Dynastic widows were a group whose social identity was predicated on loss—the loss of a husband and often the loss of influence. Given the sheer number of territories and dynastic branches of the ruling families in early modern Germany, this group encompassed a considerable number of women. In his survey of widows in the houses of Mecklenburg, Wettin, and Hohenzollern from 1200 to 1600, Karl-Heinz Spieß shows that approximately eighty percent of rulers were survived by their consorts. I have surveyed marriages concluded between 1450 and 1720 in sixteen different ruling houses and registered two-hundred-twenty widows who did not remarry after the deaths of their husbands. A quarter of these widows had no children; another quarter had no sons who survived to become rulers. One hundred-twenty-two saw their sons accede to power, and in some cases consorts acted as regents during their widowhood. More than half of this total group were widows for twenty years or longer, with the longest widowhood lasting sixty years.

In the terms of the theme of this volume, this was indeed enduring loss. Widowhood, which meant coming to terms with various kinds

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of deprivation, also provided many dynastic women with an opportunity to establish an independent identity, especially in the cases of those who had no children. Their function as guardians of tradition and upholders of the status quo was crucial to the construction of this identity. Dowagers’ courts formed important centers of education for young princesses, and they generated and perpetuated female networks rooted in conservative values. The mentality of these figures and their networks were reflected in their publishing and book-collecting activities, hitherto virtually uncharted territory.

I will concentrate on women with long widowhoods, from mainly Lutheran dynasties, for whom the Crypto-Calvinism of the 1590s and the experiences of the Thirty Years’ War were formative. First, I will look briefly at the position of the dynastic widow and society’s expectations of her and at how the social capital of the dynastic widow was centered on her reputation for piety. In a second step, I will examine how a widow’s books and publishing underpinned her authority and functioned as symbols of dynastic tradition. As a political figure, the dynastic widow herself was a focus of tradition and conservatism. Her natural allies were her theologians as she sought to ensure her own place in dynastic memory by careful and timely preparation for her own death and, in some cases, by using her own funeral as an exhortation to posterity, usually to uphold confessional tradition. This address to posterity is the focus of the final part of this essay.

Dynastic widows confronted a sudden and often radical loss that had not just emotional but also immediate political and social consequences. Widows found themselves abruptly relegated to a lesser status within the court hierarchy, which—depending on individual circumstances and constellations—could be very bitter. As Friedrich Carl von Moser’s *Teutsches Hofrecht* (The Law of German Courts) of 1754 explains, although the widow retained the respect that she had enjoyed as consort, she immediately had to cede her place in the hierarchy and lost her authority over the court itself.4 Of course, wid-

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4 Friedrich Carl von Moser, *Teutsches Hof-Recht, In zwölf Büchern* (Frankfurt am Main: Knoch and Esslinger, 1754), 1:610, 615: “The widow of a ruler retains all the privileges of inviolability and general respect and honor due to her birth and rank, just like those of the consort of a ruler. On the other hand, immediately after the death of her husband she loses her right to precedence and must cede her place to the wife of the new ruler…. Immediately after the death of the husband, the rights that a consort has had in his court and over his courtiers and vice versa the duties that they owe her cease in respect of the widow. This means that commands turn into mere