

CARTAS DOMÉSTICAS, CARTAS FAMILIARES:
THE FAMILIAL AND POLITICAL NETWORKS
OF QUEEN MARIANA OF AUSTRIA (1665-1696)

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During the Council of State deliberation of 15 December 1665, Gaspar de Bracamonte y Guzmán, Count of Peñaranda, recommended to the queen regent of Spain, Mariana of Austria (1634-1696) to write a “domestic letter”¹ to her brother, Emperor Leopold I (1640, r. 1658-1705), urging him to begin preparations to help defend the Spanish Low Countries from an imminent French attack. Peñaranda’s assumption in making such a recommendation was that a handwritten letter from the emperor’s sister would be a persuasive tool and should be used in addition to the regular diplomatic communication between the Spanish Monarchy and the Holy Roman Empire¹. Mariana had been in office for only a few months, marking this as one of the earliest occasions of what would become a habitual practice during her regency. These special kinds of letters between members of the Habsburg dynasty, particularly among ruling monarchs, were not new. Labeled as written “in their own hand”² by the royal secretaries, they were frequently copied, translated, and debated by the Council of State. During Mariana’s regency, however, these familial or domestic letters (*cartas familiares* or *domésticas*) as they were alternately called, acquired major significance as a result of the specific historical circumstances at play.

1. Peñaranda’s opinion is recorded in the Council of State’s deliberation (*consulta*) of 15 December 1665, Archivo General de Simancas (AGS), Estado (E.), legajo (leg.) 2378.

Philip IV's death on 17 September 1665 and the succession of his three-year-old son Charles II (1661-1700) to the Spanish throne created one of the most critical dynastic junctures during the period in which the two Habsburg branches co-existed, and brought Mariana to the center of dynastic politics (Oliván Santaliestra 2006a and 2006b; Llorente 2006 and 2011; López Cordón 1998; Campbell 1996; Goodman 2005; Mitchell 2013). Her husband named her regent of the monarchy as the king's tutor and the monarchy's governor until the child's fourteenth birthday. However, as the daughter of Emperor Ferdinand III (r. 1637-1657) and his Spanish-Habsburg consort, Maria of Austria (1606-1646), Mariana was also the sister of Emperor Leopold I². These intricate familial and political connections resulted from generations of strategic marriage alliances for which the Habsburgs were famous for (Sutter Fitchner 1976; Patrouch 2013; McGowan 2013), but went a step further when Leopold I married his niece, Mariana's daughter, Margaret Theresa (1651-1673), in 1666³; they were also named next in the line of succession after Charles II (Domínguez Ortiz 1982: 20-23; Sevilla González 2006: 597). The long-reaching consequences of this marriage are well known⁴. In the short term, however, the dynastic union had been established not only to secure Habsburg succession from the combined Austrian and Spanish branches, but also to set the stage for a military coalition against Louis XIV of France (r. 1643-1715)⁵. The French king was reportedly awaiting Philip IV's death to press the inheritance rights of his Spanish-born consort, Queen Maria Theresa of Austria (1638-1683), to the Spanish Netherlands⁶. This dangerous state of affairs remained essentially unchanged until 1679,

2. Council of State's deliberation, 31 March 1666, AGS, E., leg. 2381. On Ferdinand III, see Höbelt 2008; Hengerer 2012.
3. On Margaret's departure to Vienna, see Labrador Arroyo 2008; and on her rule as empress consort, Oliván Santaliestra 2011
4. The marriage provided the basis for the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714). On the implications of the succession, see Sevilla González 2005: 599-600; Nieto Nuño 2009, vol. I: 136; Pribram and Landwehr von Pragenau 1903, vol. I: 166-167; Ribot 2010: 17-23.
5. Council of State's deliberation, 4 April 1663, Archivo Histórico Nacional (AHN), E., leg. 2799.
6. Letter of the Marquis de la Fuente, Spanish ambassador in Paris, to Philip IV, Paris, 23 August 1665, AHN, E., libro 129, n. 199. This justification gave way to the War of Devolution (1667-1668). Declaration of war in AGS, E., legs. 2382 and 3100. See Spielman 1977: 53.

when Charles II married the French princess, Marie Louise of Orleans (1662-1689)⁷. During this fourteen-year period, the interests of the Spanish and Austrian Habsburgs were united as never before; yet collaboration was extremely difficult, and, at times, even impossible to attain. Given Mariana's central position as queen regent of Spain and a Habsburg by birth, her epistolary practices help us understand the ebbs and flows of dynastic politics.

This essay examines Mariana's extant and non-extant correspondence with Leopold I, Charles II, and other members of the family in order to identify the political and familial networks she relied upon to navigate the many difficult situations she faced as regent and subsequently as queen dowager. The letters, from various Spanish archives, include those to Leopold I during her regency dispatched and received through the Council of State; the letters to Charles II during the two different times that they were apart; and the letters Mariana wrote to her Habsburg relatives in the Royal Convent of the Descalzas Reales. Due to the fragmentary state of the letters, it is best to analyze them as part of the communication networks formed by secretaries, councilors of state, diplomats, courtiers, and messengers. These figures acted within specific institutional frameworks and intervened at all levels of the letters' production and delivery. They also added meaning to the written communication with oral messages which were carefully planned and relied upon by Mariana and her interlocutors. The familial-political relationships between the letter writers, the geographic distance, and the specific contexts at play also shaped their letters' characteristics, although even the most spontaneous or apparently innocuous forms of communication were not devoid of political implications.

DIPLOMATIC, DYNASTIC, AND INTERNATIONAL NETWORKS

The *cartas domésticas* were an integral part of the diplomatic repertoire the Habsburgs had in place to achieve specific political outcomes. The arrival of a handwritten letter from the emperor, for example, was

7. The marriage took place after the peace settlement between Spain and France in Nijmegen (1678-1679). See Mitchell 2015.

duly noted with the designation “*de propria mano*” and indicated that a particularly urgent issue needed attention. Leopold I, for instance, wrote several letters in his own hand to Philip IV during 1664 and 1665, pleading with the king to send the *Infanta* Margaret Theresa to Vienna⁸. A letter the emperor wrote to Philip IV on 20 February 1665, for example, had been copied and exhaustively debated by the Council of State as the king and his ministers attempted to assuage the emperor’s obvious exasperation about the endless delays⁹. During the early years of Mariana’s regency, as the war against France became the monarchy’s most pressing political issue, domestic letters were sent from Madrid to Vienna more than from Vienna to Madrid: councilors of state urged Mariana on many occasions to write to the emperor in “her own hand”, and just as frequently, the queen mentioned her intention to write these special kinds of letters to “my brother” in her responses to the Council of State¹⁰. Charles II’s handwritten letters to the emperor and his mother were also extensively debated by the council, albeit under different circumstances. Spain and the Holy Roman Empire had finally become military allies by the time Charles II took over the government; the issue of his engagement to Leopold I’s daughter, Archduchess Maria Antonia of Austria (1669-1692), became the main subject of his letters from 1677 to 1679. Mariana helped Charles II handle this delicate matter; her letters to the emperor avoided a major falling out between the two sides¹¹.

In all of these instances, the overt political intention of the familial letters was clear to all. Copies and translations of Charles II’s and Leopold I’s letters are often, albeit not always, preserved and form part of the Council of State papers¹². Many of the original letters can be found in

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8. Letters are mentioned in Council of State deliberations of 17 March 1664, 8 July 1664, 26 March 1665, and 22 August 1665, and also in a memorandum of the Imperial Ambassador, Francisco Eusebio, Count of Pötting, to Philip IV of 22 August 1665, AHN, E., leg. 2799.
 9. Letter of Emperor Leopold I to Philip IV, Vienna, 20 February 1665 (copy), and Council of State’s deliberation, 26 March 1665, AHN, E., leg. 2799.
 10. Frequently mentioned in the Council of State’s deliberations from 1665 to 1673, when the Habsburgs finally forged a major military and diplomatic coalition against France. See the series Estado, Alemania, in AGS, E., legs. 2381-2392.
 11. See, for example, letter of Charles II to Emperor Leopold I, Madrid, 30 July 1677 (copy), AHN, E., leg. 2799.
 12. Most of these letters are archived in AGS; a smaller but significant number of them is in AHN.

special *legajos* or bundles in the Archivo Histórico Nacional (Madrid), designated variously as congratulatory missives (*enborabuenas*) or letters of sympathy (*pésames*)¹³. These labels are obviously misleading; the letters' meaning and purpose can be much better appreciated when they are analyzed as part of the same body of documents discussed by the councilors of state when crafting their recommendations for the queen. Mariana's letters have not been preserved at the same rate as those written by Charles II or Leopold I, not even as copies. Nevertheless, the significance of the non-extant domestic letters can be confirmed through careful attention to the deliberations and instructions to diplomats; occasionally, the contents of her letters may also be reconstructed (Nieto Nuño 1990, vol. I: 171; Maura y Gamazo 1911, vol. I: 241).

Under Mariana's rule, the Council of State acquired an important role in the making of foreign policy, with a major influx of men and decision-making power granted from early on her regency¹⁴. The abundance of domestic letters received by the council, therefore, confirm their part in diplomatic negotiations with the Holy Roman Empire, particularly during the months leading up to Louis XIV's declaration of war in May 1667, which sorely tested intra-dynastic relations. The War of Devolution (1667-1668) was essentially a dynastic war that called into question not only Charles II's inheritance, but also Margaret's and even Leopold I's¹⁵. Louis XIV argued that Spanish territories in the Low Countries "devolved" to his consort upon Philip IV's death, because she was the daughter of the late king's first marriage. He claimed that legal statutes found in the Duchy of Brabant and the County of Flanders gave her precedence even over the male children of the king's second marriage. Expectations that the emperor would lend military

13. Many originals can be found in AHN, E., legs. 2661 and 2729.

14. The number of councilors was doubled to an average of nine councilors attending meetings; regular and extraordinary meetings increased exponentially as well (Nieto Nuño 1993, vol. I: 171). On the Council of State, including its increased agency during Mariana's regency, see Danvila y Collado 1885-1886, vol. II: 214; Cordero Torres 1944: 52; Barrios: 152; Escudero 1969; and 1999: 109-112. For the relationship of Mariana's predecessors and their *validos* with the Council of State, see Tomás y Valiente 1982.

15. War declaration of Louis XIV to Mariana, Paris, 8 May 1667, announced at her court by the French ambassador on 17 May 1667. See Council of State's deliberation, 18 May 1667, which includes copies of letters and the treatise the French king offered to justify the war, AGS, E., legs. 2383 and 3100; and AHN, E., libro 140.

support for the defense of the Low Countries ran high, not the least because of his own stakes in the succession, but his reticence to do so became evident at the outbreak of hostilities. The Spanish ambassador in Vienna, Baltasar de la Cueva y Enríquez de Cabrera, Count of Castellar, mounted an intense diplomatic campaign to move Leopold I and his ministers to act, but to no avail¹⁶. Indeed, his provocations led the emperor to request Mariana to recall him to Spain. Mariana's personal letters held the only source of hope during this trying period. The deliberations of the Council of State, particularly from June to August 1667, when Spanish losses were the greatest, highlight the exasperation —swiftly turning into anger— that Spanish ministers experienced as a result of Leopold I's neutrality in the conflict. The ministers constantly pleaded with the queen to utilize her familial connections, ostensibly through her letters, to change her brother's mind¹⁷.

Leopold I's indifference became a major liability for Mariana during the summer campaigns of 1667, when Louis XIV's armies easily conquered Spanish garrisons in the Netherlands. The Count of Peñaranda, one of the most senior members of the Council of State and a diplomatic figure of international standing, criticized Leopold I's apathy at the Council of State's meeting on 9 July, voicing a long list of grievances against the Austrian Habsburgs. Peñaranda urged Mariana to convince her brother that his indifference would result in "dire consequences and even potential uprisings among the subjects of the King of Spain once they realized that in spite of his stakes in the succession he had abandoned them in a moment of need as had never been experienced before". His long speech ended with the recommendation that Mariana should write to Leopold I "in the most severe terms that her prudence dictated"¹⁸. Mariana, who often relied

16. On the reception of the news in Vienna, see the report sent by the Count of Castellar to Mariana, 30 May 1667, AGS, E., leg. 2383.

17. Council of State's deliberations of 15 December 1665, AGS, E., leg. 2378; 17, 18 and 21 May 1667, AGS, E., legs. 2382 and 3100; 21 June 1667, AGS, E., leg. 2382; 9 July, and 9 August 1667, AGS, E., leg. 2383.

18. "[...] escribir al emperador en los terminos mas apretados que la dictara su real prudencia, representadole lo que aventura en incurrir en odio de todos los Reynos y vasallos del Rey, pues de mala gana tendran por subzesor de todos a quien totalmente los desampara en el mayor estremo de necesidad a que jamas se han visto reducidos", Peñaranda's opinion recorded in the Council of State's deliberation of 9 July 1667, AGS, E., leg. 2383 (all translations are by the author).

on the Council of State's consultations to craft instructions to her diplomats, announced that she intended to write a letter "of the same substance" as her minister had suggested¹⁹. Although there is no way to compare the content of her letter to Peñaranda's suggestions, it is very likely that she followed the same procedure in this instance as she did in her other political writings. One way or another, these types of deliberations reveal the critical role played by domestic letters during Mariana's regency.

In spite of this major failure to achieve the military collaboration that Spaniards expected, Mariana and her councilors continued to rely on the queen's domestic letters, reflecting the potential power of her blood ties with the emperor. Although Mariana extricated the monarchy from a dangerous situation without the help of her relatives in Vienna²⁰, she remained steadfast in her quest to conclude a defensive and offensive league with the Holy Roman Empire, a topic frequently discussed in the Council of State. The Partition Treaty between Leopold I and Louis XIV remained unknown to Mariana and her court when it was signed in January 1668; she learned of it only in May 1669 (Bérenger 1979; Spielman 1977: 56; Ribot 2010: 24; and 2012)²¹. Even if the treaty was politically expeditious to Leopold I, it was a major form of betrayal from a dynastic point of view and illustrates the serious difficulties Mariana had to face. As she kept the matter purposely out of the Council of State, it is not clear if she talked to Leopold I about it²². It is significant, however, that Leopold I banished Prince Johann Weikhard Auersperg, who was in charge of the negotiations with Louis XIV's envoy, by the end of the year, several months after Mariana had been told of the treaty's existence (Spielman 1977: 57)²³.

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19. Mariana's response to the Council of State's deliberation of 9 July 1667, AGS, E., leg. 2383.
 20. On the peace settlement of the War of Devolution signed in Aix-la-Chapelle on 2 May 1668, see AHN, E., leg. 2797 expedientes (exps.) 63/64 and 66/67; and also Usunáriz 2006: 430-431; the Army of Flanders reached previous levels by 1668 (Rodríguez Hernández 2007; Storrs 2006).
 21. Letter of Mariana to Esteban de Gamarra y Contreras, Spanish ambassador in The Hague, Madrid, 18 May 1669, AGS, E., leg. 2540.
 22. Letter of Mariana to Esteban Gamarra y Contreras, Spanish ambassador in The Hague, Madrid, 18 May 1669, AGS, E., leg. 2540.
 23. "El S[eño]r. emperador a tomado de mandar retirar al Principe de Ausberg de su servicio expresando algunos de los motivos publicos que se decian lo havia ocasionado no habiendo sido el menor ni el de menos consecuencia a la influencia desta

The removal from the imperial court of a man with such very “little inclination to conserve the union of the two lines of the august house of Austria” was considered a diplomatic victory for Mariana. Ministers assumed that Mariana had been responsible for Leopold I’s decision and suggested that the queen should write to the emperor personally to express her gratitude²⁴. More research is needed to ascertain whether Mariana played a role in Leopold I’s decision, and if so, in what manner. Nevertheless, the collaboration between the Spanish and Austrian Habsburgs was achieved gradually with no small measure of difficulty; it is thus significant that Mariana’s domestic letters were credited with visibly improving the relations between Spain and the Empire.

The designation of these types of communication as *cartas domésticas* accentuated rather than downplayed their political and diplomatic significance. Even the letters of sympathy written to the emperor on the death of Empress Margaret Theresa in March 1673 became a matter of extensive debate²⁵. Her daughter’s death was surely a personal blow to the queen, but it was more than a personal tragedy. It brought the question of the succession again to the forefront; its occurrence when Mariana was about to conclude a military coalition with her brother against France created additional problems. Mariana’s domestic letters were painstakingly edited, and their meaning completed with the carefully prescribed oral messages that she had given to Don Pedro Ronquillo, the highly capable diplomat chosen to deliver the letters of sympathy to Vienna. She explained to Ronquillo that her daughter’s death had wounded her to the bottom of her heart and the pain was such that “not only with the written, but with the spoken word [*la voz*] could she properly express her sadness and convey how much she lamented that of the

demostracion el reconocimiento [de] quan poco se inclinaba a la conservacion de la union de las dos lineas de la augustisima casa”, Council of State’s deliberation, 28 January 1670, AGS, E., leg. 2386.

24. “Pone el consejo en la consideracion de V[uestra]. M[a]g[esta]d. que si acaso huviere tenido V[uestra]. M[a]g[esta]d. alguna parte en ello sera justo que V[uestra]. M[a]g[esta]d. de gracias por ello al S[e]ño[r]. Emperador”, Council of State’s deliberation, 28 January 1670, AGS, E., leg. 2386.
25. Council of State’s deliberation, 16 April 1673, AHN, E., leg. 2661, exps. 253-257; and letter of Don Diego de la Torre to the Marquis of Mejorada, Madrid, 6 June 1673, AHN, E., leg. 2661, exp. 254.

emperor's"²⁶. Despite her and her brother's great loss, Mariana was deeply concerned about the issue of succession; she needed to bring up the possibility of a second marriage for the emperor as soon as possible. The matter was extremely delicate, not the least because of the emperor's professed love for his first wife (Spielman 1977: 72). Mariana's approach was to instruct the ambassador to gauge Leopold I's emotional state before raising the issue: "Whenever you deem it the appropriate time, you should express to him the necessity of ensuring the succession and how critical it is that he remarries at once, making him understand that such an important business cannot be delayed [...]". "Although the memory [of Margaret] renews pain and tears caused by her absence", she continued, "tell him that it would console me immensely to see him with sons [*hijos varones*]"²⁷. Mariana acted in this instance not much differently than her own father, Emperor Ferdinand III, who, in 1647, suggested that Mariana become Philip IV's bride —in the very same letter of sympathy he sent to the king on the death of his son, Prince Balthasar Charles (1629-1647), to whom Mariana had been engaged a few months before²⁸—. Thus, regardless of the specific historical circumstances and the individual preferences of the persons involved, we can observe a tradition of Habsburg epistolary practices that handled these matters in similar ways; those who intervened in the production of these letters were also repositories of knowledge and practices linking generations of Habsburg rulers.

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26. "He Juzgado q[ue] suceso tan lastimoso y que nos ha herido tan en lo vivo del corazon, necesita de otra mayor demostracion, y q[ue] no solo con lo escrito sino con la Voz es necesario manifestar mi pena y lo que siento la suya", Mariana's instructions to Ronquillo, Madrid, 10 June 1673, AHN, E., leg. 1632.
27. "Daresle a entender asi mismo el cuydado con q[ue] me tiene su salud por lo que deseo como tan buena hermana y por lo que conosco q[ue] interesa en ella el bien de la christi[anda]d y lo qual ha menester la sucesion de n[uest]ra casa, tocandole al mismo t[iem]po [si la coyuntura os pareciere a proposito o bien dejandolo para otra ocasion y dia que sera mejor] lo mucho q[ue] importa a todos procurar asegurarla y que para lograrlo trate luego de casarse pues no puede dejar de ser, ni conviene dilatarlo; y aunque esta memoria renuebe en la nuestra la pena y lagrimas por la falta de mi hija, me servira por otra parte de grandisimo consuelo verle con hijos varones en que se continue la descendencia y sucesion de n[uest]ra casa", Mariana's instructions for Ronquillo, Madrid, 10 June 1673, AHN, E., leg. 1632.
28. Emperor Ferdinand III's letter mentioned in the Council of Castile's deliberation, 10 January 1647, AHN, E., 2653, exp. 1.

After eight years of unrelenting efforts, Mariana gained the emperor's collaboration in a way that had seemed impossible during the early years of her regency. Within several months of Ronquillo's special embassy to deliver her letters, Leopold I married Archduchess Claudia Felicitas from the Tyrolean line of the Habsburgs, who had Mariana's full approval (Spielman 1977: 72-73). Additionally, Spain and the Holy Roman Empire forged a major military coalition against France²⁹. On 25 November 1674, Leopold I proposed a marriage between his six-year-old daughter Maria Antonia, her deceased mother's successor to the Spanish throne, and the king of Spain³⁰. As part of a large repertoire of political and diplomatic tools, the domestic letters exchanged between Mariana and Leopold I had been critical in shaping diplomatic outcomes.

POLITICAL AND FAMILIAL NETWORKS AT COURT

While ministers of the Council of State had played a decisive role in Mariana's letters to her relatives in Vienna, members of the royal households and the resident nuns at the Convent of the Descalzas Reales fulfilled a similar function in Mariana's correspondence with Charles II. Several figures acted as mediators during a troubled period between mother and son that began the day of the king's fourteenth birthday, on 6 November 1675, the same date of his legal emancipation. Charles II provoked his mother's anger by his decision to install his older half-brother, Don Juan of Austria (1629-1679), as his main political advisor. Mariana would force the young king to change his mind, thus ending the plot that inhibited her from continuing to participate in the government of the Monarchy, but only temporarily and at great political expense. On 14 January 1677, Charles II left the palace in the middle of the night. A few days later, he announced publicly

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29. Alliance between Spain, the Holy Roman Empire, the United Provinces, and the Duke of Lorraine, 1 July 1673 (Abreu y Bertodano 1751: 577-585; Herrero Sánchez 2000: 195). Mariana's war declaration to Louis XIV, 11 December 1673, AGS, E., leg. 2735.
30. Proposal of the Count of Harrach, Imperial ambassador at the Spanish court, to Mariana, discussed by the Council of State on 30 November 1674, AHN, E., leg. 2799.

his separation from his mother; shortly after, he declared the queen's mandatory retirement³¹. Several tense weeks followed, but Charles II remained steadfast in his decision to support Don Juan's bid for power. Mariana left the court for the city of Toledo on 2 March 1677 and lived in its Alcázar for the next two-and-a-half years (Mitchell 2013). Mariana's letters during this difficult period, therefore, became her main source of communication with her son and the court in Madrid.

During this grave period, Mariana turned to the nuns of the Convent of the Descalzas Reales. As Magdalena S. Sánchez, Vanessa de Cruz Medina, and other scholars have persuasively demonstrated, Habsburg women relied on the royal convents in establishing networks (Sánchez 1998; Cruz Medina 2013; Muñoz Serrulla and Vilacoba Ramos 2005). Mariana was no exception; her long history with the Descalzas Reales began even before she arrived in Madrid, when a nun named Sor Clara de la Cruz wrote her a warm letter of welcome, mentioning Mariana's own mother's close ties with the convent³². Many of the brief letters Mariana wrote to the nuns while in Madrid reveal the royal family's intimacy with the religious women of this venerable institution³³. Several abbesses and nuns are mentioned in Mariana's testament, confirming their strong ties of friendship³⁴. They developed during a lifetime of frequent visits to the convent, a favorite activity of Habsburg rulers³⁵. The nuns provided the royal family with special prayers and personal gift baskets of fruits, flowers, and foodstuffs on a regular basis which are abundantly documented in the letters³⁶. Mariana wrote one of her earliest letters after her separation from Charles II to her cousin, Sor Mariana de la Cruz, the il-

31. BNE, Mss. 18211.

32. Letter of Sor Clara de la Cruz to Mariana, 11 January 1647. I thank Renate Schreiber for providing me with this letter, which has been preserved in Riksarkiv (RAS), Extranea 195, XVI Tyskland. Arkivfragment Kejsar Ferdinand III:s, 1641-1647.

33. See the special section of the Archivo General de Palacio (AGP, Madrid) designated as Descalzas Reales.

34. Mariana's testament (copy) in SNAHN, Frías, caja (c.) 62, doc. 165.

35. For example, see Mariana's letters to Sor Mariana de la Cruz, Abbess Sor Juana del Espíritu Santo, and Ana Dorotea of Austria, from 1674 to 1678, AGP, Descalzas Reales, c. 6, exp. 31.

36. Many, if not most of the letters, acknowledge these gift baskets. See, for example, letter of Mariana to Sor Ana Dorotea, Madrid, 3 May 1675, AGP, Descalzas Reales, c. 6. exp. 31.

legitimate daughter of the Cardinal *Infante* Fernando, expressing her shock and disbelief³⁷. A few weeks after her departure, Mariana acknowledged a basket (*cestilla*) the nuns sent her and thanked them for



Marianna of Austria, Queen of Spain, anonymous. © Prado Museum (Madrid).

37. Letter of Mariana to Sor Mariana de la Cruz, s. l., dated as Thursday, 1677, AGP, Descalzas Reales, c. 6, exp. 31.

their proof of affection and support; she was also sorry for not having had time to say goodbye to the abbess personally, “whom I always remember as is fitting and as I do all the other religious women there; send them all my regards”³⁸. The Descalzas Reales, therefore, became a major source of support for the queen during her darkest hours. It also explains why Don Juan attempted, although to no avail, to diminish Mariana’s presence, who was “conspicuous in her absence” during her exile (Goodman 2005).

The intimacy and emotional support the nuns provided could be political, if the circumstances required it. Although the letters they wrote to Mariana have not survived, there is no doubt that they kept her well informed about events in Madrid and about Charles II’s well-being; this was very important for Mariana during the early months of her regency, when communication with her son was sporadic to non-existent. The convent’s role as a constant source of information can be inferred from the correspondence Sor Mariana de la Cruz maintained with the Queen of France Maria Theresa, who was also her cousin³⁹. Maria Theresa became openly critical of Charles II and Don Juan in their treatment of Mariana, a sentiment that, according to Maria Theresa, was also echoed by her “relative”, who was none other than Louis XIV⁴⁰. In her view, Charles II was not a good son for treating his mother in such a manner, because “[she] was not only his mother but his father’s wife, and if this was not enough, she was also a great princess”⁴¹. The nuns became an indirect source of communication between Mariana and Maria Theresa, who had been close friends for

38. “[...] quanto senti no poderme despedirme antes de la abadessa pues en mi siempre tendra la memoria della como tan propia a todas las religiosas poneis mis recados”, letter of Mariana to Sor Mariana de la Cruz, Aranjuez, 19 March 1677, AGP, Descalzas Reales, c. 6, exp. 31.

39. Maria Theresa’s correspondence with Sor Mariana de la Cruz (only the queen’s letters are extant) continued until the queen’s death in 1683; see AGP, Descalzas Reales c. 6, exp. 31.

40. “[...] y cierto no esta aconsejado y en esto no soy sola yo quien lo dize que ay otra perssona que es mi pariente que lo desapueba pues assido siempre obediente y buen hijo de su madre”, letter of Maria Theresa to Sor Mariana de la Cruz, s. l., 2 March 1677, AGP, Descalzas Reales, c. 6, exp. 31.

41. “[...] que cierto que no es de un hijo el tratar a su madre como la a tratado en efecto es su madre y muger de su padre y quando esto no fuera es una gran prinzeza”, letter of Maria Theresa to Sor Mariana de la Cruz, s. l., 20 September 1678, AGP, Descalzas Reales, c. 6, exp. 31.



Charles II of Spain, 1673, by Juan Carreño de Miranda. © Prado Museum (Madrid).

the ten years they had lived together in Madrid. Even though historical circumstances had made them dynastic rivals, it is clear that their familial ties were strong. When the French ambassador, Marquis Pierre of Villars, arrived in Madrid years later, after the public announcement of Charles II's marriage to the French princess Marie Louise of Orleans, he described their relationship as a "*liaison of queen mothers*" (Villars 1861: 28).

Although she had been marginalized from the government of the monarchy as well as from the king's life, Mariana soon emerged as the only person who could help Charles II break his engagement to the little Archduchess Maria Antonia, the emperor's daughter. This was a critical matter for Charles II and his ministers, for instead of a Habsburg marriage and military alliance, they preferred a Franco-Spanish marriage and peace with France. Charles II had set his sights on Marie Louise of Orleans since summer 1677⁴². When Leopold I asked the young king to ratify the marriage capitulations, tensions escalated: despite Charles II's opposition to the marriage, neither side could afford the possibility of a complete break between the Habsburgs, as the Spanish Monarchy and the Empire were major military allies in the war against France. Charles II reached out to his mother who became the mediator between her son and her brother. Indeed, Charles II and Leopold I unfailingly sent Mariana copies of their letters, acknowledging to each other when they had received them from her as well⁴³. As with the domestic letters written during Mariana's regency, the Council of State and diplomats took an active role in their production and the delivery of Charles II's letters to his mother and his uncle. The Spanish ambassador in Vienna, Don Antonio de Peralta, Marquis of Falces and Count of Santisteban, had been kept fully informed of the letters' contents. Indeed, he was given ciphered copies of them, but instructed to feign ignorance of the entire matter⁴⁴.

Mariana's participation in this major political and diplomatic issue brought her closer to her son and the court, but it was not the only point of connection. Mariana wrote to her son frequently during her stay in Toledo. Only ten letters — a fraction of those she wrote to

42. Council of State's deliberation, 2 August 1677, AHN, E., leg. 2799.

43. Letter of Charles II to Leopold I (copy), Madrid, 30 July 1677, AHN, E., leg. 2799.

44. Council of State's deliberations, 3 and 13 April 1679, AHN, E., leg. 2796.

yo estoy en una a Dios grande y ay no he
 he he he he cosa que firmo lo que co pa
 lo que lo que en las cosas que me ha
 libro favor como se ha sido la orden
 de la casa que se lo que mucho y esta
 muy grande el poder es pero no se si
 yo a muy iusto que no se si se de
 el de lo que se de lo que se de
 en la casa para que pueda pasar a esta
 pronto a los Dios grande y ay no he
 de un vida como de la y de un de la
 del Buen retiro a 23 de 8 de 1679.

La Madre que me
 se quiere.

Fragment of a letter written by Queen Marianna of Austria to her son Charles II of Spain, Buen Retiro, 23 October 1679 (AHN, E, leg. 2729, doc. 71).

Charles II— survive, but these can be complemented with the fifty-eight letters the king wrote to his mother, dated from 8 April 1678 to 20 September 1679—. Mariana's letters, all holographs, formed part of a rich and close network of communication that functioned like a well-lubricated machine because of the geographic proximity between Madrid and Toledo. Several times a week, and often daily, messages, letters, gifts, portraits, and a variety of important state documents, such as the Treaty of Nijmegen (1678-1679) as well as Charles II's marriage capitulations, were carried by numerous persons working for the queen and king in a wide range of functions, from top political officers of their respective royal households to lower ranking administrative officials⁴⁵. Charles II also relied on messages delivered orally by the many people who went back and forth from Madrid to Toledo⁴⁶.

Mariana also counted on trusted figures to communicate with her son; her goal during this period was to see him in person as a first step toward their reconciliation. Don Antonio Sebastián de Toledo, Marquis of Mancera, Mariana's High Steward (*mayordomo mayor*), for example, acted as the queen's special envoy; she entrusted him with her personal letters and messages for Charles II. At one point, Mariana sent Mancera to Aranjuez with a special letter to Charles II and a message in which she demanded a meeting with her son⁴⁷. Her order resulted in a major setback for the two, however, as Mancera was caught in the middle and exiled; Charles II lifted the punishment only near the end of Mariana's own exile. Although tensions between mother and son were palpable, their constant communication and Mariana's effective intercession with the emperor helped improve their relationship. Charles II acknowledged it at various times, such as in May 1679 when he wrote her: "I am certain that you had the main part in the way my uncle has taken this business"⁴⁸. Her actions brought her

45. For example, letters of Charles II to Mariana, Madrid, 25 July and 20 December 1678, AHN, E., leg. 2729.

46. Letter of Charles II to Mariana, Madrid, 8 July 1678, AHN, E., leg. 2729.

47. Letter of the Marquis of Mancera to Charles II's royal secretary, Jerónimo de Eguía, s. l., 2 February 1679, BNE, Ms. 2409, fol. 557; and letters of Charles II to Mariana, Madrid, 28 January and 6 May 1679, AHN, E., leg. 2729.

48. "[...] y estoy bien cierto q[ue] abras tenido la principal parte en q[ue] la buena forma en q[ue] mi tío a tomado este neg[goci]o.", letter of Charles II to Mariana, Madrid, 4 May 1679, AHN, E., leg. 2729.

closer to achieving her restitution at court, which became a certainty once the king's marriage to Marie Louise was confirmed in the summer⁴⁹. Although Don Juan's death on 17 September 1679 accelerated Mariana's return to court, she had already extracted a written promise from Charles II that he would bring her back⁵⁰. The communication networks, composed of figures such as the Marquis of Mancera, Juan Francisco de la Cerda Duke of Medinaceli, Cardinal Archbishop of Toledo Luis Manuel Fernández Portocarrero, and members of the royal households, also played major roles in aiding Mariana to emerge unscathed from this long, personal political crisis.

Mariana returned to court on 27 September 1679, with her reputation intact and the expectation that she was to assume again a relevant role⁵¹. This was perfectly obvious to the French, who dispatched their princess with specific instructions on how to deal with the queen mother⁵². When Charles II left for the French border to meet his bride, Mariana did not accompany him, marking the second and last time they would be separated, from 20 or 21 October until Charles II's return on 29 November 1679. During this second separation, so very different from the first, Mariana and Charles II remained in constant communication. Thirty-eight of her letters, all of them holographs, have survived; this may be the only set of Mariana's correspondence preserved in its entirety. Save for the few days she did not write due to migraines, Mariana wrote every day and sometimes, even twice a day. Couriers went back and forth with letters and messages, but also tapestries and jewels, state documents and memoranda. The letters are relatively short, at most a page and a half; written in a straightforward style; they communicate a sense of immediacy and liveliness. Mariana resumed her old acquaintances, and the cheerful personality that she evinced when queen consort, returned: "I went to the Descalzas this afternoon", she wrote to Charles II on 5 November 1679, "since the

49. Letter of Cardinal Portocarrero to Charles II, Toledo, 15 August 1679, AHN, E., leg. 2729.

50. Letter of Charles II to Mariana, Madrid, 20 September 1679; and letter of Mariana to Charles II, Toledo, 21 September 1679, AHN, E., leg. 2729.

51. "[...] la Reyna que hizo su entrada rezibida de los corazones de todos con aclamacion y aplauso", BNE, Ms. 9399, fol. 85r.

52. Instructions to Marie Louise of Orleans, July 1679 (copy), AHN, E., leg. 4818, exp. 52.

nuns were about to kill me if I did not”⁵³. Another day, she wrote to Charles II that it had been raining so hard in the morning and afternoon that her plans to go to the Royal Convent of the Encarnación had fallen through, and she lamented that the nuns “were fooled for two days in a row”⁵⁴.

Mariana showed strong support for her son’s impending marriage; she was enthusiastic about Marie Louise’s arrival, and affectionately took the young couple, who were eighteen and seventeen respectively, under her wing. “Do not forget to tell me the exact date of your marriage so that I can uncover the Holy Sacrament”, she asked Charles several times, “I want to ensure that you will have much happiness”, she affirmed⁵⁵. “Although it appears that my daughter will be arriving soon”, she wrote on another occasion, “I do not wish to write her less often, so I am sending you this letter for her”⁵⁶. When someone of Mariana’s stature wrote a letter, it had to be answered before she could send another. “To this date”, Mariana wrote to Charles II, “I have not received any response to the letters I have written”. However, she did not make an issue of it: “it is very likely that the trip does not allow her time to write”⁵⁷. Mariana took the lead in developing affective ties with her daughter-in-law, an important step in ensuring a smooth transition for Marie Louise: “Give your wife a hug from me until I can do that myself when I see her”, she wrote to Charles close to their arrival, adding, “I do not write to her more

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53. “[...] y esta tarde he estado en las Descalzas que ya me mataban las monjas que fuese alla”, letter of Mariana to Charles II, Madrid, 5 November 1679, AHN, E., leg. 2729.
54. “[...] estaba para ir a la Encarnacion pero llobio tanto toda la mañana y hasta cerca de las tres que no me atrebi a salir pero despues se decubrio el sol cuan lo sentiran las monjas que ya han quedado dos dias burladas”, letter of Mariana to Charles II, Madrid, 10 November 1679, AHN, E., leg. 2729.
55. “[...] y no dejes de decirme con tiempo el dia que sera tu casamiento para que haga descubrir el san[tis]simo porque tengas muchas dichas”, letter of Mariana to Charles II, Buen Retiro Palace, 9 November 1679, AHN, E., leg. 2729.
56. “[...] como mi hija me parece se ba ya acercando no quiero dejar de irla escribiendo mas a menudo y assi te enbio esta carta para ella no dejes de abisarme en el paraje que se halla y quantos dias tarda de partir a [B]urgos y el dia que sera tu casamiento para poder aca recomendarla a Dios”, letter of Mariana to Charles II, Buen Retiro Palace, 11 November 1679, AHN, E., leg. 2729.
57. “[...] te enbio la carta aunque hasta aora no he tenido respuesta a ninguna carta que la he escrito [aunque] el caminar no la hara lugar para escribir”, letter of Mariana to Charles II, Buen Retiro Palace, 18 November 1679, AHN, E., leg. 2729.

often so as not to burden her”⁵⁸. Most likely based on her own experience as queen consort, Mariana demonstrated a keen awareness of what Marie Louise must be going through. When she crossed into Spanish territory, for example, Mariana noted: “she must have been surprised with the change of food”⁵⁹. “If she speaks [Spanish] as well as she writes it”, Mariana wrote on another occasion, “we will be able to understand each other very well. I have no doubt that the more time she spends with you she will get better and better every single day”⁶⁰. “My son”, she wrote in a postscript, as the thought came to her after she had signed the letter: “do give me the pleasure of telling me whether your wife has already donned Spanish clothing, although I would prefer that the first time you see her, she would be dressed in her own French style”⁶¹. All of these early contacts and attitudes had deep political implications, and not only for the bride. It is clear that Mariana wanted to establish her own position in her son’s court, knowledgeable as she was that the new queen would take over the role she had herself occupied as consort. Her decision to move her residence to a private palace near the Alcázar spoke to both her desire to remain an important part of the court and her understanding that she was no longer at its center.

Mariana followed all the stages of Marie Louise’s and Charles II’s encounter with great interest and the joyful expectation to see her son married, not hesitating to instruct him delicately in the ways of gallantry: “I would like to recommend”, she wrote to Charles II even before he met his wife, “that you always show yourself as her finest ad-

58. “[...] a tu mujer dala un abraço de mi parte mientras yo se le puedo dar y que por no enbaraçarla no escribo mas a menudo”, letter of Mariana to Charles II, Buen Retiro Palace, 24 November 1679, AHN, E., leg. 2729.

59. “[...] sintiendome de gran consuelo saver que estas bueno y lo que me abisas que mi hija ha estado a[hí]ta la debe de haver hecho nobedad la mudança de las comidas”, letter of Mariana to Charles II, Buen Retiro Palace, 18 November 1679, AHN, E., leg. 2729.

60. “[...] que si ella habla ya tan bien como escribe sera muy bueno con que nos podremos entender mejor y cada dia se perfeccionara mas y mas quando llegue a estar contigo”, letter of Mariana to Charles II, Buen Retiro Palace, 8 November 1679, AHN, E., leg. 2729.

61. “Hijo mio hasme gusto de decir si tu mujer se ha puesto ya el traje a la española aunque me da que la beas primero con el suio Frances”, letter of Mariana to Charles II, Buen Retiro Palace, 11 November 1679 (post-scriptum), AHN, E., leg. 2729.

mirer, in spite of being such an illustrious husband”⁶². Mariana was absolutely delighted to learn that everything seemed to go well with the couple: “My happiness is immense to know that your wife has made such a great impression on you and that you are happy, and I hope to God that you will be even more [happy] every single day, that you will be an attentive husband, and that she, too, will earn your attentions”⁶³. A few days later, she wrote that “Medinaceli has told me everything and I can hardly wait to see you again so that you can tell me everything in detail”; she added, “A son can surely speak about matters of affection with his mother”⁶⁴. And again, soon afterward, she wrote, “I cannot emphasize too much how pleased I find myself knowing that you are enjoying married life”. It did not take long for Mariana to say what was mainly on her mind, and likely on everyone else’s: “Now it is just a matter of giving me a grandson soon”⁶⁵. Supporting Charles II’s and Marie Louise’s successful transition into married life was obviously a major political and dynastic matter for Mariana. The succession had been the driving force behind Mariana’s rule as regent; it had been first on her mind, even as she dealt with the very painful death of her daughter Margaret Theresa. It remained at the time of Charles II’s marriage first and foremost in her thoughts. Although she did not know it then, it would dominate the last sixteen years of her life.

Mariana’s political and familial networks developed from the existing politico-spatial structures that were part of the Habsburg system:

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62. “[...] encargarte que seas siempre muy fino galan suio aunque seas marido grande”, letter of Mariana to Charles II, Buen Retiro Palace, 4 November 1679, AHN, E., leg. 2729.
63. “[...] lo que me has consolado con decirme te ha parecido bien tu mujer y que estas contento y espero en Dios que cada dia lo estaras mas gustandola y que has de ser muy bien casado y muy atento siempre con ella y que ella tambien te lo savra merecer con mucha racon”, letter of Mariana to Charles II, Buen Retiro Palace, 21 November 1679, AHN, E., leg. 2729.
64. “[M]edina me ha participado todo por menor de lo que paso con la funcion que me he holgado harto de saver y apenas me parece puedo aguardar el berte para que me digas todo muy particularmente que un hijo a una Madre bien la tienes en las cosas de cariño”, *ibidem*.
65. “[...] y no te podre encarecer cuan consolada me hallo de lo que me dices de estar tan contento con tu mujer y te haya parecido tambien y que te halles bien con la vida de casado no ay sino tratar de darme muy presto un nieto yo espero en Dios que cada dia te hallaras mejor y que ella te lo pueda merecer tambien como es racon yo ya estoy con gran deseo de verla”, letter of Mariana to Charles II, Buen Retiro Palace, 22 November 1679, AHN, E., leg. 2729.

in the case of the correspondence with Leopold I, diplomatic avenues; in that of the correspondence with Charles II, the court; in the case of the correspondence with the nuns and, indirectly, Maria Theresa, the Convent of the Descalzas Reales. The networks reveal the central role that Habsburg women played in establishing, expanding, and advancing the dynastic enterprise, but they were part of a collective enterprise in which so many other figures participated. Letters are, within this broader network, material objects significant not only for their contents, but for their physical existence. The relationships of the letter writers shaped the style and the nature of these letters in their various degrees of intimacy and informality. Yet, even the most spontaneous forms of communication were not devoid of political implications. As we have seen, in the correspondence designated as domestic or familiar, the Habsburgs navigated their delicate position both as rulers and as family members. Mariana's letters blurred the boundaries between the familial and the political, becoming one and the same.

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