



*A Ruler's Consort in Early Modern
Germany. Aemilia Juliana of
Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt,*

Judith P. Aikin,

Farnham: Ashgate, 2014

Review by Charlotte Backerra

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Female rule and female rulers have been studied in various contexts especially during the last two decades. The same is true for female consorts and the role of women within court, monarchy, and dynastic contexts. But until now there was no broad study of one consort containing all roles and activities. Many studies were published as part of anthologies such as the two substantial volumes, edited by Clarissa Campell Orr, on *Queenship in Britain, 1660–1837. Royal Patronage, Court Culture and Dynastic Politics* (2002) and *Queenship in Europe, 1660–1815* (2004), and, in German, the essays by Katrin Keller as well as the collection *Gynäkokratie. Zu politischen Handlungsmöglichkeiten von Frauen in der höfischen Gesellschaft der Frühen Neuzeit* (“Female Rule. Possibilities of Political Activity for Women in Early Modern Court Society,” 2009). Some, for example Joanna Marschner’s most recent book on a British consort, *Queen Caroline. Cultural Politics at the Early Eighteenth-Century Court* (2014), focus on one specific field of activity. The monography under review, written by Judith Aikin about Countess Aemilia Juliana (1637–1706), consort to the count of Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt and Hohnstein from 1665, is therefore an exemplary work concerned with the life of the female consort of a small German principality in the Holy Roman Empire. Aikin, Professor (Emeritus) of German at the University of Iowa, presents Aemilia Juliana’s life and her different roles in Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt as mother of the dynasty and the people (*Landesmutter*), as partner supporting her husband in his reign or as acting regent during his absence, as head of the household and landowner, as artistic sponsor and poet in her own right, and, especially, as a pillar of prayer (*Betsäule*) for the dynasty and within the Protestant community.

A special focus of the book lies on Aemilia Juliana as author of over 700 devotional songs and prayers, as well as various prayer books, school books, a work on pharmaceuticals and cookbooks. Aemilia Juliana accompanied her daily life with prayers for every occasion and every experience of her family, of the members of her network, of the citizens of Rudolstadt, and, in general, of Christian men and women (7, 175–184). Only late in her life was she officially acknowledged as the author of some of those publications (184–185). In her testament she commanded her heirs to publish her other works, in order to strengthen the dynasty’s standing as a Protestant dynasty after her death in 1706 (186–187). Aikin uses these religious poems, given in German with an English translation, so as to state and underline the consort’s roles and activities, just like Aemilia Juliana would have done her-

self.

The introduction starts with a very short survey on research and publications in the field of female rule and consorts and the idea of the *Arbeitspaar* or “working couple” in early modern Europe, followed by explanations of the sources and existing research as well as a short overview of Aemilia Juliana’s life. A very helpful map of Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt and its neighbours and a summarised genealogical tree are included in the appendix.

The first chapter follows Aemilia Juliana on her way to “Becoming the Ruler’s Consort”, when she takes over the responsibilities of a *Landesmutter* from her mother-in-law — continuing the dynasty by bearing an heir, educating the children, and looking for future dynastic connections (31–35), working for and representing the dynasty as host to (foreign) guests (46–50), and finally as the head of the household (36–39, 45–46) and as manager of her own estates (40–42).

The artistic representation of the dynasty and Aemilia Juliana’s sponsorship of various artists and projects is shown in the chapter entitled “Enthroned at the Court of the Muses” (57–99). As “Partner in a State Marriage” (101), Aemilia Juliana worked together with her husband in ruling the principality, the count accepting her as an “equal partner” (106). Even though her most prominent role was performed through “saintly intercessions” (108), praying for the dynasty, her duties also lay in the economic development of Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt by managing various farms as well as financing mills and mines (39–43, 124–129).

In addition, the countess was a benefactor of the poor, the needy and the sick. Her special focus as an “Advocate for Women” was based on her own extensive education and included measures to increase girl-schooling throughout the principality (141–147). She also strove to improve midwifery through the introduction of an official obstetrics handbook and the publication of a prayer-book called “Spiritual tonic for women” (*Geistliches Weiber-Aqua-Vit*) (147–155), and she was part of an informal women’s network of sisters, female relatives and other, diverse female relations (155–166).

“The Ruler’s Consort Construct[ed] Her Legacy” by preparing for the afterlife personally, in daily religious services and with prayers written by herself, for example “Wer weiß, wie nahe mir mein Ende” (Who knows how near my end is), which is still widely known in our own day. As countess, she left detailed instructions for her funeral service, sermons, and burial (187–188), meant to use her prominence to further the dynasty. The concluding remarks of this study (202–203) are unfortunately very brief: just one page is not nearly enough to include the various new points made by the author throughout the text in regard to the variety of roles played by a consort and Aemilia Juliana specifically.

The bibliography contains selected primary sources, such as archival sources as well as early modern publications of work either written or edited by Aemilia Juliana, in addition to a variety of secondary works. A more comprehensive bibliography would perhaps have been useful for future researchers. The index of places, persons, keywords, and illustrations is doubtless a very valuable addition.

Regardless of the minor points mentioned, which presumably are due to the publisher's preferences, this is an excellent monograph recommended not only for scholars and students working on Aemilia Juliana of Schwarzburg-Rudolstadt, but also for those interested in seventeenth-century Protestant Germany and in early modern gender history. It will definitely set an example for any future study on consorts, their roles and influences, be they a Protestant *Landesmutter* such as Aemilia Juliana or any other form of consort.

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