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Review of Thomas Pert, *The Palatine Family and the Thirty Years' War:  
Experiences of Exile in Early Modern Europe, 1632–1648*

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THOMAS PERT, *The Palatine Family and the Thirty Years' War: Experiences of Exile in Early Modern Europe, 1632–1648*, Oxford Historical Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), xv + 299 pp. ISBN 978 0 198 87540 6. £83.00

Both Frederick V, Prince Elector Palatine and 'Winter King', and his wife Elizabeth Stuart, daughter of King James VI/I and Anne of Denmark, have attracted much scholarly attention. Frederick has mostly been the focus of German research, while Elizabeth is at the centre of a lively scholarship in British academia.<sup>1</sup> The Thirty Years War is also an integral part of British, American, and German historiography, as the flood of new publications marking the 400th anniversary of the defenestration of Prague and the outbreak of the war demonstrates.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, by focusing on the Palatine family in exile and the 1630s and 1640s in particular – the period after Frederick's death – Thomas Pert succeeds in finding a new angle on the same old story. Pert's study combines British and German historiography, as well as the history of the Thirty Years War and dynastic history. He discusses the agency of the exiled Palatine family and the conditions under which exiled dynasties were able to pursue politics.

The author presents a concise and well-structured study, implicitly divided into three parts. The first thematic block sets the scene for the analysis that follows. Chapter one summarizes the background of the study and situates the electorate of the Palatinate in the constitutional system of the Holy Roman Empire, before zooming in on Frederick

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<sup>1</sup> Recently, Nadine Akkerman, *Elizabeth Stuart: Queen of Hearts* (Oxford, 2021). On Frederick V, see Haus der Bayerischen Geschichte (ed.), *Der Winterkönig, Friedrich von der Pfalz: Bayern und Europa im Zeitalter des Dreißigjährigen Krieges* (Stuttgart, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Selected texts: John Matusiak, *Europe in Flames: The Crisis of the Thirty Years War* (Stroud, 2018); Mary Elizabeth Ailes, *Courage and Grief: Women and Sweden's Thirty Years' War* (Lincoln, NE, 2018); Sigrun Haude, *Coping with Life during the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648)* (Leiden, 2021); Adam Marks, *England and the Thirty Years' War* (Leiden, 2023); Johannes Burkhardt, *Der Krieg der Kriege: Eine neue Geschichte des Dreißigjährigen Krieges* (Stuttgart, 2018); Herfried Münkler, *Der Dreißigjährige Krieg: Europäische Katastrophe, deutsches Trauma 1618–1648* (Berlin, 2017); Georg Schmidt, *Die Reiter der Apokalypse: Geschichte des Dreißigjährigen Krieges* (Munich, 2018).

V and the prehistory of his and his family's exile, that is, his election as King of Bohemia and the defeat of his troops in the Battle of White Mountain in 1620. The following two chapters take a more structural approach and introduce the main protagonists of Palatine exile politics and their attitudes towards the core question of the restoration of the Palatine dynasty (ch. 2), before discussing the resources of the exiled Palatine dynasty (ch. 3).

As the main political actors, Pert identifies Frederick's son and successor, Charles Louis, who was underage at the time of his father's death. He first became active in Palatine politics after reaching majority in 1636. Besides political measures, he also undertook military actions in pursuit of his goal. Until 1636, his father's brother, Louis Philip of Simmern-Kaiserslautern, acted as the guardian of Charles Louis and actively pursued his nephew's restoration. Charles Louis's uncle on his mother's side, Charles I of England, was the family's almost exclusive source of financial support. Like other widows of ruling princes, Elizabeth Stuart assumed responsibility for her dynasty's and thus her children's interests. Due to her exile and the loss of her princely rights, her possibilities of exerting influence were very limited. Nevertheless, she played a central role in Palatine policy-making during the decades following her husband's death. Beyond the inner family circle, a few advisers and adherents supported the Palatine cause despite all the difficulties the Palatine family had in finding adequate ministers and maintaining power. However, the family was heavily dependent on the political and financial support of its dynastic network and (wealthy) supporters.

In line with Pierre Bourdieu's theory, Pert distinguishes three different types of capital that were available to the Palatine family: military, financial, and dynastic. The family's military and financial resources were both dependent on the willing support of others. The only capital genuinely owned by them and thus unconditionally available to them was their dynastic capital.

The second part of the book follows the chronology of the Thirty Years War while focusing on the Palatine family's attempts to regain their lost territories, status, and rights. This process is narrated in three steps: the 1630s (ch. 4), the period of the British Civil Wars (ch. 5), and the negotiations of the Westphalian peace congress (ch. 6). Chapter four

illustrates how the Palatine family was not able to shape the outcome of events itself but depended on its allies, and emphasizes the necessity of changing them if they were unable to meet the family's expectations. After the defeat of the Swedish army at Nördlingen in 1634, and due to its persistent weakness, the Palatine family set their hopes on France.

These ally relations were asymmetrical, and so the Palatine cause had to be useful for the objectives and policy of the family's allies. This becomes especially clear in the case of the Palatine connection to Sweden. Swedish support for the Palatine cause served as proof of Sweden's commitment to 'German liberty', that is, the defence of the constitutional rights of the imperial estates against the absolutist ambitions of the emperor. Moreover, by supporting the exiled Palatine family, Swedish decision-makers hoped to gain assistance from Charles I. Charles was not prepared to become militarily involved in the conflict, and limited himself to providing financial and diplomatic support to the cause. For the Palatine family, therefore, emphasizing the importance of its cause for others was paramount in attracting support. The exclusion of the Palatine dynasty from the Peace of Prague (1635) changed the conditions for its policy fundamentally, as its cause was no longer considered relevant. Pert suggests, therefore, that instead of assessing the policy of the Palatine family in terms of the success or failure of their quest for restoration, 'it is more useful to examine their effectiveness in maintaining the Palatine cause as a relevant issue on the political stage' (p. 165). This was especially true during the period of the British Civil Wars and the conflict between Charles I and Parliament, when the Palatine family ran the risk of losing its most important financial and diplomatic support. Charles Louis succeeded, however, in securing the assistance of the English Parliament, at the expense of the relationship with his royal uncle (ch. 5).

The limited agency of the Palatine family and its dependence on other powers becomes even more obvious during the negotiations of the Westphalian peace congress, as chapter six illustrates. Due to Charles Louis's exclusion from the Peace of Prague, the delegates he dispatched to both congress cities were restricted to informal diplomatic actions and had to rely on other diplomats to promote their interests. However, the Palatine cause was only supported by France, Sweden, and other powers as long as it did not hamper the

achievement of their own goals, or if it could be used as leverage. Thus, most of the negotiating parties agreed on the establishment of an eighth electorate and only a partial restoration of the Palatine family, against its explicit will. Politically isolated and without any support, Charles Louis finally had to accept this solution. Nevertheless, Pert regards the outcome of the Westphalian peace negotiations as a success for Palatine politics, arguing that the quest for a total restoration had never been realistic, and that, at the beginning of the negotiations, the Palatine family had been closer to exclusion from a future peace than to restoration.

The study concludes with an overview of the aftermath of the Thirty Years War through to 1660 (ch. 7). A comprehensive bibliography, an index, and two appendices containing tables of the Palatine Wittelsbach family tree and its European connections complete the book. Pert's findings fall in line with studies of exiled members of other dynasties, such as Amalia Elisabeth of Hesse-Kassel, Maria de Medici, and Charles II. The numerous comparisons with other cases increase the relevance of this micro-study on the Palatine family. The book is well written and very readable, even for those less familiar with the history of the Thirty Years War and the Holy Roman Empire, not to mention the Palatine dynasty. This does not mean that it lacks factual depth or analytical balance, however. Quite the opposite is true.

DOROTHÉE GOETZE is Assistant Professor in history at Mid Sweden University in Sundsvall. She holds a PhD in medieval and early modern history from the University of Bonn. Her research focuses on early modern peace history of the Baltic Sea region and the Holy Roman Empire, and imperial constitutional history. Her PhD examined the last phase of the negotiations of the Westphalian peace congress. In her current project she is investigating the activities of the Swedish crown in its capacity as a member of the Holy Roman Empire during the Great Northern War.