

INTRODUCTION



Religious Plurality at Princely Courts in Early Modern Europe, ca. 1555–1860

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This book explores the fascinating but woefully neglected topic of religious plurality at princely courts in early modern Europe. Although the real-world social, political, and cultural challenges and compromises that accompanied the coexistence and mingling of multiple religions in one society have been explored in numerous ways,¹ princely courts, strangely enough, have been almost entirely neglected in this context.² This is all the more surprising given that recent studies of early modern courts have firmly established that they were political and cultural microcosms that incorporated social plurality, that they were linked with one another and their own territorial societies in various ways, and that they can be structurally compared with one another across Europe and beyond.³ Few scholars have attempted to apply to princely courts the insights gained in studies of mixed marriages, of the construction of confessional boundaries in urban societies, or of the experience of religious difference within the household and family in early modern Europe—this collection features the work of some of those who have done so.

Forschungsstand/Historiographical Context

An important reason for the neglect of courts regarding questions of religious diversity seems to be blind spots in the historiography. Since the triumph of the “confessionalization” paradigm in Germanophone historiography in the 1980s

and its subsequent widespread acceptance throughout early modern studies, it has been axiomatic to say European monarchies in the early modern period (in particular the “Confessional Age”) legitimized their rule largely in terms of dynasty and religion.⁴ According to this metanarrative, the religious split in Western Christendom in the sixteenth century ultimately resulted in the emergence of the modern state and modern society. Monarchs and churches sought to enforce uniformity in religious practice and belief for reasons related both to a perceived need for spiritual unity and to their desire to consolidate their own power. In the process they imposed increasingly far-reaching and stringent supervisory and disciplinary systems on their subjects and congregations.⁵ Accordingly, in the ideal type, the divine right of a ruler correlated with the confession that the ruler had selected, or at least tacitly approved. Early modern politics were thus oriented (and indeed, the path of history led) toward the goal of a confessional homogeneity of dynasty, church, court, and subjects. The very logic underlying princely authority itself has therefore given rise to the assumption that at any princely court only a single confession could have been tolerated.

In fact, in the early modern period, confessionally “mixed” societies in which people of various denominations—or people indifferent to confession—coexisted and intermingled were common.⁶ Such confessional flexibility and sharing occurred not only at the ignorant, oblivious, and/or undisciplined lowest levels of societies, but also at the highest levels, up to and including the princely courts (as the contributions to this volume amply illustrate), where the confessionalization master narrative would have us believe that concern for religious uniformity would have been the most intense. However, multiple confessions, sometimes entirely different religions, and even forms of unbelief came together surprisingly often at such courts.

Another aspect of the confessionalization paradigm was that following the confessional apocalypse of the Thirty Years’ War (1618–48), the worst and purportedly last of the religious wars, Europe allegedly entered a post-confessional age in which religion mattered less and less in the political and diplomatic realms, and rulers engaged in more pragmatic and secular statecraft. The confessionalization thesis thereby built on the long-standing and seemingly undying interdisciplinary myth that the negotiations and outcome of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 established modern political sovereignty and the modern state system.⁷ Consequently, the confessionalization master narrative largely precluded studying religious plurality at princely courts before 1648, because such a phenomenon was presumed to be impossible (or at best uninteresting). It also precluded studying religious plurality at princely courts after 1648, because religion was then thought to be increasingly irrelevant.

It is now well accepted that at all levels of European society confessional-political questions and conflicts continued to have tremendous influence well beyond 1648, especially on the domestic and international politics of European

courts. Thus, religious plurality at court had potentially wide-ranging consequences for early modern societies in general, which makes it an intriguing topic for scholars interested in a wide range of research questions. As witnessed by the abundance of textual and visual historical sources studied in this volume, “mixed courts” left traces in different ways and at different levels, be they dynastic, diplomatic, symbolic, gender-related, theological, or social. This underlines the fluidity and dynamics within an early modern “*Ständegesellschaft*” where no social sphere—especially the rulers’ courts—could exist separately from other milieus.⁸ This introduction touches on some aspects of this complex phenomenon that are examined more thoroughly in the following chapters.

Aspects of Religious Plurality at Princely Courts

There were many causes of religious heterogeneity at princely courts, such as the conversions of rulers, competing confessional allegiances in composite monarchies, and the mobility of court personnel. The main factor, however, was certainly dynastic marriage, and this is reflected in a number of the contributions to this volume. In the Holy Roman Empire, as well as in several European monarchies, there were countless examples of princely marriages between partners who not only belonged to different confessions before becoming married but also continued to do so afterward. In Europe after 1648, this practice did not end but rather increased. There are a number of different reasons for this: changes in the international political framework and options for dynastic alliances; better legal safeguards for confessional minorities at the territorial level; limited dynastic options for appropriate marriage partner choices (especially for the Calvinist, or Reformed, princely dynasties of the empire); and possibly also individual decisions regarding marriage partners. Of course, confessionally mixed marriages sometimes led to the conversion of one partner, though even in such cases the dynasties newly linked through the marriage continued to belong to different confessions. In other cases, both marriage partners retained their respective confessions and established an openly confessionally pluralistic court, or they made arrangements by secret agreement to allow one marriage partner to continue the private observance of his or her faith.⁹ Whatever their outcome, such marriages—as with confessionally mixed courts in general—stood in opposition to the presumed norm of early modern confessional homogeneity. If even the ruling family, household, or entourage (supposedly a role model for society as a whole) defied one confession’s exclusive claim to the God-given truth, then this obviously would not remain unchallenged elsewhere. This volume presents some of the heretofore largely unexplored implications of religious plurality at princely courts, not only for political authority

(or resistance), dynastic legitimation, and monarchical self-representation, but also for the intersectional treatment of gender roles.

The pressures of confessional nonconformity or change impacted the actions and depictions of the bride, the consort, and the widow, figures traditionally regarded as an embodiment of dynastic piety and guardians of confessional purity.¹⁰ The situation of the bride, who marries into a different confession and moves to a new place together with her male and female courtiers, or of the wife or widow, whose husband or son converts while she adheres to her natal confession, raise all manner of gender-related issues, including the cultivation of image and iconography, the fashioning of female piety and its communication to audiences beyond the immediate court environment, as well as the influence of the widow's court.¹¹ The implications for the masculinity of male consorts who changed confession would also bear investigation.¹²

It is obvious that bi-confessional marriages were far from normal or uncomplicated or *selbstverständlich*. They were often preceded by lengthy political and theological negotiations of marriage contracts, which could lead to diplomatic confrontations and even public controversies.¹³ In many cases new and special ceremonies at court were required, resulting, for example, in multiple wedding celebrations or special arrangements for receiving communion. In other instances, confessional variability at court resulted in changing forms of dynastic and monarchical self-representation. Where both partners kept their confessional allegiances, new religious spaces and clerical positions had to be created.¹⁴ Bi-confessional marriages required discrete spheres for the religious education of the couple's offspring, with the heir and other sons commonly raised in the father's confession and the daughters in that of their mother.¹⁵ Ideas of confessional irenicism featured prominently here, even in very practical respects such as in the ways daily religious rituals were executed. Indeed, confessionally mixed marriages highlight the intricate imbrication not just of the political and the religious, and the dynastic and the personal, but also the ceremonial and the quotidian that marked the early modern princely court.

Beyond the immediate context of the court, the multiconfessional household or entourage of the ruler could raise the populace's fears of confessional alterations, but it might also inspire hopes for interconfessional collaboration, institutionalized religious coexistence, and even the end of confessional differences.¹⁶ The dynastic-political dimensions of interreligious dialogue, plans for religious change, and confessional blending that derived from religious plurality at princely courts have not as yet been systematically studied, nor have the transformations of the "ways of knowing" (*Wissenskulturen*) at courts that were brought about due to changes in personnel and the influence of new ideas from other confessional and religious cultures as results of mixed marriages.¹⁷ It is no coincidence that the driving forces of theological irenicism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were closely connected with the confessionally mixed rul-

ing Houses of Hanover-Great Britain, Brandenburg-Prussia, Wolfenbüttel, and Württemberg.¹⁸ One aim of this book, therefore, is to investigate the dynastic-political impetus of interconfessional dialogue, which has hardly been considered before.

Another important aspect of our research findings is the cosmopolitanism at royal courts in early modern Europe, which came about largely through the introduction of personnel from other confessions who facilitated a transfer of ideas and transformed religious practices, social techniques, and knowledge systems.¹⁹ Here the volume resonates with recent work showing that local expressions of faith in the early modern world were often formed through contact with broader European or even global spheres.²⁰ Alternatively, the influx of such non-coreligionists at court (or even more so, the apostasy of a member of the court converting from the established confession to another) could bring issues of conformity and tolerance to a head, resulting in political and diplomatic crises.²¹ Thus, this volume explores the phenomena of religious plurality at princely courts especially so as to shed light on their dynastic, political, theological, performative/representative, and epistemological dimensions. As common as religious plurality at princely courts was, it usually represented some kind of irregularity or exception, and it was these abnormal or deviant cases that made the unwritten normative rules and assumptions clear.

Scope and Context

It was never the intention of this volume to account for all mixed courts in the early modern period. Their sheer number defies treatment in any one study. Rather, recognizing that the most effective way to study religious plurality at princely courts is from a comparative perspective, we present here a variety of methodological and disciplinary approaches. Our goal has been to bring together multifarious perspectives of early modern studies that have heretofore generally been discussed only separately—such as domestic and international politics, dynastic strategies, church history, monarchical self-representation, gender roles, and intellectual history—by examining one topic where they all intersect.

The volume represents a wide sampling of case studies from across Europe. Though there are British, Swedish, and French examples here, the main focus is on German-speaking Central Europe. This should come as no surprise, given the political and religious diversity within the Holy Roman Empire—the petri dish of Europe, as it were. The period under investigation is also deliberately broad, from the middle of the sixteenth to the middle of the nineteenth centuries, to emphasize the continued importance of religious plurality from the Reformation across the traditional divide of 1648 through the *Sattelzeit* and

beyond. Similarly, the case studies include not only synchronic “snapshots” of phenomena but also investigations over the *plus longue durée*.²²

The following chapters focus on plurality within Western Christianity and mainly in the early modern period, yet they stand against a much broader backdrop of religious plurality at court and raise issues that are to be understood in a global context. The role of the court Jew, for example, has been thoroughly explored.²³ This context also includes the presence and participation of both non-Christians at European courts and Europeans at non-Christian and non-European courts. European princely courts tended to equate the exotic or oriental with the “Turkish other” and were fascinated with the Muslim Ottoman court and harem. Consequently, incidences of Europeans at the Ottoman court were well documented and have been subject to detailed scholarly investigation,²⁴ as have been the visits or employment of Ottoman subjects, “Moors,” and Tatars at early modern European courts.²⁵ Further examples of non-Christian presence include Africans at several courts of the Holy Roman Empire or the well-studied visits of Native Americans to the French and English courts.²⁶ It is striking that in these cases the issue of religious encounters often seems to remain understudied.

The Chapters

Taken collectively, the chapters gathered here elude both reduction to any (false) consensus on the nature of religiously mixed courts or any programmatic statement on how religious plurality at early modern courts must be studied. The approach of the volume may be varied—transconfessional, intra-confessional, and also irenicist—but in general terms it illustrates the longevity of the religious-political connections and debate among ruling dynasties and also the different confessional camps. The broad range of subjects, approaches, and arguments in the chapters—studies that not only often complicate the confessionalization paradigm but that also in some instances pose challenges to each other—serves more as a call for further investigation than as a unified conclusion about these courts’ significance and meaning.

With that said, the chapters can be grouped according to the particular dynamic that stands at the center of their analyses. We have consciously mirrored this categorization in the organization of the volume. Of course, none of the sections and their core foci are hermetically sealed, and indeed strands of common interest run between the volume’s various chapters and ultimately across the breadth of the book.

The first section takes as its central focus the dynastic marriage policies that so often served as the genesis of religious plurality at court. Benjamin Marschke’s chapter examines the negotiations surrounding the frequent plans

for dynastic marriages—some of which came to be, others of which did not—between members of the Reformed Hohenzollern dynasty of Prussia and Lutheran princely houses in the eighteenth century. Although setting the terms for how the religious question would be managed between the religiously plural couple and at their court often required substantial and extended negotiation, Marschke notes a trend toward increasing indifference toward intra-Protestant confessional difference as the eighteenth century progressed, even while the barrier between Protestant-Catholic matches remained insurmountable. Alexander Schunka's chapter focuses more directly on the theological issues involved in cross-confessional intra-Protestant matches across the Holy Roman Empire in the long eighteenth century, showing that some theologians well into the 1700s considered a religiously mixed princely marriage and court something with which to nervously cope, while others hoped to harvest the potential of such a match to encourage broader forms of religious change. By the end of the century, Schunka shows, even matches between Protestant and Catholic houses became increasingly possible.

The next set of chapters shifts its gaze from dynastic marriage policies and patterns writ large to focus more tightly on particular instances of princely conversion that sometimes accompanied them. Ines Peper and Marion Romberg assess the challenges conversion posed to princely representation through the case of Elisabeth Christine of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel, who converted from Lutheranism to Catholicism in order to marry the future Habsburg Emperor Karl VI in 1707. The elaborate ceremonial performances and representational exertions (in both print and image) undertaken to cast the converted bride in a positive public light demonstrate how princely conversions forced courts to carefully communicate with their surrounding societies and take active efforts to manage public opinion. Sara Smart's chapter centers not on a conversion that took place at the time of marriage, nor indeed on Elector Johann Sigismund of Brandenburg's later conversion from Lutheranism to Calvinism itself, but rather on the ways in which his nonconverting Lutheran spouse Anna served as a focal point of critique and resistance at court in the aftermath of a princely conversion that she never came to support. Religious plurality at court was here a source of internal tension and provided privileged access for critical sentiments to find expression at the very seat of princely authority. Jonathan Spangler's chapter examines princely conversions of Protestant marriage partners to Catholicism at the French royal court in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The matches Spangler investigates navigated the tense relationship between perduring concerns over confessional conflict and religious toleration (especially in reference to the issuance and eventual revocation of the Edict of Nantes) on the one hand and the dynastic and power-political concerns of a common transconfessional European court culture on the other. Although the scales usually tipped toward the latter in terms of bringing about French

princely marriages and the conversions of their non-Catholic partners, the ongoing presence of the former could leave deep fingerprints on the experience of the marriage partners at court.

Expanding beyond examples centered primarily on princely actors themselves, the volume's third section contains chapters that assess the domestic political challenges posed by religious plurality at court. Some incidents of dissonance between the confessional identities of courts and those of their surrounding societies were produced by dynastic marriage or princely conversion, others by broader social and religious change within polities. Such dynamics complicated relations between society and court, though not necessarily in the manner and to the extent the confessionalization paradigm would suggest. Tryntje Helfferich's chapter examines the court of the Reformed Landgrave Moritz of Hessen-Kassel within his overwhelmingly Lutheran territory in the decades following his succession in 1592. Moritz, as Helfferich describes, has often been taken as paradigmatic of the confessionally driven "Second Reformation" in which leaders of Lutheran territories converted to Calvinism and pushed agendas of religious change against domestic opposition. By looking especially at the festive and performative cultural life at Moritz's mixed court, however, Helfferich paints a more nuanced picture of how religious plurality at Second Reformation courts could function in modes set apart from the dominance of confessional animosity that the confessionalization paradigm would lead us to expect. David Luebke's chapter approaches the tangle of kinship networks and religious difference at the courts of Westphalian prince-bishops from the mid-sixteenth through mid-seventeenth centuries. Key to Luebke's analysis is his depiction of the atmosphere of confessional ambiguity that prevailed in the administration of the prince-bishoprics and in access to offices in church and state in decades following the Religious Peace of Augsburg of 1555. It was not until the mid-seventeenth century that confessional identities and their consequences for appointments became cemented in such a manner as to allow the implementation of more confessionally Catholic policies.

While Helfferich's and Luebke's chapters show efforts to navigate around the problems posed by religious difference at court, the volume's fourth section, in contrast, focuses on figures who approached religious plurality at court as a positive asset, indeed as a creative engine of political and religious possibility. Daniel Riches examines the religiously plural court of the Lutheran King Johan III of Sweden and his Catholic Queen Katarina Jagellonica. The particular dynamic of this mixed court provided Johan with the ideal vehicle to propagate innovative plans for religious change and to pursue sweeping political and diplomatic schemes that were only made possible through his mixed marriage. Samuel Keeley takes the story of religious plurality at court forward to the nineteenth century in his study of the Prussian diplomat Christian Carl Josias Bunsen, who for two decades served as Prussian ambassador in London. Keeley describes how Bunsen navigated between the complex religious land-

scapes of the Prussian and British courts in order to pursue a program of Protestant cooperation and spiritual renewal that included a jointly administered missionary project in Jerusalem. Though Johan III and Bunsen were both ultimately frustrated in their respective ambitions, it was the religiously pluralistic courts, which served as the arenas of their activities, that enabled them to accomplish as much as they did.

In the closing section, Jeroen Duindam's contribution places the chapters and this book in a global context. Duindam shifts the perspective to show how European religious and dynastic "norms" were actually exceptions to global norms. In royal houses outside Europe, where polygyny was common and religious orthodoxy less stringent, the issue of religious plurality at princely courts was generally a nonissue—ironically it was often only the presence of European missionaries that made it an issue. Finally, the editors' conclusion draws together the recurring themes of the volume and identifies avenues of future research.

Genesis

We four coeditors wish to thank not only all the authors who ultimately are featured in this volume, but also all the people who have been part of the larger project. This book traces its origins to the "Mixed Courts: Dynasty, Politics and Religion in the Early Modern World" conference in Gotha in March 2013. The conference was the brainchild of Alexander Schunka, Michael Schaich, and Benjamin Marschke, and it was generously supported by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG), the German Historical Institute London (GHIL), and the Forschungszentrum Gotha at the University of Erfurt. Special thanks to Andreas Gestrich, then Director of the GHIL, for supporting the conference (and the project) not only materially but also intellectually by attending and serving as a commentator at the conference.

The idea of the conference (and ultimately this book) continued to intrigue us even after several false starts at publishing a *Sammelband* and a change of characters—Michael Schaich amicably withdrew to focus on other projects. Sara Smart, Daniel Riches, David Luebke, Schunka, and Marschke were all coincidentally in Wolfenbüttel in the summer of 2018, and at various points their conversation turned to the "Mixed Courts" project. Smart and Riches (one of the original participants in the 2013 conference) were enlisted as coorganizers/coeditors. With Luebke's encouragement, all agreed to jump-start the project as "Religious Plurality at Princely Courts" by issuing a new call for papers for the 2019 German Studies Association (GSA) conference (in Portland, Oregon), combining the new contributions (from 2019) with revised and updated versions of the originals (from 2013), and then submitting the manuscript for publication in the Spektrum series.

Notes

1. See, for example, Dixon, Freist, and Greengrass, *Living with Religious Diversity*; Luebke and Lindemann, *Mixed Matches*; and Cristellon, “Mixed Marriages in Early Modern Europe.”
2. Notable exceptions: Hufschmidt, “Den Krieg im Braut-Bette schlichten”; and Kepsch, *Dynastie und Konfession*.
3. See the exemplary comparative works of Jeroen Duindam, such as Duindam, *Vienna and Versailles*; Duindam, Artan, and Kunt, *Royal Courts in Dynastic States*; and Duindam and Dabringhaus, *The Dynastic Centre*.
4. See the foundational works by Heinz Schilling and Wolfgang Reinhard on *Konfessionalisierung*—for example, Reinhard, “Gegenreformation als Modernisierung?”; Reinhard, “Konfession und Konfessionalisierung in Europa”; Schilling, *Konfessionskonflikt und Staatsbildung*; Schilling, “Die Konfessionalisierung im Reich”; and Schilling, “Die Konfessionalisierung Europas.”
5. Regarding problems with the confessionalization paradigm, see, for example, von Greyerz et al., *Interkonfessionalität—Transkonfessionalität—binnenkonfessionelle Pluralität*.
6. See David M. Luebke’s contribution to this book. Regarding confessional indifference, see the works of Ralf-Peter Fuchs and David M. Luebke, Jesse Spohnholz, Andreas Pietsch, and Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger—for example, Spohnholz, “Multiconfessional Celebration of the Eucharist”; Fuchs, “The Production of Knowledge”; Luebke, “Sharing Sacred Spaces”; and Pietsch and Stollberg-Rilinger, *Konfessionelle Ambiguität*.
7. On 1648, see, for example, Croxton, “The Peace of Westphalia”; and Osiander, “Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Westphalian Myth.”
8. Schulze, *Ständische Gesellschaft*.
9. See Tryntje Helfferich’s contribution to this book. These arrangements often mirrored those made in mixed marriages elsewhere. See Freist, *Glaube—Liebe—Zwietracht*.
10. Bepler, “Die Fürstin als Betsäule.”
11. See the contributions by Sara Smart, Ines Peper and Marion Romberg, in this book.
12. One thinks of Friedrich of Hessen-Kassel (1676–1751), who married into the Swedish royal family and ultimately became king (r. 1720–1751), and especially George of Denmark (1653–1708), who married into the English royal family and was royal consort after 1702. See Beem, “Why Prince George of Denmark?”; Farguson, “Dynastic Politics”; and Burmeister, *Friedrich. König von Schweden*.
13. One prominent case was the marriage of Elisabeth Christine of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel, a Lutheran, to the Catholic Holy Roman Emperor. See Ines Peper and Marion Romberg’s contribution to this book. See also the invaluable database of marriage contracts that resulted from a DFG-funded research project at the Universität Marburg.
14. See Benjamin Marschke’s contribution to this book.
15. For example, such an agreement was made in 1645 between Reformed Brandenburg and Lutheran Kurland regarding the marriage of Luise Charlotte of Brandenburg (1617–76) and Duke Jakob of Kurland (1610–81). See Schönpflug, *Die Heiraten der Hohenzollern*, 116–17. In the complex confessional circumstances that prevailed at the court of the Catholic Duke Wilhelm of Jülich-Cleves-Berg (r. 1539–92), his two sons were brought up as Catholics while his daughters were raised to be Protestants by the duke’s sister Amalie (1517–86). See Becker, “Theologie am jülich-klevischen Hof,” 251–62, here 260.
16. See Alexander Schunka’s contribution to this book.

17. On the “ways of knowing” at court, see the works of Martin Mulsow—for example, Mulsow, “Dilettantismus oder ‘Nebenwerk’?”
18. See Samuel Keeley’s contribution to this book, as well as Jacob, *Strangers Nowhere in the World*; and Riches, *Protestant Cosmopolitanism*.
19. On such irenicism, see the works of Alexander Schunka, such as Schunka, *Ein neuer Blick nach Westen*.
20. See Rublack, *Protestant Empires*.
21. For a spectacular example, see Riches, “Conversion and Diplomacy.”
22. See the contribution to this book by Jonathan Spangler, as well as those by Luebke, Marschke, and Schunka.
23. See, most recently, Mintzker, *The Many Deaths of Jew Süß*.
24. See the works of Leslie Pierce and Tobias Graf—for example, Pierce, *The Imperial Harem*; Pierce, *Empress of the East*; and Graf, *The Sultan’s Renegades*. See also Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters*; and Lal, *Empress*.
25. See the many works on the famous visit of Suleyman Aga to the court of Louis XIV in 1669. Regarding Muslims in Central Europe, see the works of Stephan Theilig—for example, Theilig, *Türken, Mohren und Tataren*.
26. See, for example, several of the essays collected in Honeck, Klimke, and Kuhlmann, *Germany and the Black Diaspora*; Ellis and Steen, “An Indian Delegation”; and Vaughan, *Transatlantic Encounters*.

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