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BOOK REVIEW

Liesbeth Geevers, The Spanish Habsburgs and Dynastic Rule, 1500–1700

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What exactly did it mean to be a "Spanish Habsburg" in the early modern period? In this book, Liesbeth Geevers demonstrates that this seemingly simple question is anything but. As she states in her introduction, "complicated dynamics between relatives, which played out over several generations and were made up of equal parts affection and distrust, determined who was considered to be a Habsburg and thus . . . dictated the shape of the Spanish Habsburg dynasty" (3). To answer the basic question of who qualified as a Spanish Habsburg, Geevers asks a series of subsidiary questions related to the dynasty's past, present, and future at any given point. Which family members were included in genealogical charts? Who was buried in dynastic tombs, particularly the Escorial? Who was considered eligible to govern dynastic territories, like the Low Countries or Sicily? And who made these decisions in the first place, and why? In each case, the answer depended on a complex algorithm of political circumstances. Through exploration of various sources, from genealogical narratives to political testaments and wills, Geevers illustrates that the "Habsburg dynasty" never had a single, straightforward, or stable definition.

The book has seven main chapters. The first three chapters focus on the idea of "dynastic centralization" in the period 1500–1700; that is, as Geevers explains, "the process which allowed the emergence of dominant [Spanish Habsburg] family heads, who managed to claim a greater share of the dynasty's patrimony" (19). Geevers argues that Spanish Habsburg kings claimed ever more authority to determine which of their family members could inherit, marry, or govern. Part of what made this process complicated, as Geevers describes in chapter 1, is that the Habsburgs blended three separate traditions of succession practices (Austrian, Castilian, and Burgundian). Local traditions differed greatly, for example, on whether a king's younger brothers, younger sons, or daughters could inherit positions or titles. Geevers suggests that practices changed over time; by the seventeenth century, Spanish monarchs wholly excluded daughters and younger sons from inheriting the throne.

Chapters 2 and 3 focus on "the formation and representation of the Habsburgs as a [family] group," in the form of genealogical narratives and communities of the dead (52). By connecting past, present, and future members of the Habsburg family, genealogies and dynastic tombs created a sense of historical continuity and group identity. But who got included or excluded always depended on a range of factors. In chapter 2, for example, Geevers analyzes forty genealogies of the Habsburgs composed between 1500 and 1680. Many of these works were written by independent scholars rather than official Habsburg chroniclers. Whether the genealogists mentioned, say, Charles V's sisters or his illegitimate children, often depended on whether those figures played a prominent role in those writers' local politics. By contrast, the Habsburg rulers had much more control over who got buried in a family tomb, as Geevers describes in chapter 3. As she states, "dynastic burial sites thus present much more unambiguous insights into the construction of the dynasty by the dynasty" (86). Philip II's grand vision for the Escorial as a display of dynastic identity is very much a case in point. Philip broke with Castilian tradition by gathering the remains of a wide range of relatives. He also sometimes broke with his relatives' wishes concerning their final resting place, including those of his son

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Carlos. This process of centralization solidified over time, so that by 1700 dozens of Spanish Habsburg bodies had been collected in one place—with a marked preference for *male* Habsburgs, emphasizing patrilineal descent.

The next four chapters further explore the theme of centralization and Habsburg family dynamics, with an emphasis on gender roles. Here too Geevers notes changes over time. In the first half of the sixteenth century, Charles V depended on close female relatives, like his aunt Margaret of Austria and his sister Mary of Hungary, to serve as governors of the various far-flung Habsburg territories. After 1560, however, many Habsburg women chose a different path, that of the "Infanta Monja" ("princess nun"), based in the Descalzas Reales monastery in Madrid. An important precedent for this was set by Philip II's sister Maria and her daughter Margaret (who became famous as Sister Margaret of the Cross). As a result, Philip and his descendants had fewer female relatives to choose from as royal governors and thus expanded the roles played by other relatives, especially nephews. Philip III, for example, showered his nephew Emanuele Filiberto with titles and benefices. Strictly speaking, although Filiberto was Philip II's grandson, he was of the House of Savoy rather than Habsburg. But as a young man, he was educated at the royal Spanish court; he held numerous high offices in Spanish service, including admiral of the Mediterranean fleet and viceroy of Sicily; and perhaps most important, when he died in 1624 Philip IV ordered that he should be buried in the royal crypt at the Escorial. Thus, as Geevers argues, over time Filiberto was "Habsburgified."

In the later seventeenth century, however, the Spanish Habsburgs began running out of close relatives to pick from. For the first few decades of his reign, Philip IV had no nephews he could groom for command, and so he "found himself employing whatever relatives were on offer, foregoing the lengthy apprenticeships that previous appointees had gone through" (203). For a while he turned to his cousins, Grand Duke Ferdinando II de'Medici and his siblings. Eager to prove themselves the equals of the House of Savoy, the Medici gladly accepted Habsburg patronage and royal offices. But this was a stopgap measure that weakened to the point of extinction by the time of Charles II. He died childless, and his only nephew was French. As Geevers states, "the ruling family group had disappeared" (234).

Geevers concludes by suggesting that "dynasties can best be understood as a composite of constructions that exists in different temporal dimensions" (235). Genealogies, crypts, and succession documents forged the idea of a Spanish Habsburg line that connected the past, present, and future—or at least it did while the supply of Habsburgs lasted. One question that Geevers does not address is whether the trends she identifies applied to other early modern dynasties. I suspect they did, but we must depend on future research to prove it. Geevers thus opens fruitful lines for other scholars to pursue.

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