsbo 2011, p. 92.

<sup>123</sup> Bregnsbo 2011, pp. 93-94, also underscores this dynastic purpose of the marriage.

<sup>124</sup> Haag 2018, pp. 1827-1836.

one exception, though: Lübeck, which was in the hands of the Holstein-Gottorps. Although Carl had been elected successor of the bishop in 1701, a new Gottorp prince nevertheless managed to take over when the old bishop died in 1705. After that, Carl retired to a quiet, unmarried life at his manors in Denmark, where he lived for many years together with his sister Sophie Hedevig, also unmarried.

Christian V, when his father died in 1670, was the first king to ascend to the throne as a hereditary and absolute ruler. He seems to have felt freer to handle his extramarital relatives than previous kings. We have already noticed that he made his half-brother Ulrik Frederik a count, and married him to an important connection in Oldenburg. Christian V was also the first Danish king to openly have a mistress while his queen, Charlotte Amalie, was still alive. The mistress, the commoner Sophie Amalie Moth, was made countess of Samsø in 1677, and in the next year her children were ennobled with the name Gyldenløve.

The children of the king and Sophie Amalie Moth had illustrious careers. Christian Gyldenløve received military training at home and abroad. He was for a time governor (*stiftamtmand*) in Bergen and in charge of the Norwegian army when his uncle Ulrik Frederik was governor general of Norway, and married the latter's daughter Charlotte Amalie in 1696. After her death, he married a woman from the Danish high nobility. His first wife brought with her the county of Larvik, and their children founded the noble family Danneskiold-Laurvig. The children in the second marriage carried the name Danneskiold-Samsøe and were counts and countesses of Samsø. It is interesting that territories within the kingdoms (Larvik in Norway, Samsø in Denmark) could now be used to heighten the status of royal favourites. After the introduction of absolutism, it was no longer necessary to go to the Duchies. Christian Gyldenløve's children also got royal permission to carry a princely crown in their coats-of-arms.<sup>125</sup> This was a symbol of their position: slightly above even the titled nobility.

Christian's brother Ulrik Christian Gyldenløve was already as a child given the post as governor (*stiftamtmand*) of Iceland, a function he also filled in adulthood, although governing from Copenhagen. He was trained in the navy and became president of the Navy Board, and he had important navy charges during the Great Northern War. He never married, but his sister Christiane got a splendid match, Count Frederik Ahlefeldt of Langeland, who came from one of the two lead-

<sup>125</sup> Benito Scocozza: *Gyldendal og Politikens Danmarkshistorie. Bind 8. Ved afgrundens rand 1600-1700*, Copenhagen 2003, p. 314.



ing families of Schleswig-Holstein (the other being the Rantzaus) and later on served as governor of the royal parts of the Duchies.

There is a clear tendency for kings to dispose more freely over their relatives after the introduction of absolutism, and also to act more independently of moral and marital restraints. Christian V followed the example of Louis XIV, having an officially recognised mistress, the commoner Sophie Amalie Moth; as already noted, he made her countess of Samsø and recognised the Gyldenløves she bore him.<sup>126</sup> This tendency reached its climax after the end of our period of investigation, with Frederik IV, who openly had several mistresses while his queen Louise was still alive and, after the death of the queen in 1721, he officially married the last of them, the noblewoman Anna Sophie Reventlow, and even crowned her queen.<sup>127</sup> This makes her the only queen in Danish history, as far as we know, who was not princely born.

### **Summing up: The changing dynasty**

The family members of the Oldenburg house were only to a very modest degree used in ruling the country. In contrast to daughters and younger sisters, sons and younger brothers seem often to have been more of a problem than an asset for the kings. They had to be placed in appropriate positions, but much of the placing was about avoiding future conflicts within the house and thus a sort of dynasty securing. They were usually kept out of positions with any real influence. Preferably, they would remain as bachelors in order to avoid potentially dangerous new branches of the house. A position as (unmarried) prince-bishop in northern Germany was considered to be ideal. Younger females, on the other hand, were important tools for forging dynastic connections.

In the 16th century, the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein was both a problem and an asset for the house. Younger male relatives could get a ruling position there. This was to create political problems in the 17th century, but the Duchies were useful nonetheless, since the king could more freely give away titles there; this option was opened in Denmark and Norway only with absolutism.

While the legitimate sons were not frequently used productively by the kings, the children born out of wedlock are a different story. Christian IV created a network of noble sons-in-law by using his mor-

<sup>126</sup> Bregnsbo 2010, pp. 101-109.

<sup>127</sup> Bregnsbo 2010, pp. 120-135. Frederik IV lived in a morganatic marriage with a noblewoman 1701-1704, and once again with Anna Sophie Reventlow from 1712, although there are doubts about the legal status of the marriage act: Bregnsbo 2010, p. 136.

ganatic daughters. Although the accession to the throne by Frederik III meant an end to this extended family, the late 17th century saw an increasing use of illegitimate sons in important positions. It is worth noting that relatives further out, such as grandchildren and relatives of sons-in-law, were very seldom used in the service of the state or the dynasty. Such relatives who occasionally found an occupation seemed to be drawn to the military, and being periodically in the service of different armies was normal for both princely sons and high noblemen.<sup>128</sup>

The dynasty was, thus, a floating and changing entity. On the basis of our study this far, it is difficult to see the Oldenburg dynasty as a coordinated power group. This will be further studied by looking at internal conflicts.

#### *Conflicts, exclusions and inclusions within the house*

In this final section, conflicts within the family and between its different branches will be focussed on, in order to reveal how inclusions, delimitations and exclusions of the dynasty took place. Who belonged to the dynasty, who had a say in dynastic matters, and who was left outside? As stated in the introduction, dynasty must be seen as a contextual concept and its inclusiveness can very well have varied.

As we have noticed in the study of the uses and placing of offspring, there seems to have been a tendency for kings to take a firmer grip over the dynasty in the late 17th century. It will be of interest to see if this trend is also visible when we look at power relations more broadly within the family circle. Was a dynasty formation process going on, that can be described as a dynastic centralization?

#### **The Schleswig-Holstein issue in the 16th century**

The fact that the Danish king was also duke of the united duchies of Schleswig (a fief of the Danish crown) and Holstein (a fief of the Imperial crown) could be an asset for the dynasty, but was also a family problem.<sup>129</sup> As we have seen, Christian III could satisfy the claims of

<sup>128</sup> For example, of the nine sons of Hans the younger of Sønderborg, Christian IV's uncle, only one, Philip, is known to have been in military service for Denmark, during the Kalmar war, while both he and several of his brothers had also been in the service of others, such as the emperor or Sweden; Jensen 1971, pp. 19–24. Another example is Christian of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, a nephew of Christian IV, known in German history as *Der tolle Halberstädter*, who fought for Denmark in the Thirty Years' War, but he also fought with several other armies.

<sup>129</sup> There are several good overviews of the political history of Schleswig-Holstein in this period, the most recent in Danish being *Sønderjyllands historie*

his brothers Hans the elder and Adolf (founder of the Gottorp line) by partitioning the Duchies, which he did in 1544. This was in itself a consequence of an old conflict within the house. As early as 1490, King Hans had had to give his brother, Duke Frederik (the later Frederik I of Denmark-Norway) lands within the Duchies. At that time, their mother, dowager queen Dorothea, had fought for the rights of her younger son Frederik; she also tried to get the Swedish throne – Sweden being in union with Denmark at the time – for him, and encouraged him to seek a part of Denmark proper. It was on this occasion that the diet, in 1494, declared Denmark to be indivisible.<sup>130</sup>

In 1490, the nobility of the Duchies had been against a partition and it was the same nobility, under the leadership of Johann Rantzau, who again tried to keep Schleswig-Holstein as united as possible in 1544. It was also Rantzau who negotiated the promise to get the youngest brother, Frederik, a princely bishopric and decline his rights to the Duchies.<sup>131</sup> The distribution of the assets of the house was not only an internal matter; the family had to negotiate with other power groups.

Much of the same situation was repeated after Frederik II ascended to the throne in 1559. The complications led in due time to the establishment of the Sønderborg lines of the Oldenburgs.<sup>132</sup> The king tried to steer his younger brothers Hans and Magnus into the bishopric path, but this was opposed by their mother, Queen Dowager Dorothea, who wanted equality among the sons and to see all of them as reigning dukes. As we have seen, the Magnus problem was solved by sending him as prince-bishop to Ösel, on the condition that he should not marry and that the island should fall to the Danish crown upon his death. This was contrary to the will of Dorothea, who angrily wrote

1. *Indtil 1815*, eds. Hans Schultz Hansen, Lars N. Henningsen & Carsten Porskrog Rasmussen, Aabenraa 2008 (the name notwithstanding, it has a good account of Holstein's political history), and in German *Geschichte Schleswig-Holsteins. Von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Ulrich Lange, 2nd edition, Neumünster 2003.

<sup>130</sup> Møllerup 1900-1906, pp. 31-35.

<sup>131</sup> Gottfried Ernst Hoffmann: 'Die Herzogtümer von der Landesteilung von 1544 bis zum Kopenhagener Frieden von 1660', *Geschichte Schleswig-Holsteins*. 5. Band, ed. Olaf Klose, Neumünster 1986, pp. 5-9.

<sup>132</sup> On this process see Kr. Erslev: *Augustenborgernes Arvekrav. En historisk Redegørelse for den sønderborgske Hertuginies arveretlige Stilling i Hertugdømmene*, Copenhagen 1915; Jørgen Steen Jensen: *Hertug Hans den Yngre*, Sønderborg 1971; Inge Adriansen: 'Hertug Hans den Yngre' (2005a) and 'Hertugerne af Sønderborg' (2005b), both in *De slesvigske hertuger*, eds. Carsten Porskrog Rasmussen, Inge Adriansen & Lennart S. Madsen, Aabenraa 2005.

to Frederik that his younger brothers also should have the right to live 'in Christian order in marriage' and have children. This was important, she wrote to her son, as he, the king, might die without heirs (Frederik in fact did not marry before his mother was dead).<sup>133</sup> Dynastic securing was clearly a priority for Dorothea. She also emphasized the king's responsibility for his younger, still 'unsupported' sisters.<sup>134</sup>

The queen dowager was also involved, using her family connections in Saxony and Brunswick,<sup>135</sup> in the attempts to place the youngest brother, Hans, as princely archbishop of Bremen.<sup>136</sup> Her letters to her son, in this and in many other cases, show her to be a stout defender of the rights of all her children and as an outspoken critic of the king.<sup>137</sup> It is not unlikely that she was a driving force behind Frederik's final decision to partition his parts of the Duchies with Hans.

The Schleswig-Holstein diet had not yet sworn allegiance to King Frederik II and Duke Adolf, and in 1564 Frederik proposed that they and Hans should be acclaimed at the diet. Hans received land carved out of the king's territory around Sønderborg town and castle, as well as the islands of Als and Ærø, smaller parts of Holstein, and some financial benefits from the king. In exchange, Hans declared that he would not stake any additional hereditary claims. This was a partial success for Hans and his mother, but at the diet, the nobility refused to acclaim Hans as ruling duke. Much to his and Dorothea's disappointment, the position he ended with was inferior to those of his brothers.<sup>138</sup>

As Kristian Erslev has remarked, two opposing opinions about the constitutional arrangements of Schleswig-Holstein were expressed: the diet (in practice, the nobility) saw it as its right to decide who was to govern the lands, while 'the princely house saw the two lands as a pure family heritage, where each male heir should have his share, if he was not satisfied in any other way.'<sup>139</sup> From a dynastic point of view,

<sup>133</sup> *Aarsberetninger fra Det Kongelige Geheimearchiv, indeholdende Bidrag til dansk Historie af utrykte Kilder*, ed. C.F. Wegener, I, Copenhagen 1852-1855, p. 99: 'In Christlicher Ordnunge Ir leben ehlich zubrechten'.

<sup>134</sup> *Aarsberetninger* I, p. 95: 'einiche vhnvorsorgte schwester in bruderlichem getrewenn beuelch haltenn'.

<sup>135</sup> *Aarsberetninger* I, pp. 137-138, 146.

<sup>136</sup> Erslev 1915, p. 3.

<sup>137</sup> See, e.g., *Aarsberetninger* I, pp. 94-96 about the marriage of his sister Dorothea. She also explicitly writes that the wellbeing of all her children is of importance to her; *ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>138</sup> Erslev 1915, p. 4-15.

<sup>139</sup> Erslev 1915, p. 9.

the Duchies were part of the common assets of the house. But this did not mean that the dynasty functioned as a coordinated group with the same goals; as we have seen, the members had different interests and could get what they wanted only by negotiations with other powerholders (here, the nobility).

The relation between the brothers/dukes was severed by a conflict over the forms of the investiture with Schleswig as a fief under the Danish crown. Here, the third brother, Duke Hans the Elder, reportedly less keen on formal matters, negotiated a compromise, and the investiture of Adolf and Hans (and the king himself as duke) took place under great festivity in Odense in 1580.<sup>140</sup> Only a few months later, Hans died without heirs and a new conflict arose over the inheritance. It was finally divided between the king and Duke Adolf, while Hans the younger, who no longer had the support of his mother (dead in 1571), had to be content with a few small parts of his brother's new acquisitions.<sup>141</sup>

The death of Duke Adolf in 1586 started a complicated sequence of conflicts, which we do not have to follow in all details.<sup>142</sup> From the Gottorp side, Duchess Dowager Christine was champion of the inheritance rights of all her three young sons. On the royal side, Queen Dowager Sophie also wanted her three under-aged sons to have parts in the Duchies. The Danish Council of the Realm wanted to keep especially Schleswig close to the kingdom, and the nobility of the Duchies, now under the leadership of Heinrich Rantzau, wanted to split them up as little as possible. It is interesting to see that the dynastic contacts were frequently used: Christine had her brother, Landgrave Wilhelm of Hesse, on her side,<sup>143</sup> and Sophie's father, Duke Ulrich of Mecklenburg-Güstrow, even came to Denmark to support her in this and other conflicts with the Council.<sup>144</sup>

The unexpected deaths of two of Adolf's sons opened the way for a compromise between the Danish Council and the nobility of the Duchies. The last son of Adolf, Johann Adolf, was installed as a duke in 1593, together with Christian IV. Sophie, who had several conflicts going with the Council, was the loser and was ordered by the Council to withdraw to her designated dowager's residence in Nykøbing Fal-

<sup>140</sup> Møllerup 1903-1905, pp. 236-237.

<sup>141</sup> Frederik made the agreement officially also on behalf of his brother, but does not seem to have had a mandate to do so: Erslev 1915, p. 21.

<sup>142</sup> Good modern accounts in Lind 2001, pp. 366-367, and Heiberg 2009, pp. 33-36.

<sup>143</sup> Møllerup 1903-1905, p. 16.

<sup>144</sup> Grønder-Hansen 2013, p. 316

ster. Sophie had lost politically and undoubtedly felt humiliated, but still retained her family position, arranging not only the marriages of two of her daughters, but also being the driving force behind the marriage of Christian IV to Anna Cathrine of Brandenburg.<sup>145</sup>

Johann Adolf was to seek a close relation to his royal relative and wanted to marry Christian's sister Augusta. It is interesting that the negotiations to a large extent took place through Dowager Queen Sophie, who even wrote to Johann Adolf that he ought to wait with bringing up the issue officially until Christian reached maturity and was crowned, since it was easier to speak with one (the king) than with many (the Council).<sup>146</sup> The marriage took place in 1596, the very day after the coronation of Christian IV. The marriage between the Danish and the Gottorp lines of the Oldenburgs was a dynastic matter, which the Danish political elite should be kept out of, and it was handled by the queen dowager.

There were, as we have seen, conflicting interests within the Oldenburg family. The younger sons fought for getting a ruling position in the Duchies, while both the nobility and the kings wanted to keep them as little divided as possible. The position of the dowagers was very important in securing the dynasty's future by arranging marriages and distributing the inheritance. The outcome was not clear-cut, but mostly favoured the kings in the long run. This result was not apparent from the outset. The hierarchy within the dynasty was not uncontested, and the house of Holstein-Gottorp had not yet developed into a fully separate dynasty.

#### **Christian IV and the troublesome family**

In the times of Christian IV, the Danish Oldenburgs swelled to an extended family group, perhaps even an extended dynasty, within which the members were often in conflict with each other. He lived for long, he had uncles and aunts, he had siblings and, as we have seen, he had quite a few children.

One major conflict arose out of the death of Queen Dowager Sophie in 1631.<sup>147</sup> Christian and his sisters Hedevig, electress dowager of Saxony, and Augusta, duchess dowager of Holstein-Gottorp, were present at her deathbed at Nykøbing Castle. The king ordered Augusta to make an inventory of the estate of the deceased, but the sisters seem to have let carry valuables on board a ship in the harbour; the

<sup>145</sup> Scoccozza 1987, pp. 39-48.

<sup>146</sup> *DNT* III, pp. 71-75.

<sup>147</sup> This is not well covered in the literature but is treated briefly in Scoccozza 1987, pp. 209-210.



king closed the harbour and ordered the goods back to the castle.<sup>148</sup> This started a long feud where also the children of the king's two dead sisters, Queen Anne of England and Duchess Elisabeth of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel, were interested in having their share.<sup>149</sup> Christian accused Augusta of not letting him see the inventory, but she seems to have claimed that it was he who had let it disappear.<sup>150</sup>

This might seem a purely familial affair but it became foreign policy, or rather a question of the relations between the king's different lands. He demanded that Augusta should defend herself in front of a joint committee of representatives of the councillors of Denmark and of the Duchies, following the union agreement between Denmark and Schleswig-Holstein of 1533. In 1634, he angrily wrote to Duke Friedrich III of Holstein-Gottorp, Augusta's son, about her refusal to do this, citing her claim of not being bound by the union agreement since she is not a reigning person.<sup>151</sup> In 1635, the king appointed eight Danish councillors to meet in Kolding for this purpose,<sup>152</sup> but it is not known if this meeting was held, nor how the dispute ended. In any case, the affair shows a dynasty with competing wills, where the king could ask, argue, and threaten, even use his institutional powers as king and duke, but could not be sure to get his way.

Another headache for Christian IV was his son and elected successor, Prince Christian.<sup>153</sup> Prince Christian seems never to have been able to make ends meet, and the responsibility for his finances was a grey zone between the king and the Council of the Realm. Prince Christian's strategy was to often visit his father and be supported by him. He also on several occasions got the king to pay his debts.

In 1643, the king complained that the prince wanted to spend the winter at Skanderborg Castle 'due to firewood and fishing', and he suspected that the prince tried to get the king's son-in-law Corfitz Ulfeldt, councillor and *de facto* minister for finance, to persuade him to accept this.<sup>154</sup> The suspicion is on target; the prince had written to Ulfeldt, who was married to his half-sister Leonora Christina, about the Skanderborg visit.<sup>155</sup> Later the same year, the prince once again wrote

<sup>148</sup> *Christian IVs breve* II, pp. 363-364.

<sup>149</sup> *Christian IVs breve* III, p. 55; IV, p. 312, pp. 331-332.

<sup>150</sup> *Christian IVs breve* IV, pp. 26-27.

<sup>151</sup> *Christian IVs breve* III, pp. 298-300, 345-346.

<sup>152</sup> *Christian IVs breve* III, pp. 362-363.

<sup>153</sup> Scoccoza 1987, pp. 219-220; Heiberg 2009, pp. 243-245.

<sup>154</sup> *Christian IVs breve* V, p. 287. There were woods and lakes around Skanderborg, otherwise rare in Denmark.

<sup>155</sup> *Prins Christian (V)s breve* II, ed. E. Marquard, Copenhagen 1956, p. 750.

to Ulfeldt about his economic matters, probably in an attempt to get him to persuade the other members of the Council to contribute to his maintenance.<sup>156</sup> In the same year, the king complained to Ulfeldt that the prince ‘drags with him a terrible lot of people’, and having him at the court is like ‘holding an eternal wedding party’.<sup>157</sup>

These conflicts and irritations might seem petty, but they testify to the fact that negotiations were often going on within the family. The king complained, but often had to give in. Although king, father of the prince and head of the dynasty, Christian IV had to negotiate with the Council, with the prince, and in other cases with other family members, and the outcome was seldom to his satisfaction. Family business was mixed with state business, and family connections – in this case, Ulfeldt – were used by both sides.

The biggest and best-known family conflict during the reign of Christian IV was his divorce from his morganatic wife Kirsten Munk and his accusations of her infidelity. The king spent much time and energy during the rest of his life accusing her and defending himself, writing numerous letters and notes about the course of events during the final years of their relationship, which had finally broken down in 1630.<sup>158</sup> Christian wanted to have her tried, but Kirsten belonged to the circles of the council nobility and the Council protected her. Kirsten was not allowed to leave her manor in Jutland and the children were forbidden to visit her, but they did so nevertheless. To this came the rivalry between them and the king’s children with the his new partner, Vibeke Kruse, as we have seen.

All this has been narrated many times and there is no need to dwell further on the details of this tragic divorce story.<sup>159</sup> It shows the same pattern as the king’s other family conflicts: Christian IV is indignant, sometimes furious, giving orders, complaining about misconduct and trying to domesticate his family, mixing family affairs with political institutions – all basically in vain. The children kept seeing their mother, the position of Kirsten after the break was never clarified, and the rivalry between different batches of children was to explode after the death of the king.

<sup>156</sup> *Prins Christian (V)s breve* II, p. 751.

<sup>157</sup> *Christian IVs breve* VIII, p. 238: ‘Ett forferdeligt haab folck, hand sleber med siig’; ‘holde *continuerlig* Briillup’.

<sup>158</sup> See, e.g., *Christian IVs breve* II, pp. 309–314 (1630), IV, pp. 99–101 (1636), V, pp. 12–14 (1641), VI, pp. 144–146 (1646), to mention only a few examples.

<sup>159</sup> See, e.g., Scocozza 1987, pp. 220–235; Heiberg 2009 235–242; Bregnsbo 2010, pp. 43–90; Bodil Wamberg: *Christian IV - en mand under indflydelse*, Copenhagen 1993, *passim*.

### The King loses power in the state but takes control over the dynasty

The period between 1648 and 1660 is traditionally seen as the height of the power of the Danish high nobility. In order to get elected, Frederik III had to accept a coronation charter that has been described as the hardest a Danish king has ever had to accept. The power of the king was heavily limited in favour of the Council of the Realm, also in such a traditionally dynastic field as foreign policy.<sup>160</sup>

At the same time, the fragile 'extended dynasty' of Christian IV broke down and it came to a clash between the royal family and the non-royal children – or rather, these children now became decidedly non-royal. This conflict has often been depicted in Danish historiography as '*opgøret med sværønnernes parti*', 'the reckoning with the party of the sons-in-law'.<sup>161</sup> This was again a complicated game between several actors, the councillors, the king, and sons-in-law who had conflicting agendas and did not necessarily support each other. It has also, not without right, been depicted as a conflict between the two leading ladies of the country, the half-sisters-in-law, the ambitious queen, Sophie Amalie, and Christian IV's daughter Leonora Christina, wife of the mighty Corfitz Ulfeldt.<sup>162</sup>

Immediately after the death of Christian IV, Corfitz Ulfeldt and Leonora Christina acted as the leading couple of the country. Corfitz got the Council of the Realm to declare the late king's relation to Kirsten Munk a legitimate marriage, which made Leonora Christina and her siblings true royal children. The Council stated that this recognition did not diminish the rights of Duke Frederik and his heirs; the meaning of this was of course to exclude the possibility of choosing one of Kirsten's sons as king. Corfitz and Leonora might have had such hopes for their oldest son, as he was the oldest grandson of Christian IV. But it also meant that the royal blood of the Munk children and grandchildren was recognized, and that might one day in the future open up the road to the throne.<sup>163</sup> Frederik, as yet, had only one son and he was only two years old – no one could know if he would survive into adulthood. Such far-sighted inheritance possibilities, sometimes

<sup>160</sup> Knud J.V. Jespersen: *Danmarks historie. Bind 3. Tiden 1648-1730*, Copenhagen 1989, pp. 70-75, on the restrictions in foreign policy p. 71.

<sup>161</sup> Fridericia 1896-1902, pp. 346-356; Ellehøj 1977, pp. 417-430; Scocozza 2003, pp. 189-199; a good recent account that weaves together the familiar and political conflicts in Ståle Dyrvik, *Danmark-Norge 1380-1814. Bind III. Truede tvillingriker 1648-1720*, Oslo 1998, pp. 31-44.

<sup>162</sup> Jørgen Hein, 'Den onde dronning og fangen i Blåtårn. Omkring Sophie Amalie og Leonora Christina', in *Danske dronninger i tusind år*, ed. Steffen Heiberg, 2nd ed., Copenhagen 2001.

<sup>163</sup> Heiberg 1993, p. 93.

stretching over centuries, were undoubtedly of importance in dynastic thinking at the time, as the county of Oldenburg case was to demonstrate a few decades later (see below).<sup>164</sup>

At the funeral of the deceased king, Leonora Christina and Kirsten's other daughters, on Corfitz' initiative but against the will of the Council, were each escorted by a Danish nobleman; they were thus treated as royal daughters.<sup>165</sup> The Munk children had made their way into the dynasty, a sort of forced dynastic inclusion, but it proved to be a Pyrrhic victory. Corfitz and Leonora overstretched their position and aroused opposition among the old elite. Frederik III went on the offensive, supported by large parts of the council nobility, who had had enough of the powerful sons-in-law.

Frederik III now stripped the Munk children of their titles of counts and countesses; at the same time, the royal daughters got the title of princess.<sup>166</sup> As he could move more freely as duke of Schleswig-Holstein, Frederik immediately fired Pentz, the husband of Sophie Elisabeth, from his important charge in Glückstadt. Ebbe Ulfeldt, married to Hedevig, who had never been of political importance, was nevertheless removed from his rather peripheral position as governor of Bornholm in 1650, and later charged with fraud. Hannibal Sehested, the mighty governor general of Norway who was married to Christiane, was also accused of corruption and removed from all posts in 1651.<sup>167</sup> Even the rather insignificant husband of Elisabeth Augusta, Hans Lindenov, lost his positions.

Most dramatic was the fall of Leonora Christina and Corfitz Ulfeldt.<sup>168</sup> To make a very long and complicated story extremely short, he was faced with corruption charges, fled the country in 1651 and died in exile in 1664. She was caught in England in 1663, and returned to spend 22 years as prisoner at Copenhagen Castle. This was obviously Queen Sophie Amalie's revenge, since Leonora Christina was released a few days after the then-queen dowager's death.

Frederik III started his reign as a politically highly circumscribed regent, heavily dependent on the council elite. Yet in the same process, in cooperation with the old elite, he strengthened his power over

<sup>164</sup> The importance of such long-lasting inheritance claims is effectively shown by Erslev 1915, when discussing the Sønderborg claims to the Duchies and Denmark-Norway.

<sup>165</sup> Heiberg 1993, pp. 96-97

<sup>166</sup> Scocozza 2003, p. 191.

<sup>167</sup> On the process against Sehested and his fall see C.O. Bøggild-Andersen: *Hannibal Sehested. En dansk Statsmand*, Copenhagen 1946, pp. 113-138.

<sup>168</sup> A detailed account in Heiberg 1993, pp. 90-149.

the family. One could imagine that he would rather have used all possible family connections to strengthen his political position – to extend the dynasty – but he chose another form of dynasty formation, exclusion, trimming down the amorphous family of Christian IV. It is not unlikely that the difficulties he had seen his father have with the family was a formatting experience for him; centralization within the dynasty was obviously his priority. In his political testament of 1652, made in his capacity as duke of Schleswig-Holstein, he declared primogeniture in the royal parts of the duchies; this was a prelude to what was to come in 1660.<sup>169</sup>

### **Absolutism in state and dynasty from 1660 onwards**

1660 is one of the ‘great’ years in Danish historiography. After the Swedish siege on Copenhagen and the peace treaty that stabilised the new border in the Sound, a diet was summoned to Copenhagen. The state was in a severe financial crisis, the commoners, headed by the burghers of Copenhagen, revolted against having to pay more taxes if the nobility did not give up their tax exemptions, and a tense political situation developed. The king cleverly used this, and his loyal troops, to get the diet to declare Denmark a hereditary monarchy, and, although this was hardly the intention of the diet, he interpreted this as absolute government; it meant the end for the Council of the Realm and no more diets. A royal *coup d’état* had taken place.<sup>170</sup>

It was left to the king to make any changes necessary in the government, and the Act of Hereditary Absolute Rule (*arveenevoldsregeringsakten*) of 1661 stated that ‘all *jura majestatis*, absolute government and all *regalia*’ belonged to the king and his heirs.<sup>171</sup> In the Royal Law (*kongeloven*, *Lex Regia*), signed by the king in 1665, the king was declared responsible to no one except God, and free to do anything except deviate from the right religion, divide his realm, or diminish his own powers.

The greater part of the Royal Law, 22 of its 40 paragraphs, can be seen, according to Knud J.V. Jespersen, as a ‘house law, regulating the internal conditions of the royal house, and a law of succession, which

<sup>169</sup> Sebastian Olden-Jørgensen, ‘Christian V’s og Frederik IV’s politiske testamenter’, *Historisk Tidsskrift* vol. 96:1, 1996, p. 316.

<sup>170</sup> Thoroughly discussed, with references to the rich literature, in Jespersen 1989, pp. 158–173; a good overview also in Dyrvik 1998, pp. 71–90; a recent interpretation, stressing the unique situation after the war as a prerequisite for the *coup d’état*, in Sebastian Olden-Jørgensen: *Svenskekrigene*, Aarhus 2018, pp. 58–80.

<sup>171</sup> Quoted from Jespersen 1989, p. 168: ‘alle jura majestatis, absolut regering og alle regalia’.

regulated the future accessions to the throne'.<sup>172</sup> House laws (*Hausgesetze*) were common among German princely houses, regulating not least the inheritance, but they were often the result of conflicts over the inheritance or of division or non-division of lands. They took the form of a *Vertrag*, an agreement, between different parts within the dynasty, or between the ruler and the emperor.<sup>173</sup> If it can thus be partly misleading to compare *Lex Regia* with a house law, since it was promulgated by the king and not the result of any negotiations, it is certainly to the point when Jespersen writes that 'the king and the state was now one and the same thing, and the conditions in the royal house were important state matters.'<sup>174</sup> An important step was taken in dynasty formation.

The law stresses that authority cannot be divided, neither in the state nor in the family. It explicitly says that all lands and rights of the king must belong to him alone, and that 'the other princes and princesses of blood should be satisfied with hoping and waiting, until the turn will finally come to them and their lines, one after the other' (§ 19).<sup>175</sup> The royal children shall be furnished 'with necessary and befitting maintenance, somehow fitting their status, with which they in all ways have to be satisfied' (§ 20).<sup>176</sup> The maintenance of the royal children was now finally declared an issue for the state, and it was up to the king to decide about it; the wording 'somehow fitting their status' does not sound very generous.

Princes were not allowed to travel abroad, nor to go into service of other sovereigns, without the permission of the king. Princesses were to be supported by the king until they married, at which point they would receive a marriage tax; the king could decide the sum at will (§§ 21–22). The hierarchy within the family is clearly spelled out in § 24: 'the princes and princesses of blood shall have the uppermost seat

<sup>172</sup> Jespersen 1989, p. 182. *Kongeloven* is available on the Internet at <http://danmarkshistorien.dk/leksikon-og-kilder/vis/materiale/kongeloven-1665/#indhold2> (2019-04-09).

<sup>173</sup> See, e.g., the agreements in *Die Hausgesetze der regierenden deutschen Fürstenhäuser*, ed. Hermann Schultze, Jena 1862, [https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=2wYsAQAAIAAJ&hl=en\\_GB&pg=GBS.PR3](https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=2wYsAQAAIAAJ&hl=en_GB&pg=GBS.PR3) (2019-04-09). I thank Liesbeth Geevers for making me aware of these sources.

<sup>174</sup> Jespersen 1989, p. 182.

<sup>175</sup> 'de andre Printzer og Printzesser aff Blodet lade sig nøye med haabet og bie, indtill radden omsider kommer till dennem og deris Linier, Een effter anden'.

<sup>176</sup> 'med nødvendig og reputeerlig underhold, deris Stand nogenlunde gemess, 'aff Kongen forsørges, huormed de og i alle maade skulle lade sig nøye'.



and place after the king and the queen, and among themselves have the seat and place that the line shows them to be close to the succession to the governance'.<sup>177</sup> The heritage created an undisputable organisational principle. The last 28 paragraphs of the law give detailed instructions of the succession, where the oldest male line shall always come before younger lines and female lines.

The distinction between royal children and 'natural' children is made explicit; the rules of succession are only valid for 'rightly legitimate children and no other' (§ 40).<sup>178</sup> This new clarity enhanced dynastic security: children born out of wedlock enjoyed no inheritance rights. In this sense, they did not belong to the dynasty and, as a result, were less dangerous. It is telling that one of the fallen sons-in-law, the capable administrator and diplomat Hannibal Sehested, returned into royal grace and was one of Frederik III's most important advisers in the early years of absolutism. As we have seen several examples of above, both Frederik and later Christian V also used the Gyldenløves at their will. The impression left by the studies on marriages and relations above is confirmed also in this part of the study. Absolutism meant that the king took power both in the state and in the dynasty.

There is an interesting point revealing a potential family conflict which never surfaced. The Royal Law was not made public, even within the family, but was regarded as a state secret. It was read aloud in the Secret Council immediately after the death of Frederik III in 1670, and again at the anointment of Christian V, the following year, thus making it known to a limited circle, but was only published in 1709. The reason why it was not made public at an early stage might be that Frederik III feared the reaction of the Queen. Precedence in succession was given to children of Crown Prince Christian, while the queen is understood to have wanted her second-eldest son, Jørgen, as heir, should he survive his brother. According to tradition, Frederik III was once asked by a close adviser why he did not publish the Royal Law, and he is reported to have answered: 'For heaven's sake, let me keep domestic peace with the Queen!'<sup>179</sup> We see the same pattern as previously, the queen acting as guardian of the rights of the younger sons, but this time in vain.

<sup>177</sup> 'Printzerne og Printzesserne aff Blodet skulle haffve den øffverste sted i Sæde og gang effter Kongen og dronningen og iblant sig sielff haffve præcedentie og offversted, ligesom Linien udviser dem at være nest til Arffvesuccessionen udj Regieringen.'

<sup>178</sup> 'rette Egteböörn og ingen anden'.

<sup>179</sup> Fridericia 1896-1902, p. 508; also Jespersen 1989, p. 180, finds this explanation possible.

This strong position of the ruler within the family was also upheld by Christian V, for example in his political testament of 1684: he prescribed that Schleswig should never again be used as an appanage for younger sons, and hardened the royal rule over the areas the queen would receive as dowager.<sup>180</sup> In the same document, he also reformulated the relation between the ruler and the realm: 'the Kingdoms belong to the King as his Patrimony'.<sup>181</sup> Dynasty and the state was now one and the same thing, at least in the rhetoric of the king.

There was indeed a dynastic centralization taking place within the Oldenburgs at the end of the 17th century. But the relations to the Gottorps, the Sønderborgs and not least the German Oldenburgs demonstrate, as we will see, that the outer limits of the dynasty could in some contexts stretch far.

### **The Gottorps, the Sønderborgs, and the Oldenburg inheritance**

As we have seen, side branches came into being with Duke Adolf and Duke Hans the Younger in the middle of the 16th century. Adolf resided at Gottorp (Gottorf) Castle outside the town of Schleswig, and his line is known as (Schleswig-)Holstein-Gottorp or simply Gottorp. Together with the Danish kings, the Gottorps were reigning dukes of the whole of Schleswig-Holstein, and since their possessions lay scattered over the Duchies, their ability to build up a territorial power base was limited. Still, as long as they kept peace with their royal Danish relatives, they had a stable position.

Much the same can be said about Hans the younger and his heirs. As we have seen, Hans was denied recognition as reigning duke; he fought for the rest of his life, in vain, to get a position that was on a par with the other dukes.<sup>182</sup> He and his descendants – the Sønderborg lines – were called *afdelte herrer*, 'divided lords', that is, their territories were regarded as a subdivision of the lands the Danish king held as duke of Schleswig-Holstein. The small possessions of Hans the younger were further divided into five diminutive parts among his male heirs; as one of the sons died without heirs, four survived (Sønderborg, Nordborg, Glücksburg and Plön). The dukes had a somewhat dubious situation: they were dukes but not reigning dukes; they were princes but had in principle a subordinate position, like noblemen; they had their own lands, only slightly larger than neighbouring large noble estates. All this notwithstanding, the Sønderborg dukes acted

<sup>180</sup> Olden-Jørgensen 1996, p. 318, 321.

<sup>181</sup> Olden-Jørgensen 1996, p. 321; 'Rigerne hører Kongen til som sit Patrimonium'.

<sup>182</sup> Erslev 1915, pp. 45-66.

as reigning princes: they published regulations for their subjects, had their own law courts and even struck coins.<sup>183</sup>

Were the Gottorps and Sønderborgs part of the royal house, or not? It is of course a matter of definition, but it seems fair to say that they soon came to be regarded as houses in their own right. A clear sign of this, and probably one of the great advantages for younger brothers in getting a ruling position, was that they could marry freely. And they married princely. Duke Adolf himself, in 1564, married Christine of Hesse, and four of their seven children were married, all with princely spouses. Duke Johann Adolf married, as we have seen, a sister of Christian IV, which strengthened the bonds between the related houses, while three of his sisters went to Ostfriesland, Mecklenburg and Sweden.<sup>184</sup> Johann Adolf's daughters also married lesser princes, from the Palatinate-Sulzbach, Saxony-Lauenburg and Plön. In short, the Gottorps were regarded as befitting matches in the northern German princely world.

Interestingly, the same must be said about the Sønderborgs. Their dubious position notwithstanding, they also married princely spouses, although on a slightly lower level. Ten of Hans the younger's multitude of children married (one son twice), all to petty German houses, often of smaller territories resulting from inheritance partitions, sometimes as far away as Württemberg or Silesia.<sup>185</sup> Duke Joachim Ernst of Plön, however, wed a daughter of Johann Adolf of Gottorp, thus upholding the family relation. They did not marry their Danish relatives; in Copenhagen, the Sønderborgs were probably regarded as having a too-inferior status. Nor do they seem to have stood in frequent contact with their royal relatives: in 1638, Hans' daughter Margrethe, married to Johann of Nassau-Siegen, is reported to have asked Christian IV to

<sup>183</sup> Porskrog Rasmusen 2008, pp. 196–197. On the Sønderborg duchies see Hoffmann 1986, pp. 128–133, and several articles in Porskrog Rasmusen et. al. (eds.) 2008. The Sønderborgs' position as 'dukes without land' can perhaps best be compared to the *Sekundogenituren* within the Empire; see, e.g., Joachim Säckl: 'Herrschaftsbildung und dynastische Zeichensetzung. Die Sekundogeniturfürstentümer Sachsen-Weissenfels, Sachsen-Merseburg und Sachsen-Weitz in der zweiten Hälfte des 17. Jahrhunderts', in Vinzenz Czech (ed.), *Fürsten ohne Land. Höfische Pracht in den sächsischen Sekundogenituren Weissenfels, Merseburg und Weitz*, Berlin 2009.

<sup>184</sup> The last one, Christine, in due time became queen, as her husband Duke Karl ousted his nephew Sigismund and made himself king Karl IX, but that could not be foreseen at the time of her marriage in 1592.

<sup>185</sup> Jensen 1971, pp. 19–30; to name a few examples, Alexander got a princess from the county of Schwarzburg in Thuringia, Frederik was married twice to princesses from Saxony-Lauenburg and Anhalt-Zerbst, and Dorothea to the duke of Liegnitz-Brieg in Silesia.

employ one of her sons, arguing that she was born 'from the house of Norway', but this reference to common origin did not help.<sup>186</sup> 'House of Norway' was sometimes used as a label since Norway, according to the kings, was a hereditary country, and in that respect had higher status than Denmark.<sup>187</sup> And in a strict sense, there was no 'house of Denmark' before the introduction of hereditary monarchy in 1660.

The choice of marriage partners can be regarded as a sort of mutual empowerment of dynasties.<sup>188</sup> By accepting a marriage partner, a dynasty recognized his or her dynasty as a true princely dynasty. In this sense, the marriages of the Gottorps and the Sønnderborgs into German princely houses were their entrance tickets into the club of reigning houses, and they must be regarded as established dynasties by early in the 17th century. Their dynasty formation can be seen as a sort of willed dynastic exclusion from the royal line.

If the small Sønnderborg duchies were thus treated as equals by lesser German princely houses, they were left out of political influence and the attempts of the dukes to keep a position equal to the Gottorp and the royal lines failed. This can be seen in an example from 1643, when the Sønnderborg dukes collectively complained to Christian IV that he and Friedrich III of Gottorp had raised the customs duties at Rendsburg and Haderslev without giving the Sønnderborgs their share. Christian answered that it was not an augment of the duties they, according to the settlement from 1564, had the right to a share in; it was a new fee put on by him and the duke as dukes of Schleswig-Holstein and nothing the Sønnderborgs had any right to.<sup>189</sup> It is a very clear refutation of their claims to a part in the ruling of the Duchies.

In contrast, the Danish king had to cooperate with his co-duke of Holstein-Gottorp in governing Schleswig-Holstein. When the Gottorps in 1616 forced the Schleswig-Holstein diet to accept the inheritance principle, reducing the diet's election to a mere homage, this was

<sup>186</sup> Quoted from Jensen 1971, p. 28: 'aus dem hause Nordthwegen'. This Johann is rendered by Jensen as 'of Catsenelebogen', which was a title some Nassaus used at the time as a claim, but the subdivision of the Nassau lands he actually ruled was Nassau-Siegen. Written communication from Jasper van der Steen, Leiden University.

<sup>187</sup> The idea of Norway as a hereditary monarchy (as it had been in the middle ages) played a part in Frederik III's absolutist plans; Dyrvik 1998, pp. 29-30; Helge Kongsrud, *Den kongelige arveretten til Norge 1536-1661. Idé og politisk instrument*, Oslo 1984.

<sup>188</sup> The term 'mutual empowerment' from Hendrik Spruyt: *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors. An Analysis of Systems Change*, Princeton 1994, who uses it for the recognition in diplomatic praxis between states.

<sup>189</sup> *Christian IVs breve V*, p. 422, footnote 1.

of course also positive for the royal-ducal line. Although stressed by the Thirty Years' War and the Danish–Swedish war of 1643–1645, both of which ravaged the Duchies, the cooperation basically survived. The union agreement of 1533, with its clauses on defensive military cooperation, was renewed and expanded several times.<sup>190</sup>

The cooperation broke down in the Danish–Swedish wars 1657–1660. Duke Friedrich III of Holstein-Gottorp chose to side with his son-in-law, the Swedish king. In the peace of 1658, Denmark-Norway not only lost important territories to Sweden, but also had to recognize the duke as sovereign ruler in his Schleswig territories; this was repeated in the final peace in 1660. This meant that Schleswig was now loosened from its formal ties as a fief under the Danish crown, and also made the Danish king sovereign as duke in his parts of Schleswig. Since Holstein was a fief of the German empire, no such changes could be made there; in theory at least, the co-rule of the royal and the ducal lines continued in Holstein.

The small stretches of land in Schleswig, where the duke of Gottorp was now sovereign ruler, were of limited economic and, especially, military importance, but symbolically, this was an important step in Gottorp dynasty and state formation. If the Gottorps reached the position as a reigning house in 1544, one might say they achieved a sort of statehood in 1658. Relations between the Oldenburgs and the Gottorps were now tense, but a reconciliation attempt was made in 1667 with the marriage between Frederik III's daughter Frederikke Amalie and the new Gottorp duke, Christian Albrecht.<sup>191</sup>

It is interesting to compare this marriage to the marriage in 1596 between Duke Johann Adolf of Gottorp and Frederik II's daughter Augusta. They were close relatives – she was the daughter of his cousin – and it might be seen as an attempt to keep the dynasty together. The marriage of 1667 was of the type not unusual after conflicts or wars in Europe, where an agreement is confirmed by a marriage between the two conflicting parties.<sup>192</sup> In this way, the 1667 marriage showed clearly that the Gottorps and the royal Oldenburgs now were two separate dynasties.

<sup>190</sup> Hoffmann 1986, pp. 134–158; Ulrich Lange, 'Stände, Landesherr und große Politik. Vom Konsens des 16. zu den Konflikten des 17. Jahrhunderts', in Lange (ed.) 2003, pp. 225–240.

<sup>191</sup> Porskrog Rasmusen 2008, pp. 311–317; Hoffmann 1986, pp. 200/4–200/18.

<sup>192</sup> This was done, for instance, after the Scanian War between Denmark-Norway and Sweden, when Christian V's daughter in 1680 married the Swedish king.

Sovereignty in Schleswig put the king in a better position relative to the small duchies of the Sønderborg lines; he now claimed taxes directly from them. The finances of the Sønderborg duchy broke down and a royal commission declared it bankrupt in 1667; it now went back to the crown.<sup>193</sup> The same procedure was used to get Nordborg back to the crown in 1669.<sup>194</sup> In Glücksburg, with the assistance of his brother-in-law, the Great Elector, Duke Christian managed to get an agreement in 1668, whereby his subordination to the king was made clear, but which left the small duchy in the possession of his heirs until they died out in 1779.<sup>195</sup> The duchy of Plön, however, was situated in Holstein and thus outside the immediate reach of the king.

Plön came to be central in an issue that was to show that although the Oldenburgs had developed into different dynasties, family ties still mattered in cases of potential inheritances. In 1448, Christian of Oldenburg had been elected king of Denmark, while his younger brother had kept the county of Oldenburg, on the German North Sea coast. The same line reigned in Oldenburg until count Anton Günther died without legitimate heirs in 1667. The succession had already been discussed, involving the Gottorps, the Danish Oldenburgs and the emperor as overlord, and it had been decided that Denmark and Holstein-Gottorp were to share the county. But the Sønderborg lines could just as well be seen as legitimate heirs, and in fact, their oldest member, Duke Joachim Ernst of Plön, was closer to the inheritance, since he was the son of Hans the younger and thus several generations 'older' than the other two claimants.

Joachim Ernst played his cards well and a long-awaited decision of the *Reichshofrat* in Vienna was generally suspected to go in his favour, which made the Danes keen to find a solution before the verdict. Parallel to official negotiations, there were secret contacts between Copenhagen and Plön, which ended in 1671 with an agreement that gave Joachim Ernst some territories in Holstein and a considerable sum of money in return for ceding all rights in Oldenburg to Christian V. Parts of the agreement were kept secret and Christian Albrecht of Holstein-Gottorp was more or less fooled into giving up his rights for a

<sup>193</sup> Adriansen 2005b, p. 193.

<sup>194</sup> Adriansen, 'Hertugerne af Nordborg', in Porskrog Rasmusen *et al.* (eds.) 2005, pp. 214-215. Nordborg was to be re-established in 1676 under a duke from the Plön line.

<sup>195</sup> Carsten Porskrog Rasmusen, 'De ældre glücksborgske hertuger', in Porskrog Rasmusen *et al.* (eds.) 2005, pp. 229-230.



sum of money, not knowing that Christian in this way also took the Plön part. The whole county went to Denmark.<sup>196</sup>

The episode shows how a dynasty in the most extended sense could be very far-reaching, indeed. Branches that had separated hundreds of years ago and functioned as separate houses could suddenly find themselves on one big family tree. The result also reshuffled dynastic relations once again. Holstein-Gottorp again oriented itself toward Sweden and against Denmark. This hostility was to lead to Denmark's takeover of all Gottorp parts of Schleswig in 1721, and of Holstein in 1773.

On the other hand, the Plöns, together with the other Sønderborg lines, were taken in as lost sheep coming back to the herd.<sup>197</sup> Joachim Ernst's younger son August was made duke of Nordborg by the king in 1676.<sup>198</sup> Duke Hans Adolf of Plön, who succeeded his father Joachim Ernst the same year as the agreement was struck, was inducted into the Elephant Order and became field marshal of Denmark. He had important military charges during the Scanian war and Christian V honoured him with an official visit to his duchy in 1680.<sup>199</sup> Later on, Frederik IV protected the young Friedrich Karl of Plön.<sup>200</sup> The Sønderborg lines were now seen as cadet lines of the dynasty, and indeed, one of their descendants, in 1863, was to ascend to the Danish throne as Christian IX; they are still sitting there.

### **Summing up: From a quarrelsome family to a stream-lined dynasty**

We have repeatedly seen conflicting interests within the family. It was up to the king to try to satisfy his relatives' often conflicting claims on the family assets, the most important being the right to rule and the status following from this right. This could, in the 16th century, be done by using the king's position as duke of Schleswig-Holstein, which lay outside the reach of the Council of the Realm. But here, too, there were conflicting interests, not only within the family but also within the political elites in Denmark and in the Duchies. As a power group in the state, the dynasty was in a way weak. From a dynastic point of view, it could sometimes be more important to place the members in

<sup>196</sup> Erslev 1915, pp. 81-90; Olden-Jørgensen 1999, pp. 188-196.

<sup>197</sup> 'With the agreement of 1671, the Sønderborgs glided over in warm water'; Erslev 1915, p. 95.

<sup>198</sup> This was part of the 1671 agreement; Peter Dragsbo, 'Hertugerne af Nordborg', in Porskrog Rasmussen *et al.* (eds.) 2005, pp. 215-217.

<sup>199</sup> Inge Adriansen: 'Hertugerne af Pløn', in Porskrog Rasmussen *et al.* (eds.) 2005, pp. 252-253.

<sup>200</sup> Erslev 1915, p. 97.

socially adequate positions, that is, ruling positions, than to keep a patrimony, or a state, together. Younger male members desired an independent position, and when getting one, they started their own dynasty formation.

The potential dynasty grew to an amorphous entity due to Christian IV's attempt to keep all his children, also the ones not born to him by the queen, in adequate social positions, each according to his/her status. The marriages of the daughters also created a new, half-royal group among the nobility. But Frederik III slimmed down this big family tree by his reckoning with his half-brothers-in-law. It is worth noting that this came before absolutism; Frederik III started by taking power within the dynasty through a radical dynastic exclusion. Also, in the introduction of absolutism, this aspect played an important part for Frederik III; much of the codification of absolutist rule, the Royal Law, dealt in fact with the internal organization of the dynasty. And it was around the king and his line, the agnatic primogeniture, that the dynasty was centralized.

The fate of the Oldenburg's relations with the Gottorp and Sønderborg lines shows the necessity of using a flexible concept of dynasty. Although they clearly developed into separate dynasties – in the Gottorp case also a hostile one – they were all united again in a new family fight in the county of Oldenburg inheritance issue. The outcome led to a new dynastic inclusion, the return of the Sønderborgs as a kind of junior branches of the Danish Oldenburg dynasty. The central role of inheritable assets in dynasty formation is made clear here.

#### *Conclusions: dynasty formation of the Danish Oldenburgs*

How can the dynasty formation of the Danish Oldenburgs best be characterized, and what lessons for further dynasty studies can be drawn from this history? This will be discussed by summarizing the most important empirical results.

The Oldenburg marriage sphere consisted of Lutheran ruling houses in northern Germany, complemented with a few connections to Protestant royal houses, forming an inter-dynastic web. Here, an analytic distinction is made between a web – actually existing connections – and a network, the difference being that a network is actively used for exchanging important information and advice, and for knitting alliances. The marriage web was indeed such an active network. During the 16th and the first half of the 17th centuries, the Danish-Norwegian kings used this network frequently, both in the service of Danish foreign policy and for their own political and dynastic interests. This usage, however, declined in the late 17th century.

There is a clear gendering of the dynastic tasks of the children. The

part played by the daughters as an asset for the dynasty is clear. As brides to foreign courts, they became important both as symbols of the inter-dynastic connections and the status of the houses involved, and concretely as correspondents. For the sons, something of the same is true only for the oldest son, destined to take over the throne, who was supposed to marry a foreign princess who then would serve the daughterly tasks of her dynasty at the Danish court. The younger sons should preferably stay unmarried, thus serving the task of dynasty securing by preventing competing side lines to be founded. As long as Schleswig-Holstein could be divided, younger brothers could be satisfied there and could marry, if they wanted. Duke Magnus also married, but posed no threat to the dynasty while he pursued a career on his own on the eastern shores of the Baltic. But the most notable exception is the 1643 marriage of Duke Frederik, the later Frederik III, which was a case of dynasty securing, since his older brother did not produce an heir. Prince Jørgen's Stuart marriage late in the period is also a special case, involving a connection to a prestigious foreign dynasty and his moving to England; in a way, he was assigned a feminine dynastic task: being exported, like the daughters, to another house.

The generational, or rather age, difference was important for the fate of the sons; younger sons as a rule stayed unmarried, as just said, and had an inferior position. A solution common to many Protestant princely families to the problem of getting the younger sons supported was to place them as prince-bishops. This was also used in a few cases by the Oldenburgs, but they never managed to monopolize any such position. The bishopric policy of the kings has received a good deal of attention in Danish historiography, but it is worth underscoring that compared to the performance of their competitors in northern Germany, even that of their Gottorp cousins, this Oldenburg policy largely failed.

All legitimate sons, older or younger, were kept out of political influence and as a rule did not hold any important positions in the administration of the lands of the king. It is not clear from this study why this was done. A contributing factor was certainly that, in principle in the electoral Danish monarchy, only the king and the chosen successor, if there was one, had a direct relation to the realm. It has often been noted that Christian IV never trusted anyone but himself. But this study reveals that this tendency was more than a personal characteristic; this element of dynastic centralization in the behaviour of the Oldenburg kings was present throughout the period under study.

Together with gender and age, the degree of legitimacy was also important for the fate of the children. In some respects, the illegitimate children – the phrase used here to describe all royal children

not born by a queen but recognized by the kings – had much of the same trajectories as the legitimate ones. Few of the sons married, but most of the daughters. But there is a difference in their usage: the kings seem to have felt freer to use the illegitimate sons for civilian and military charges. They were obviously less dangerous and more dependent on the king. This is especially true of the illegitimate sons after 1660; most of them also married, all to domestic noblewomen.

The illegitimate daughters, just as the legitimate, were important for forging connections. They were, however, married exclusively to domestic noblemen. This is also true about the only illegitimate son to marry before 1660. This was a sign of their status level. The illegitimate children got noble-like surnames and married into the high nobility. The study of Christian IV's letters reveals many subtle signs of how they were symbolically placed slightly below the princely level but slightly above the nobility. There were also differences between them. The children of the king's morganatic wife Kirsten Munk were granted the titles of counts and countesses, placing them clearly above the domestic nobility, since titled nobility had not yet been introduced. All this shows an elaborate sense of social distinctions and the importance laid on placing the children on an appropriate level.

This seems to me to be one of the most striking findings of this study: The strong will of royal parents to place their children in a situation that enabled them to continue to live on a certain status level. This quest for *Ebenbürtigkeit* or rather status equality, can be seen in the way the legitimate royal daughters were married to princes of other ruling houses, how princesses from such houses without exception became the spouses of the sons who married, and not least in how the illegitimate children were treated, titled and married. This has often been interpreted in traditional political terms as a matter of forging alliances. The marriages of Christian IV's illegitimate daughters into the high nobility have been interpreted exclusively as conscious acts to build up a counterweight to the conciliar nobility. This aspect cannot be neglected, but it might have come as a result of a marriage policy directed primarily towards securing the daughters' appropriate position, not the other way around.

Turning to the conflicts, inclusions and exclusions of the dynasty, it can hardly be said that the Oldenburgs functioned as a coherent power group within the state. Rather, in many situations, they acted as individuals with conflicting interests. Their most defining dynasty asset was the right to rule, and notions of a special highness followed from this. But this asset could only be shared to a limited degree.

The right to rule was not hereditary in Denmark-Norway before 1660, but a *de facto* hereditary situation was created by the tradition of

choosing the king's oldest son as his future successor. The importance of the Danish elective monarchy lay not in the open election process with several candidates, like in Poland-Lithuania or in the Holy Roman Empire, but in the conditions to which the Council of the Realm could bind the king in the coronation charter. Although the idea that Norway really was a hereditary kingdom did exist in the royal circles, it did not have any practical implications, since only the one elected by the Danish Council could become king of Norway. This made Schleswig-Holstein, traditionally hereditary (whatever the local nobility said), crucial for the dynasty. By establishing more or less ruling side branches there, the Gottorps and the Sønnerborgs, it was possible to satisfy two generations of younger brothers.

It is interesting to see how these new lines developed into separate dynasties by marrying into other ruling houses of northern Germany, especially to learn that this was true also about the Sønnerborg lines, which can hardly be said to have any sovereign positions. By being accepted by other houses, they demonstrated how marriages between houses can be seen as a mutual empowerment, making a family a member of the circles of ruling dynasties.

In the inheritance conflicts, it is interesting to observe the part played by the queens, and especially the dowager queens. They seem to have regarded it as their dynastic duty to speak for the younger sons, whom they often sided with in family conflicts. Another interesting trait is that dynastic centralization in these questions was weak. The kings had great difficulties domesticizing their family, repeatedly having to negotiate and accept compromises. This increased as the house expanded under Christian IV, when his illegitimate children and sons-in-law can partly be seen as included in the dynasty.

The ascension to the throne of Frederik III in 1648 marks a new emphasis on dynastic centralization. He slimmed down the extended family of his father, and went even further with the introduction of hereditary monarchy and absolute rule in 1660. An important part in the political revolution of 1660 was, for the monarch, the achievement of absolutism within the house. This was a defining step in Oldenburg dynasty formation. Most of the Royal Law, the constitution of Danish-Norwegian absolutism, dealt with cementing the strong position of the king and his male line within the dynasty. This centralization explains what we saw in the studies of marriage patterns and the usage and placing of the children: the kings were freer to handle their family members after 1660.

This is not to say that political and structural factors were not important in the coming of Danish absolutism, as has been discussed by previous scholars, as the inefficiency of the old-fashioned state appara-

tus, the necessity of hastening the transition from domain state to tax state in order to keep pace with the burgeoning military-fiscal muscle of competing powers, the development of a professional military loyal to the king, and the social stresses created by the privileged position of the nobility. But dynastic factors might be an overlooked component in this process. Introducing absolutism was also a way of achieving dynasty securing and dynastic centralization.

The inheritance conflict over the county of Oldenburg shows that the ever-present question of inheriting ruling positions can reshape a dynasty. The royal Oldenburgs, the Gottorps and especially the Plön line of the Sønderborgs, which had long since parted into separate dynasties, found themselves again engaged in a family conflict within what could once again be seen as one dynasty. This might seem paradoxical, but it shows the necessity of working with a flexible concept of 'dynasty'; the extent of the dynasty could vary in different contexts at the same time. The outcome marked the final break with the Gottorps but re-formed the Sønderborg branches into cadet lines of their royal relatives.

The story of Oldenburg dynasty formation shows the usefulness of 'dynasty' as an analytic tool. It enables us to interpret acts and processes in terms of dynasty formation, dynasty securing, dynastic inclusion/exclusion and dynastic centralization, thereby unlocking new perspectives. The Schleswig-Holstein question in the 16th century, the son-in-law-policy of Christian IV and the introduction of absolutism, for instance, have all here been seen in a new light. It is also worth pondering if these analytic tools can enable new light to be cast on more general state formation processes.

Danish state formation went from a *monarchia mixta*, an old-fashioned domain state and a loosely knitted conglomerate state where the king and the Council shared power, to an absolutist, military-fiscal and still basically conglomerate state, albeit a much more centralized one. Dynastic centralization was a part of this process. It is not the intention here to speculate on the exact relations between those two processes. It is possible that the need of the state to reform after the threatening military catastrophe in 1658/60 called for centralization, and royal absolutism might have been the most efficient way to achieve it. On the other hand, neighbouring Sweden shows that a *monarchia mixta* could survive and build an efficient military-fiscal state. State formation and dynasty formation might perhaps best be seen as partly independent processes, in the end supporting each other, when both went in a heavily centralizing direction.

These results open up for new questions. It would be of great interest to study how the dynastic aspirations of the Oldenburgs were



manifested in symbols, rituals and such cultural artefacts as genealogies and historical accounts. Of special interest would be to see if the symbolic manifestations changed in the course of dynastic centralization and absolutism. Another interesting question is how the Oldenburg experience compares with other European dynasties of the period. Was dynastic centralization a general trend within the European princely families? It is not unlikely that impulses and inspiration were transmitted through the inter-dynastic networks that we have encountered. A dynastic perspective can lead to new approaches to one of the oldest objects of history writing: the ruling houses.

## *RESUMÉ*

### *Dynastidannelse De danske Oldenborgere 1536-1699*

Det danske kongehus, Oldenborgerne, befandt sig i tidlig moderne tid som alle andre fyrstehuse i en proces af kontinuerlig dynastidannelse, hvor de søgte at konsolidere og udbygge deres position. De bevidste handlinger med dette formål kaldes dynastisikring. Hvem der tilhørte dynastiet, varierede efter tid og sammenhæng, og den proces, der afgjorde det, kaldes dynastisk inklusion og eksklusion. Internt kunne et dynasti være mere eller mindre stramt styret af et oftest mandligt overhoved, og dette kaldes graden af dynastisk centralisering. Disse begreber anvendes på tre felter: ægteskabsforbindelser, de kongelige familiemedlemmers position og interne dynastiske konflikter.

Ægteskaber er et af de vigtigste værktøjer til dynastisikring og udviser en klar kønsspecifik profil: Døtrene giftes bort til fremmede fyrster, den ældste søn skulle overtage tronen og de yngste sønner helst forblive ugifte for ikke at spalte dynastiet i sidelinjer (dynastisikring). De bortgiftede døtre dannede knudepunkter i et interdynastisk netværk, hvor råd, hjælp og information udveksledes. I den sammen-

hæng synes det at have været afgørende, at børnene fortsat kunne leve standsmæssigt. Illegitime (naturlige) kongebørn blev statusmæssigt placeret mellem de kongelige og den højadel, de blev giftet ind i.

Oldenborgerne brugte kun i begrænset grad deres legitime børn til at regere riget, så i den forstand var perioden præget af dynastisk centralisering. Derimod anvendtes både de illegitime sønner og de illegitime døtres mænd politisk, fordi de ikke indebar nogen risiko for dynastiske sidelinjer. Yngre sønner kunne afsættes som fyrstbiskopper i Det Tyske Rige, men oldenborgerne havde kun begrænset held med denne strategi. En anden mulighed var arvedelinger i Slesvig-Holsten. Denne mulighed blev udnyttet i 1500-tallet, men siden politisk umulig på grund af modstand fra det slesvig-holstenske ridderskab.

De interne konflikter i dynastiet viser et billede af splittelse snarere end koordination, og før 1660 har kongerne påfaldende svært ved at styre deres slægtninge. Under Christian 4. bliver de illegitime børn en del af dynastiet, og konflikterne øges. Frederik 3.s tronbestigelse 1648 markerer et vendepunkt, og opgøret med „svigersønnernes parti“ udtrykker en hårdhændet dynastisk eksklusion. Enevælden 1660 er et yderligere skridt i retning af dynastisk centralisering: Kongeloven fastslår kongens enevælde internt i familien, og det professionelle diplomati mindsker kongernes afhængighed af familiemedlemmer i udlandet.

De gottorpske og sønderborgske linjer begyndte gennem en slags frivillig eksklusion snart deres egen dynastidannelse, men i forbindelse med sagen om arveretten til grevskabet Oldenburg kom det til et regulært opgør, hvor afstanden øgedes mellem gottorperne og den kongelige linje, mens de sønderborgske linjer derimod knyttedes tættere til kongehuset som sidelinjer.

Over tid kan der i det oldenborgske hus iagttages en dynastisk centralisering, drevet frem af forskellige former for dynastisikring, inklusion og eksklusion. Denne proces indgik i et samspil med en statslig centralisering, og med enevældens indførelse mødtes de to linjer og støttede gensidigt hinanden.