

In conclusion, the volume sheds light on the nature of enterprise in the multi-ethnic and multi-religious context of the Ottoman Empire, highlighting its capabilities of accumulation, differentiation, and penetration of local markets. It thus fills a critical gap in recent scholarship on the economic and social evolution of the Ottoman Empire's final centuries, particularly regarding the broader transformations of European and global capitalism.

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S. Mantini (ed.), *Reti d'Europa. Margherita d'Austria tra confini e modernità*, Bari-Roma, Laterza, 2024, pp. 312.

More than twenty years after the conference dedicated to *Margherita d'Austria (Political constructions and diplomacy between the Farnese Court and the Spanish Monarchy)* (Parma, 2001), the panorama of studies on Margaret of Austria (1522-1586), duchess of Parma and Piacenza as well as governor of the Netherlands and of the city of L'Aquila in the Abruzzi region in Central Italy, is enriched by a new choral reflection, capable not only of placing her character within the turbulent political climate of Europe at the time of the Habsburg hegemony, but also of accounting for the complex and multifaceted role of an actress of unquestionable importance in the system of internal balances within the Spanish Monarchy. Studying Margherita helps to understand these balances because her life embodies some of the factors that ensured the long duration of the Habsburg rule over a fragmented and diverse group of states.

This volume highlights the impact on European politics and society of a successful culture of government that developed within the Habsburg dynasty, i.e., the network of family and personal ties that covered the entire continent, including the sovereigns, their closest relatives, and the ministers closest to the throne. A dynasty in every way like all those essential cells of the *ancien régime* society, that operated at every level to coordinate the contribution of individuals – requested and provided according to their role, inclinations, and operating context – and to maximise the results achieved in terms of preserving and increasing social prestige and real power.

It is precisely at the foundations of this political culture that the book edited by Silvia Mantini places the contribution of the women of the House of Austria, and in particular the “aunts”: guardians and educators of their nephews and nieces, and trainers in understanding their

mission and role, and in mastering the formal and informal tools necessary to exercise it. This is a common thread linking Margaret of Habsburg (1480-1530), daughter of Mary of Burgundy and of the emperor Maximilian, her niece Mary (1505-1558), queen of Hungary, and Mary's niece Margaret of Austria, all of whom were responsible for the early education of the young members of the family, both male and female. Like her father, emperor Charles V, and her aunt Mary of Hungary, Margaret of Austria was educated according to the system of values, ideological projects, and political and cultural strategies on which both Charles's vision of a universal Christian empire and Philip II's Spanish monarchy were based.

Through the prism of a multidisciplinary perspective, the volume effectively reconstructs the dynamics through which the Habsburg developed an original concept of sovereign power, modelling it on the critical issues of an international context marked by conflict between the empire and the papacy, and between the Habsburgs and the Franco-Ottoman coalition – but also by the Protestant Reformation and European overseas expansion – and basing it on the exercise of multiple legitimising functions by the monarch, his relatives, and his principal ministers: the defence of the Christian faith, the reconciliation of religious divisions, administrative rationalisation, and the mediation of conflicts between subjects from a position of strength.

The functions of the members of the House of Habsburg during the reigns of Emperor Charles V and his successor, Philip II of Spain, were particularly significant as representatives of the monarch in his absence. Their responsibilities included mediating between competing interest groups within the provinces – framing these disputes as political struggles among noble factions – and preserving the dynasty's role as a balance to prevent revolts and defections. They acted as intermediaries between allied families and the sovereign, between subjects and the throne, and played a crucial role in constructing and sustaining extensive networks of relationships that provided coherence and unity of purpose within the Habsburg sphere of influence. Furthermore, they served as interpreters and implementers of the political directives of Charles V and Philip II within key decision-making arenas, both domestically and internationally.

Margaret is thus presented as the wife of duke Ottavio Farnese since November 1538 and therefore as a fundamental asset in the alliance between Charles V and Pope Paul III, that is to say between the papacy and the empire, at an extremely delicate moment in the dialectic between the two main powers of the Christian world, which were competing for the leading role in the reform of the Church and which were in substantial contrast on the crucial issue of the attitude – more

conciliatory or more repressive – towards the Lutheran reformers.

An active protagonist in relations between the two families, committed both to defending the interests of her father, the emperor, and to supporting the Farnese family's attempts to acquire an independent lordship in the Po Valley, the figure of Margaret – restored both through the sources produced by her mediation and government, and through those produced by the activities of her allies and agents – also offers us a magnifying glass on a crucial phase of the internal conflict within the group of the great noble families who supported the Catholic Monarchy in Italy, in particular in the south of the peninsula, in the Kingdom of Naples. Here, the authoritarian and centralising approach of the viceroy of Naples Pedro Álvarez de Toledo aroused opposition among the leaders of the local ruling class, bringing them together in an alliance between the members of the Neapolitan aristocracy as the D'Avalos, Lannoy, and Sanseverino families.

This was a crucial point in the Mediterranean and Italian politics of the Habsburgs, as this conflict led to both the Neapolitan revolt of 1547 and the defection from the imperial camp of Ferrante Sanseverino, Prince of Salerno, who was banished and entered the service of the king of France in 1552. In May 1533, the arrival in Naples of Margaret, entrusted to the Princess of Sulmona Françoise d'Entremont de Montbel, widow of viceroy Charles de Lannoy, gave new life and political leverage to the Flemish component of the pro-imperial aristocracy, which was firmly established in Naples through fiefdoms and government positions granted to them by Charles V, in order to integrate their interests with the global horizons of Habsburg strategy.

Margaret's role in a later phase of the dialectic between noble factions, inaugurated by the succession of Philip II as sovereign of the Iberian kingdoms, the Netherlands, and the Italian states of the crown, was no less significant. This coincided with a fundamental shift in the development of the political culture of the Habsburg, a factor of balance and synthesis between the centralizing tension typical of the Toledo style of government (and therefore of the faction of the duke of Alba) and an approach that placed greater emphasis on the close cooperation with local Italian elites, advocated by the faction of the prince of Eboli.

In analysing this contrast, the volume introduces an important reflection on the unifying function of the ideological factor – which at the dawn of Tridentine Catholic Christianity was primarily religious in nature – namely, the adherence by the two sides, respectively, to Dominican spirituality on the one hand and to that promoted by the Society of Jesus on the other hand. Through this reading, also the religion lies at the centre of complex and articulated interactions that affected society on multiple levels, involving individuals and groups of different social

backgrounds, social rank, and geographical origins, and shaped transnational relational networks characterized by strong political significance.

No less emphasized in the volume is the widespread and participatory debate on the nature of power and the structures necessary to exercise it within the Hispanic Monarchy and among its leaders: a theoretical debate stimulated by the growing complexity of the functions and prerogatives attributed to the monarch, which imposed new criteria in the collection, selection, and archiving of information, the discussion of government issues, problems, and initiatives within councils representing the interests of the elites, and finally the targeted delegation of specific tasks to those most suited in terms of ability, influence, and authority. The topicality of the collective reflection on the concept of sovereignty, on the sources of political legitimacy, and on forms of government resulted in a deeply felt urgency on the part of Margaret and of all the other members of the family, to mobilize cognitive resources and diverse knowledge, and to capitalize on the demands of the peripheral areas to become decision-making centres of the monarchy, in direct communication with the royal court and other provincial arenas of power – and this was precisely the case with L’Aquila – by creating personal relationships with agents, secretaries, administrators, ambassadors, architects, artists, bankers, and informants. All intermediate figures capable of feeding the flow of information that supported political decision-making, of shaping and implementing the initiatives of the prominent actors closest to the throne, of defending their interests in the main arenas of power of the monarchy, both internally and abroad, and of developing an effective and meaningful representation of the Habsburg power in Europe and overseas. It is no coincidence, therefore, that some of Margaret’s most significant contributions to the Habsburg and Farnese politics derived from her consistent and intelligent artistic and architectural patronage, from the political sensitivity poured into the visual rendering of the solidity and legitimacy of sovereign power.

By promoting an interdisciplinary dialogue between scholars, and thus between the numerous and constantly evolving fields of research that converge into the studies on the Spanish monarchy and Baroque Italy, the project coordinated by Mantini, which is at the origins of the volume, gives further depth and substance to a figure who has for too long been reduced to her role as governor of the Netherlands or, worse still, to her relationship with her father the emperor, her brother the king of Spain, her husband the duke of Piacenza and Parma, and her father-in-law the Pope.

The formal and substantial prominence of the women of the House of

Habsburg emerges from their position at the top of a system based on personal connections and blood ties, but also from their participation in a constant dialectic between individual sensibilities and experiences within a common vision, a common Habsburg project that constituted one of the bridges between medieval Christianity and early modern Europe and one of the most lasting and fundamental legacies of the Spanish monarchy in its European and overseas territories.

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David Matthews, *The Class Struggle and Welfare. Social Policy under Capitalism*, Monthly Review Press, New York 2024, pp. 231.

David Matthews' book analyses the evolution of the welfare system from an interesting historical perspective, positioning it as a central feature within the class struggle and the capitalist system's development. The extension of welfare benefits the labour and capital forces, which push welfare to advance and support their economic self-interests. A broad social coverage improves labour productivity, reduces capital costs for reproducing labour forces, and promotes the acceptance of the capitalist system within society, particularly among the working class, especially during the classical era of Fordism. Industrialisation transforms the rules of industrial capitalist accumulation, which leads to the progressive destruction of the pre-capitalist world and its social reproduction forms. Welfare functions as a stabilising mechanism for these transformations following decades of strikes and workers' resistance. It is an income redistribution action by the state which does not affect or alter the industrial productive capacity and thus does not penalise the profit rate.

However, we cannot fully understand the rise in welfare without first discussing the transformations of the state. From an institutional form representing specific class interests, i.e., with the Constitution and Parliament reflecting bourgeois-based interests, the state gradually incorporates not only the capital forces but also those of labour (as well as rentier interests) by expanding the electorate. Thus, when the state's legitimacy derives from the recognition of both capital and labour forces, the creation of welfare becomes a tool to achieve a synthesis of their respective interests, alongside improvements in wages and a reduction in working hours. Adopting progressive fiscal policies makes the transfer of resources for welfare more acceptable, as does the shift in economic mentality that, following the Second World War, placed