

THE UNWICKED STEPMOTHER: THE DOWAGER EMPRESS ELEONORA II GONZAGA AS A SWING VOTE AT THE COURT OF VIENNA

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ABSTRACT

The Dowager Empress Eleonora II Gonzaga was credited with great influence over her step-son Emperor Leopold I (r. 1657-1705). For that reason, she was not just courted by Venetian, French and Papal diplomats. Even the minutes of the conferences of Austrian ministers acknowledged her political role and discussed the best way to make use of her potential. However, Eleonora did not consistently favour one of the court factions. The marriage of her daughter to Polish king Michal Korybut in 1670 might have been supposed to turn her into an 'Easterner', willing to appease the French. Indeed, Eleonora was originally regarded as an ally by French ambassador Gremonville, but decisively turned against him in 1671/72. Ten years later, with a French threat to her native Mantua (and her own inheritance prospects in Monferrato), she once again spear-headed a drive by the pro-Spanish 'war hawks' against the 'business-as-usual' appeasers in power at the time.

KEYWORDS: Eleonora II Gonzaga; Vienna court factions; Easterners vs Westerners; appeasers vs anti-appeasers; Mantua and Monferrato.

LA MADRASTRA (NO) MALVADA: LA EMPERATRIZ VIUDA ELEONORA II GONZAGA COMO VOTO DE CALIDAD EN LA CORTE DE VIENA

RESUMEN

A la emperatriz viuda Eleonora II Gonzaga se le atribuía una gran influencia sobre su hijastro el emperador Leopoldo I (r. 1657-1705). Por ello, no solo fue cortejada por diplomáticos venecianos, franceses y papales. Incluso las minutas de las conferencias de los ministros austriacos reconocían su papel político y discutían la mejor manera de aprovechar su potencial. Sin embargo, Eleonora no favoreció sistemáticamente a una de las facciones de la corte. El matrimonio de su hija con el rey polaco Michal Korybut en 1670 podría haberla convertido en una "oriental", dispuesta a apaciguar a los franceses. De hecho, Eleonora fue considerada al principio como una aliada por el embajador francés Gremonville, pero en 1671-72 se volvió decididamente en su contra. Diez años más tarde, ante la amenaza francesa a su Mantua natal (y a sus

propias perspectivas de herencia en Monferrato), volvió a encabezar una campaña de los “halcones de guerra” proespañoles contra los “apaciguadores” de la época.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Eleonora II Gonzaga; facciones cortesanas de Viena; Orientalistas contra occidentalistas; apaciguadores contra no apaciguadores; Mantua y Monferrato.

I. THE PIOUS COLUMBINE OF THE VIENNESE COURT?

Eleonora II (1628-1686), the third wife and widow of Emperor Ferdinand III (1608-1657), was the exact opposite of the proverbial wicked stepmother.¹ She seems to have established a genuinely positive relationship with her stepson Leopold I (1640-1705) who was only six when his own mother died, twelve when his father married Eleonora and fourteen when the death of his elder brother catapulted him into the position of heir apparent. The Dowager Empress certainly conformed to the standards of the “*pietas austriaca*”: she was active in founding or supporting convents – with a particularly soft spot for the Ursulines² – and even started a society of ladies with the forbidding title of “the slaves of virtue”. Even more important, in 1668, after a fire in the Hofburg when a relic miraculously survived, she founded the Order of the Starry Cross, the most exclusive prayer-group of high-born Catholic ladies down to the present day.³ As a Mantuan princess she was at the centre of the dominance Italian culture enjoyed in seventeenth century Vienna. She organized an *Accademia Poetica Italiana* where both her brother-in-law Leopold Wilhelm and her stepson, the Emperor, competed in composing sonnets.⁴

However, this article is not designed to appreciate the cultural impact of her presence and her activities, but her political role. In the beginning, there was some idle speculation that Eleonora might re-marry, but nothing came of it.⁵ For a number of

¹ As far as Eleonora’s birth date is concerned, I am following the arguments of Rotraut Becker, “Eleonora II Gonzaga,” *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* 42 (1993), 428-434.

² Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv Wien (HHStA), Spanien Hofkorrespondenz 6, Konvolut 4, fol. 110, 193 (Eleonora to Pötting 17 March 1665, 6 June 1669).

³ Else Kastner-Michalitschke, *Geschichte und Verfassungen des Sternkreuzordens* (Vienna: Eichinger, 1909), 17-24; Katrin Keller, *Hofdamen. Amtsträgerinnen im Wiener Hofstaat des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Vienna: Böhlau 2005), 173; Matthias Schnettger, “Die Kaiserinnen aus dem Hause Gonzaga: Eleonora die Ältere und Eleonora die Jüngere,” in *Nur die Frau des Kaisers. Kaiserinnen in der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Bettina Braun, Katrin Keller & Matthias Schnettger (Vienna: Böhlau, 2016), 117-140, here: 130-1.

⁴ Adam Wolf, *Fürst Wenzel Lobkowitz. Erster geheimer Rath Kaiser Leopolds I. 1609-1677* (Vienna: Braumüller, 1869), 64; Markus Jeitler, “Eleonore Magdalena Gonzaga von Mantua-Nevers und ihre Spuren in der Baugeschichte Wiens,” in *Fürstliche Witwen in der Frühen Neuzeit – Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte eines Standes*, ed. Ulrike Ilg (Petersberg: Michael Imhof, 2015), 125-140; Marko Deisinger, “Kulturtransfer unter Eleonore II. zum Import italienischer Oratorien an den Wiener Hof,” *Römische Historische Mitteilungen* 65 (2023): 269-312.

⁵ For two of these rumours, concerning Charles II of England and John Casimir of Poland, see Katrin Keller & Alessandro Catalano, eds., *Die Diarien und Tagzettel des Kardinals Ernst Albrecht von Harrach (1598-1667)* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2010), vol. VII, 40 (24 March 1662), 887 (16 Sept. 1667).

years the Dowager Empress was still the only Empress around. In terms of social graces her court did not rival but certainly complemented the Emperor's, especially during the first decade of his reign. When Leopold I finally got married to his Spanish niece in 1666, diplomats still seemed to prefer the salon of the outspoken Dowager Empress to the timid teenager Margarita Teresa.⁶ Eleonora seems to have enjoyed a less harmonious relationship with Leopold's second wife, the famous beauty Claudia Felicitas (1653-1676) from the Tyrolean cadet branch of the Habsburgs whom the English envoy had described in such glowing terms as "extremely witty, of a most delicate sheaf of her body".⁷ Maybe Eleonora was on even worse terms with Claudia's mother Anna, a Medici princess. As his third wife Leopold married Eleonora of Pfalz-Neuburg in 1676. Their affinity made itself felt not just in terms of Christian names. The Dowager Empress soon established a family link by marrying her younger daughter Maria Anna to Eleonore's eldest brother.

The impression that women played a minor part in Imperial politics of that period is misleading. True, none of the seventeenth century consorts were called to lead a regency government, like Anne d'Autriche in France (1643-61), Leopold's sister Mariana in Spain (1665-75) or indeed Claudia of Medici in the Tyrol (1632-46) and Eleonora of Pfalz-Neuburg, Leopold I's third wife, in 1711 during the interval between Joseph I's death and his brother Charles (VI)'s return from Spain. That was happenstance, though, a result of genealogical roulette. Vienna Habsburg rulers simply managed to live long enough until their off-spring had reached maturity. Still, historian John Spielman's verdict that Eleonora "left politics to the men", would have come as a surprise to the men in her family.⁸ If Adam Wolf, the pioneering biographer of Leopold's minister Lobkovic, concluded that she was content to follow her step-son's lead,⁹ a number of contemporaries interpreted that relationship the other way round. She had "beaucoup d'autorité auprès de l'Empereur",¹⁰ or even better: "un ascendant inconceivable sur l'esprit de l'Empereur".¹¹ Or, in the words of one Venetian ambassador, "Certo e che apresso l'Imperatore essercita quando vuole autorità."¹²

⁶ Laura Olivan Santaliestra, "'Giovane d'anni ma vecchie di giudizio'. La emperatriz Margarita en la corte de Viena," in *La dinastía de los Austria. Las relaciones entre la Monarquía Católica y el Imperio*, eds., José Martínez Millán & Rubén González Cuerva (Madrid: Polifemo, 2011), vol. II, 837-908; Rostislav Smíšek, "Quod genus hoc hominum! Margarita Teresa de Austria y su corte española en los ojos de los observadores contemporáneos," *ibidem*, 909-951.

⁷ Alfred F. Pribram & Moriz Landwehr v. Pragenau, eds., *Privatbriefe Kaiser Leopold an den Grafen F.E. Pötting 1662-1673*, vol. II (= *Fontes Rerum Austriacarum* 57, Wien: Gerold, 1904), 229 (Gasconi 12 April 1672).

⁸ John P. Spielman, *Leopold I of Austria* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1977), 83.

⁹ Wolf, *Lobkowitz*, 60.

¹⁰ HHStA, W 824, diary of Esaias Pufendorf 1671-74, fol. 61; the diary with its 1000 closely spaced pages is a fascinating source; on the background of its author and his mission to Vienna see Oswald Redlich, "Das Tagebuch Esaias Pufendorfs, schwedischen Residenten am Kaiserhof von 1671 bis 1674," *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 37 (1917): 541-597.

¹¹ Ferenc Toth, ed., *Journal des campagnes du duc Charles V de Lorraine* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2017), 39.

¹² HHStA, Dispacci di Germania 134, no. 197 (11 Jan. 1670).

The trouble with assessing female clout is not just the possibly misogynist assumptions of Victorian historians. It's a question of sources. Royal mistresses might throw tantrums in public and attract the notice of society reporters *avant la lettre*. As one expert has written about Leopold's contemporary Charles II, the 'Merry Monarch', and his ladies: "At the time it was widely assumed that they had great influence upon policy-making but [...] such a notion was false."¹³ Mothers and sisters probably counted for more, in the long run. Nor did they have to compose memoranda or sit through council meetings.¹⁴ This was a sign of strength rather than weakness. That privilege turns into a drawback for the historian, though, when trying to assess their political relevance. We have to rely on the evidence of third parties, in particular on the reports of diplomats who tried to use Eleonora's receptions as a convenient sounding-board or strove to use her to advance their cause.

Jacques Bretel de Gremonville, the French ambassador, famously – and patronizingly – compared Eleonora to Columbine, a character from the Italian *commedia dell'arte* who provides the buffo part without necessarily understanding the complexities of the plot, "aidant admirablement l'intrigue".¹⁵ Spielman thinks that Leopold "treated her with great affection and forbearance, tolerantly allowing her to indulge her passion for royal matchmaking and family politics to a degree normally permitted only to the head of the family."¹⁶ This is an obvious reference to a remark in one of Leopold's letters, referring to an instance when Eleonora was supposed to have been working at cross-purposes with her stepson, allegedly trying to offer her own daughter as a bride for Carlos II (rather than waiting for Leopold's daughter to grow up). But it is highly likely that the incident was due to an over-eager intermediary, the scheming Cristobal Rojas de Spinola (whom Leopold suggested should be offered an American bishopric to get rid of him).¹⁷

In terms of policies, the Court of Vienna has usually been analysed under the headings of 'Westerners' versus 'Easterners', a Spanish and a French party. Of course, as long as the Spanish inheritance was the great prize the Vienna branch of the family was fighting for it was slightly frivolous to talk about a French party at all.¹⁸ Leopold I at one point quite literally pre-empted the EU-mantra of "ever closer union" when

¹³ Ronald Hutton, *Charles the Second. King of England, Scotland and Ireland* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 451.

¹⁴ The few letters by Eleonora preserved in HHStA, Familienkorrespondenz A 31 only deal with administrative details.

¹⁵ Auguste Mignet, ed., *Négociations relatives à la Succession d'Espagne sous Louis XIV*, vol. II (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1835), 412 (8 Jan. 1668); Lucien Bely, *Les Secrets de Louis XIV. Mystères d'Etat et pouvoir absolu* (Paris: Tallandier, 2013), 334.

¹⁶ Spielman, *Leopold I*, 32.

¹⁷ Pribram & Landwehr, eds., *Privatbriefe*, II, 75 (9 April 1670), 83 (22 May 1670). However, the idea of marrying one of Eleonora's daughters to Carlos II surfaced in both Vienna and Madrid in the years to come: HHStA, Pufendorf diary, fol. 132 (21 Oct. 1671); Rocío Martínez López, "«Con la esperanza de un sucesor» El uso político de la fertilidad en las negociaciones matrimoniales de los Habsburgo durante la segunda mitad del siglo XVII," *Hipogrijo* 9.1 (2021): 797-822, here: 817-818.

¹⁸ Indeed, the French liked to talk about a "German party" instead. See Jean Berenger, *Leopold Ier (1640-1705). Fondateur de la puissance autrichienne* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2004), 153-160.

talking about the relations of the two branches of the Casa d'Austria.¹⁹ But if there were no parties in the modern sense of the word, one could certainly differentiate between 'hawks' and 'doves', proponents of 'appeasement' of Louis XIV or 'anti-appeasers', between people who unquestionably followed the dictates of Habsburg family solidarity and the lead of the Spanish ambassador versus those who resented 'big brother's' interference and opted for a more flexible approach, not excluding occasional ententes with France.

Eleonora II does not easily fit into that pattern. Contrary to her nick-name in the Accademia, the 'Immutable',²⁰ she might be said to have been a swing voter. A swing voter moreover, who enjoyed a certain kind of immunity. Contrary to the aristocrats who were vying for the position of *valido* or 'primo ministro', the Dowager Empress faced little risk of disgrace or allegations of treasonable behaviour. Eleonora II engaged in politics to further the careers of her family. She herself once explained that as a mother her priority was to work for the advantage of her daughters.²¹ (Her only son Ferdinand Joseph had died as an infant in 1658.) Let us take that assumption as a starting point to try and explain when and why Eleonora II tended to side with one or the other 'faction' at the Court of Vienna.

The political genes of Eleonora's Gonzaga-Nevers family were not exactly pro-Spanish. To block their inheritance, Spain had unleashed a war that resulted in the sack of Mantua in 1630. The Gonzaga princes who had joined their relative Eleonora I (Ferdinand II's wife) in Vienna were well-known for their reserved attitude towards the Spanish party. They were generally close to Ferdinand III's younger brother Leopold Wilhelm, whose own relations with Spain went through a series of ups and downs. In 1647, he was appointed governor general of the Low Countries. He thus served as a linchpin who held the two lines of the dynasty together but clearly resented the 'back-seat driving' of his Spanish advisors or minders. The way he was shoved aside in the mid-1650's, as soon as the fortunes of war took a turn for the worse, may well have left a bitter taste in his mouth. In 1657, there were even wild rumours that Eleonora might go on to marry Leopold Wilhelm, if he – rather than his nephew – were to stand for election as Holy Roman Emperor.²²

Relations between the two main branches of the house of Austria entered a rather paradoxical period of mutual misunderstandings after the death of Philipp IV in 1665. Leopold's sister Mariana was now Queen Regent of Spain. But the leading

¹⁹ HHStA, Spanien Hofkorrespondenz 6, Konvolut 4, fol. 34 (25 Jan. 1663): "la union sempre piu ristrette".

²⁰ Harms Kaufman, "Raimondo Graf Montecuccoli 1609-1680" (PhD thesis, Freie Universität Berlin, 1971), 20f; Schnettger, *Kaiserinnen*, 137.

²¹ Elisabeth Schoder, "Reichsitalien zwischen den Großmächten. Die Zwistigkeiten um das Herzogtum Monferrato in der zweiten Hälfte des 17. Jahrhunderts" (PhD thesis, Universität Wien, 1994), 252 (17 Aug. 1680).

²² Alfred F. Pribram, ed., *Venetianische Berichte vom Kaiserhofe 1657-1661* (Vienna: Gerold 1901), 14 (21 April 1657); Renate Schreiber, "ein galerie nach meinem humor": *Erzherzog Leopold Wilhelm* (Vienna: Kunsthistorisches Museum, 2004); René Vermeir, "Un austriaco en Flandes: El archiduque Leopoldo Guillermo, gobernador general de los Países Bajos meridionales (1647-1656)," in Martínez Millán & González Cuerva, eds., *La Dinastía de los Austrias*, 583-608; Lothar Höbelt, *Ferdinand III. Friedenskaiser wider Willen* (Graz: Ares, 2008), 121-2, 261-3, 394-5, 398.

statesmen in Vienna and Madrid did not see eye to eye. Part of the problem was that it was far from clear who were the leading statesmen. Mariana's confidant Father Nithart, a former university professor from Graz, never really became a *valido* but showed an uncanny aptitude to alienate Spaniards of whatever faction. To escape his political isolation, he tried to mend fences with Gaspar de Penaranda, the Elder Statesman with the most consistent 'anti-Austrian' record. To make matters even worse, Nithart also tended to undermine the position of Count Franz Eusebius Pötting, the Imperial ambassador to Madrid from 1662 to 1673.²³

In Vienna, there was a tug-of-war between Princes Johann Weikhard Auersperg and Vaclav Lobkovic, with the middle-class up-start Johann Paul Hoher increasingly handling routine business. Dutch and Spanish diplomats voiced the same complaints about the way business was conducted at the Viennese Court. There were 'negative turf wars' with everyone trying to shift responsibility and blame onto his colleagues.²⁴ Emperor Leopold I once quipped: "I am neutral between my ministers."²⁵ He sometimes almost created the impression of encouraging a shadow government to prepare alternatives. Penaranda is supposed to have granted that Leopold may have been a good musician and an honest cavalier, but no ruler. Maybe the Emperor was more manipulative than he was given credit for, but this quality did little to reassure his potential allies. He argued that, separated as he was from his sister by a (somewhat exaggerated) distance of 400 or 600 (German) miles, any advice he tendered would be out of date by the time it reached Madrid. Thus, once again, he generally preferred to stay neutral.²⁶ To paraphrase the famous question attributed to Henry Kissinger: If you wanted to talk to the Austrians, who(m) do you call?²⁷

Eleonora had never met her step-daughter Mariana who had left Vienna two years before her marriage to Ferdinand III. Apparently, in the beginning at least, she did not favour Leopold's marriage to his Spanish niece. In 1659, she was certainly sceptical about the way Spain negotiated about the fate of Casale behind the back of her brother, duke Carlo II of Mantua.²⁸ There was tension between the Gonzagas and Medina de las Torres, one of the leading Spanish statesmen, who was a rival for the small Italian duchy of Sabbionetta. Medina in turn was supposed to have a soft spot

²³ HHStA, Pufendorf diary, fol. 149, 232v; María del Carmen Sáenz Berceo, "Juan Everardo Nithard, un valido extranjero," in *Los Validos*, ed. José Antonio Escudero (Madrid: Dykinson 2005), 323-352; Sylvia Z. Mitchell, *Queen, Mother and Stateswoman: Mariana of Austria and the Government of Spain* (Philadelphia: Penn State University Press, 2019), 71, 81, 86, 244; Alfred F. Pribram, *Franz Paul Freiherr von Lisola (1613-1674) und die Politik seiner Zeit* (Leipzig: Veit, 1894), 264, 281, 289, 292; Rafael Valladares, *La rebelión de Portugal 1640-1680. Guerra, conflicto y poderes en la Monarquía hispánica* (Valladolid: Junta de Castilla y León, 1998), 195f.

²⁴ HHStA, Pufendorf diary, fol. 110v ("daß immer einer dem anderen die sache auf den hals schieben wollt"), 126 (19 Oct. 1671).

²⁵ Pribram & Landwehr, eds., *Privatbriefe I*, 390 (20 June 1668).

²⁶ Ibidem, II, 97 (1 August 1670), 124 (19 Nov. 1670), 160 (6 May 1671). A German mile equalled more than seven kilometres.

²⁷ Gideon Rachman, "Kissinger never wanted to dial Europe," *The Financial Times*, 22 July 2009.

²⁸ Pribram, ed., *Venetianische Berichte*, 247 (14 June 1659), 298 (26 Sept. 1659); Luis Tercero Casado, "Infelix Austria: relaciones entre Madrid y Viena desde la Paz de Westfalia hasta la Paz de los Pirineos (1648-1659)" (PhD thesis, Universität Wien, 2017), 296.

for Juan Jose, Philip IV's illegitimate son by la Calderona. Court gossip even hinted that Medina might be Juan Jose's real father. Whatever the biological truth behind these rumours, they can hardly have endeared him to Eleonora who was even more outspoken in her condemnation of Juan Jose's manoeuvres than the rest of the Habsburgs. In turn, Pötting reported that Medina urged the removal of Eleonora from the Court as a pre-condition for the Infanta Margarita Teresa's marriage to Leopold.²⁹

When after Nithart's fall and exile in the spring of 1669, Louis XIV – tongue-in-cheek – offered Mariana his support against all possible schemes by Juan Jose, Eleonora openly stated the Queen should have accepted his offer. When a Spaniard objected that in that case she would have been locked away in a nunnery, Eleonora was unfazed: At least she would have saved her reputation.³⁰ This outburst fits in well with the allegations of Gremonville who counted the Dowager Empress as his ally during those years. Ambassadors had a certain incentive to be vainglorious about their good contacts. At one point, he claimed to have tempted Eleonora with diamonds (which she did not accept) and with the possibility of marrying her younger daughter to Louis XIV's younger brother (whose English wife Henriette had just died).³¹

In December 1669, the Court of Vienna was rattled by the news of Prince Auersperg's sudden fall from grace. Auersperg – like Peñaranda in Spain – had been respected for his knowledge and expertise, never loved. Auersperg had been the minister who let himself be persuaded to negotiate the Partition Treaty with France in January, 1668.³² Of course, it was all supposed to be top secret. There being no Nobel peace prize yet, the carrot dangled before the widowed Auersperg had been his elevation to the status of a cardinal. But Louis XIV proved unable to deliver. The Pope, Clement IX Rospigliosi, refused to be stampeded into extra promotions. The very secrecy surrounding the partition treaty militated against advancing Auersperg's claims too openly. By 1669, Louis XIV and Lionne had certainly put Auersperg's candidacy on a back-burner.³³

As a result, Auersperg got increasingly nervous and “confused”.³⁴ In the end, he succeeded in sitting himself between two stools. However, Eleonora accused him

²⁹ Ibidem I, 118 (Pötting's report 26 Feb. 1665); Giuseppe Coniglio, *I Gonzaga* (Milano: dall'Oglio 1967), 498; Alistair Malcolm, *Royal Favouritism and the Governing Elite of the Spanish Monarchy, 1640-1665* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 223, 234-6, 243; R. A. Stradling, “A Spanish Statesman if Appeasement: Medina de las Torres and Spanish Policy,” *The Historical Journal* 19 (1976), 1-31; here: 4-6, 17, 25; Rafael Valladares, “Haro sin Mazarino. España y el fin del ‘orden de los Pirineos,’” *Pedralbes* 29 (2009): 339-393, here: 374.

³⁰ Mignet, ed., *Negotiations III*, 432 (11 April 1669).

³¹ Ibidem, 500f (11 Jan. 1671).

³² Jean Berenger, “An Attempted Rapprochement between France and the Emperor: The Secret Treaty for the Partition of the Spanish Succession of 19 January 1668,” in *Louis XIV and Europe*, ed. Ragnhild Hatton (London: Macmillan, 1976), 133-152. The gist of the treaty did not remain secret for very long. It was regarded as a “stab in the back” by Spain. But there were extenuating circumstances. Leopold hoped to dampen French appetites in the short run, at least.

³³ Grete Mecenseffy, “Im Dienste dreier Herren. Leben und Wirken des Fürsten Johann Weikhard Auersperg (1615-1677),” *Archiv für Österreichische Geschichte* 114 (1938), 297-508; here: 467-485; Wolf, *Lobkowitz*, 196-201.

³⁴ Helga Kirchberger, “Briefe Kaiser Leopolds I. an Pater Emmerich Sinelli 1668-1675” (PhD thesis, Universität Wien, 1953), 12 (19 August 1669).

of creating nothing but troubles ("imbroglio").³⁵ Indirectly, maybe, her efforts to facilitate a reconciliation between the Emperor and the Pope, may have contributed to Auersperg's fall (they certainly irritated the Spanish Ambassador).³⁶ But Leopold did not point to any 'smoking gun' revealing Auersperg's sins but hinted at a kind of cumulative irritation with Auersperg's "enredos y embustes". (He added such dismissals had to be done rapidly and unexpectedly).³⁷ Auersperg himself certainly blamed the Spanish for his misfortune. Significantly, his first reaction was to appeal to Eleonora for protection. But this time the Dowager Empress was far from her usual outspoken self. She only opened the letter in the Emperor's presence – and left it unanswered.³⁸

Gremonville immediately asked for an audience with Eleonora to find out about the Court revolution. She turned the tables on him by asking for his views, adding that she had no certain knowledge herself. Leopold had told her not to worry "avec cette priere de ne s'en meler pas."³⁹ The crisis raised speculation over Lobkovic's rise to premier minister. Once again, the Venetian Ambassador praised Eleonora's prudence: He duly noted that she took pains to evade any commitment and to distance herself from such a difficult challenge: "d'astenersi da scabrosi cimente come potrebbe riuscir al presente non solo poco grato anzi di fastidio al Imperatore."⁴⁰

II. THE POLISH SON-IN-LAW

Let's return to the *Tu felix Austria, nube*-cliche. Eleonora had a soft spot for the exiled heir to the Duchy of Lorraine, the future Charles V. French pamphleteers would later on even try and insinuate a love affair between the Dowager Empress and Charles who was thirteen years her junior.⁴¹ That made him an ideal partner for Eleonora's elder daughter, also called Eleonora, one of the bitter-sweet love stories of the baroque – but with a happy ending. In 1668-69 Charles was angling for the Crown of Poland. Eleonora told her stepson in no uncertain terms: "Io confesso che vorrei ch'il principe di Lorena fosse rei per dargli mia filia perche questa e la vera politica di questa casa e nessuno puo dire il contrario solo quelli che sono guadagnati dalla Francia".⁴² Leopold

³⁵ Lobkovic Archives Nelahozeves, B 6, fol. 1217 (no date); *ibid.* fol. 1277 (3 May 1669), 1295 (22 Nov. 1669) for further disparaging remarks.

³⁶ HHStA, Dispacci di Germania 134, no. 149 (28 Sept. 1669); no. 165 (2 Nov. 1669); no. 168 (9 Nov. 1669); Oswald Redlich, *Weltmacht des Barock. Österreich in der Zeit Leopolds I.* (Vienna: Rohrer, 4th ed. 1961), 98.

³⁷ Pribram & Landwehr, eds., *Privatbriefe II*, 56 (14 Dec. 1669), 62 (30 Jan. 1670); Mecenseffy, "Im Dienste dreier Herren," 493-497; Souches also pointed to "orgueil", not "trahison", as Auersperg's capital sin (HHStA, Pufendorf diary, fol. 150v, 10 Nov. 1671).

³⁸ HHStA, Dispacci di Germania 134, no. 189 (21 Dec. 1669); Silvia Mitchell, "Cartas domésticas, cartas familiares. The Familial Networks of Queen Mariana of Austria (1665-1696)," in *De Puño y letra. Cartas personales en las redes dinásticas de la Casa de Austria*, eds. Bernardo J. García García, Katrin Keller & Andrea Sommer-Mathis (Madrid: Iberoamericana/Vervuert, 2019), 247-272, here: 254.

³⁹ Mignet, ed., *Negotiations III*, 453 (no precise date given!).

⁴⁰ HHStA, Dispacci di Germania 134, no. 197 (11 Jan. 1670).

⁴¹ Paul Wentzcke, *Feldherr des Kaisers. Leben und Taten Herzog Karls V. von Lothringen* (Leipzig: Koehler & Amelang 1943), 31, 56, 65.

⁴² Lobkovic Archives Nelahozeves, B 6, fol. 1232 (Eleonora to Leopold, no date).

supported his candidacy without any great enthusiasm. France and Brandenburg favoured the Duke of Pfalz-Neuburg (as did Lobkovic).⁴³ Gremonville spread the rumour that he had offered French support for Charles – in return for unspecified concessions and promises. Eleonora apparently recoiled from any such temptation. She complained that Gremonville was trying to lead her into a labyrinth.⁴⁴ The story has to be taken with more than the usual pinch of salt, because Gremonville told it at a time when their relationship had clearly soured.

Charles of Lorraine's election campaign turned out to be unsuccessful. The Poles voted for a native, 'Piaśt' candidate, Michał Korybut Wiśniowiecki. Leopold I was pleased. He immediately noted how useful it was that the king was unmarried.⁴⁵ Eleonora was undaunted, too. She continued to pursue her plans to turn her daughter into the Queen of Poland. The impecunious Michał desperately needed a bride – because of her dowry. The French may have tempted him with higher sums but he still opted for an alliance with his next door neighbour.⁴⁶ While Eleonora was celebrating her birthday on 18 November 1669, news arrived that a Polish ambassador was on his way to ask for the hand of her daughter.⁴⁷ The Dowager Empress – accompanied by no less a guardian than the President of the Aulic War Council, her former mayordomo Raimondo Montecuccoli – insisted on joining her daughter on the trip to Poland.⁴⁸ In February 1670 her daughter Eleonora and Michael were married in Czenstochowa.

The link to Poland had an ambivalent effect on Eleonora's outlook. On the one hand, it turned her into an ally of the 'Easterners', the ministers whose priority was to confront the dangers and opportunities facing Austria in the East. It also appealed to the 'pietas Austriaca': Fighting the infidels in the East rather than courting the anti-French heretics in the West, was a project that enjoyed the support of the Papacy. Moreover, the fall of Candia (5 Sept. 1669) had freed the Ottomans' hands – and resources – for adventures elsewhere. When news of the Venetian surrender reached Leopold – once again at one of Eleonora's parties – he lamented that it was fatal for Christendom. "Now it's us who will receive the blows."⁴⁹ Routine border incidents

⁴³ Miguel Conde Pazos, "Elección de Miguel I como Rey de Polonia a través del embajador español en Viena, el Conde del Castellar (1669)," in *De la tierra al cielo. Líneas recientes de investigación en Historia Moderna*, ed. Eliseo Serrano Martín (Zaragoza: Institución Fernando el Católico, 2013), 543-558.

⁴⁴ HHStA, Pufendorf diary, fol. 151, 161 (28 Nov. 1671).

⁴⁵ Příbram & Landwehr, eds., *Privatbriefe* II 34 (3 July 1669).

⁴⁶ HHStA, Dispacci di Germania 134, no. 175, 23 Nov. 1669: Michał opted for the "speranze del bene che si può ricevere da un principe vicino che l'apprensione del male da un lontano".

⁴⁷ Ibidem, no. 175 (23 Nov. 1669); HHStA, Spaniel Hofkorrespondenz 6, Konvolut 4, fol. 197, 211v (Eleonora to Pötting 4 July & 29 Nov. 1669).

⁴⁸ HHStA, Dispacci di Germania 134, no. 191 (28 Dec. 1669); Max Dvořák, ed., "Briefe Kaiser Leopolds I. an Wenzel Eusenius Lobkowitz 1657-1674," *Archiv für Österreichische Geschichte* 80 (1894): 458-514; here: 490 (31 Jan. 1670).

⁴⁹ HHStA, Dispacci di Germania 134, no. 150 (5 Oct. 1669): "A noi hora toccherano li colpi".

suddenly assumed an ominous character.⁵⁰ Montecuccoli pushed for a rearmament drive at the very time he was accompanying Eleonora to her daughter's wedding.⁵¹

The reverse side of the coin was: Austria could hardly afford a war on two fronts. As Leopold I put it he was confronted by “Turcos veros a fronte, Turcos gallos a tergo”.⁵² Facing East meant pursuing a strategy of appeasement in the West. This might have been in line with Eleonora's earlier easy-going confidences with Gremonville and the French. That was not the way things worked out, though. On the one hand, Lobkovic had gotten himself into the bad books of the Dowager Empress: He was no fan of the Lorraine family, had supported the Neuburgs and opposed the Polish marriage.⁵³ Lobkovic and Gremonville warned each other that they should no longer confide in Eleonora who had earlier played the intermediary between them. Lobkovic now dismissed her as “trop capricieuse et ne s’attachait qu’aux apparences”.⁵⁴ Lobkovic and Gremonville went through an elaborate charade of mock-disputes and reconciliations in 1670/71 but the break with the Dowager Empress proved final.

In the spring of 1671, Gremonville cloaked his set-back in all sorts of conspiracy theories. For him, Eleonora now counted as the “boute-feu” – the one who put the torch to the incendiary (an epitheton formerly reserved for the violently anti-French Habsburg diplomat Lisola).⁵⁵ He claimed that the Spanish had won Eleonora's gratitude by awarding a knighthood of Calatrava to one of her Italian camp-followers, Canossa. At least that is what Lobkovic told Gremonville who added a cloak-and-dagger story of his own. One of Eleonora's chamber-maids, who was a confidant of the Spanish Marquise d'Eril, was supposed to have tried to poison another servant who had acted as an informer for Gremonville. When the plot failed and suspicion fell on the girl, Eleonora supposedly put her out of harm's way by letting her take refuge in a convent, under the pretence that she was pregnant.⁵⁶

Apart from the secrets and rumours surrounding their private tiffs, there were a number of reasons for Eleonora to turn against France. Given her connection to Charles of Lorraine, she must have resented the French occupation of Lorraine in the autumn of 1670. Significantly, it was with conditional offers to return Lorraine that Gremonville tried to tempt her.⁵⁷ Moreover, the ‘French party’ in Poland resented the election of Michael Korybut and formed a far from loyal opposition to her present

⁵⁰ Traitors tried to open the gates of Kallo in the Far East of Hungary (Ibidem, no. 151, 5 Oct. 1669); there was a sudden fire in the main Danube stronghold of Komarom (ibidem, no. 182, 7 Dec. 1669).

⁵¹ Ibidem, no. 171 (16 Nov. 1669); no. 194 (4 Jan. 1670).

⁵² Pribram & Landwehr, eds., *Privatbriefe II*, 61 (30 Jan. 1670).

⁵³ HHStA, Dispacci di Germania 139, no. 45 (4 Dec. 1671); Pufendorf diary, fol. 100v (25 Sept. 1671); Conde Pazos, “Elección de Miguel I,” 551-555.

⁵⁴ Mignet, ed., *Negotiations III*, 508 (19 March 1671).

⁵⁵ Ibidem, 458 (9 Jan. 1670); 518 (21 May 1671).

⁵⁶ Ibidem, 519 (“une sous-femme de chambre, pour empoisonner un de ses valets de garde-robe, qui est mon confident, est en qui ladite impératrice se confie sans reserve, laquelle néanmoins, l’a fait enfermer dans un couvent, aimant mieux laisser croire qu’elle est grosse [...] ladite femme avait grand commerce avec la marquise d’Eril.”); on Eril see Olivan Santaliestra, “Giovane d’anni,” 883-893.

⁵⁷ HHStA, Dispacci di Germania 139, no. 45 (5 Dec. 1671); Pufendorf diary, fol. 161 (28 Nov. 1671).

son-in-law. Things came to a head in the winter of 1671-72. The Ottomans made moves to start a war against Poland. Eleonora made no secret that she expected Leopold to support his Polish brother-in-law to the hilt.⁵⁸ However, Leopold was only willing to do so with all sorts of reservations. After all, it was a lesser evil by far if the Turks, freed from their running feud with Venice after 1669, expended their energies against Poland rather than in Hungary, where an anti-Habsburg conspiracy had just been uncovered and rebels issued open invitations to the Grand Vizir.⁵⁹

At the same time, the lacklustre performance of Michal Korybut persuaded his domestic opponents to do their best to get rid of him. At least part of that opposition was willing to accommodate the interests of Eleonora and her daughter. The Queen, a beauty, and a clever one at that, was regarded as an asset. One pro-Habsburg Lithuanian grandee, Krzysztof Pac, was quoted that if it were not for her, her husband would long since have been deposed.⁶⁰ To square the circle, amidst allegations that Michal had in the meantime become impotent, no less a person than the Primate of Poland, Archbishop Mikolaj Prazmowski, advanced the modest proposal that the marriage should be annulled.⁶¹ The king should be made to follow the example of his predecessor and abdicate. Ideally, Queen Eleonora would then simply go on to marry his successor.⁶² Austrian diplomats like Peter Stom(b), the Imperial resident in Poland, were at least willing to listen to such loose talk. Others archly commented that was the way you might talk to a Frenchwoman, but not to a member of the august House of Austria.⁶³

The Dowager Empress, in particular, did not mince words. In her outburst she was supposed to have declared that rather than consent to such a shameful procedure, she would prefer to see her daughter consigned to perpetual poverty – or that she had never been born. She extorted a promise from Leopold that he would not abandon Michal “coute que coute”.⁶⁴ The Emperor duly told Stom that he was opposed to an abdication (after all, who knows whom the Poles were going to vote for next time round?). Eleonora still suspected Lobkovic of favouring the Primate’s “pestilentissima consilia”.⁶⁵ That’s why Leopold felt that it was necessary to remind Stom that if one or

⁵⁸ HHStA, Pufendorf diary, fol. 194 (11 Jan. 1672); Arthur Levinson, ed., *Nuntiaturreichichte vom Kaiserhofe Leopolds I.*, vol. II (1670-1679) (Vienna: Hölder, 1918), 112 (17 Jan. 1672).

⁵⁹ Miguel Conde Pazos, “Miguel I de Polonia y la reconstrucción de la política de colaboración dinástica de la Casa de Austria (1669-1673),” *Tiempos Modernos* 36 (2018), 331-355, here 348; Georg Michels, *The Habsburg Empire under Siege. Ottoman Expansion and Hungarian Revolt in the Age of Grand Vizier Ahmed Köprülü (1661-76)* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2021).

⁶⁰ HHStA, Pufendorf diary, fol. 292v (26 June 1672); see also Hagenau, *Sobieski*, 367.

⁶¹ In Vienna, it was reported that the Pope would not make any difficulties about a divorce; Kriegsarchiv (KA). Alte Feldakten (AFA) 172 (Montecuccoli notes), 1672/XIII/70 (conference 4 April 1672).

⁶² HHStA, Österreichische Geheime Staatsregistratur (ÖGStR) 53, Fasz. 41/2, no. 7 & 8, fol. 15v, 18, Stom to Leopold, 16 & 23 March 1672; Gerda Hagenau, *Jan Sobieski. Der Retter Wiens* (Vienna: Amalthea, 1983), 308. Sobieski, too, was said to be an “enthusiastic admirer” of Michal’s “wonderfully pretty” queen (ibidem, 283, 293). But, of course, he was already married.

⁶³ HHStA, Pufendorf diary, fol. 218 (17 Feb. 1672).

⁶⁴ Ibidem, fol. 242v (24 March 1672).

⁶⁵ HHStA, Dispacci di Germania 139, no. 63 (23 Jan. 1672), no. 91 (9 April 1672): Lobkovic “voleva in parte moderare questi sentimenti...”.

the other of his ministers was quoted as having said otherwise, such rumours constituted a “pure falsehood”.⁶⁶ Eleonora was to repeat this reassuring piece of news in a letter to her daughter designed to be shown to her husband.⁶⁷

Leopold also ordered his hapless resident to extract the truth about the state of Michal Korybut’s health and marriage.⁶⁸ Stom had indeed hinted that the king did not treat his wife with the respect she deserved.⁶⁹ He now came up with convoluted explanations about the king’s peculiarities, involving the ministrations of a chamber woman, and with pained references to the “diversity of discourse” on the topic.⁷⁰ Politically, Leopold re-affirmed his trust in Michal Korybut. However, in his opinion, Michal had not learnt his “trade” properly yet and should be kept on a shorter leash. His wife should definitely be given a bigger say in politics. In particular, she should try and broker an agreement with the Polish opposition, i.e. people like the obnoxious Primate Archbishop.⁷¹ This attempt at reconciliation proved to be an uphill struggle: the political activities of his consort only aroused the jealousy of the king who apparently did not put it beyond her to agree with the agenda of his opponents, gladly replacing him with her teenage crush Charles of Lorraine.⁷²

Of course, the spring of 1672 was not just the time when the gossips giggled over Michal Korybut’s marital difficulties, it was the time when Louis XIV stopped making any bones about his intention of attacking the Netherlands.⁷³ Spain was swinging round to concluding an alliance with the Dutch, rather than wait for the “beneficium Polyphemi” of being swallowed last.⁷⁴ In Vienna however, the appeasers, led by Lobkovic, still advised caution. They signed a non-aggression pact with Louis XIV on 1 November 1671. Rather than put his neck out, the Emperor should wait and see. His advisors presumably overestimated the resilience of the Dutch: Hoher was certain that the Netherlands could under no circumstances be “ruined”.⁷⁵ After all, the Habsburgs themselves had inconclusively battered against their ring of fortifications for eighty years.

Theoretically, if your agenda was to help the Poles in the East, putting the Western issues on a back-burner might seem a good idea. Would not her Polish ties force Eleonora to throw her weight behind the appeasers? On the contrary. Even if she did not always see eye to eye with the Spanish and their adherents, she was just as

⁶⁶ HHStA, ÖGStR 53, Fasz. 41/2, no. 9, fol. 20, Leopold to Stomm 10 April 1672.

⁶⁷ Ibidem, fol. 96v, conference conclusions 4 April 1672.

⁶⁸ Ibidem, no. 3, fol. 6, Leopold to Stomm 29 Feb. 1672. Three weeks later Leopold again urged that he was awaiting this news with impatience (no. 6, fol. 12v, 21 March 1672).

⁶⁹ Ibidem, no. 1, fol. 3, Stomm to Leopold 18 Feb. 1672.

⁷⁰ Ibidem, no. 7, fol. 13 (16 March 1672); no. 13, fol. 33v (Leopold 25 April), 42 (27 April 1672).

⁷¹ Ibidem, no. 9, fol. 21 (10 April 1672), no. 13, fol. 32 (25 April 1672), no. 61 (17 Nov. 1672).

⁷² Ibidem, no. 81, fol. 399, Stomm to Leopold 30 Nov. 1672.

⁷³ Paul Sonnino, *Louis XIV and the origins of the Dutch War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

⁷⁴ HHStA, Pufendorf diary, fol. 87v (15 Sept. 1671); Mitchell, *Mariana of Austria*, 150.

⁷⁵ Ibidem, fol. 163 (29 Nov. 1671); Lobkovic was quoted with similar views (ibidem, fol. 115v, 13 Oct. 1671); see also Pribram & Landwehr, eds., *Privatbriefe II*, 233 (18 May 1672). However, in his biography of *Lisola*, 547 Pribram discounts the idea that Vienna statesmen were motivated by an overestimation of the Dutch potential for resistance.

much irritated by the cautious indecision of the ‘appeasers’. Throughout the winter of 1671/72 the Dowager Empress was named as the power behind the scenes, pulling the strings behind the Westerners who were eager for a fight and for a firm alliance with Spain, from her mayordomo Albert Zinzendorf to the Margrave Hermann von Baden, an admirer and former collaborator of the Spanish hard-liner Castel Rodrigo.⁷⁶ Leopold certainly encouraged this sort of shadow government to prepare memoranda and present alternatives, with his confidant Pater Imre Sinelli acting as a go-between. As a crowning achievement Eleonora set her sights on roping in Hoher, the anxious up-start eager to swim with the flow.⁷⁷

In turn, Westerners like Baden started thinking about making the best of the Neutrality Agreement and using the interval for fighting a short preventive campaign against the Turks before turning West.⁷⁸ Auxiliaries sent to Poland would simply starve for lack of supplies, Baden argued. That’s why it was much more profitable to use them and start a diversion in Hungary. For such a purpose, help from the princes of the Empire might be far more readily forthcoming than against the Sun King. Thus, the winter of 1672 witnessed a fusion of the hawks who ganged up against Lobkovic’s impenetrable passivity. Maybe, at this juncture there was not necessarily such a big contrast between ‘Easterners’ and ‘Westerners’. After all, as Eleonora pointed out, the one German state that seemed bound to support the Dutch was Brandenburg that was at the same time much better positioned to intervene in Poland than anybody else.⁷⁹

During the winter of 1672 the betting was on whether Spain would dare ratify the alliance with the Dutch her envoy had signed on 17 December 1671. Gremontville indulged in wishful thinking when he offered odds of 10 to 1 against it.⁸⁰ Events proved him wrong. The rumours that Spain had indeed ratified the treaty were confirmed by a letter from Mariana to her brother that arrived in Vienna on 3 March 1672.⁸¹ The Emperor could wait and see what happened to the Dutch. But once Spain was involved, he could no longer evade his responsibilities. Far from acting as a go-between any longer, Eleonora was at the forefront of those who argued for a dismissal of Gremontville.⁸² The precise reason for the personal antagonism that had replaced their former easy-going relationship remains a bit of a mystery. The chevalier and the

⁷⁶ HHStA, Pufendorf diary, fol. 131v, 174v, 207, 227; Christian Beese, *Markgraf Hermann von Baden (1628-1691). General, Diplomat und Minister Kaiser Leopolds I.* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 1991), 91f. In 1667, Baden had supported Castel Rodrigo’s project – vetoed by Mariana – to pawn part of the Spanish Netherlands in return for funds to continue the war against France. Of course, being a “hard-liner” vis-a-vis France, made him an “appeaser”, as far as Portugal was concerned. See Pribram, *Lisola*, 454; K. H. D. Haley, *An English Diplomat in the Low Countries. Sir William Temple and John De Witt, 1665-1672* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), 134-7, Antonio José Rodríguez Hernández, *España, Flandes y la Guerra de Devolución (1667-1668)* (Madrid: Adalid, 2007), 215.

⁷⁷ HHStA, Pufendorf diary, fol. 196v (12 Jan.), 197v (13 Jan.), 206 (26 Jan. 1672).

⁷⁸ Ibidem, fol. 174v (11 Dec. 1671), 192v (8 Jan. 1672); HHStA, Polen I 77, fol. 386v (Montecuccoli’s vote in a conference on 15 Jan. 1672).

⁷⁹ HHStA, Dispacchi di Germania 140, no. 126 (23 July 1672); Pufendorf diary, fol. 256 (10 April 1672). Eleonore also seems to have favoured a Brandenburg candidate for the Polish crown in 1674 (Levinson, ed., *Nuntiatursberichte II*, 167).

⁸⁰ HHStA, Pufendorf diary, fol. 191v (10 Jan. 1672).

⁸¹ HHStA, Dispacchi di Germania 139, no. 80 (5 March 1672).

⁸² HHStA, Pufendorf diary, fol. 231v (4 & 6 March 1672).

princess both confined themselves to mysterious hints.⁸³ But the result was unmistakable.

Fortunately for the Habsburgs, at roughly the same time it became clear that the Ottomans were going to fight Poland rather than exploit the Emperor's difficulties in Hungary.⁸⁴ This turn of events put Eleonora in a dilemma: She loyally swore that she would rather see Poland go to pieces than endanger the prospects of the dynasty by pleading for a war on two fronts. But she did continue to throw her weight behind the Polish special envoy's efforts to persuade the Emperor to support Michal Korybut more vigorously.⁸⁵ With hindsight, at least, it is obvious that in this case she was at cross-purposes with Leopold who was determined to avoid any such entanglements. The Emperor only offered a single regiment to his brother-in-law that was supposed to safeguard Cracow in the worst-case scenario of an Ottoman breakthrough.⁸⁶

Leopold's ministers were very much in two minds about the peace of Buczacz that Poland had been forced to sign with the Ottomans in October, 1672.⁸⁷ They piously claimed that war made it more likely that the nation would rally behind the king.⁸⁸ As usual, Leopold did not want to be blamed for the results one way or the other: Stom was told to refrain from any comments or advice on the crucial question of war and peace. Leopold added: It would certainly be against all reason for him to attract the ire of the Turks right now that Poland was on the point of signing the peace.⁸⁹ Eleonora cannot have been too pleased. There was a brief revival of her interventionist spirits after Michal's death in late 1673. When the news of Jan Sobieski's election reached Vienna in May 1674, Eleonora is supposed to have cried for three hours.⁹⁰ But her pleas for an armed intervention fell on stony ground.⁹¹ By now, her allies among the hawks – including Lorraine – clearly wanted to concentrate on the Western Front.

⁸³ Ibidem, fol. 239 (18 March), 247 (1 April), 264 (3 May 1672). Gremontville offered various explanations: Either Eleonora had taken offence because she interpreted his complaints about her patronage of Canossa as hints about an improper relationship – or she resented him spreading the rumour that she had initially agreed to the plot replacing Michal Korybut. In the end, however, Gremontville even claimed the estrangement had been just a charade to confuse observers.

⁸⁴ Ibidem, fol. 260v (21 & 27 April 1672); Dispacchi di Germania 139, no. 94 (16 April 1672); KA, AFA 172, 1672/XIII/69 (4 April 1672), 83 (13 May 1672).

⁸⁵ HHStA, Dispacchi di Germania 139, no. 90 (2 April 1672); ibidem 140, no. 148 (17 Sept. 1672), 151 (24 Sept. 1672), 185 (7 Jan. 1673); W. G. von Antal & J. C. H. de Pater, eds., *Weensche Gezantschapsberichten van 1670 tot 1720, vol. I: 1670-1697* (s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1929), 48 (17 July 1672).

⁸⁶ HHStA, ÖGStR 53, Fasz. 41/2, no. 51, fol. 199, Leopold to Stomm 23 Oct. 1672.

⁸⁷ HHStA, ÖGStR 53, Fasz. 41/2, fol. 237, conference conclusions 26 Oct. 1672.

⁸⁸ To some extent, they were right: The renewal of the Turkish war was accompanied by an internal truce on 12 March 1673 (Hagenau, *Sobieski*, 331).

⁸⁹ HHStA, ÖGStR 53, Fasz. 41/2, no. 51, fol. 199; no. 54, fol. 223, 228 (23 Oct. 1672).

⁹⁰ HHStA, Pufendorf diary, fol. 500 (17 May 1674).

⁹¹ Miguel Conde Pazos, "La misión diplomática de Don Pedro Ronquillo en Varsovia con motivo de la elección de Juan Sobieski como Rey de Polonia en 1674," *Pedralbes* 38 (2018): 187-227; here: 218.

III. TROUBLE WITH THE MEDICI RELATIVES

During those years, her Polish relations were not Eleonora's only worry. After all, the Dowager Empress was a Mantuan princess. At roughly the same time that Poland and the Dutch were asking for Austrian help, Eleonora instigated a semi-private campaign against her ex-sister-in-law. Her Brother Duke Carlo II had married a Tyrolean Archduchess, Isabella Clara (1629-85), the daughter of a Medici princess who ran the Tyrol after her husband's death. There was little love lost between the Italian relatives. When Eleonora's brother died in August 1665, there were rumours of poison and foul play. The scandal was exacerbated when Isabella Clara was accused of consorting with a low-born lover, allegedly from a family of converted Jews, Carlo Bulgarini.⁹²

The only redeeming feature was that in 1671, Isabella's son Duke Ferdinando Carlo (1652-1708) was married to Anna Isabella, the heiress of the Gonzaga cadet branch of Guastalla that counted as clients of Spain. Thus, when news reached Vienna that the newly-weds had separated, Eleonora finally lost patience with her nephew – and his mother. What Eleonora saw as her trump card – then and later – was the threat to bankrupt the Duchy by withdrawing her dowry.⁹³ She sent Count Gottlieb Windisch-Graetz to Mantua as a trouble-shooter to sort things out. Windisch-Graetz was a rising young diplomat who had just returned from Paris.⁹⁴ If he acted in the Emperor's name, it was still fairly clear who was the moving spirit behind his mission. The Venetian reports spoke of the extraordinary pressure Eleonora applied.⁹⁵ Actually, Windisch-Graetz's official reports were addressed to Eleonora (even if he sent copies to Leopold).⁹⁶

Windisch-Graetz arrived in Mantua in October 1671. He confirmed the reports about the “disordinatissimo vita” of the young Duke. It wasn't just the usual “libidinous” infidelities or the tension between Anna and her mother-in-law that upset his relatives. His Guastalla in-laws insisted that his young wife was in mortal danger as long as Bulgarini continued to be around.⁹⁷ Windisch-Graetz happily cited the example of Louis XIII who had intervened in Savoy and arrested his sister Cristina's lover d'Aglié a generation earlier. He hinted at love trysts of the Dowager Duchess on boat

⁹² Giancarlo Malacarne, *I Gonzaga-Nevers: Morte di una dinastia. Da Carlo I a Ferdinando Carlo (1628-1708)* (Modena: Il Bulino, 2008), 175, 184; Alessandro Bianchi, *Al servizio del principe. Diplomazia e corte nel ducato di Mantova 1665-1708* (Milano: Unicopli, 2012), 64; Coniglio, *I Gonzaga*, 456.

⁹³ HHStA, Dispacci di Germania 139, no. 14 (19 Sept. 1671); on the dowry question see ibidem 155, no. 29 (28 Sept. 1681); Daniela Frigo, “Les deux impératrices de la Maison de Gonzague et la politique italienne de l'empire (1622-1686),” *Dix-Septième Siècle* 243 (2009), 219-237. Apparently only a fifth of her dowry had actually been paid – something that was far from unusual, though.

⁹⁴ Windisch-Graetz at that time was still a Protestant; he only converted in 1683; see HHStA, Pufendorf diary, fol. 95, 183, 186v, 188, 221; Klaus Müller, *Das kaiserliche Gesandtschaftswesen im Jahrhundert nach dem Westfälischen Frieden (1648-1740)* (Bonn: Röhrscheid, 1976), 242.

⁹⁵ HHStA, Dispacci di Germania 139, no. 14 (19 Sept. 1671).

⁹⁶ HHStA, Österreichische Geheime Staatsregistratur (ÖGStR) 59, Faszikel 45/2.

⁹⁷ Ibidem, Windisch-Graetz to Eleonore, 2 Dec. 1671; see also Bianchi, *Al servizio del principe*, 70-74.

tours but unfortunately divulged no juicy details: “There are a thousand particulars that one could not entrust to paper...”⁹⁸

It was not just Isabella’s private life that raised hackles. Even worse, she also committed political infidelities. When faced with the ire of her Viennese relatives, she threatened to flee to her mother’s native Florence and appeal to the Sun King for help.⁹⁹ In the end, by fair means or foul, Isabella Clara was persuaded to enter the convent of Santa Orsola, where Eleonora herself had once received her education. The Dowager Empress even lobbied the Pope to allow Isabella to dispense with the customary probationary period (“noviziato”) to make sure she stayed in her convent.¹⁰⁰ Bulgarini, too, was supposed to be locked up in a monastery. Moreover, Windisch-Graetz managed to ensure that Eleonora’s favourites, the brothers Orazio and Luigi Canossa, took over the running of the Duchy.¹⁰¹ However, Eleonora’s victory proved to be short-lived. Already one year later, there were reports of conspiratorial meetings in Bulgarini’s cell; Isabella openly celebrated her “outings” from S. Orsola. Orazio Canossa died in the spring of 1673; his brother Luigi, as Imperial plenipotentiary, was summarily banished from Mantua.¹⁰²

1673 was a dismal year for Eleonora, for several reasons. During the mid-1670’s her influence at the Court of Vienna probably reached a low point. After the death of his Spanish wife in the spring of 1673, Leopold was persuaded to remarry with almost unseemly haste.¹⁰³ His choice fell on Isabella Clara’s Tyrolean niece that had long been courted by the Duke of York (later James II). The Alpine beauty had been dangled in front of the Stuarts as an inducement to join the Emperor rather than the Bourbons during the Dutch War. Eleonora had supported that idea, as did the Spanish.¹⁰⁴ But the negotiations dragged on interminably. Once Margarita Teresa had died, Leopold exercised his right of first refusal. Claudia Felicitas was described as proud and string-willed, a trait of character she shared with her mother who moved with her to Vienna. For the first time there was real rivalry between the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ Empress. Eleonora and her daughter who had returned from Poland after Korybut’s death were in danger of being overshadowed by the Tyrolean-Medici connection.¹⁰⁵

The hawkish Dowager Empress and the ‘appeaser’ Lobkovic had been antagonists on foreign policy issues. Yet, far from gloating over his fall from grace in

⁹⁸ Ibidem, Windisch-Graetz report 26 Nov. 1671, fol. 1, 2, 5.

⁹⁹ Ibidem, Windisch-Graetz reports 29 Oct. 1671, fol. 9; 26 Nov. 1671, fol. 8. Isabella Clara had apparently also tried to arrange a marriage between one of her Tyrolean nieces and Louis XIV’s brother.

¹⁰⁰ HHStA, Dispacci di Germania 139, no. 58 (9 Jan. 1672).

¹⁰¹ Gremontville had already reported such a plan in the spring. Mignet (ed.), *Negotiations* III 523 (31 May 1671).

¹⁰² Francesco Vecchiato, “Tra Asburgo e Bourbon. La tragedia di Louis Canossa, ministro dell’ultimo duca di Mantova,” *Archivio Veneto* 183 (1997): 67-130.

¹⁰³ Mitchell, *Mariana of Austria*, 156.

¹⁰⁴ HHStA, Dispacci di Germania 139, no. 87 (26 March 1672); Alfred F. Pribram, “Ein Habsburg-Stuart’sches Heiratsprojekt,” *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 29 (1908): 423-466.

¹⁰⁵ HHStA, Pufendorf diary, fol. 503 (5 June 1674); Alfred v. Arneth, *Prinz Eugen* (Vienna: 1864), vol. I, 195.

May 1674, they found themselves in the same boat in terms of factional in-fighting. Lobkovic had also managed to antagonize the Tyrolean Medici ladies. Part of Lobkovic's disgrace rubbed off on Eleonora. Some members of her entourage (like Zinzendorf) privately even showed signs of solidarity with the fallen giant.¹⁰⁶ Hermann von Baden, too, had often mused that if Lobkovic was toppled, his successors might turn out to be even worse.¹⁰⁷ All politics is local. While some saw Lobkovic's fall from grace as a triumph of Spanish influence now that Vienna and Madrid were once again war-time allies, others regarded it as the final step towards a take-over by the domestic network of the Moravian magnate Prince Ferdinand Dietrichstein, often called the father-in-law of the monarchy, who continued in office as the new Empress's mayordomo.¹⁰⁸

It took some time, until March 1675, before Leopold allowed his half-sister to leave Poland and move back to Habsburg Silesia, at least.¹⁰⁹ The Spanish Ambassador, the Marquess of Balbases, apparently launched the idea that she should marry her first love Charles of Lorraine and move to Brussels as regents of the Spanish Netherlands (with himself as a power behind the scenes).¹¹⁰ In 1675, her mother Eleonora also had a falling-out with her mayordomo Count Albrecht Zinzendorf.¹¹¹ Even Leopold was apparently perplexed as to the reasons for Zinzendorf's dismissal. Perhaps Zinzendorf's failings as a financial manager counted against him. He was certainly unable to pay for Eleonora's extra expenses out of his own pocket as his predecessors Montecuccoli and Marradas were supposed to have done.¹¹²

However, Empress Claudia Felicitas died in April 1676. Eleonora's prospects improved with Leopold's third marriage to Eleonora of Pfalz-Neuburg. There was a certain irony at work. The 'appeaser' Lobkovic had always been suspected of partiality for the Neuburg family who happened to be cousins of his wife. Duke Philipp of Pfalz-Neuburg had been politically suspect as a fellow-traveller of Louis XIV or at least as a neutralist during the initial stages of the Dutch War. His daughter's marriage in 1676 ushered in a diplomatic revolution en miniature. The Neuburg family – who included a crowd of brothers who were avid collectors of prince-bishoprics – became steadfast allies of the Emperor. They also became allies of the Dowager Empress, with both exercising “no little weight”, each “in their particular manner”, as the Dutch envoy reported.¹¹³

¹⁰⁶ Ibidem, fol. 516v (30 Sept. 1674) 523 (11 Nov. 1674); for Zinzendorf's and Sinelli's comments see fol. 514 (14 Sept.), 506 (1 July), 508v (28 July).

¹⁰⁷ HHStA, Pufendorf diary, fol. 167 (3 Dec. 1671), 211v (6 Feb. 1672).

¹⁰⁸ Ibidem, fol. 516v (30 Sept. 1674); 521v (6 Nov. 1674); Rostislav Smíšek, *Česářský dvůr a dvorská kariéra Dietrichštejnů a Schwarzenberků za vlády Leopolda I.* (České Budějovice: Editio UBM, 2009), 341-371.

¹⁰⁹ HHStA, ÖGStR 57, Faszikel 43/1, no. 38, fol. 79 (Leopold to Thurn 27 Oct. 1674), no. 59, fol. 131 (31 Dec. 1674), no. 96, fol. 218 (9 March 1675).

¹¹⁰ HHStA, Pufendorf diary, fol. 516v (30 Sept. 1674).

¹¹¹ Kirchberger, “Briefe Kaiser Leopold I. an P. Emmerich Sinelli,” 144 (23 Jan. 1675): “Ipse autem timeo imperatricem non facile de sua opinione cessuram, et tali casu ipse non libenter tali dominae inservirem, quam tantum scilicet amorem erga me haberet.” This time no background information to be found in Dispacci di Germania 144, no. 104 (10 Feb. 1675).

¹¹² HHStA, Pufendorf diary, fol. 507 (10 July 1674).

¹¹³ Antal & de Pater, eds., *Weensche Gezantschapsberichten*, 253 (18 May 1681).

The new Empress's eldest brother Johann Wilhelm, who was to inherit the Electoral Palatinate in 1690, married Eleonora's younger daughter Anna Maria in 1678. Her elder sister, the widowed Queen of Poland, was finally allowed to marry Charles V of Lorraine. Geographically, she stepped into the shoes of her erstwhile Medici rivals. Charles had refused to accept Louis XIV's conditions for his return to Nancy, as laid down by the Peace of Nijmegen. As a suitable alternative for an Imperial brother-in-law he was appointed governor of the Tyrol.¹¹⁴ While her husband only visited the Tyrol during the winter, the ex-Queen of Poland now resided in the Innsbruck Hofburg, right across from the Church where Maximilian as the founder of the family fortune had wanted to be buried.

IV. MANTUA AND THE MONFERRATO

Mantua also was the starting point for Eleonora's next major intervention in politics. Only this time the stakes were much higher. For a few crucial months she became a stalwart supporter – indeed a “boute-feu” – of the pro-Spanish faction that increasingly pushed the business-as-usual appeasers into the background. In 1680, Louis XIV started with his (in)famous ‘reunions’, expanding French suzerainty by no more than 5 villages a week, as his Minister of War Louvois quipped.¹¹⁵ This strategy culminated in the seizure of Strasbourg in September 1681 which created outrage in Germany. However, the aspect of Louis' expansionary moves that threatened Eleonora's interests had little to do with the Rhine and much more with the Po and her native Mantua.

The Duke of Mantua, young Ferdinando Carlo, did not take kindly to the treatment meted out to his mother. He made no secret of his aversion to the Imperial Court and to the Germans.¹¹⁶ The Gonzaga inheritance included the Monferrato; the Monferrato included the fortress of Casale. If Casale became French, Casale and Pinerolo formed a French vice against Savoy. As early as 1659, Eleonora had reacted violently to the possibility of a clause being inserted into the Peace of the Pyrenees that the fortress should be dismantled.¹¹⁷ To prevent Casale from falling into the wrong hands the Spanish were supposed to pay towards the upkeep of the garrison. Unfortunately, the payment of Spanish subsidies all over Europe was subject to severe delays. The money for Casale was supposed to be paid out of Sicilian revenues. Once the rebellion of Messina occurred, those funds dried up. To subsidize the high life (and “voluptuous pleasures”) of an Italian princeling did not rank high on Madrid's list of priorities.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Hans Kramer, “Herzog Karl V. von Lothringen und Königinwitwe Eleonore in Tirol,” *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 62 (1954): 460-489.

¹¹⁵ Camille Rousset, *Histoire de Louvois et son administration politique et militaire* (Paris: Didier, 1891), vol. III, 24 (10 Jan. 1680).

¹¹⁶ HHStA, Vorträge 6, 1682, fol. 62 (6 Aug. 1682).

¹¹⁷ Pribram, ed., *Venetianische Berichte*, 247 (14 June 1659), 254 (28 June 1659), 298 (26 Sept. 1659).

¹¹⁸ HHStA, Vorträge 5, 1679, fol. 37 (conference conclusions 1 March 1679); Luis Ribot, *La Monarquía de España y la guerra de Mesina (1674-1678)* (Madrid: Actas, 2002), 381-3, Schoder, “Reichsitalien,” 37, 65-9, 184, 208, 254.

Even in Isabella Clara's days there had been rumours that she was putting out feelers to the French about Casale.¹¹⁹ Ferdinando Carlo chose to regard the delayed Spanish payments as a breach of contract that provided him with an excuse to start negotiating with the French about a lease of Casale. The first round of talks collapsed dramatically when his chief minister Ercole Mattioli tried to play both sides and was kidnapped by the French in 1679 (giving rise to rumours that he was the famous 'prisoner with the iron mask' incarcerated in Pinerolo).¹²⁰ Mattioli's manoeuvres served to delay the plan but did not prevent its final execution. In the autumn of 1681, the required sum was finally sent to Mantua in barrels of wine. On 30 September, the same day the French entered Strasbourg, they also marched into Casale.¹²¹

Austrian diplomats were alarmed, not just for the sake of Casale. On the one hand, the coup against Casale happened just at the time when the French-born Dowager Duchess of Savoy, Marie-Jeanne de Nemours, was trying to ship her sixteen-year-old son Vittorio Amadeo II off to Portugal where he was supposed to marry her niece, the Princess Isabella Luisa.¹²² Thus the House of Savoy would finally achieve royal rank – and his mother would be able to prolong her regency indefinitely. Unless a way could be found to encourage Vittorio Amadeo to defy his mother and stay at home, Savoy would thus be safely anchored within the orbit of French alliances for the foreseeable future. With France now able to put extra pressure on Savoy, the opportunity costs of Habsburg passivity could be high. As the Imperial ambassador in Venice, Francesco della Torre, put it in a highly dramatic fashion: The Dowager Empress needed to act before the young Duke was “violated” by his mother.¹²³

On the other hand, even closer at home, if Ferdinando Carlo was willing to barter away Casale, Eleonora was afraid the rake's progress might continue with handing over Guastalla to the French, thus threatening Spanish Milan from both East and West.¹²⁴ Even worse, he might as well exchange his native Mantua for some wealthier but strategically less crucial French principality.¹²⁵ Moreover, the Duke's rickety marriage had not yet been blessed with children. In that case, Eleonora – or her descendants – were next in line to inherit the Monferrato. The Dowager Empress was adamant: since her daughter, the ex-Queen of Poland, had married an exiled “lackland” prince, the Emperor must not allow her to be cheated out of this

¹¹⁹ HHStA, Dispacci di Germania 139, no. 25 (17 Oct. 1671).

¹²⁰ For a contrary view see Jean-Christian Petitfils, “Le Masque de fer démasqué?” in *Les énigmes de l'histoire de France*, ed. Jean-Christian Petitfils (Paris: Perrin 2018), 153-172, here: 165.

¹²¹ Rousset, *Louvois* III, 102-140; Schoder, “Reichsitalien,” 94-104, 331-346; Malacarne, *I Gonzaga-Nevers*, 194-207, 224-230.

¹²² Robert Oresko, “Maria Giovanna Battista of Savoy-Nemours (1644-1724), daughter, consort and regent of Savoy,” in *Queenship in Europe 1660-1815. The Role of the Consort*, ed. Clarisse Campbell Orr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 16-55; Rousset, *Louvois* III, 133, 153, 279; Carl A. Hanson, *Economy and Society in Baroque Portugal, 1668-1703* (London: Macmillan, 1981), 153.

¹²³ HHStA, ÖGStR 57, Faszikel 43/2, no. 117, fol. 75 (21 Feb. 1682).

¹²⁴ HHStA, Dispacci di Germania 155, no. 46 (2 Nov. 1681).

¹²⁵ HHStA, Vorträge 5, IX-XII 1681, fol. 36v (30 Sept 1681); see della Torre's reports in HHStA, ÖGStR 57, Faszikel 43/2, no. 89, fol. 435v (4 Oct. 1681), no. 105, fol. 19v (6 Dec. 1681); HHStA, Vorträge 6, 1683, fol. 38v, 46 (1 April 1683) already produced a far more sceptical reactions to the rumours about French designs on Mantua.

inheritance.¹²⁶ At the same time, Ferdinando Carlo was said to be trying to legitimise one of his illegitimate sons.¹²⁷

Given such ample provocation, Eleonora – once again – assumed the leadership of the ‘war-hawks’. By comparison, even the Spanish ambassador, a fellow Italian, the Marquess of Borgomanero, sounded a note of caution.¹²⁸ The Dowager Empress advocated sending troops to Mantua as soon as possible. Venice was unwilling to let them pass through her territory, because of the recent outbreak of the plague in Vienna. Eleonora brushed all these objections away. After all, there had been no plague in the Tyrol, the province governed by her son-in-law.¹²⁹ When the crisis about Casale broke, Leopold I happened to be in Hungary, involved in delicate negotiations with the Hungarian diet in Sopron. Eleonora was not willing to wait for his return. The Venetian ambassador, Domenico Contarini, who was following events closely, wrote admiringly that she would not spare herself any exertions.¹³⁰

Eleonora had already been alerted when her nephew’s renewed contacts with Louis XIV became known in summer. As a precaution, the conference of ministers had asked the Dowager Empress to use her contacts to win over a number of officers of the Casale garrison.¹³¹ She was also supposed to tackle Contarini about the dangers facing Italy.¹³² She herself bombarded Leopold with messages and messengers, first dispatching her current mayordomo, Count Carl Waldstein, to Sopron, followed by a cleric, who was supposed to catch the ear of the Emperor more easily.¹³³ In the end, she herself travelled to meet him half-ways on his return journey to Vienna. As a result, the Emperor promised his step-mother that he would start re-arming once the diet was over. Re-arming affected Eleonora in more than one way. If a campaign were to be fought, her son-in-law Charles of Lorraine would be first in line to be nominated as Commander-in-Chief.¹³⁴

Eleonora and her followers were convinced that time was of the essence less Italy should be lost to the French without any resistance at all. Prince Johann Adolph Schwarzenberg – who in that respect had inherited Lobkovic’s mantle – and the indispensable Hoher, the team in charge of routine administration, did not share that sense of alarmism. They were none too sure about Ferdinando Carlo’s “evil intentions”. At any rate, nothing could be done about it right now.¹³⁵ It was already too late in the year to send any troops. In general, they fell back on the traditional evasive policy of Vienna: let others go ahead. If Italy was threatened, it was up to the Italians to make the first move – and up to the Spaniards to pay for it all. Maybe as a second best, the Venetians would be willing to supply a garrison to guarantee the neutrality of Mantua.

¹²⁶ HHStA, Dispacci di Germania 155, no. 22 (14 Sept. 1681).

¹²⁷ HHStA, Vorträge 6, 1683, fol. 39v (1 April 1683); Bianchi, *Al servizio del principe*, 75, 84.

¹²⁸ HHStA, Dispacci di Germania 155, no. 46 (2 Nov. 1681), 49 (9 Nov. 1681).

¹²⁹ Ibidem, no. 29 (28 Sept. 1681).

¹³⁰ Ibidem, no. 33 (12 Oct. 1681).

¹³¹ HHStA, Vorträge 5, I-VIII 1681, fol. 130 (25 Aug. 1681); Schoder, “Reichsitalien,” 117, 162.

¹³² HHStA, Vorträge 5, IX-XII 1681, fol. 3 (4 Sept. 1681).

¹³³ HHStA, Dispacci di Germania 155, no. 37 (19 Oct. 1681), 52 (16 Nov. 1681).

¹³⁴ Ibidem, no. 55 (23 Nov. 1681), no. 72 (4 Jan. 1682).

¹³⁵ HHStA, Vorträge 5, IX-XII 1681, fol. 27v (30 Sept. 1681?).

Half a century ago Venice had done so to keep the Imperial troops away, maybe they could do so once more to pre-empt the French?¹³⁶

However, the conference quite officially decided to involve Eleonora in their plans: A private person should travel to Venice, in the name of the Dowager Empress.¹³⁷ Ambassador Della Torre raised the stakes.¹³⁸ He had no inhibitions about suggesting a mission by Eleonora herself. A famously pious lady like her could certainly travel to Italy under the pretext of a pilgrimage to Loreto “to give warmth to the league of Italian princes” – and in particular to encourage the adolescent Duke of Savoy! Once again, the Vienna mandarins backed off. That pretence would not fool the French – and should not be risked unless the success of the mission could be guaranteed. One must not expose the Empress to a rebuff. What if Ferdinando Carlo should refuse to welcome his aunt in true style? In the end, the ministers compromised by suggesting that perhaps Eleonora might take a first step by visiting her daughter in Innsbruck.¹³⁹

As usual, Eleonora chose a cleric, Father Herculaneum, as her emissary. He was to plead for a Venetian garrison but Schwarzenberg had his suspicions that he had been given rather far-ranging instructions. He was right. The good Father’s report about the state of affairs in Mantua ended with the unequivocal statement: the only way to deal with the Duke was “per forza”.¹⁴⁰ In fact, the Venetians had already come up with such a proposal, in a strictly confidential and unofficial manner, though. Contarini had forwarded a suggestion to Eleonora that the best way to deal with the crisis might be to kidnap the Duke on one of his hunting expeditions close to the Milan border. This time it was the staid ministers’ turn to be outraged. They went on record that those were matters “completely mal a propos and impractical”.¹⁴¹

But the appeasers were clearly fighting a losing battle. In the summer of 1682, once there was a prospect of roping in the Dutch and their German allies, like Count Waldeck, the ‘appeasers’ were swamped by hard-liners like Hermann von Baden and Zinzendorf (politically still an asset despite his former disagreement with Eleonora).¹⁴² On 23 July, a much-enlarged conference took a clear-cut decision to pursue a Western programme of resistance to the French, notwithstanding the dark clouds gathering in the East. The Turkish threat was only used to camouflage the planned diplomatic

¹³⁶ HHStA, Vorträge 6, 1682, fol. 7f (23 Jan. 1682), 35, 38v (25 Feb. 1682).

¹³⁷ HHStA, Vorträge 6, 1682, fol. 6-8 (23 Jan. 1682).

¹³⁸ Della Torre was one of Eleonora’s proteges but still on bad terms with her confidant Canossa; HHStA, Vorträge 5, fol. 110-130 (conference conclusions 25 Aug. 1681); for a time, Della Torre mainly blamed the Mantuan ministers and claimed the Duke had realized that he had been betrayed by the French; HHStA, ÖGStR 57, Faszikel 43/2, no. 107, fol. 26v (20 Dec. 1681), but: no. 112, fol. 55v (23 Jan. 1682); Müller, *Gesandtschaftswesen*, 59, 231; Schoder, “Reichsitalien,” 197, 274, 301, 306, 342.

¹³⁹ HHStA, Vorträge 6, 1682, fol. 35 (25 Feb. 1682), 41-44 (minutes 2 March 1682); Redlich, *Weltmacht des Barock*, 157 mentions Eleonore’s willingness to undertake such a mission.

¹⁴⁰ HHStA, Vorträge 6, 1682, fol. 35 (minutes 25 Feb. 1682), 41 (2 March 1682, discussing P. Herculaneum’s report from 21 Feb. 1682)

¹⁴¹ HHStA, Vorträge 6, 1682, fol. 6 (23 Jan. 1682); Schoder, “Reichsitalien,” 410-418.

¹⁴² For the strategic options see Lothar Höbelt, “1683 and all that: Easterners, Westerners – or a War on Two Fronts,” *English Historical Review* (forthcoming); William Pull, *William III. From Prince of Orange to King of England. A History 1650-1689* (London: Unicorn, 2021), 458-465.

mission to Italy. The roving Ambassador was to canvass the Italian princes “pretendi subsidii pro imminente bello cum Turci”, while at the same time exaggerating the dangers emanating from France. He was explicitly ordered to stick to the line agreed to between Eleonora and the Emperor.¹⁴³

V. THE FINAL YEARS

Partly due to her influence with her step-son, partly due to her native Mantua's strategic importance, Eleonora had achieved something like the status of a super-numerary Secretary of State for Italian affairs.¹⁴⁴ She did not direct foreign policy but whether she made use of the ‘Westerners’ to safeguard her inheritance or whether the ‘Westerners’ made use of her to advance their agenda, she had clearly been part of the vanguard of ‘hard-liners’ that decisively outflanked the old guard between the autumn of 1681 and the summer of 1682. Again, though, her allegiance to ‘party’ could not be taken for granted. Once again, her change of front can be traced to family links. As a prince of the Empire who had lost his duchy to French aggression, her son-in-law Charles of Lorraine “had every reason to be a ‘Westerner’”, as Thomas Barker rightly points out.¹⁴⁵ However, once Lorraine had been appointed Commander-in-Chief of the army fighting the Turks, he was almost bound to become an ‘Easterner’, at least in the short run. Any move to send troops to the West threatened to restrict his freedom of manoeuvre and harm his reputation as a great captain.

Moreover, Charles was at daggers drawn with Hermann von Baden, now President of the Aulic War Council – part of the classic rivalry between ‘minister of war’ and commanders in the field. Their views differed on almost everything: Baden had been in favour of a defensive strategy in the spring of 1683, Lorraine wanted to start a siege before the Grand Visir reached Hungary. Baden was in favour of using new-fangled bayonets; Lorraine preferred to rely on old-fashioned pikemen.¹⁴⁶ Lorraine wanted to start a commando raid on the famous bridge of Esseg crossing the Drava in winter; Baden wanted to postpone the operation until the spring.¹⁴⁷ To add insult to injury, the Spanish Ambassador, Borgomanero, got into a fight with Lorraine's wife over a question of court ceremonial.¹⁴⁸ Eleonora charged him with an “esprit si brouillon”.¹⁴⁹

Thus, if Eleonora was part of the wave that carried the Westerners to their astonishing victories in spite of all odds in 1682, in late 1683 she was also clearly part of what Barker has described as “the victory of the ‘Easterners’.” She would defend

¹⁴³ HHStA, Vorträge 6, 1682, fol. 57 (11 July 1682), fol. 64v (23 July 1682).

¹⁴⁴ In late 1683, Eleonora was again asked to sound out the possibilities of Mantua accepting a pro-Habsburg garrison; HHStA, Vorträge 6, 1683, fol. 60 (21 Nov. 1683).

¹⁴⁵ Thomas M. Barker, *Double Eagle and Crescent. Vienna's second Turkish Siege and its historical Setting* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1967), 181.

¹⁴⁶ Kriegsarchiv, Alte Feldakten (AFA) 187, 1683/IV/9 & 12 (22 April).

¹⁴⁷ HHStA, Disparci di Germania 158, no. 356 (26 Dec. 1683).

¹⁴⁸ Ibidem, no. 354 (26 Dec. 1683), 357 (2 Jan. 1684).

¹⁴⁹ Rubén González Cuerva, “La última cruzada: España en la Guerra de la Liga Santa (1683-1699)” in *Tiempo de Cambios. Guerra, diplomacia y política internacional de la Monarquía Hispánica (1648-1700)*, ed. Porfirio Sanz Camañes (Madrid: Actas, 2012) 221-248, here: 225.

her son-in-law against all attempts to undermine his chances of success in the East. Easterners were bound to be exasperated at the pre-occupation of the Westerners with the Cold War against Louis XIV, when they were fighting a hot war along the Danube. At one point, it is said, Lorraine went so far as to say he preferred kow-towing to Louis XIV to all this half-heartedness in pursuing the campaign in the East. He could rely on the faction of the three Eleonoras (well, at least two of them: his wife and his mother-in-law).¹⁵⁰

In the long run, though, the pendulum was bound to swing back. Habsburgs were eager to clear up the mess in Hungary and cash in on the windfall profits made possible by the Turkish defeat in front of Vienna. But their eyes were still fixed on the West. In 1685 the inheritance of the Palatinate opened a new front for the reigning Empress and her Neuburg family to be worried about French designs. For the Dowager Empress it was still Mantua, the Monferrato and Italy that was uppermost in her mind. When Fernando Carlo reverted to his bad ways and had her confidant Luigi Canossa arrested, the Dowager Empress – a few months before her death – was her usual outspoken self: “che hore non sono piu li tempi passati di lasciarsi acciecare con minacci”. Once the Turkish War was over, the Emperor was resolved to put things right and then the Duke’s calls for help from France would be to no avail.¹⁵¹

Eleonora was a ‘swing vote’ in terms of the dichotomy between Easterners and Westerners. She did not consistently pursue a Western agenda either at the beginning of the 1670s or at the beginning of the 1680s. But her ‘hawkish’ determination to get things done did help to unleash a turn-around in both cases, even if later on she reverted to giving priority to Eastern goals like saving her Polish son-in-law or supporting the career of her Lorraine son-in-law in Hungary. But in the end the Italian connection, the Monferrato, could always be relied on to bring her back to opposing Louis XIV rather than pursuing any Eastern mirage.

¹⁵⁰ Barker, *Double Eagle and Crescent*, 363, 412.

¹⁵¹ Bianchi, *Al servizio del principe*, 86; Vecchiato, “Canossa”.

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