



## ARTICLES

## Dynasty as a Patchwork House, or the (Evil) Stepmother: The Example of Zofia Jagiellonka

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The significant age difference between Princess Zofia Jagiellonka and her husband had as one advantage for the princess that she had no competitors within her age group (e.g. a stepmother). Moreover, her stepdaughters were approximately the same age and, after her husband's death, she found herself in similar circumstances to the as a widow. Zofia Jagiellonka eventually resolved the long-standing relationship between her husband and his mistress, knowing in this regard how to defend her social position. She consciously took up the role of mediator among the relatives, and she had a mitigating effect on the tensions between father and son. Her social consciousness included providing for the welfare of the new family by meeting the expectations placed on her with regards to her stepchildren. Her life was not that of the stereotypical “evil stepmother.” Rather, she was someone from whom her stepchildren and others repeatedly sought counsel. Through her royal birth, she was (with regard to her social status) superior to her Guelph relatives, and she had the king—her brother—as her protector. In terms of her relationship to her stepchildren, it was perhaps a great advantage that she herself bore no children, and thus there was no competitive milieu at the court in Wolfenbüttel.

Keywords: aristocratic stepfamily, stepmother, stepchildren, widowhood, court in Wolfenbüttel

Already in Virgil's his third eclogue we find mention of *iniusta noverca*.<sup>1</sup> In fairy tales such as Snow White, Cinderella, or Little Sister and Little Brother, the evil stepmother appears in a central role, albeit predominantly since the nineteenth century. Today, words conjoined with “step” carry a pejorative connotation, and not just in German; for example, Polish and Italian both talk of dealing with someone/something in a “stepmotherly” way (*traktować kogoś/coś po macoszemu*, *trattare qualcosa/qualcuno da matrigna*). This shows that the middle-class family—comprised of father, mother, and children—was seen as the norm. And whereas

1 “P. Vergili Maronis Ecloga Tertia,” last accessed October 3, 2019, <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/vergil/ec3.shtml>. For help with the English version I would like to thank Philip Jacobs.

an aunt or a sister-in-law could serve as a “second mother” for the care and rearing of children, a stepmother was always perceived as a stranger.<sup>2</sup>

Blended families, as it turns out, were quite common in the early modern period, a simple result of the fact that people did not live long lives and women were not legally competent to act on their own, that is why the widows soon got married again.<sup>3</sup> While an untold number of men fell in battle, for women the rigours of childbirth were critical moments in life, moments which many did not survive. One can observe the *famiglia* as a dynamic process in which different constellations of individuals, bringing their respective circles with them, came together and then once again dispersed.<sup>4</sup> With this, the relative ages of the members fluctuated and generations could overlap, making that the nuclear family was the exception. This was also true in the case of dynasties: the continued existence of the ruling house was dependent on a rightful heir, whose appearance or non-appearance led to either the idealization or diminution of the wife/mother. It was at this point that economic and political factors came into play: marriage was subject to strict regulations and prohibitions, both secular and religious.

The Jagiellonians, originally from Lithuania, began their rule in Poland toward the end of the fourteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Władysław II Jagiello’s first marriage ended suddenly due to the childbirth-related death of his wife Jadwiga, who was heiress to the throne. His second wife Anna left behind a daughter, also named Jadwiga (1408–1431). His third spouse, Elżbieta, whom he married in 1417 and became the stepmother of Jadwiga, brought with her children and stepchildren from her previous marriages;<sup>6</sup> she soon became ill and bore no further children. The royal stepfather took care to arrange marriages for the two youngest stepdaughters. Finally, Jagiello’s fourth marriage—at around seventy years of age—produced three sons. The stepmother, Zofia, was said to have poisoned the sole remaining biological child from the previous marriages of her husband, the daughter Jadwiga.<sup>7</sup> So, the dynasty of the Jagiellonians in Poland-

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2 Lanzinger, *Verwaltete Verwandtschaft*, 261.

3 Warner, *Stepfamilies in Europe*.

4 Hareven, “The Family as Process,” 322–29.

5 Bues, *Die Jagiellonen*.

6 The oldest Otton died in 1420, so Jan (d. 1476) inherited Pilica and Łańcut, and was voivode of Cracow (1459–1472). In 1404 Jadwiga married Jan Rupelny, the heir of Tochołów. Elżbieta (d. 1452) wed to Bolko V, Duke of Opole, in 1418 and in 1423 Eufemia (d. 1424) married to Jan z Jičina. Niemczyk, “Kilka uwag,” 138–51.

7 Wdowiszewski, *Genealogia Jagiellonów*, 48; Czwojdrak, *Zofia Holszańska*.

Lithuania began with a truly “patchwork family”; as for what its daily life was like, however, we know very little. The next generation of monarchs in Poland would ultimately prove quite healthy and the familial situation was uncluttered: Kazimierz Jagiellończyk had thirteen children with his Habsburg wife, with only two of the girls dying at a young age.<sup>8</sup>

In this paper I will follow the fate of a Jagiellonian princess of the following generation who married an elderly Duke of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel. I will examine how she matched the challenges in the new family and how she got along with her stepchildren, especially how she reacted to the illegitimate “step-family” and how she acted as mediator in the conflict between her husband and the hereditary prince.

### *The Royal Family in Poland*

In the sixteenth century, things became more complicated. Zygmunt I, as prince, had a steady relationship with a mistress, who bore him three children. Prior to his marrying at the proper social level for a royal, his mistress Katarzyna Telniczanka was married off to the Grand Treasurer of the Crown Andrzej Kościelecki, thereby staying within the royal orbit. Zygmunt’s illegitimate son Jan (1499–1538), vested with a papal dispensation for having been born outside of wedlock and raised to a noble rank, was later made Bishop of Vilnius and Posen and involved himself in political matters. Their first daughter Regina’s birth (1500/01–1526) was never legitimized; on October 20, 1518, she married the royal secretary Hieronim Szafraniec, with whom she had earlier attended the royal wedding in April that year. Finally, their second daughter Katarzyna (1503–1548) grew up at the royal court in Buda; in 1515 she attended the Jagiellonian Double Wedding in Vienna and in 1522 she became Countess Montfort.<sup>9</sup> Rumours suggest that the fourth child of the now-officially married Katarzyna Telniczanka was also begotten by King Zygmunt, but in any case the girl, Beata Kościelecka, grew up at the court of Queen Bona Sforza.<sup>10</sup> The illegitimate children were not in competition with the legitimate offspring and they were never kept away from court. Suitable partners were sought for the girls, and for

8 Interestingly, it seems as if the intention was simply to replace the child who had died, given that the next-born daughter received the same name. Consequently, there were three Elizabeths (one after the other).

9 So, Katarzyna attended (along with her cousin Anna of Bohemia and Hungary) the meeting in Vienna in 1515. For the wedding, see Burmeister, “Graf Georg III. von Montfort-Bregenz-Pfannberg,” 16–19.

10 Pawiński, *Młode lata Zygmunta Starego*, 56–61.

the boys a career in the church was possible. One might even suppose that this committed relationship to his mistress protected the king from the fate of his brothers, who died young of venereal disease.

The relationship of a stepmother to the children from the first marriage could be more difficult, since here there might well be competition among them. When Zygmunt I married for the second time in 1518, the daughters from his first marriage, Jadwiga (1513–1573) and Anna (1515–1520), were present at the wedding celebration, as noted by the chroniclers. After the early death of their mother, Barbara Szapolyai, in 1515, Jadwiga—for whom a husband was sought forthwith, but without success until 1535—and her sister were put under the charge of the Head of the Household, Mikołaj Piotrowski, and the female family members of the Great Chancellor of the Crown, Krzysztof Szydłowiecki. They lived in the princess house at the Wawel.<sup>11</sup>

Bona Sforza did not have much contact with her underage stepdaughters, but she developed an especially close relationship with her first-born daughter Izabela (1519–1559).<sup>12</sup> After the heir to the throne, Zygmunt August (1520–1572) was born, he was followed by three sisters: Zofia (1522–1575), Anna (1523–1596), and Katarzyna (1526–1583). Queen Bona ensured that her daughters would have a good humanistic education. The princesses profited from the animated intellectual climate both at the court and in Cracow; they were living in the heyday of the Polish renaissance. In a period of religious tensions, the children were raised with an emphasis on tolerance, and all three inherited from their mother an enthusiasm for the arts. It was not easy for the three youngest daughters (who remained unmarried during their father's lifetime) to live for so long with such a domineering mother, initially at the Wawel and then in the Ujazdów castle near Warsaw. Princesses at their home court had no tasks other than to perform official duties, making marriage proved to be a good option.

A man twice the age of the thirty-three-year-old Zofia, Duke Heinrich II von Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel, sought her hand;<sup>13</sup> after some brief negotiations the marriage by proxy took place in Warsaw at the end of January 1556, marking the last family gathering of the Jagiellonians. Duke Heinrich had been widowed fifteen years earlier and had not contemplated marrying again. In total, twenty-

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11 Fischinger and Fabiański, *The Renaissance Wawel*, 189f.

12 Izabela spent her childhood with her parents and was always taken along on trips; she remained closely tied to her mother throughout her life.

13 Duke Heinrich's mother, Katharina von Pommern, was a sister-in-law of Zofia Jagiellonka's aunt, Duchess Anna von Pommern.

one children—of whom eleven were legitimate—had seemed to secure the continuation of the dynasty. However, the duke had lived for decades with his concubine Eva von Trott zu Solz (1506–1567), even during his first marriage.<sup>14</sup> In 1532, after his paramour's third pregnancy, the affair could no longer be kept secret. The duke sought to resolve the problem with a ruse: the sham burial of his lover as a plague victim.<sup>15</sup> Even after that, an additional seven children were born in secret at the Stauffenburg and Liebenburg.

But the hereditary configuration changed dramatically in 1553 for the Wolfenbüttel branch of the Guelph dynasty: by then, four of the boys from the legitimate relationship had died at a young age, and in the battle of Sievershausen both the hereditary prince and his brother died. The continuation of the dynasty now hung solely on a single prince, Julius, who was eligible to inherit the crown, but with whom Heinrich absolutely did not get along. Heinrich's sole purpose for entering into the marriage with the Jagiellonian princess in 1556 was perfectly clear: the birth of a son.

### *The New Relatives*

After marriage, an educated and cosmopolitan princess could, at least superficially, find her way relatively quickly within the early modern class structure of her new court. Of course, there were often local idiosyncrasies to accommodate and language barriers or religious differences to overcome. How quickly she achieved a position of respect within the new court structure depended on her flexibility and perseverance. Support from her husband, her mother-in-law or other female relatives by marriage could help. What also proved useful was strong backing from her family of origin. Corresponding with cognate relatives, advisors, scholars, and artists allowed the princess to take part in public affairs, and being well-informed helped her to make the right decisions. This network of correspondents could turn out to be a sort of “life insurance.”

On February 22, 1556, after travelling for three weeks, Zofia Jagiellonka reached Wolfenbüttel, one of the many small towns in the Holy Roman Empire that hosted a ducal residence. Imposingly decorated as it was, her entrance into the town made quite an impression. Her spouse embraced the old knighthood

14 Kwan, “Gefangene der Liebe,” 23–35.

15 Having a mistress in the sixteenth century was not unusual, nor morally reprehensible. Rather what incensed Duke Heinrich's contemporaries was the phony burial. His mistress was afterwards kept in castles (not unlike a prisoner), where the Duke could visit her undisturbed.

and the Catholic faith and was one of the last princes of this kind in the north of the empire. Princess Zofia was superior to him not only in social rank, but also intellectually. However, in Wolfenbüttel she was not surrounded by a flowering renaissance; the duchy had recently been ravaged by war and was devastated.<sup>16</sup> Zofia was also in a difficult situation at court: her stepchildren were older than her, or only slightly younger; she had to tolerate the duke's well-known affair with a lady-in-waiting at the court, and consequently, his frequent absences; she sought as well to mediate the persistent and fierce confrontations between the duke and his only son. In addition, the hoped-for offspring (the sole reason for the marriage) never came to be.

The Wolfenbüttel branch of the Guelph dynasty was in fact quarrelling with other branches of the house, as well as with surrounding cities. Yet, her husband's age did bring advantages: the woman who would have been her mother-in-law had been dead for thirty years, and all of his siblings in the clerical state would live only a few more years.<sup>17</sup> The brother-in-law, Christoph (1487–1558), archbishop of Bremen and bishop of Verden, not only had to do battle with the Lutherans, but also with his brother, who claimed the dioceses for his son.<sup>18</sup> The next brother-in-law, Georg (1494–1566), after his nephew resigned as hereditary prince, became bishop of Minden in 1554, then in 1558 his brother's successor in Bremen and Verden, and led a cultured life while holding several sinecures. Her brother-in-law Wilhelm (1514–1557), who had been held prisoner by Duke Heinrich for years, was able (thanks to Mecklenburg's protection) to live out his life as a commander in Mirow.<sup>19</sup> Sister-in-law Elisabeth was the abbess of Steterburg from approximately 1515 until 1560/63.<sup>20</sup> Duke Heinrich was involved in a lengthy dispute with his nephew, Franz I of Sachsen-Lauenburg, over the dowry of his sister Katharina, the widowed duchess of Sachsen-Lauenburg.<sup>21</sup>

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16 From 1542 until 1547, the Duke himself had been held captive outside of his duchy. Bepler, *Kleine Wolfenbütteler*, 61–66, 74–77.

17 “Die Muetter soll der Tochter gesagt haben, den alten man zu nehmen nit scheuhn, dan sy hette Iren Vater auch altn genomen,” so was reported by Sigismund von Herberstein to King Ferdinand, Wien 10 I 1556: HHStA, StAbt Polen I 8 1556, fol. 1.

18 Reimann, “Christoph, Herzog von Braunschweig-Lüneburg-Wolfenbüttel,” 100–3.

19 Wilhelm von Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel submitted a complaint against his brother; for example, in 1549 to the *Reichshofrat*: HHStA RHR Judicialia APA 6–34; Lisch, “Neuere Geschichte der Johanniter-Comthurei Mirow,” 97–110.

20 Ruhlender, *Die Damen vom Stift Steterburg*.

21 NLA WO 1 Alt 24 no. 3.

*The Illegitimate “Step-family”*

All the problems in the highly complex social structure of the court quite quickly became apparent to Zofia Jagiellonka: namely, her husband’s mistress and the contact with the stepchildren. At that time the unmarried Hereditary Prince Julius and the youngest stepdaughter Clara lived in Wolfenbüttel, and the illegitimate Eitel Heinrich served at court. Naturally, Heinrich of Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel did not immediately end the relationship with his long-time lover.<sup>22</sup> In April 1556, Hereditary Prince Julius complained to his maternal relatives about rides “to the whorehouse” to Eva von Trott at Löwenburg.<sup>23</sup> During hunting trips, the duke would stay for a while with her; in the beginning, his new wife could not take any pleasure in such hunting outings. Evidently something changed later, for in 1563 we hear that Heinrich went on a hunt with his wife.<sup>24</sup> Whether the two women ever had direct contact with one another is not clear. The ducal court provided for the maintenance of a lavish court for the concubine and her daughters; the Wolfenbüttel court accounts show that they were afforded valuable fabrics and furs, silver objects and pearls, as well as history books.<sup>25</sup>

Of the ennobled children (von Kirchberg), five of them would survive Eva von Trott and Zofia Jagiellonka.<sup>26</sup> The girls were well looked after by their father and given in marriage to distinguished officials at court. The widowed daughter, Bransifora, entered a second marriage on March 9, 1556, two weeks after the wedding of her father.<sup>27</sup> Sidonia von Kirchberg was married in 1560 to a councillor and captain from Schöningen, Christof von Weferling, and upon his death she received as dowager the Watzum estate.<sup>28</sup> The educated Eva von

22 Röhrig, *Mätressen und Favoriten*, 412f; Watanabe-O’Kelly, “Consort and mistress,” 90–99.

23 “So dann sei er, hertzog Julius, hiebevor offtermals mit dem vatter zu der Lowenburg zu der Trottingeritten, und aber alls er uff die letst solches nit mer tun wollen, sonder gesagt, dieweile er ime sonst niendert gebrauchen thete, so wollte er auch nit in das huren haus reitten...” Report of the Württemberg envoys to Wolfenbüttel, s.l. [20] IV 1566. HStAS, A 71 Bü 404.

24 Duke Heinrich to Prince Julius, Wolfenbüttel 9 VIII 1563: NLA WO 1 Alt 22 no. 23, fol. 11.

25 NLA WO 1 Alt 22 no. 56. See Sack, “Weitere Aufschlüsse über Eva von Trott,” 97–107.

26 Strombeck, “Eva von Trott,” 11–57.

27 Her husband, Christian von Janitz, a captain from Liebenburg, also fell in the battle of Sievershausen. She then married Georg von Beuetin, a captain from Schöningen, who later became the director of mines in Zillerfeld before his death in 1564. For the wedding, he had received an extensive fief; the court continued to pay for maintenance as well as any debts. See NLA WO 1 Alt 26 no. 208/ 77.

28 Duke Heinrich, Wolfenbüttel 10 IX 1565: NLA WO 1 Alt 27 no. 1082. Printed in Kratz, “Documentarische Nachrichten,” 79–327, suppl. no. 6, 316f., and Duke Heinrich, Wolfenbüttel 23 V 1566: *ibid.* no. 7, 318. She died around 1599.

Kirchberg remained unmarried; in the 1590s she is mentioned as a companion to the widowed Duchess Hedwig (1540–1602), daughter-in-law of Duke Heinrich.<sup>29</sup> The Kirchberg inheritance fell in 1606 to Eva's five nieces.<sup>30</sup>

The two oldest sons, to the delight of their father, showed some military talent. Heinrich Theuerdanck (1524–1592) had been raised together with his half-brother who was of the same age. After Duke Heinrich's return to his duchy—he had been held prisoner in Hesse from 1542 until 1547—he put his house in order and on February 27, 1547, he enfeoffed the oldest son and his brothers with the fiefdom of Kirchberg, which they held for the rest of their lives and whose name they bore.<sup>31</sup> In 1549 and again in 1570 (after the death of their father) the sons received writs of protection issued by the emperor.<sup>32</sup> Even in the Guelph family, Heinrich made sure that his oldest sons would guarantee the perquisites for the illegitimate siblings.<sup>33</sup> Eight days after the battle of Sievershausen in 1553 and the deaths of the two sons, Hereditary Prince Julius had to commit himself to the following: upon his father's death, he would neither reduce nor suspend for Heinrich Theuerdanck von Kirchberg, his mother, and his siblings the bequests assigned to them from the income and holdings of the Stauffenburg. These consisted of 12,000 gold gulden for him and his brothers and 4,000 *Joachimsthalers* for the sisters Sidonia and Eva. Furthermore, he had to leave unchanged, as well as protect, the rights of all those named.<sup>34</sup>

Eitel Heinrich von Kirchberg (1537/40–1597), who lived in a house in Wolfenbüttel, served as master of the stables and councillor at the ducal court;<sup>35</sup> his twelve horses were kept at the court and his servants were fed from the court kitchen. He fought as a colonel in the 1570s in the Netherlands, shortly after which he was given diplomatic missions. In 1585 he supported Hereditary Prince Heinrich Julius (who lodged with him) in welcoming his bride.<sup>36</sup> Duke Heinrich had intended to legitimize his quite capable illegitimate son to be his successor, but the young man had declined the honour. Nevertheless the

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29 The testament of Eva von Kirchberg from 1598: Stadtarchiv Hildesheim Best. 100–160 no. 291a.

30 NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 164.

31 Kratz, "Nachrichten," suppl. no. 1, 304–8.

32 Wien 21 I 1549 and 27 IX 1570: HHStA RHR Schutzbriefe 8-2-31; NLA WO 71 Urk no. 30.

33 Prince Karl Viktor and Prince Philipp Magnus, Wolfenbüttel, 26 IX 1551: NLA WO 2 Urk 1 no. 86a.

34 Prince Julius, Wolfenbüttel 17 VII 1553: NLA WO 2 Urk 1 no. 90a.

35 NLA WO 4 Alt 19 no. 962. Samse, *Die Zentralverwaltung*, 192.

36 NLA WO 1 Alt 6 no. 9; NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 141.

duke insisted that his legitimate son should have good relations with his half-brother.<sup>37</sup>

As the youngest, Heinrich Karl von Kirchberg (ca. 1548–1591) was destined for the clerical state; in 1558 the priories of St. Crucis and St. Mauritius in Hildesheim were vested to him. He lived a princely life, to such an extent that complaints were frequently lodged that he did not carry out his duties as provost of the collegiate church,<sup>38</sup> and these complaints even made their way to the Imperial Chamber Court (*Reichskammergericht*).<sup>39</sup> Duke Julius protected his younger half-brother more than once and also paid his debts.<sup>40</sup> He died following a fall in the residence of his paternal nephew, Julius Heinrich, in Gröningen.

How eminently the von Kirchberg brothers were viewed in the duchy is shown by their positions in the funeral procession for Duke Julius in 1589. Eitel Heinrich led the seventh and final horse, right before the funeral horse that preceded the funeral carriage. “The whole Braunschweig coat of arms, carved and adorned with colours and gold,” was carried by Heinrich Karl following the carriage, and Heinrich Theuerdank carried a helmet “covered with black velvet and a band.”<sup>41</sup> One can assume that the brothers had also been included in the funeral procession of their father; Duchess Zofia must have met them even if there is nothing to be found in the archival sources. The younger generation met among themselves, and while not as equals, their relations were nevertheless gracious. There was remarkably little potential for conflict in these relationships.<sup>42</sup>

### *The Year of Transition: 1558*

Zofia Jagiellonka was clever enough to accept her fate without complaint. As quickly as possible, she took advantage of the limited possibilities to cautiously effect what changes she could. Initially twenty-seven Polish men and women were in her household; three of her ladies-in-waiting married Wolfenbüttel

37 “Volgentz wolle der vatter, das er der Tröttin son, dem bastard, als einem bruder zuspreche...” Report of the Württemberg envoys to Wolfenbüttel, s.l. [20] IV 1566. HStAS A 71 Bü 404.

38 NLA WO 2 Alt no. 2227.

39 For example, see NLA HA, Hann. 27 Hildesheim no. 97, no. 939, and no. 2143.

40 NLA WO 1 Alt no. 45.

41 “Das ganze Braunschweigische Wapen, geschnitzet und mit Farben und Golde staffirt ... mit schwarzem Sammit und einer Binden überzogen.” NLA HA Celle Br. 44 no. 1539; Bünting and Letzner, *Braunschweig-Lüneburgische Chronica*, 1077f.

42 See Schulz, *Von Bastarden und natürlichen Kindern*, 98–111.

court officials, remaining in Zofia's service until her death.<sup>43</sup> However, most of those who came with her left to return to their homeland within six to twenty-four months, so from an early stage her court household would have included German staff as part of it. In short order, the duchess learned German so as to communicate with her husband and staff.<sup>44</sup> She did not have her own office; in addition to her husband's correspondence, she fostered contact with the family members in an effort to preserve the dynasty.

Zofia Jagiellonka learned in the first two years how to make her way within the realm of Wolfenbüttel court relationships. The year 1558 brought many innovations, and she had a considerable part in this: one can even talk about this year being a *caesura* at the Wolfenbüttel court. Two years after the wedding, the dowry had been paid in full by Poland-Lithuania. From a family law perspective, the marriage was now a completed transaction, and Zofia was no longer a member of the Jagiellonian family: at her wedding she had renounced her rights to any inheritance.<sup>45</sup> At that point, the duchess had finally "arrived" in her new home. Fourteen days later, Zofia composed her will, in which she designated her husband as sole inheritor.<sup>46</sup> She made bequests to her unmarried sisters and stepdaughters, as well as to the women in her entourage. Also in 1558, Duke Heinrich surveyed Zofia's widow's seat, as that year's inventory of the manor house in Schöningen shows.<sup>47</sup> There was always a need for money in Wolfenbüttel, so in 1558 a battle began that lasted for many years regarding Zofia's maternal inheritance in Naples. Bona Sforza had bequeathed 50,000 ducats to each of her daughters.<sup>48</sup>

There must have been some earnest discussions between Zofia and her husband. Settling the estates of his brothers Wilhelm and Christoph, as well as a protracted severe cold, reminded the sixty-nine-year-old duke of the fragility of life.<sup>49</sup> In this same year, Duke Heinrich dealt with his relationship to Eva

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43 Urszula Czarnecka married the councillor Heinrich Grote, Zofia Czermińska wed Wolf von Marwitz, and the secretary Agnieszka married Georg von der Lippe.

44 "Hetten nit geglaubt, das E[wer] L[iebden] so gar guett hochdeutsch mit Latteinischen buchstaben schreiben können." Duke Heinrich to Duchess Zofia, Greve 2 XI 1561: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 4, fol. 34.

45 Receipt for the reception of the third and final installment of the dowry, Wolfenbüttel 13 V 1558: AGAD perg. 5487, and Duchess Zofia's renunciation of the inheritance, Wolfenbüttel 23 II 1556: AGAD perg. 5480. Printed in Bues, *Zofia Jagiellonka*, no. I 6d, 91f., and no. I 5b, 71–73.

46 NLA WO 3 Urk 1 no. 9. Printed in Bues, *Zofia Jagiellonka*, no. II 1, 98–101.

47 NLA WO 8 Alt Schön no. 488.

48 In particular, NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 40, no. 41, and no. 42.

49 The letters at that time make frequent mention of Duke Heinrich's poor health: for example, "zubesorgen ist, ir f[ürstliche] g[naden] werde es nicht lange treiben." Prince Julius to Duke Christoph von Württemberg, Küstrin 10 IX 1558: HStAS A 71 Bü 412.

von Trott; he had a house built for her in Hildesheim, where she would live until her death in 1567. How Zofia Jagiellonka achieved this, and whether the royal relatives exerted any pressure, remains unclear.<sup>50</sup> We only know that Duke Heinrich spent almost all of August 1558 at Liebenburg. A letter he wrote from there to Duchess Zofia stated that the construction had been completely finished, the Bishop of Minden had not yet visited, but he wanted to take care of what she had requested.<sup>51</sup> This can only relate to the planned transfer of his mistress to Hildesheim, because in the spring Heinrich had asked his brother—the provost from St. Crucis in Hildesheim—to ensure that Eva von Trott would be allowed to live in the associated court for the rest of her life,<sup>52</sup> while the priory was promised to her son, Karl Heinrich.

A peculiarity in the marital contract of Duchess Zofia from November 30, 1555, lays out the *ius succedendi* for the expected sons of this union; after the wedding ceremony, on February 25, 1556, Duke Heinrich issued a *cautio de successione* in Wolfenbüttel.<sup>53</sup> However, things did not work out as he intended. After a couple of years, the ducal pair gave up hope of producing any children. The question of succession consequently remained acute: without a solution, the duchy would revert to the widely-branched Guelph dynasty. Therefore, the relationship to the legitimate hereditary prince, Julius, from Duke Heinrich's first marriage (and with whom he was estranged) somehow had to be resolved.<sup>54</sup>

### *The Conflict between Husband and Son*

Since Zofia quickly gained a position of respect, one can infer that it was not only family members who repeatedly pleaded with her to intercede with Duke Heinrich. The duke's fourth son from his first marriage, Julius (1528–1589), was not suitable for military service because of an injured foot, and so was put on the path of an ecclesiastical career. He pursued his studies, and as a young man

50 The royal relatives had been in correspondence with the Guelphs since the summer of 1556, with much of their communication between the mother Bona and the sisters Izabela, Anna, and Katarzyna, albeit limited to fixed pleasantries. See NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 2, fols. 51–68.

51 Duke Heinrich to Duchess Zofia, Holzen 16 VIII 1558: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 4, fol. 3, fol. 14.

52 Duke Heinrich to Duke Georg, Wolfenbüttel 28 III 1558: Kratz, "Nachrichten," suppl. no. 4, 312–14.

53 AGAD perg. 5476; NLA WO 3 Urk 1 no. 5, and AGAD perg. 5482. Printed in Bues, *Zofia Jagiellonka*, no. I 3, 50–59, and no. I 5c, 73f.

54 Duchess Zofia to Prince Julius, Wolfenbüttel 1558: NLA WO 1 Alt 22 no. 23, fol. 64. Mohrmann, "Vater-Sohn-Konflikt und Staatsnotwendigkeit," 63–100.

spent two years in France.<sup>55</sup> His father was not at all pleased when, after the death of his two older brothers in 1553, Julius became hereditary prince: this provided the motivating factor for Heinrich to wed the Jagiellonian princess. The tensions between father and son led to repeated conflicts. Immediately after his father's marriage in June 1556, Julius contacted King Zygmunt August, his "step-uncle."<sup>56</sup> In 1557, the hereditary prince was arrested, at which point his maternal relatives in Württemberg and his brother-in-law Margrave Johann von Brandenburg-Küstrin attempted to mediate in the row. The situation at the Wolfenbüttel court was also discussed at the Frankfurt meeting of the Prince-Electors in March 1558. The newly elected emperor, Ferdinand, in fact asked the father to permit Prince Julius to join the imperial court for a time.<sup>57</sup> In the spring of 1558, a new fierce quarrel resulted in Julius fleeing to the court of his married sister in Küstrin.<sup>58</sup>

Hereditary Prince Julius now turned in confidence to Zofia Jagiellonka who understood the character of her husband and who believed in the innocence of her stepson. "God willing that matters may proceed as we hope, so that such conflict and such discord not last long," she wrote; she promised "to do what we can to turn matters to the best outcome, and we are always benevolently disposed toward you."<sup>59</sup> That autumn she sought to encourage him: she and Julius' sisters had expressed support for him to Duke Heinrich and they were confident that reconciliation would be possible. In December 1558 she promised "to help so that all conflict and all discord may reach a peaceful conclusion and unity"; he just needed to be patient, since given her husband's poor health, she could not upset him.<sup>60</sup>

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55 Wagnitz, "Der Lebensweg von Herzog Julius von Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel," 77–105.

56 "Was wihr auch derselben landen und leutten zum besten mit unserm vermügen dienen und wilfaren können, ihn dem solt uns E[wer] K[önigliche] W[ir]den zw yederzeytt gewilliget und geneygt spuren und befinden." Prince Julius to King Zygmunt August, Wolfenbüttel 11 VI 1556: HStAS A 71 Bü 404.

57 "Sollte bey unns allerlay sehen und lernen, daß deiner l[jiebden] als dem vatter und auch ime selbst zu allen ehern und gutten gelangen möchte." Emperor Ferdinand to Duke Heinrich, Wien 25 V 1558: HStAS A 71 Bü 415.

58 "...und [hat] sein l[jiebd] dermassen bedreuet, das der gutte junge herr aus furcht allerlej vermutlichen unglugs entwuschet und unsers abwesens in unserm hoflager zu Custrin ankommen." Margrave Johann von Brandenburg-Küstrin to Duke Christoph von Württemberg, Warmbrunn/Cieplice 1 V 1558: HStAS A 71 Bü 416. NLA WO 1 Alt 22 no. 22.

59 "Wolt got, das es nach unserm wonschen mochte gen, so wolde solcher zwiespalt und uneinicheit nicht lange weren ... was wir zu der sachen kunnen zum besten wenden, seint wir alzeit gutwillich." Duchess Zofia to Prince Julius, Wolfenbüttel 28 VIII 1558: NLA WO 1 Alt 22 no. 23, fol. 68.

60 "Dar zu vorhelffen, das alle zwiespalt und undeinigkeit muchte zu frieden und einigkeit gereichen." Duchess Zofia to Prince Julius, Wolfenbüttel 4 XII 1558: NLA WO 1 Alt 22 no. 23, fol. 64.

Zofia proceeded quite diplomatically. She discretely explored different possibilities and skilfully used her dynastic connections not only in Saxony, Brandenburg, Pomerania, and in the region of Bohemia, but also those of her husband in Württemberg and Hesse. With relatives in neighbouring Brandenburg, where her half-sister Jadwiga had been electress since 1535, she arranged for a marriage between her stepson Julius and her niece Hedwig, and in the autumn of 1559 they worked on the marriage contract. At the end of that year, Duke Christoph von Württemberg approved an advance of 4,000 thalers for the upcoming wedding.<sup>61</sup> The knights in the duchy of Wolfenbüttel mentioned in correspondence that twelve or thirteen princes had died in recent years and no others had been born for almost thirty years, so they gladly approved of the planned marriage.<sup>62</sup> In the end, Duke Heinrich also gave his approval, and in the course of this a successful reconciliation between both the Guelphs was worked out.

Hereditary Prince Julius confirms Duchess Zofia's active role:

And so our kindly beloved mother responded to his proposal not just with encouragement and assistance, but also sought ways and means for how it might be had from our kindly beloved father, so that we may hope, with the help of the Almighty, His Highness will allow himself to be moved, and kindly and paternally approve of such a marriage.<sup>63</sup>

On February 25, 1560, the wedding took place in Cöln on the Spree, however Zofia Jagiellonka could not participate in it since her husband did not attend.<sup>64</sup> Margrave Johann von Brandenburg-Küstrin reminded Duchess Zofia that the marriage did not yet resolve the question of succession. He stressed the importance “that His Highness not forget to insert his son, Duke Julius, in his testament as the legitimate heir, for without that, one might fear that

61 The marriage contract, Wolfenbüttel 11 X 1559: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 126, fols. 160–69; Treasurer to Duke Christoph von Württemberg, Stuttgart 6 XII 1559: HStAS A 71 Bü 1565.

62 The knighthood to Duchess Zofia, s. l. 11 IX 1559: 1 Alt 23 no. 126, fols. 197–200.

63 “So tut in anregung desselben unser freuntliche geliebte fraw mutter nicht allein herinnen furschub forderungk, sondern sucht mittl und wege wie es bey unserm freundlichen geliebten hern und vater zuerhalten sein möge. Das wir nun höffen mitt hulf des Almechtigen ire liebden werden sich bewegen lassen und uns solche verheiratung freuntlich und vatterlich gestatten.” Prince Julius to Margrave Johann Georg von Brandenburg-Küstrin, Wolfenbüttel X [1559]: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 126, fols. 116f.

64 Duchess Zofia to Margravine Hedwig von Brandenburg, Wolfenbüttel [XI 1559]: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 126, fol. 150.

otherwise such a testament might justifiably be overturned.”<sup>65</sup> She must have been successful in this. In the summer, the young couple returned home to Wolfenbüttel with the dowry and presents, at which time Hereditary Prince Julius showed his Württemberg relatives the splendid wedding gifts from his stepmother.<sup>66</sup>

The close proximity and tight living space in the small residence town did not lend themselves to harmonious family life; in the spring of 1561 there was persistent argument between father and son, both of whom had wildly different temperaments. The situation worsened during the course of the year. Duchess Zofia had plenty to do, seeking to have a balancing influence on both sides. Her astuteness was confirmed by her spouse: “because we however judge that to us Your Highness is much too erudite, we do not want to engage in any further disputation with her.”<sup>67</sup> The solution to the father-son conflict came in the autumn of 1562 with the young couple setting up their own court in Hessen—in the meantime a daughter (and Zofia’s godchild), Sophie Hedwig, had been born.<sup>68</sup> The birth of an heir to the throne, Julius Heinrich, in 1564 was what ultimately led to a true reconciliation between the now proud grandfather and his own son. Duchess Zofia’s exemplary behaviour during these years was also highlighted as one of her virtues in the sermon at her funeral in 1575: “And since indignation and strife occurred between His Grace, the Prince, and His father of praiseworthy memory, Her Princely Grace of holy memory was the unifying peacemaker, helping to avert much damage that could have been consequent to such discord.”<sup>69</sup>

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65 “Das seine liebden derselben shon herzog iulius in irem thestament sein legitima zuvorordneten nicht vorgessen mochte, dan one das zu besorgen, das sonsten solch thestament zurecht mochte umbgestossen werden.” Margrave Johann von Brandenburg-Küstrin to Duchess Zofia, Küstrin 2 II 1560: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 126, fols. 104f.

66 “So ist auch von der hochgebornen fürstin, unserer gnedigen und freuntlichen lieben frauen mutter, frauen Sophien ... hiezu mher mutterliche gaben und beilage verehret worden dann von unserm freuntlichen lieben hern und vatern selbst.” Prince Julius to Duke Christoph von Württemberg, Küstrin 16 IV 1560: HStAS A 71 Bü 423. “Vortzeichnus Frauen Hedwigs geborner Marggräfin zu Brandenburg Herzogin zu Braunschweig und Lüneburg etc. abfertigung.” Cöln/Spree 24 VI 1560: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 126, fols. 3–16.

67 “Weyll wir aber darinnen befinden, das uns euer liebden viel zu gelert ist, wollen wir uns mit derselben ferner in keine disputierung einlassen.” Duke Heinrich to Duchess Zofia, Holzminden 13 XI 1561: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 4, fol. 38.

68 NLA WO 1 Alt 22 no. 26.

69 “Und do unwillen und zwietracht zwischen seiner fürstlichen gnaden her vater loblicher gedechtnis furgefallen, ist ihre fürstliche gnaden seliger gedechtnis die einige friedmacherin gewesen, die ... viel unraht, der aus solchem unfried hette erfolgen können, verhindert.” Lazarus Arnoldi, “Eine kurz Vermanung

Duke Julius and his wife called Duchess Zofia simply “mother”; she had assured him that “we do not want to be a stepmother to both.”<sup>70</sup> She had been able to nurture a good relationship with her stepson: first of all, because she had no children of her own; secondly, because the wife she thought of for her stepson, her daughter-in-law was a close relative; and thirdly, because the personality types of her stepson and herself were similar. Julius appreciated her cosmopolitan attitude and tolerance, her subtlety and good taste, her numerous artistic interests and her good management of the household. He adopted her as his model in many things, but being only six years older than him Duchess Zofia never played a mother role for him.<sup>71</sup> The renovations and enlargement of the palace at Wolfenbüttel came, for the most part, from Zofia Jagiellonka’s ideas: the remodelling of the interior, and the laying out of the pleasure garden, along with spice and herb gardens, where in 1563 one found, for example, cypresses and rosemary bushes.<sup>72</sup> The duchess also refined daily life; the inventories at the time of Duke Heinrich’s death distinguish between the old and new silver cutlery.<sup>73</sup> Zofia, accustomed to the artistic sense of her homeland, had a central role in all the projects, through which she sought to create a well-functioning court that was in keeping with their social position. It was now once again worthwhile to stop for a visit in Wolfenbüttel.

### *Contact with the Stepdaughters*

Upon her marriage, Duchess Zofia immediately came into contact with ladies of the Guelph dynasty; two unmarried stepdaughters still lived in Wolfenbüttel, even though efforts had been made (unsuccessfully) between 1549 and 1555 to find partners for them.<sup>74</sup> The extent to which Zofia involved herself in seeking marriages for these stepdaughters is not known. In her testament written in 1558, she remembered both Guelph stepdaughters (at the time still unmarried) with

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aus dem fünfzigsten Capitel des Ersten buchs Mosis gethan zu Wulfenbüttel in der Schlosapell fur den Altar als die fürstliche Leich von Schöningen abgeholt undt mit Christlichen Ceremonien in die fürstliche Schlosapell ist gebracht worden den 25 Junii [1575]”: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 64, fols. 65–92, here 78v.

70 “Das wir nicht wollen der beiden also ein stiffrawe mutter [sein].” Duchess Zofia to Prince Julius, Wolfenbüttel, 4 XII 1558: NLA WO 1 Alt 22 no. 23, fol. 64.

71 Prince Julius’ mother Maria had died when he was twelve.

72 Duke Heinrich to Prince Julius, Wolfenbüttel 28 V 1563: NLA WO 1 Alt 22 no. 22, fol. 38.

73 Silverware inventory, Wolfenbüttel [16 VII 1568]: NLA HA Cal. Br. 21 no. 501, fols. 2f.

74 See NLA WO 1 Alt 8 no. 246. For a general overview of the web of relationships among the relatives, see Nolte, *Familie, Hof und Herrschaft*, 67–72.

a valuable piece of jewellery *ad beneplacitum ipsius coniugis nostri*.<sup>75</sup> The youngest, Clara (1532–1595), who had initially been intended as abbess of Gandersheim, married her cousin Philipp II von Braunschweig-Grubenhagen (1533–1596) in Wolfenbüttel in the summer of 1560,<sup>76</sup> subsequently living with him at the Katlenburg, which was expanded into a renaissance palace. A year later, the oldest stepdaughter, Margarete (1516–1580), was married to Duke Johann von Münsterberg-Oels, a marriage that was troubled from the very beginning.<sup>77</sup> In addition, there was as well Katharina (1518–1574), who since 1537 had been married to Margrave Johann von Brandenburg-Küstrin, and through that marriage was a brother-in-law's wife of Zofia's half-sister Jadwiga in Cöln on the Spree. Zofia corresponded now and then with her and her spouse, who was meant to support her in the event of the death of Duke Heinrich.

By 1561 (that is five years after her own marriage), all the children now had a spouse. But that was not the end of the stepchildren's role in her life. There were discussions of economic matters, they exchanged pleasantries and family news, or they stopped by to visit. As long as Duke Heinrich was alive, his daughter Margarete was surely the source of the greatest concern. While Margarete initially only corresponded with her father, in the autumn of 1562 she began to exchange letters with her stepmother Zofia as well; there were not just money worries, but also significant marital problems.<sup>78</sup> All the relatives and Duchess Zofia were called upon to try and influence Duke Heinrich: "I beseech Your Grace by the will of God, that Your Grace would seek the best for me and to intercede for me kindly to my Lord and Father to consider how one might help poor me."<sup>79</sup> While in 1563 it ostensibly came to an official settlement, even the death of Duke Johann at the beginning of 1565 did not resolve all the problems. Duchess Margarete (and her relatives) struggled with her stepson, Karl Christoph, over her jointure. After the

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75 Wolfenbüttel 28 V 1558: NLA WO 3 Urk 1 no. 9. Printed in Bues, *Zofia Jagiellonka*, no. II 1, 98–101, here 99.

76 NLA WO 1 Alt 24 no. 8.

77 NLA WO 1 Alt 24 no. 14, and no. 15.

78 Duchess Zofia to Duchess Margarete and Duke Johann, Wolfenbüttel 7 XII 1562: NLA WO 1 Alt 24 no. 16, fols. 56–59.

79 "Ich bitte Euer Gnaden durch Gottes willen Euer Gnaden will zu meinem besten sein und meiner kegen meinen heren und vatter zum besten gedencken und ... aus dencken, wie mich armen menschen doch mocht geholffen werden." Duchess Margarete to Duchess Zofia, Oels 7 IX 1563: NLA WO 1 Alt 24 no. 18, fol. 15. The stepdaughter Katharina also informed Zofia how bad things were for her sister, that she had *ein ganz böses wesen* and she asked Zofia to express vigorous support to her father: *ibid.*, fol. 25.

latter's death in 1569, she left the duchy of Münsterberg and lived until her death at Stauffenburg, which her brother had granted her.<sup>80</sup>

In the new family Duchess Zofia took the place expected of a motherly figure. She always had an open ear for the personal needs and problems of her stepchildren; she advised them in all circumstances and intervened with her husband for them. In summary, she led the household skilfully and effectively.

### *The Period of Widowhood*

Seldom did this turning point in the life of a princess proceed without problems. The widow had to fight for the promised jointure, which had often been granted to her years earlier. Her finances then determined her other possibilities, presuming she ran the household well. Now she had only herself to rely on as she held her ground in both a totally new living environment in what were mostly rural areas, and where she now had to be the ruler in a new smaller-scale setting. Key to adapting well were good social contacts with both the female members of the family that she had married into, and the nobility living in the area, which were fostered through mutual visits to one another. What likewise showed itself to be advantageous was when the princess had earlier developed an extensive circle of people with whom she corresponded, and who now supported her with both counsel and active help.<sup>81</sup>

On June 11, 1568, after the death of Duke Heinrich II, Zofia Jagiellonka entered this new phase of her life at the age of forty-six. By the end of July she was already corresponding from Schöningen with her stepson, Duke Julius, about her jointure.<sup>82</sup> As for her inner emotional state, we know very little. Those who corresponded with her wished her luck and offered support.<sup>83</sup> The widowed duchess tussled with her stepson for more than three years over her jointure: the correspondence from this period is marked by mutual mistrust. The conflict also involved her brother, the Polish king, and Emperor Maximilian II. In the end, her settlement and various inheritances left her financially so well off that she could maintain a larger court than she had been able to afford earlier in

80 NLA WO 1 Alt 24 no. 21.

81 For a general overview see Schattkowsky, *Witwenschaft in der Frühen Neuzeit*.

82 Duchess Zofia to Duke Julius, Schöningen 21 VII 1568: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 31, fol. 2.

83 Electress Jadwiga von Brandenburg to Duchess Zofia, Cöln/Spree 21 IX 1569: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 20, fols. 20f.; Electress Anna von Sachsen to Duchess Zofia, Nassau 16 VIII 1568: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 24, fols. 24f.

Wolfenbüttel.<sup>84</sup> After the issue of her jointure was clarified, Zofia's relationship with her stepson improved, as they found that they shared common interests. Duke Julius, an admirer of art, oriented himself according to her good tastes, and in many ways took her as his role model.

As duchess, Zofia retained her elegant and confident tastes from her home life in Cracow. She was taken to be (in a modern sense) a style icon among the Guelph family.<sup>85</sup> It was not just in questions of etiquette that Zofia's advice was so appreciated.<sup>86</sup> Her fashionable headdresses amazed; her niece Elisabeth Magdalena inquired about the beautiful style of her bonnet,<sup>87</sup> and Julius asked his stepmother for drawings of it since he wanted to have one made for his wife on the occasion of his accession at Braunschweig.<sup>88</sup> He also requested to have copies made of the tapestry series "The Nine Heroes." After the resolution of the jointure in 1573, Zofia generously bequeathed this series to her stepson, which from then on would decorate the Knights' Hall in the Wolfenbüttel palace.<sup>89</sup>

Whenever Duke Julius wanted to impress his guests at official receptions, he borrowed Duchess Zofia's silver tableware that she had brought with her from Poland.<sup>90</sup> Duke Julius also had sketches made of the two large silver candlesticks (from her dowry) that were in her court chapel, as he wanted similar pieces for the Wolfenbüttel palace chapel.<sup>91</sup> In the sixteenth-century Lutheran church, altar candles were not essential liturgical elements, yet this zealous proponent of the reformation gladly adopted the decorations of his Catholic relatives for religious services.

Immediately after the death of Duke Heinrich in the summer of 1568, Duke Julius introduced Lutheranism into the duchy.<sup>92</sup> In these early years of her widowhood, Duchess Zofia had contact with Jakob Andreae and other theologians.<sup>93</sup> Zofia, who was responsible for church governance in her

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84 Bues, "Frictions in the life of Polish princesses and queens consort," 108–12.

85 Bues, "Art Collections as Dynastic Tool," 21–26.

86 Duchess Zofia to Duke Julius, Schöningen 9 IX 1574: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 16, fol. 93.

87 Duchess Elisabeth Magdalena to Duchess Zofia, Cöln/Spree 13 XI 1570: NLA HA Cal.Br. 21 no. 935, fol. 3.

88 Duke Julius to Duchess Zofia, Wolfenbüttel 11 VIII 1569: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 7, fol. 62.

89 Duke Julius's receipt of the "Tapezereien," Wolfenbüttel 1573: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 15, fols. 6–13.

90 For the child's baptism in 1574. "Vorzeichnus des uberschickten Silbergeschiers," s. l. VI 1574: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 16, fol. 60. The dowager duchess often had to urge the return of the borrowed silver. For example, Duchess Zofia to Duke Julius, Schöningen 19 XII 1569: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 8, fol. 54.

91 Duke Julius to Duchess Zofia, Wolfenbüttel 8 I 1573: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 48, fols. 50–55.

92 In general, Graefe, *Staatsklugheit und Frömmigkeit*.

93 Z. B. Jakob Andreae to Duchess Zofia, Stuttgart 22 II 1569: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 6, fols. 42–43.

jurisdictions of Schöningen and Jerxheim, soon converted to Lutheranism; however, for political reasons this was not made public.<sup>94</sup> On the ideas of the reformation, she was in accord with her stepson, and she likewise supported his plans to found a university in Helmstedt. The two had shared interests that reached beyond merely economic matters. Both had come to appreciate one another, and Zofia was a most welcome guest in Wolfenbüttel, especially for a merry St. Martin's Eve, Shrove Tuesday events, or the baptism of a child. Social contact with the ruling family, however, primarily ran through Duchess Hedwig.

Her daughter-in-law and niece, Hedwig, advised Zofia after the death of her husband "that grieving would not assuage the loss, but instead only weigh down the heart," and she sought to console her mother-in-law by sending her artichokes, wild cherries, fresh salmon, and other delicacies.<sup>95</sup> For spiritual reflection, she sent her a newly published *Corpus Doctrinae* and later a Church Ordinance (*Kirchenordnung*).<sup>96</sup> Duchess Zofia kept in close contact with her daughter-in-law/niece and grandchildren, writing and visiting them, as well as sending presents. Zofia was godmother to the firstborn daughter, Sophie Hedwig (1561–1631), and donated a valuable family Bible from Poland to her grandson and heir to the throne, Heinrich Julius (1564–1613). Hedwig's sister Elisabeth Magdalena (1537–1595), dowager duchess from Braunschweig-Celle, regularly came to Schöningen.<sup>97</sup> Despite being a widow, it was not insignificant that Zofia was totally financially independent, something of which all the relatives were aware: as one remarked, "I was recently informed that Your Highness has brought together a handsome sum of money."<sup>98</sup>

Widowhood also strengthened her connection with her stepdaughters. The Dowager Duchess Margarete, six years older than her step-mother, immediately after the death of her father, established contact with the Dowager Duchess Zofia.<sup>99</sup> A similar common destiny—widowhood—intensified the relationship. In 1569 Margarete returned to the duchy and lived at Stauffenburg, so it was easy

94 Pirożyński, "Das Verhältnis der Herzogin Sophie von Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel," 263–98.

95 "Dass durch trauren kein milterung des anligens geschepft sondern vil mehr das hertz beschwert." Duchess Hedwig to Duchess Zofia, Hessen VII 1568: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 127, fol. 2.

96 Duchess Hedwig to Duchess Zofia, Wolfenbüttel 12 XII 1568: *ibid.*, fol. 13.

97 So, in November 1569 or July 1573: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 8, fol. 36; NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 14, fol. 64.

98 "Nun bin ich unlengst berichtet, das Euer Liebden eine statliche Summa gelts beieinander haben." Countess Margarete von Mansfeld to Duchess Zofia, Eisleben 31 X 1569: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 27, fols. 51–52.

99 Duchess Margarete to Duchess Zofia, Oels 29 VI 1568: NLA WO 1 Alt 24 no. 41, fol. 92.

for her to see and visit Zofia, exchange news with her and seek her advice.<sup>100</sup> As 1569 turned to 1570, Zofia, together with her stepdaughters Margarete and Clara, went on a journey to Berlin.<sup>101</sup> Her stepdaughter Katharina had not only invited them to a bear hunt, but also to attend the wedding festivities of her step-granddaughter Katharina with step-grandson Joachim Friedrich (of the Electress Jadwiga von Brandenburg), a major family event.<sup>102</sup> As part of Zofia's ensuing journey to Bad Ems the following spring, a visit with Margarete at Stauffenburg lay on the way, and when returning, the dowager duchess took the opportunity to pass through Katlenburg to visit Duchess Clara.<sup>103</sup> The journey to the court in Kassel in 1574 led Duchess Zofia once again via Stauffenburg, at which point she simply took her depressed stepdaughter with her to Kassel and then back to Wolfenbüttel and Schöningen as well.<sup>104</sup> This shows the good relationship between Zofia Jagiellonka and her stepdaughter, who was five years older than her.

The relationship with her stepdaughter Clara (who was ten years younger than her) and her husband was not quite as close. Zofia did correspond with the ducal couple of Braunschweig-Grubenhagen, exchanging inquiries about their health, recommendations for physicians, complaints about staff, and also sending small gifts.<sup>105</sup> When returning from another treatment to Bad Ems in 1571, the Dowager Duchess Zofia again stopped by to visit her stepdaughter.<sup>106</sup>

Two family members who had a special relationship with Zofia Jagiellonka were her stepdaughter Katharina and husband Margrave Johann von Brandenburg-Küstrin (the latter's sister-in-law being Electress Jadwiga von Brandenburg, who was Zofia's half-sister, producing a double family connection). Duchess Zofia was the contact point for letters from their residence,<sup>107</sup> and she also sent her

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100 She shared that she had *nach Euer Gnaden rath gedan* and had written to the margrave. Duchess Margarete to Duchess Zofia, Stauffenburg 21 IV 1575: NLA WO 1 Alt 24 no. 41, fol. 111.

101 Duchess Zofia to Duke Julius, Berlin 4 I 1570: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 9, fol. 2–3.

102 Margrave Johann von Brandenburg-Küstrin to Duchess Zofia, Küstrin 24 XI 1569: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 22, fols. 69–71; Duchess Zofia to Duke Julius, Berlin 4 I 1570: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 9, fols. 1–2.

103 Duchess Zofia to Duke Julius, Schöningen 6 IV 1570: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 9, fol. 16; Duchess Zofia to Duke Julius, Katlenburg 29 VI 1570: *ibid.*, fol. 38.

104 Duchess Zofia to Duke Julius, Fürstenberg 11 VIII 1574 and Stauffenburg 28 VIII 1574: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 16, fols. 69–77.

105 NLA WO 1 Alt 24 no. 9 until no. 11.

106 Duchess Clara to Duchess Zofia, Katlenburg 7 VII 1571: NLA WO 1 Alt 24 no. 10, fol. 22.

107 She promised her stepson that she would forward the correspondence from Küstrin to his travelling court in Gandersheim. Duchess Zofia to Duke Julius, Schöningen 3 II 1571: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 10, fol. 30.

staff to Poland by way of Küstrin.<sup>108</sup> Together they had both been engaged in the family's father-son conflict and were involved in the wedding of Julius and Hedwig. The relatives would have been pleased to see the Wolfenbüttel ducal couple at that wedding, but it was not to be.<sup>109</sup> Once widowed, Zofia was able to attend Katharina's wedding in Küstrin a year later, and then on the same trip visit her half-sister in the Margraviate,<sup>110</sup> returning to Brandenburg in the spring of 1571.<sup>111</sup> After the death of the margrave at the beginning of 1571, contact between the two women became even closer; Dowager Duchess Zofia lent money to Katharina.<sup>112</sup> They sent each other prescriptions for medicines and ordered foodstuffs, especially fish.<sup>113</sup> In November 1572, Katharina visited Zofia in Schöningen, at which time they planned a springtime journey together to Karlsbad / Karlovy Vary.<sup>114</sup> Katharina died in 1574, prior to Duchess Zofia.

Her good relationships with the family of her husband also included his extended family. Dowager Duchess Zofia corresponded with her husband's niece, Dowager Duchess Clara von Sachsen-Lauenburg (1518–1576); they exchanged letters about family matters (widowhood and remarriage of her daughter, also named Clara), invitations, gifts as well as some discussions of business matters and an exchange of doctors.<sup>115</sup>

Similarly, Zofia Jagiellonka supported Duchess Sidonia (1518–1575), a sister of August, Elector of Saxony, in her difficult living situation. The marriage between Sidonia and Duke Erich II von Braunschweig-Calenberg (ten years her junior) had been tumultuous for a long time: childlessness, separation and mistresses, debts, house arrest, confessional differences, and accusations of poisoning all demonstrate how dysfunctional this marriage was. During the witch trials, Sidonia repeatedly visited Duchess Zofia and asked for her advice.<sup>116</sup> In a coordinated

108 Margravine Katharina to Duchess Zofia, Küstrin 11 IX 1573: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 22, fol. 44.

109 "Bitten wir Euer Liebden schwesterlichen und freuntlichen, Euer Liebden wollen bei hochgedachtem derselben gemhall helfen anhalten und befördern, das Euer Liebden beide nicht aussenbleiben." Princess Hedwig to Duchess Zofia, Cöln/Spree 13 XI 1559: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 123, fols. 148–149.

110 Duchess Zofia to Duke Julius, Schöningen 19 XII 1569: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 8, fol. 52.

111 Duchess Zofia to her knights, Schöningen 1 III 1571: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 35, fol. 151.

112 Margravine Katharina to Duchess Zofia, Küstrin 12 X 1570: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 21, fol. 71.

113 Margravine Katharina to Duchess Zofia, Küstrin 28 VII 1570 and 1 X 1571: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 21, fol. 64, and fol. 95.

114 Duchess Zofia to Margravine Katharina, Schöningen 1 II 1572: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 22, fols. 32–33.

115 NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 119.

116 Repeated thanks were expressed for her good will with regard to the disputes involving Sidonia. Electress Anna von Sachsen to Duchess Zofia, Nassau 16 VIII 1568: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 24, fols. 24–25; and Elector August von Sachsen to Duchess Zofia, Dresden 29 V 1572: *ibid.*, fols. 14–15.

effort, Zofia, stepdaughter Margarete, and daughter-in-law Hedwig wrote a letter petitioning Duke Erich II to release Sidonia's lady-in-waiting Katharina Dux, (*née* von Dassel), wife of the head bailiff in Wolfenbüttel, against whom a trial was underway in which she was charged with participating in a conspiracy to poison Duke Erich.<sup>117</sup> Ultimately Sidonia fled by way of Schöningen, where she stayed from July 20 to August 7, 1572, after which she reached her home territory, Saxony, where she died at the beginning of 1575. Upon news of her death, Duke Julius and Duke Wilhelm von Braunschweig-Lüneburg immediately consulted with Zofia Jagiellonka on how best to proceed.<sup>118</sup> Her foresight and her levelheaded judgments were both welcomed and sought-after. Here too, then, one sees Zofia Jagiellonka's remarkable position within the web of relatives in the Guelph dynasty.

### *Conclusion*

In summary, one can conclude that Zofia Jagiellonka got her bearings with remarkable skill and ingenuity at her new court, reacting with prudence and intelligence. The significant age difference between herself and her husband brought an advantage with it, namely, that she had no competitors within her age group. Moreover, her stepdaughters were approximately the same age and, after her husband's death, in similar circumstances to her as widows, and they gladly socialized with her. Zofia eventually resolved the long-standing relationship between her husband and his mistress, knowing in this regard how to defend her social position and not to be content with merely providing him an "alibi." She consciously took up the role of mediator among the relatives, and had a mitigating effect on the tensions between father and son. She was always active in traditional princess' pursuits: namely, finding appropriate marriage partners for the next generation. Her social consciousness included providing for the welfare of the new family in fulfilling the motherly responsibilities for her stepchildren. She tried to strengthen the connectedness of the family members corresponding with all of them and giving her appreciated advice. One does not see in her a "stepmother's life"; rather Zofia's counsel was repeatedly sought. It was to

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117 Merkel, "Die Irrungen zwischen Herzog Erich II," 41; das Protokoll des Verfahrens, Neustadt 21 IV 1572: NLA HA Cal. Or. 3 no. 105.

118 "Das von uns nicht zuvil noch zu wenig geschehe und wir den glimpf zu allen seiten behalten..." Duke Julius to Duchess Zofia, Wolfenbüttel 17 I 1575: NLA WO 1 Alt 23 no. 17, fol. 2, and Duchess Zofia to Duke Julius, Schöningen 23 I 1575: *ibid.*, fol. 6.

this Jagiellonian's benefit that she had grown up in a tolerant, humanistically-oriented and multiethnic kingdom. Through her royal birth she was (with regard to her social status) superior to her Guelph relatives and she had the king—her brother—in reserve, as her protector. In terms of her relationship to the stepchildren it has been a great advantage that she herself bore no children, ensuring there would be no competitive milieu at the court in Wolfenbüttel. Zofia Jagiellonka, highly educated, and good at languages, had many different interests, letting many people gladly engage her in correspondence and discussions. From her mother Bona Sforza she had inherited the talent to run a good household, and through several inheritances she was financially independent even as a widow which strengthened her position and acceptance within the family.

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