INTRODUCTION

A QUEEN IN TRAINING AND AN EMPRESS IN CHARGE

The following book attempts to place the Habsburg archduchess Elizabeth and her mother the Holy Roman Empress María into the center of an analysis of the court in which they lived and the political systems of which this court was a part in the years from the birth of the archduchess in 1554 through the year of her betrothal to the king of France, Charles IX, in 1569. The Habsburg family to which the women belonged is famous for its world-wide connections. As Archduchess Elizabeth grew up, her relatives across the continent of Europe connected her mother and her to a multitude of states and people. This network of relatives included emperors, queens, kings, archduchesses, archdukes, dukes, regents, knights, nuns, and cardinals. The women and men were grandparents, parents, siblings, spouses, daughters, sons, in-laws, aunts, uncles, and cousins. They governed from Lithuania to Portugal and from Scotland to Sicily, and some had increasingly effective claims to rule overseas as well. Elizabeth would discover, connect to and build these relations as she lived a life that took her from the Vienna of the Ottoman Wars to the Paris of the Saint Bartholomew’s Day Massacre, the Prague of the emperor-patron Rudolf II and then back to Counter-Reformation Vienna, where she remains today.

A study of Elizabeth and her mother helps to provide context not only for their lives, but for the lives of others close to them. These include María’s husband, Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian II, her father-in-law Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand I, and her sons, Holy Roman Emperors Rudolf II and Matthias. In addition, this close analysis of María’s court provides a deeper understanding of the upbringing and background of María’s daughter Anna, the future Queen of Spain, and María’s sons Ernst, the future governor of the Low Countries, Albrecht, the viceroy of Portugal who later jointly ruled the Habsburg Low Countries, and Maximilian, the future Grandmaster of the Teutonic Knights.

The reason for studying Archduchess Elizabeth and her mother María is not only a biographical one. The following study will place these two women into the context of the burgeoning field of Court
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Studies (with its subfield of Queenship Studies), as well as into the context of the analysis of the creation of the central European Habsburgs’ jointly-ruled territories and these territories’ shifting and complicated relations with the larger Holy Roman Empire of which many of the territories were part. In some ways, the present book continues the study of what R.J.W. Evans called thirty years ago, the “making of the Habsburg Monarchy.”¹ It will be shown how the women’s court of the central European Habsburgs and its members’ ties to men and women’s courts elsewhere played important roles in the meshing of the various cultures, political units, and expectations which the Habsburgs brought together.

In order to accomplish the goal of a thorough analysis of the first fifteen years of Archduchess Elizabeth’s life in her mother María’s court, a large variety of sources have been consulted. These include many which have not been studied in this way before. In addition to more traditional sources such as court regulations, correspondence, diaries, wills, inventories, government business, legislative, and diplomatic reports, numismatic evidence is adduced. In order to understand the various ceremonial entrances, tournaments, festivals, and the like, published accounts of them (the so-called “Thurnierbücher,”) have been looked at in detail, together with their illustrations (woodcuts or engravings) and other pictorial depictions of the events. The texts of plays and music performed around the court have been consulted, as have the literary sources for the performances and reports of sermons held at the court. The physical environment has been studied via analysis of still-existing buildings and streets as well as via an analysis of the crown jewels, sculptures, reliefs, stained glass windows, grave-stones and other aspects of the material world which are extant or lists of items such as clothing and accessories. Paintings from the period have been turned to as evidence. Printed sources such as books and broadsheets are also to be found among the sources discussed below.

Because the perspective from which the analysis is presented, the gaze through which it is conceptualized, is that of an infant, toddler, young girl, and adolescent, large numbers of visual and some aural sources had to be integrated. The device which structures the narrative, providing the justification for the chronological framework as well as for the events and images presented, is the imagined life of