



***Stuart Marriage Diplomacy: Dynastic  
Politics in their European Context,  
1604-1630***

**Valentina Caldari and  
Sara J. Wolfson, eds.**

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Families are time-consuming. The three years of my ever-delayed attempts to review this ambitious collection are set against domestic upheaval, relocations, and births. However, this is nothing when compared to the efforts of the Bourbons, Habsburgs, and Stuarts to maintain a generation-long period of marital negotiations (with partners with whom they might simultaneously be in a state of cold war), uphold wider dynastic obligations, honour potential treaty terms, further the interests of composite crowns, and defend their national churches, merchants, and citizens. It is hardly a surprise that most of the initially contemplated marriages were never made, whether due to premature death, religious preference, or shifting strategic interests.

Drawing together nineteen thematically and chronologically diverse conference papers, Valentina Caldari and Sara Wolfson attempt to weave together the policies and constraints bearing on all three royal families and their diplomats, though the Stuarts inevitably take centre stage as the most chaotic. King James I of England, wishing to use his children's potential marriages to become the lynchpin of European diplomacy—which, as the volume successfully argues, was an extension of his policy as James VI of Scotland—may have considered himself a man thwarted by fate. His heir, Prince Henry, died young. Henry's shoes were filled by Prince Charles, whose foolish efforts in Madrid to woo and conclude a treaty to wed the *Infanta* Maria Ana led his father to wish that the Spanish would “salt him and eat him.” (15) James I's son-in-law, the Palatine Frederick, soon proved a belligerent millstone. His daughter Elizabeth became an inspirational figurehead for unlicensed and sometimes embarrassing military activity for years to come, as shown by Steve Murdoch and Adam Marks. Nonetheless, in chapters concerning the court, counsel, and ceremony by Malcolm Smuts, David Coast, and Melinda Gough, James I emerges as the real architect of any match's problems. He was comically secretive, burning letters and dramatically feigning gout at moments of displeasure. The editors state that they have aimed to reverse Whiggish interpretations of the pre-Civil War period (10), but

Smut's exploration of James I's management of his favourites and councillors, coupled with Murdoch's clear demonstration of Charles I's systematic and blinkered cutting of any useful family ties in Northern Europe, only confirms the idea that the Civil War was a disaster waiting to happen.

Nonetheless, this volume proves the value of the editors' plea that any intellectual Brexit should be avoided. It certainly restores the European perspective to the marital negotiations and adds their impact upon global events. Innovative chapters by Kelsey Flynn and Edmond Smith explore the impact of negotiations through the eyes of Spanish and French consuls, merchants of the East India Company, and even pioneer settlers and privateers in the Americas. Nonetheless, Peter Wilson's magisterial chapter on the constrictive influence of the Thirty Years War on Stuart policy, and Caldari, Coast, and Manuel Rivero Rodríguez on Spain, shows just how little influence British diplomats could ever have on events. Indeed, just as now, there is a sense of London backtracking and floundering around policy, unsure of its relationship to Europe.

Beyond these goals, the volume is structured into six sections, dealing with the marriage negotiations through "The Court," "Politics," "War," "News," "Continental Europe," and "Ceremony." As Clare Jackson has pointed out in the *Scottish Historical Review*, these sections can be chronologically confusing (*SHR*, 98 (2019), 313–314). Others, I found, gel more readily and could function as standalone guides to the historiography of the period. For example, "Marriage and News" would be a useful set of case studies on the development of public opinion to complement more heavily-researched "information-hubs," such as Venice or the Dutch Republic. Coast, Paul Arblaster, and Helmer Helmers together reveal how the Low Countries, and in particular Brussels, emerged as a news hub for Northern Europe, whilst elsewhere, just as with social media, enticing fake news on the royal matches was manufactured to fill copy.

There are inevitable overlaps in discussion, and it would be useful to have some sort of tabulated concordat of the various diplomats involved, their office, and period of activity, but this, like any concluding remarks, is missing. A chapter is also lacking on the negotiations for Princess Elizabeth's marriage. More editorial consistency would have been beneficial, as some chapters are far longer than others,

with inconsistent subheadings across the book. It requires more illustrations and maps, and that which is provided for Wilson's chapter is far too small to be useful without a magnifying glass. Moreover, I am not convinced that the volume has done much in its aim to overturn impressions of Henrietta Maria as "a girl, an idiot" (9), for Wolfson's argument that her playing at nuns was evidence of agency rings hollow (55). What this volume really shows is that the negotiations were designed for any princess, Spanish or French, first or fifth daughter, to fit the terms of a marriage treaty. Indeed, in the final chapter, Andrea de Meo Arbore illustrates how a chapel built to accommodate the worship of a Spanish *infanta* was finally used, if only rarely, by a French princess and her Italian mother.

I have been critical, but *Stuart Marriage Diplomacy* is nonetheless an impressive collection. It combines many different approaches from international scholarship and succeeds in its ambition to fill some obvious gaps in the literature. It should of course be read alongside McGowan's more well-known analysis of marital celebrations (Margaret McGowan (ed.), *Dynastic Marriages 1612-1615: A Celebration of the Habsburg and Bourbon Unions* (Farnham, 2013), but would also serve as a counterpoint to more nationally-focused monographs of early seventeenth-century European monarchs. Finally, and crucially, it hints at how a Hanoverian monarchy came to be the Protestant powerhouse of Europe, fulfilling James I's ambitions of a century before.

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