

*To rule and to prepare: Claudia de' Medici and her European "fellow widows"*¹

by

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In his book *Familien = Stats=Recht Derer Teutschen Reichsstände* from 1745 Johann Jacob Moser, a legal scholar from Wuerttemberg, wrote the following on early modern widows, ruling as guardians for their sons: "Some may, when asked, not give a penny for a form of government whereby female guardians may rule nations, but 1. this is a *quaestio consilii* and not *juris*, 2. one cannot deny that royal houses and their country have fared as well– if not better – during the rule of a female guardian than during the reign of males. In this question one cannot state firm rules."²

The case of Claudia de' Medici, ruling Tyrol as regent, widow and guardian for her still under aged son and heir to the throne, Ferdinand Karl, was not unique in European history. During the medieval and early modern period one finds quite a number of female rulers who for a pre-determined period – until the heir to the throne came of age – assumed the reign of a county, a duchy, or even an electorate in the German Empire. In recent years scholarship, dealing with noble widows in general and noble widows as guardians in particular, has received increasing attention.³ The possibilities of women for assuming power during the Middle Ages and the early modern period was rediscovered, their influence on politics defined in a new manner. One finds in Europe female rulers who may provide a broader context for the widowhood of Claudia de'

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²Cited in Heide Wunder, „Dynastie und Herrschaftssicherung: Geschlechter und Geschlecht. Einleitung“, in *Dynastie und Herrschaftssicherung in der Frühen Neuzeit. Geschlechter und Geschlecht*, Heide Wunder, ed. , Zeitschrift für historische Forschung, Beiheft 28, Berlin 2002, 9-27, 12.

³See in general, Wunder, „Dynastie und Herrschaftssicherung“ (note 3); eadem, „Normen und Institutionen der Geschlechterordnung am Beginn der Frühen Neuzeit“, in Heide Wunder, Gisela Engel, eds. , *Geschlechterperspektiven. Forschungen zur Frühen Neuzeit*, Königstein/Ts., 1998, 57-78; Martina Schattkowsky, „Witwenschaft in der Frühen Neuzeit. Fürstliche und adelige Witwen zwischen Selbst- und Fremdbestimmung. Einleitung“, in Martina Schattkowsky, ed. *Witwenschaft in der Frühen Neuzeit. Fürstliche und adelige Witwen zwischen Selbst- und Fremdbestimmung*, Schriften zur Sächsischen Geschichte und Volkskunde, 6, Leipzig 2003, 11-32; Ute Küppers-Braun, „Dynastisches Handeln von Frauen in der Frühen Neuzeit“, in Heide Wunder, ed. *Dynastie und Herrschaftssicherung in der Frühen Neuzeit. Geschlechter und Geschlecht*, Zeitschrift für historische Forschung, Beiheft 28, Berlin 2002, 221-238; Uta Löwenstein, „Daß sie sich uf iren Withumbssitz begeben und sich sonsten anderer der Herrschafften Sachen und Handlungen nicht unternehmen ...': Hofhaltungen fürstlicher Frauen und Witwen in der frühen Neuzeit“, in Jörg Jochen Berns, Detlef Ignasiak, eds., *Frühneuzeitliche Hofkultur in Hessen und Thüringen*, Jenaer Studien, 1, Erlangen/Jena 1993, 115-141; especially on the Middle Ages see Bettina Elpers, *Regieren, Erziehen, Bewahren: Mütterliche Regentschaften im Hochmittelalter*, Studien zur europäischen Rechtsgeschichte, 166, Frankfurt/Main 2003, 325-335

Medici. Well-known examples are Catherine de' Medici (1519-1589), the mother of three French kings, Maria de' Medici (1573-1642), the mother of Luis the 13th of France and Anna of Austria (1601-1666), mother of Luis the 14th. Besides these great female rulers one finds widows as female rulers in smaller territories and one such person is the topic of this essay. At the same time, the period from 1632/33 to 1646, during which Claudia de' Medici⁴ ruled as widow and guardian, may serve as a point of departure for placing the events of this period in a larger European context, looking at them through the kaleidoscope of other widows of the Early Modern period.

In Europe, the possibility of passing the affairs of government to a female guardian after the death of a ruler was utilized regularly as a way to secure the continuation of the dynasty. The literature on constitutional issues incorporated this. Veit Ludwig von Seckendorf wrote in his *Teutschen Fürsten-Stat* (1656) "A princess ought to get a good education because it may well happen that a ducal or comital female ... will come to rule as a guardian for her children".⁵ This potential regency was considered a reason for giving princesses a good education.

The late prince's will was the deciding factor for transferring affairs of government to the princess.⁶ In the case of Claudia de' Medici, Leopold 5th⁷ in his will appointed the emperor Ferdinand 2nd, his brother, as 'guardian and *Gerhaben* (lit. the person with the child on the lap)⁸ with complete powers of guardianship with purpose and in the highest confidence², while Claudia in the will was appointed co-guardian (*Mitgerhabin*).⁹ Ferdinand 2nd accepted the conditions of the will and transferred the powers of government in the Upper Austrian countries as well as the guardianship to Claudia de' Medici, as he was occupied elsewhere and unable to focus on Tyrol. Still, he was not a passive co-guardian. Right from the beginning he made his demands on Tyrol so apparent that Claudia de' Medici had narrow room for maneuvering, especially in issues concerning defense of the country and always had to take into consideration the entire spectrum

⁴For a recent biography of Claudia de' Medici see Sabine Weiss, *Claudia de' Medici. Eine italienische Prinzessin als Landesfürstin von Tirol (1604-1648)*, Innsbruck/Wien, 2004; older biographies are Hans Brugger, *Die Regierungszeit der Erzherzogin Claudia in Tirol*, phil. Diss., Graz 1952; see also Josef Egger, *Geschichte Tirols von den ältesten Zeiten bis in die Neuzeit*, Bd. 2, Innsbruck 1876, especially pp. 365-397

⁵Cited in: Wunder, *Dynastie und Herrschaftssicherung*, 9.

⁶For a general discussion of female succession (in Imperial Germany) see Johannes Arndt, „Möglichkeiten und Grenzen weiblicher Selbstbehauptung gegenüber männlicher Dominanz im Reichsgrafenstand des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts“, *Vierteljahresschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 77, 1990, 153-174, esp. 154-158.

⁷On Leopold 5th see Sabine Weiss, „Erzherzog Leopold V. – Ritter des Ordens vom Goldenen Vlies. Biographische Notizen zu Karriere und Lebenswelt eines frühbarocken Tiroler Landesfürsten“, *Tiroler Heimat*, 66, 2002, 29-80

⁸Gerhabe = Synonym for guardian (*Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm*, Bd. 5, München 1984, reprint of Leipzig 1897 edition, 2552-2553)

⁹TLA Innsbruck, Hs. 1097, 1r.

of interests of the House of Austria. Ferdinand 2nd, and from 1637 Ferdinand 3rd, interfered in the education of Ferdinand Karl in order to produce a ruler of the western part of the family lands who would rule in accordance with the Emperor and his politics.¹⁰ For Claudia de' Medici, as a ruler and guardian, it was not a disadvantage to have the Emperor as guardian for her son. The emperor was a strong ally, guaranteeing protection during the crises and conflicts of the Thirty-years War.

In general, one can observe that widowed rulers tried to emphasize the “quality” of the co-guardians in the cases they were able to decide this. It is told about countess Johanetta Elisabeth von Bentheim (1592-1644) that she ruled for her son together with three of her brothers-in-law. In this case the brothers-in-law assumed this task on their own as Johanetta's husband had not left any will, which made matters quite difficult. The marriage contract determined in this case the position of Johanetta, her residence and her finances as a widow.¹¹ Johanetta installed her three brothers as guardians for her son as well, probably in order to create a certain counter balance to the brothers-in-law. It meant that her son had a total of seven guardians. Johanetta was a member of the influential Nassau-Katzenelnbogen family and having her three strong brothers as co-guardians and being able to count on their assistance turned out to be very wise during conflicts.¹²

An imperial decree accompanied the transfer of power in some royal families which meant that a widow of one of the houses for which an imperial decree was the practice, had to apply to the emperor in order to have her powers of government confirmed.¹³ One case in point is Anna Amalia of Sachsen-Weimar-Eisenach (1739-1807), to whom, after her husband Ernst August Constantin's death, the emperor Franz Stephan in 1759 at first delegated only the guardianship for the heir and in matters of government posed the condition that the Saxon Elector

¹⁰Extensive correspondance concerning this in HHStA Wien, Familienarchiv, A. Familienakten, II, 6. Erziehung, Kart. 53 sowie ebd., Familienarchiv, A. Familienakten, II, 8. Testamente und Verlassenschaften, Kart. 76.

¹¹Stephanie Marra, „Gräfin Johanna Elisabeth von Bentheim (1592-1654). Witwenherrschaft und Vormundschaftsregierung im Dreißigjährigen Krieg,“ in Martina Schattkowsky ed. *Witwenschaft in der Frühen Neuzeit. Fürstliche und adelige Witwen zwischen Selbst- und Fremdbestimmung* (Schriften zur Sächsischen Geschichte und Volkskunde, 6), Leipzig 2003, 227-248, 234.

¹²Ibid., 234, 238, 245

¹³According to Zedler's *Universal-Lexikon* this confirmation was not customary in all princely houses. One example is the Electorate of Saxony where Saxon not imperial law governed this issue. Applying for confirmation was not always an easy task (see Johann Heinrich Zedler, *Großes vollständiges Universal-Lexikon*, Bd. 50, 2, repr., Graz 1998, 954-966, and Johannes Kunisch, „Hausgesetzgebung und Mächtesystem. Zur Einbeziehung hausvertraglicher Erbfolgeregelungen in die Staatenpolitik des ancien régime,“ Kunisch (ed.), *Der dynastische Fürstenstaat. Zur Bedeutung von Sukzessionsordnungen für die Entstehung des frühmodernen Staates*, Historische Forschungen, 21, Berlin 1982, 49-80; Heinz Mohnhaupt, „Die Lehre von der ‚Lex Fundamentalis‘ und die Hausgesetzgebung europäischer Dynastien“, *ibid.*, 3-33

Friedrich August 2nd had to participate in the government. The reason could have been that Anna Amalia at that time was still quite young. The party of the duchess, first and foremost supported by her father, duke Carl 1st of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel, protested this decision and was ultimately successful, as in July 1759 Franz Stephan surrendered the full power of government to Anna Amalia.¹⁴ In her notes, *Meine Gedanken*, she described her situation in the following manner: “During my eighteenth year the greatest epoch of my life began. I became a mother for the second time, was widowed, became a guardian and a regent! The quick changes, one following hard in the heels of another created such turmoil in my soul that I could not find myself, a confluence of ideas, feelings all of which were undeveloped! No friend I could bare my soul to! I felt my uselessness, and still I had to find everything within myself.”¹⁵

Another situation arose if the deceased prince left children of an earlier marriage, as was the case for landgravine Elisabeth Dorothea von Hessen-Darmstadt (1640-1709). She did have a son who was still underage, yet the government was transferred to a son from the deceased landgrave’s first marriage. At first Elisabeth Dorothea had to withdraw to her dower lands, which did not agree with her pronounced political ambitions. Although isolated from politics she strived to keep her influence at court and in politics. However, her means were limited to voice strong criticism of her stepson’s style of governing. She contacted her previous teacher, Daniel Richter, working as an administrator in Sachsen-Gotha and in an extensive correspondence discussed the possibilities she did have for gaining influence in the government in spite of being a widow. Richter responded with detailed recommendations such as her most important goal being to acquire all possible information and keeping herself informed continuously about governmental matters. It was also important to win the confidence of her stepson. However, implementing these recommendations turned out to be superfluous, as after only four months in office Elisabeth Dorothea’s stepson died, leaving the road open for her own son, Karl Ludwig, and in turn for the regency of Elisabeth Dorothea as Karl Ludwig was only 11 years old.¹⁶

¹⁴Volker Ebersbach, *Carl August von Sachsen-Weimar-Eisenach*, Köln/Weimar/Wien, 1998, 36 f.; see also Ursula Salentin, *Anna Amalia. Wegbereiterin der Weimarer Klassik*, Köln/Weimar/Wien, 3rd ed., 2001, esp. 28-57. The Landgravine Elisabeth Dorothea von Hessen-Darmstadt also asked emperor Leopold 1st for the transfer for government business. The confirmation of her rights in the decree of January 16, 1679, concurrently confirmed the legality of the regency (Helga Meise, „habe ich die politica bei H. Richter angefangen’. Herrschaftsaltag und Herrschaftsverständnis der Landgräfin Elisabeth Dorothea von Hessen-Darmstadt (1640-1709),” Heide Wunder (ed.), *Dynastie und Herrschaftssicherung in der Frühen Neuzeit. Geschlechter und Geschlecht*, Zeitschrift für historische Forschung, Beiheft 28, Berlin 2002, 113-134, esp. 120 f.

¹⁵Cited in Salentin, *Anna Amalia*, 28 f.

¹⁶Meise, „Herrschaftsaltag,“ 115-119

In contrast to the complications that might arise from a transfer of power, described above, no major problems arose in the case of Claudia de' Medici. The legal and political situation was unambiguously regulated through the will of Leopold 5th and this, apparently, created no major problems with Ferdinand 2nd. In several instructions he confirmed the regency of Claudia and her powers vis-à-vis the estates and the special council, the *Geheimen Rat*, first in two instructions of October 23rd, 1632, and April 8th, 1633.¹⁷ At the opening of the first land parliament in March 1633, the emperor addressed himself to the estates in a "Creditiu Schreiben" (March 17th, 1633).¹⁸ He was represented through two envoys, the "Geheimen Räte" Johann Kaspar von Stadion and Ernst Fugger at the first open land parliament in April 1633 – also a clear signal of his power and presence. In the same manner the homage took place with the two imperial envoys, as deputies for the emperor, accepting homage from Claudia de' Medici and Ferdinand Karl "as your rightful and natural lord."¹⁹ This imperial power and presence in Tyrol appears later in the politics of Claudia de' Medici, which can be described as pro-imperial. The collected interests of the House of Austria took highest priority although she did try from time to time to push through the interests of her Upper Austrian lands. Communication between her as regent and the subordinate authorities functioned well right from the beginning. The Archduchess was to be informed about all negotiations and meetings and she had access to the most important councils. She had, since the death of Leopold 5th, headed a special council, appointed by the deceased. The guidelines for organizing the country was, in accordance with the instructions in the will of Leopold 5th, made public in the two instructions, issued in 1632 and 1633 by Ferdinand 2nd and Claudia de' Medici in order to secure a smooth transfer of government business.²⁰

Education

During the early modern period the education of an heir apparent offered several possibilities for princely widows for handing down their ideas about politics and power to the next generation.

¹⁷TLA Innsbruck, Hs. 1096 and Hs. 1097

¹⁸TLA Innsbruck, Landschaftliches Archiv, Verhandlungen der Landschaft, Bd. 18, 1633-1639, 56r f.

¹⁹TLA Innsbruck, Landschaftliches Archiv, Verhandlungen der Landschaft, Bd. 18, 1633-1639, 56r-58r, 60r f.:

„Euren rechten Natürlichen Erbherren vnnd khünfftigen Lanndtsfürsten“, Brugger, *Regierungszeit*, (note 4) 12 f.

²⁰Here it was also established, that Claudia de' Medici had to be informed about the deliberations of the „Geheimen Rate“. It becomes apparent that the Archduchess from the beginning had been equipped with extensive powers and commanded the necessary channels for the communication of information. Both instructions in TLA Innsbruck, Hs. 1096 and Hs. 1097.

They used these possibilities in different manners just as the results turned out very differently. Some rather remarkable literary-educational texts by a royal mother for her son's education have survived. The duchesses sought, through their so-called educational handbooks to personally influence their sons and secure this influence beyond their abdication or even death.²¹

During the 16th century, a time of schisms and confessional confrontations, the duchess Elisabeth of Braunschweig-Lüneburg composed a Christian letter, *Sendbrieff*, to her subjects and a handbook of government to her son.²² This early female *Fürstenspiegel* (Mirror of Princes) became a model for later popular mirrors, first and foremost during the 17th century.²³ The 195 pages contained, along with extensive religious guidance and a general appeal to trust in God, much practical advice and many hints for the benefit of the heir apparent Erich 2nd, who took over government in 1545. He could read recommendations on how to select government officials or on when to introduce new taxes. The son should also avoid contracting debt – otherwise the creditors would besiege him – and here Elisabeth could speak from her own experiences after her husband's death. Following further advice and hints concerning marriage, the duchess commented on controversial doctrines from her Lutheran point of view. Alas, the success of this advice turned out to be rather limited. Only a short time after assuming power, Erich 2nd converted to Catholicism, which his mother had fought so vehemently. He exiled the Lutheran ministers and Elisabeth was reduced to fighting for having them released from prison.²⁴ This period, however, lasted only a short while as Erich, after having fought on the emperor's side in Spain, returned to Braunschweig, and rejoined the Lutheran faith and henceforth allied him with Protestant princes.

One hundred years later, a contemporary of Claudia de' Medici, landgravine Elisabeth Dorothea von Hessen-Darmstadt, ruling from 1678-1688 as guardian for her oldest son Ernst Ludwig, composed *lections* for the education of her sons. In another treatise, "What

²¹Cornelia Niekus Moore, „Die adelige Mutter als Erzieherin. Erbauungsliteratur adeliger Mütter für ihre Kinder,“ August Buck, ed., *Europäische Hofkultur im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert*, III, Wolfenbütteler Arbeiten zur Barockkultur, 10, Hamburg 1981, 505-510

²²Heide Wunder, „*Er ist die Sonn', sie ist der Mond*“. *Frauen in der Frühen Neuzeit*, München, 1992, 210

²³Merry Wiesner, „Herzogin Elisabeth von Braunschweig-Lüneburg (1510-1558),“ Kerstin Merkel, Heide Wunder, eds., *Deutsche Frauen der Frühen Neuzeit. Dichterinnen, Malerinnen, Mäzeninnen*, Darmstadt 2000, 39-48, esp. 40, 44; on the early modern mirrors see Pierre Béhar, Herbert Schneider, eds., *Der Fürst und sein Volk. Herrscherlob und Herrscherkritik in den habsburgischen Ländern der frühen Neuzeit*, Annales Universitatis Saraviensis. Philosophische Fakultät, 23, St. Ingbert 2004; Volker Bauer, *Hofökonomie. Der Diskurs über den Fürstenhof in Zeremonialwissenschaft, Hausväterliteratur und Kameralismus*, Frühneuzeitstudien, N.F., 1, Wien, 1997.

²⁴Wiesner, „Herzogin Elisabeth von Braunschweig-Lüneburg,“ 45

displeases me with Ernst Ludwig” she criticized her son’s ability to assume power.²⁵ A year later she handed over power to Ernst Ludwig not without repeating her doubts. In a letter, composed shortly before her act of resignation “begun early in the morning at 5 o’clock and completed at 7”²⁶ she attempted to obligate the heir apparent through an oath to assume her concept of governance. In accordance with being king of God’s grace the prince was the representative of God on earth and responsible for the well being of his subjects. Accordingly, Ernst Ludwig should demonstrate the princely virtues of justice and benevolence. He should distinguish himself by being a lover of truth, wisdom and care for the subjects and “for the sake of peace” honor faithfulness, friendship and neighborhood. She also warned him against toadies (flatterers), *Fuchsschwänzern*.²⁷

One hundred years later, during the Enlightenment it became common practice for duchesses, governing for their sons, to employ prominent educators to take care of the education of the heir apparent. Karoline, countess of Wied-Neuwied, founded in 1775 the “Ismenische Gesellschaft” in order to educate the heir Friedrich Carl. This society counted as members government officials and learned men who decided on important issues and presented proposals for the education of the young count.²⁸ Anna Amalia von Sachsen-Weimar –Eisenach also appointed a council of important educators, according to Goethe, a close friend of the heir apparent, “an assembly of excellent men.”²⁹ She called for, among others, the protestant-pietistic theologian, Johan Wilhelm Seidler, the jurist Eustachius von Görtz zu Schlitz and the philosopher Christoph Martin Wieland.³⁰

Interestingly, Claudia de’ Medici appears to have worried a lot less about the education of her son than some of her above-mentioned “colleagues”. The education of Ferdinand Karl rested, as Leopold 5th had determined in his will, with the Jesuits who traditionally were prepared for this task and who in the beginning of the 17th century had risen to become the closest ecclesiastical advisers to the Habsburg princes.³¹ Yet in spite of this apparent

²⁵Meise, „Herrschaftsalltag,” 124-126

²⁶Cited after Meise, „Herrschaftsalltag“, 126

²⁷Meise, „Herrschaftsalltag“, 126

²⁸Wunder, „Er ist die Sonn“, 212

²⁹Ebersbach, *Carl August*, 46

³⁰Ebersbach, *Carl August*, 47 ff.

³¹Bernhard Duhr, *Geschichte der Jesuiten in den Ländern deutscher Zunge im XVII. Jahrhundert, 2. Teil*, Geschichte der Jesuiten in den Ländern deutscher Zunge, 2, Freiburg 1913, 237

reticence of Claudia de' Medici the issue of education³² does allow for insight into the constellation of people at the court in Innsbruck, and above all an insight into the interests of emperor Ferdinand 2nd and Ferdinand 3rd. As guardians, but first and foremost as ruler of the Habsburg lands, the emperors were deeply involved in the education of Ferdinand Karl.³³ In the early 1630s the correspondence between Vienna and Innsbruck mostly deals with questions concerning the education of the prince and the establishment of his household. A letter of instruction of July 19, 1633, to the court secretary of the late Leopold 5th, Anton Girardi von Castel, emperor Ferdinand 2nd submits his wishes concerning the education of the then five-year old Ferdinand Karl.³⁴ The youngster was allowed to remain in the women's apartments a few more years and so the establishment of a household could wait a bit.³⁵ The emperor enclosed a brief sketch of his own education and course of study as a model and as an expression of his own position.

As Ferdinand Karl gets older the political aspects become increasingly important. The assumption of government by the archduke in 1646 turned out to be a phase of special importance as it became apparent that he did not fully support imperial interests. In 1650 the councilor and chancellor Isaak Vollmar was appointed Lord chamberlain.³⁶ He assumed an important position between Ferdinand Karl and the emperor Ferdinand 3rd. In the Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv in Vienna one finds an instruction for Isaak Vollmar revealing interesting information about the imperial political interests in the Upper Austrian lands and about the discrepancies between these and the ideas of Ferdinand Karl's concerning government. The instructions, „Puncta. So mit Hl. Volmär angehenden Erzherzoglichen Hofkanzler, vor seiner

³²On the education at the courts see Werner Paravicini, Jörg Wettlaufer, eds., *Erziehung und Bildung bei Hofe*, Residenzenforschung, 13, Stuttgart 2002, and Johannes Arndt, „Möglichkeiten und Grenzen weiblicher Selbstbehauptung gegenüber männlicher Dominanz im Reichsgrafenstand des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts,“ *Vierteljahresschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 77, 1990, 153-174, esp. 159f.

³³On Ferdinand Karl see Felizitas Salfinger, *Das Tiroler Landesfürstentum in der ersten Hälfte der Regierungszeit Erzherzog Ferdinand Karls (1646-1654)*, phil. Diss., Innsbruck 1953

³⁴HHStA Wien, Familienarchiv, A. Familienakten, II, 6. Erziehung, Kart. 53, 84r-88v; see also Max Grossrubatscher, *Hofkanzler Anton Girardi von Castello (1602-1660). Ein Gegenspieler Kanzler Bienners*, phil. Diss., Innsbruck 1975, 71-76; a brief biography of Anton Girardi von Castells is also found in Albert Erlacher, *Beamten-schematismus der drei oberösterreichischen Wesen in den Jahren 1632-1646*, phil. Diss., Innsbruck 1973, 40-42

³⁵The education in the women's rooms until the age of seven and then by the Jesuits was typical of the princely courts of the 17th century. When the period in the women's room, where the young prince had been taught reading, writing and arithmetic, ended, he would have his own household, see Antje Stannek, „Exempla & Imitatio. Medien und Methoden höfischer Standeserziehung im 17. Jahrhundert,“ Werner Paravicini, Jörg Wettlaufer, eds., *Erziehung und Bildung bei Hofe*, Residenzenforschung, 13, Stuttgart 2002, 107-123

³⁶Siegfried Seeber, *Beamten-schematismus der drei oberösterreichischen Wesen in den Jahren 1646-1665*, phil. Diss., Innsbruck 1977, 27 f.

abreis, in Ihrer Kayl: MayL. Namen, alhir zu conferiren und abzureden seindt“³⁷ are dated October 24th, 1650, shortly before Ferdinand Karl acceded to the throne. It deals with various problems, which to Ferdinand 3rd were the cause of the growing alienation between Vienna and Innsbruck, first and foremost, deviations from imperial policies by the then 22-year old archduke. This alienation apparently resulted from Karl Ferdinand having complained about some of the emperor’s decisions and utterings and about the emperor not showing ‘special affection’ toward the Upper Austrian line of the Habsburg dynasty. The instruction to Vollmar was then to have Ferdinand Karl show his special affection toward the imperial line, which meant having him swear an oath to follow imperial policies. Ferdinand 3rd further enumerates five points of difference between Innsbruck and Vienna, primarily concerning issues of foreign policy³⁸ and the controversies with the prince-bishops of Brixen.³⁹ Ferdinand 3rd also lists some other issues, which he considers the cause of Ferdinand Karl’s alienation and presents his point of view. Ferdinand Karl should have reproached him for not having demonstrated any eagerness in connection with the loss of Elsass and the Breisach fortress at the Peace of Westphalia nor for the recuperation of the four *Waldstädte*.⁴⁰ Also mentioned is the lack of imperial support – according to Ferdinand Karl’s optics – to the aspirations of Sigismund Franz for a clerical office⁴¹ and the disagreement on the division of the inheritance of Claudia de’ Medici and Maria Leopoldine.⁴² Finally Ferdinand 3rd urged Vollmar to keep him informed about all the negotiations and correspondences of the heir apparent that concerned the entire Habsburg House and its foreign policy.

The reason for the interests of Ferdinand 3rd is obvious. In periods of unrest and warfare it was of utmost important to secure the Western hereditary lands and the loyalty of its prince. The importance of Tyrol had been discussed repeatedly. Maximilian 1st and Charles 5th had stressed the importance of Tyrol as the bridge, as the heart in the Roman Empire and as a citadel for all the Austrian countries and according the Charles 5th the German hereditary lands

³⁷HHStA Wien, Familienarchiv, A. Familienakten, II, 8. Testamente und Verlassenschaften, Kart. 76, 61r-69v.

³⁸Salfinger, *Tiroler Landesfürstentum*, 63-67

³⁹Ignaz Egger, *Die Stellung des Fürstentums Brixen zum Tiroler Landtag in der Zeit von 1620-65*, phil. Diss., Innsbruck, 1971

⁴⁰HHStA Wien, Familienarchiv, A. Familienakten, II, 8, Kart. 76, 62v.

⁴¹Hans Sonnweber, *Erzherzog Sigmund Franz von Tirol*, phil. Diss., Innsbruck 1949

⁴²The empress, Maria Leopoldine, second wife of Ferdinand 3rd and sister of Ferdinand Karl, had died in 1649. Ferdinand 3rd had apparently attempted, according to the source, to get the share of the inheritance of Maria Leopoldine, that belonged to Claudia de’ Medici (HHStA Wien, Familienarchiv, A. Familienakten, II, 8, Kart. 76, 61v, 62v, 68r.)

could not be secured if “Tyrol was lost.”⁴³ The Thirty Years’ War and an acute threat from French troops were reasons enough for Ferdinand 2nd and later Ferdinand 3rd to take care that the Western parts of the hereditary lands produced a loyal prince whose politics were in line with theirs.

Opportunities for actively shaping political development

The opportunities of a female ruler for shaping politics can be detected in the actual day-to-day politics, in the involvement in important councils and committees and in the activities in the sphere of foreign policy, especially important during the Thirty Years’ War. Examples of this is the Electress Maria Anna of Bavaria who as guardian for her son signed a so-called resolution of the realm, *Reichsabschied*, in 1654,⁴⁴ or the landgravines who interfered in confessional controversies, as did landgravine Elisabeth Dorothea of Hessen-Darmstadt during the seventeenth-century debate on reconciliation, and who was cited by princes and Electors.⁴⁵ Another was the reformed landgravine Elisabeth von Hessen-Kassel, leading among the protestant representatives who opposed the Catholic-oriented politics of emperor Ferdinand 3rd.⁴⁶ The main task of all princely widows was, however, to secure and fortify their territory, often against threats and a strong co-guardian could definitely be an asset.

The attention of Claudia de’ Medici was less directed towards foreign policy or confessional issues reaching beyond the territory than towards securing the Upper Austrian lands in the Western, first and foremost the Swabian territory, as well as strengthening the economy. The assumption of power took place in proper order and without problems. The guidelines for organizing government came from the will of Leopold 5th. The special council, *Geheime Rat*, to which five advisors who had served under Leopold 5th were appointed, retained its important role. Claudia de’ Medici had to be informed before the council decided on resolutions.⁴⁷

⁴³The cited statements were used by the Tirolean estates in the early 18th century in and arguing with the Emperor in Vienna. Printed in *Information In Dennen Tyrollischen Landschafft Sachen*“ by Philipp Bärtl in 1706 and copied 1733/34 (TLA Innsbruck, Landtagsakten, landesfürstliche, Fasz. 20, 2)

⁴⁴Johann Heinrich Zedler, *Großes vollständiges Universal-Lexikon*, Bd. 50, 2nd repr., Graz 1998, 954-966: “Vormundschaft (fürstliche)”, 955

⁴⁵Harm Klueping, ed., *Irenik und Antikonfessionalismus im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert*, Hildesheimer Forschungen, 2, Hildesheim/Zürich/New York 2003, 112

⁴⁶Anton Schindling, *Die Anfänge des Immerwährenden Reichstags zu Regensburg. Ständevertretung und Staatskunst nach dem Westfälischen Frieden*, Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte Mainz. Abteilung Universalgeschichte, 143, Mainz 1991, 30

⁴⁷Erlacher, *Beamtschematismus*, 43

The primary advisors turned out to be Wilhelm Bienner, Anton Girardi von Castell, Isaak Vollmar and the Jesuit confessors Pater Malaspina and after his death in 1647 Eustach Pagano.⁴⁸ The two imperial commissaries, Johann Kaspar von Stadion and Ernst Fugger, may have played an even more important role during the early part of her reign, involved as they were in the land parliamentary debates. The constellation of these people did, however, contain a potential conflict because of their diverse interests. Isaak Vollmar turned out to be pro-imperial and oriented towards the policies of the entire empire, which became apparent early during his tenure in the Upper Austrian countries.⁴⁹ He also represented the Upper Austrian and imperial interests at the Diet and during peace negotiation.⁵⁰

Wilhelm Bienner, on the other hand, favored a policy more independent of Vienna and thus came into conflict with Isaak Vollmar.⁵¹ The interest of Anton Girardi von Kastell was probably oriented toward those of Vienna. In 1632/33 he was envoy in Vienna in order to clarify questions concerning the transfer of power in Tyrol, the education of the heir apparent and the defense of the country.⁵²

Unfortunately there are only a few first-hand information on the ideas of Claudia de' Medici on governing. Neither handbooks on government, formulated by her, nor advice and hints to the heir apparent have survived, which might have revealed her ideas of which spiritual and political concepts were to be handed down to the next generation. We may discern from the decisions and actions of the archduchess, that Claudia de' Medici felt obligated to defend early absolutist ideas. In accordance with these, she liked to present herself as the mother of the land, *Landesmutter*, with a loyal and solicitous affection for Tyrol.⁵³ This image should, however, not hide the fact that she could be rather harsh towards the estates, forcing upon them against their will decisions concerning military actions and political alliances in order to cover the high military expenses.⁵⁴ She followed the line of Vienna and the head of the Habsburg dynasty, especially when the interests of Vienna and Upper Austria overlapped, primarily in military

⁴⁸Duhr, *Geschichte der Jesuiten*, 238-242

⁴⁹Brugger, *Regierungszeit* (note 4), 125

⁵⁰Brugger, *Regierungszeit*, 123; Weiss, Claudia, 147 f.

⁵¹Brugger, *Regierungszeit*, 125; Erlacher, *Beamten-schematismus*, 204; Josef Hirn, *Kanzler Bienner und sein Prozeß*, Innsbruck 1898, 228

⁵²HHStA Wien, Familienarchiv, A. Familienakten, II, Kart. 53

⁵³Martin P. Schennach, *Tiroler Landesverteidigung. 1600-1650. Landmiliz und Söldnertum*, Schlern-Schriften, 323, Innsbruck 2003, 85 f.

⁵⁴Claudia de' Medici did try to keep Tyrol free from imperial troops and from participating in the occupation of Veltlin, but failed. Se Schennach, *Landesverteidigung*, 34; Brugger, *Regierungszeit*, 27-29.

matters. The defense of the western border of the Habsburg countries was in the interest of Claudia de' Medici as well as of the emperors Ferdinand 2nd and 3rd.

From the beginning of her reign, it was apparent that the decisions and instructions of Ferdinand 2nd first and foremost were aimed at securing effectively the defense of the country, so important to all the Habsburg lands. When Anton Girardi in 1632 was sent to Vienna to regulate the transfer of power, he was confronted with critical remarks to the effect that Claudia de' Medici ought to worry less about the legal position of her sons and more about the security of the country in order that Tyrol did not suffer like Alsace which was occupied.⁵⁵

These utterances reveal a political situation that was perceived to be highly explosive. So, the main tasks of the reign of Claudia de' Medici were those of organizing the defense of the country and the Tyrolean army even though Tyrol remained spared for invasion. Enemy troops never reached the borders of the countries.⁵⁶

Among the tasks of defending the country was to secure the Southwestern lands, dealing with Graubünden and with the threat from the French troops, who in the beginning of the 1630s were near Geneva and in the area of Mantua and Verona.⁵⁷ Decisions on where to place troops, which military action to participate in and how to supply the country were now part of daily business and the influence on the emperor on this issues and hence on daily politics became very apparent. She had early on asked for and received military advisors from Vienna, including the high ranking *Hofkriegsratspräsident*, Johann Kaspar von Stadion, and she relied for her military decisions mostly on the war council which came to play a considerably more important role than during the reign of Leopold 5th.⁵⁸

The issue of defense of the country show the ambivalent policy of Claudia de' Medici. On the one hand, her most important endeavor was to reduce the strain on the population of troops marching through the countries while upholding the independence of Tyrol. She attempted to keep the country free of imperial troops marching through as that always resulted in high costs and great misery for the population not to mention the debilitating effect upon the economy.⁵⁹ This attempt to appear more self-conscious and emancipated from the emperor had its limitation, yet it was a small victory when the commander of the imperial troops in Tyrol,

⁵⁵Grossrubatscher, *Hofkanzler Anton Girardi von Castello*, 74

⁵⁶Schennach, *Landesverteidigung*, 28

⁵⁷Brugger, *Regierungszeit*, 6

⁵⁸Brugger, *Regierungszeit*, 6; Schennach, *Landesverteidigung*, 28, 30, 33

⁵⁹Martin P. Schennach, *Ritter, Landsknecht, Aufgebot. Quellen zum Tiroler Kriegswesen. 14.-17. Jahrhundert*, *Tiroler Geschichtsquellen*, 49, Innsbruck, 98 f., 335-338

Wolf Rudolf von Ossa, at her urgings was replaced by Johann Barwitz von Fernamont.⁶⁰ On the other hand, Claudia de' Medici was forced to fulfill the obligations of alliances with the emperor, as for example in 1639 when, after the fall of Breisenach, the duchess against the wishes of the estates forced through an alliance with the Emperor and Spain against France.⁶¹

The fact, that her reign was so clearly marked by issues of defense and wars groups Claudia de' Medici with other early modern ruling princesses like the Medici queens of France and Anna of Austria. During the 1630's and 1640s, they were glorified as "femmes fortes" or "femmes heroïques" and in pictures and texts connected to well-known strong women of the past, such as Esther and Bathseba of the Old Testament or to Cleopatra.⁶² A woman who assumed government for her son was the model of a "femme forte." She was a woman, characterized by masculine virtues, such as ability for political and military leadership. The discourse, influenced above all by the "querelles de femmes" saw the strong early modern princesses as proof of the equality of the sexes in politics and in society and with talents for governing and military leadership, in short "as women who partook equally of the human condition".⁶³ A prime example of such a "femme forte" was Anna of Austria, the mother of Louis 14th as were the two Medici-princesses on the French throne, Maria de' Medici and Catharina de' Medici.

Conclusion

A closer look at royal and ducal widows, who for a limited period assumed the reins of government for their sons, makes it possible to evaluate the opportunities of women for participating and acting at court and in government. The women, mentioned in this article, have in common that they possessed the power to govern and exercised it. Having a strong co-guardian to back one up meant additional power and security if threatening situations arose or if one's territory had to be defended. At the court of these widows, a flowering culture developed and the widows exercised power and influence, expressed goals and ideas for governing and had in general as their agenda to rule and to prepare. The objectives for their preparations would be different. In the case of Claudia de' Medici her primary goal was to secure the territories, other

⁶⁰Schennach, Landesverteidigung, 34; Erlacher, *Beamstenschematismus*, 36; Brugger, *Regierungszeit*, 27-29

⁶¹Brugger, *Regierungszeit*, 47 f.; Weiss, Claudia, 45

⁶²Christa Schlumbohm, „Die Glorifizierung der Barockfürstin als ‚Femme Forte‘“, August Buch, ed., *Europäische Hofkultur im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert*, Wolfenbütteler Arbeiten zur Barockkultur, 9, II, Hamburg 1981, 113-122; Mary D. Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi. The Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art*, Princeton, N. J. 1989, esp. 154-178

⁶³Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 171

princesses sought to prepare their sons by communicating basic political and confessional ideas. Their aims were to exert influence on the education and development of the heir apparent and to implant their own ideas about government and power on their sons to assure the survival of these ideas beyond the point when they retired or died.

In the second half of the 19th century, the Tyrolean historian Josef Egger wrote in his history of Tyrol, “Although the power of the prince rested, not with a strong man, but with a woman, it did increase during this period.”⁶⁴ This quote shows clearly the reservations prominent during the 19th century towards female regents on the throne. If one compares this quote with that of Veit Ludwig von Seckendorf and Johan Jacob Moser cited at the beginning of this essay, it becomes obvious that contemporaries of Claudia de’ Medici and her female fellow regents considered it a matter of course that a woman occupied the throne for her son. Women who as widows on the throne were transitory rulers or “queens for a limited period”⁶⁵, and who ruled and who prepared were no rarity.

⁶⁴ „Obwohl die landesfürstliche Gewalt in diesen Tagen nicht in den Händen eines kräftigen Mannes, sondern in denen einer Frau ruhte, so wuchs sie doch“ (Egger, *Geschichte Tirols*, Bd. 2, 383)

⁶⁵Cf. the title of Anka Muhlsteins recent book, *Königinnen auf Zeit. Katharina von Medici. Maria von Medici. Anna von Österreich*, Frankfurt/Main-Leipzig 2003