



*Disregarding Norms:
Emperor Charles VI and
His Intimate Relationships*

Charlotte Backerra



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UNIVERSITY OF GÖTTINGEN

Abstract: Emperor Charles VI (1685-1740) followed his parents in the Habsburg, devout Catholic principles of the *pietas austriaca*. This meant that, as emperor, Charles saw himself as guardian of the Church of Rome, a role that he emphasized in imperial and dynastic politics, architecture, and his private diaries. These diaries show the importance he placed on religion through daily religious services. But Charles VI also wrote about court life, dynastic politics, his family, and, most importantly, his intimate partners. According to his diaries, he had sexual relationships with both women and men, but only two relationships of an emotionally intimate nature: the first with his closest friend and confidant, Michael Johann Count Althann (1679-1722), the second with his wife Empress Elisabeth Christine (1691-1750). The male-male relationships, including with a hunter's boy, have not seemed compatible with his Catholic beliefs to researchers since the nineteenth century. Based on the theory of "norm competition" for early modern times, this article contextualizes the religious beliefs of Charles VI and his sexual and intimate relationships and takes the concept further to show that, in regards to intimate or emotional relationships, religious, legal, or gender norms could, at least by a monarch, be disregarded even in the early modern period.

Keywords: Emperor Charles VI; *pietas austriaca*; intimate relationships; norm competition; disregarding norms

mperor Charles VI (1685-1740) and his wife Elisabeth Christine (1691-1750) were a traditional dynastic couple.¹ Charles (VI) was the son of Emperor Leopold I and the younger brother of Emperor Joseph I. Since 1700, he was named (with his agreement), one of the contenders for the Spanish Succession. As Charles III, King of Spain, he fought in the War of the Spanish Succession from 1703. After his brother's death in 1711, Charles was elected King of the Romans and crowned Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire in Frankfurt. He ruled for nearly thirty years, dying unexpectedly on 20 October 1740. His heir and successor to the kingdoms of Bohemia, Hungary, Serbia, Croatia, and all the Habsburg territories was his eldest daughter Maria Theresa. In 1708, Charles VI married Elisabeth Christine. They had four children—although their son died after only a few weeks—and they reigned together as a royal and imperial couple in Spain, the Habsburg territories, and the Holy Roman Empire. The marriage had been a long time coming because of the

¹ The author would like to thank the editors of this special issue, the anonymous reviewers, and Cathleen Sarti for critically reading several versions of this article. Their constructive comments were a great help in clarifying language, structure, and argumentation.

prerequisite of her conversion to Catholicism.² In diplomatic sources, observers of the couple noted how close their relationship was: “The Emperor loves the Empress so much that it is said to be one of the happiest marriages in the world.”³

There is, however, another, contrasting image of Charles VI:

For the readers of the yellow press, it must be added that the bisexual emperor [Charles VI] had affairs with his favourite, Count Michael Althann, as well as with a hunter’s boy, his bestial addiction to hunting caused the death of 100,000 pieces of game and of his Master of the Horse, Prince Schwarzenberg, and thirdly, he raged for jewels.⁴

This article offers an explanation for the apparent contradiction between Charles VI’s position as a devout monarch of the most powerful Catholic dynasty—the Habsburgs—and evidence of his male-male relationships, which were forbidden by church law at the time. Charles’s religious behaviour and religious politics closely followed the *pietas austriaca*, the Catholic beliefs of the Habsburg dynasty. For example, Charles observed mass daily, prayed, made regular pilgrimages, and supported a number of religious orders and institutions. But scholars have hardly researched his attitude towards deviant behaviour in the form of same-sex relationships or sodomy. In historiography, the emperor’s own intimate and sexual relationships have also largely gone unnoticed. Furthermore, the—still very limited—literature on Charles VI has rarely linked the question of his piety and his private life, and when it happens, doubt is cast on the existence of any sexual male-male relationships. For instance, one commentator concluded that while “the Emperor’s personal devotion needs to be considered, ... it is questionable how far homosexual liaisons can be reconciled with this.”⁵

This article uses the concepts of “norm competition” and “ambiguity tolerance” to explain how a devout Catholic monarch with a traditional, evidently successful, and healthy married life also had extramarital affairs.⁶ Arne Karsten and Hillard von Thiessen have argued that norms are defined as unwritten, but known and accepted rules for acting in any given situation. They are not fixed but change throughout history according to different periods, different political systems, social groups, or changing individual circumstances. Normally, for

² See: Wilhelm Hoeck, *Anton Ulrich und Elisabeth Christine von Braunschweig-Lüneburg-Wolfenbüttel: Eine durch archivalische Dokumente begründete Darstellung ihres Übertritts zur römischen Kirche* (Wolfenbüttel: Verlag der Holle’schen Buch-, Kunst- und Musikalien-Handlung, 1845); and Gerlinde Körper, “Studien zur Biographie Elisabeth Christines von Braunschweig-Lüneburg-Wolfenbüttel (Gemahlin Kaiser Karls VI. und Mutter Maria Theresias)” (PhD dissertation, University of Vienna), 46–263.

³ Christian August von Berkentin, Danish envoy to the Imperial Court, to King Christian VI of Denmark, Vienna, 15 November 1730 (ns), TKuAK 74, cited from Klaus Müller, *Das kaiserliche Gesandtschaftswesen im Jahrhundert nach dem Westfälischen Frieden (1648-1740)* (Bonn: Ludwig Röhrscheid Verlag, 1976), 232n303. The original is in German; unless stated, all quotes from German works are my own translation.

⁴ Friedrich Polleroß, “Monumenta Virtutis Austriacae: Addenda zur Kunstpolitik Kaiser Karls VI.,” in *Kunst, Politik, Religion: Studien zur Kunst in Süddeutschland, Österreich, Tschechien und der Slowakei*, ed. Markus Hörsch and Elisabeth Oy-Marra (Petersberg: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2000), 118.

⁵ Franz-Stefan Seitschek, *Die Tagebücher Kaiser Karls VI.: Zwischen Arbeitseifer und Melancholie* (Horn: Ferdinand Berger & Söhne, 2018), 120.

⁶ See: Arne Karsten and Hillard von Thiessen, eds., *Normenkonkurrenz in historischer Perspektive* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2015).

any given role one can play, there are numerous norms that apply to that role.⁷ Nearly every human being has several roles at any given time. In the best case, the norms for each role are overlapping. But some norm systems cannot be brought into accord, and conflicts arise from inconsistent and incompatible rules.⁸

Hillard von Thiessen states that the premodern world was defined by co-existing norm systems: primarily, religious norms which were based on confessional beliefs and practices; social norms, which guided all dealings with dynasty, family, and other social networks, for example patronage; and political norms, which aimed at stability of the political system and the exercise and control of power.⁹ A nobleman, for example, was expected to serve his monarch and to strive for the prosperity and proper administration of the dominion, which were political norms. Nonetheless, according to social norms, a nobleman had to support his family or dynasty by appointing family members to positions at court or in administration, no matter their actual competence for the job.¹⁰

Actors did not necessarily experience competing norms as a struggle; in contrast, they were able to choose between different, equally legitimate norms to act upon.¹¹ In order to cope with inconsistent and incompatible norms, people had to develop what has been referred to as “ambiguity tolerance” for competing norms. Researchers of early modern societies have stated that such situations were handled pragmatically.¹² Social groups divided tasks to avoid norm competition for single members,¹³ and societies tried to establish separate spaces consistent with roles and norms.¹⁴

For early modern men and women, just as for society today, constant role changing was common. So too was a certain separation of roles and norms.¹⁵ According to social norms, as head of his dynasty, Charles VI had to marry and to have legitimate children. As a member of the Habsburg dynasty, he had to follow religious norms, expressed via the *pietas austriaca*, and he had to be a devout member of the Roman Catholic Church, which included staying true to his marriage vows. Moreover, as monarch, Charles was the Defender of the Faith and the Catholic Church, which meant that he had to ensure political stability. His numerous affairs with women, which are addressed in this article, were part of a norm system regarding

⁷ Arne Karsten and Hillard von Thiessen, “Einleitung: Normenkonkurrenz in historischer Perspektive,” in *Normenkonkurrenz in historischer Perspektive*, ed. Arne Karsten and Hillard von Thiessen (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2015), 9–10.

⁸ Karsten and Von Thiessen, “Einleitung,” 10–12.

⁹ Hillard von Thiessen, “Normenkonkurrenz: Handlungsspielräume, Rollen, normativer Wandel und normative Kontinuität vom späten Mittelalter bis zum Übergang zur Moderne,” in *Normenkonkurrenz in historischer Perspektive*, ed. Arne Karsten and Hillard von Thiessen (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2015), 255–265.

¹⁰ Von Thiessen, “Normenkonkurrenz,” 252–253. Further norm systems might be added, for example economic norms, depending on the time period or circumstances either aiming at profit or economic stability.

¹¹ Von Thiessen, “Normenkonkurrenz,” 254.

¹² Von Thiessen, “Normenkonkurrenz,” 266.

¹³ See: Von Thiessen, “Normenkonkurrenz,” 269–272, for the confessional diversity of members of ruling families or for the distribution of roles in papal families to adhere to different religious and political norms.

¹⁴ This was especially true for religious orders or groups. See: Von Thiessen, “Normenkonkurrenz,” 274–278.

¹⁵ In contrast to modern, Western societies, however, incompatible norms did not necessarily lead to scruples or remorse or even offences from contemporaries in cases of a breach or a transgression of norms. See: Karsten and Von Thiessen, “Einleitung,” 7–8, for a case of a global firestorm against a tweeter who transgressed certain norms of speech and conduct.

gender, where promiscuity was seen as an expression of masculinity and power.¹⁶ This contrasted with the religious norm of marital fidelity.

Charles VI's apparent lack of concern about male-male relationships, which were considered a mortal sin by religious norms and a deed punishable by death by legal norms of the time, shows that norms could be disregarded entirely. Disregarding norms that usually structured premodern life means that, in any given situation, a person did not follow the accepted norms of his or her role or chose to switch to a role where a certain behaviour was accepted, but rather ignored all acceptable rules for behaviour to follow personal preferences. To do so, and not to expect negative consequences by others, certain powerful status was needed. For example, a monarch or at least a member of the social and/or political elite could probably openly disregard norms without facing adverse reactions by his or her peers. However, a disregard for norms was probably not something a monarch reflected on. But if it was an additional, standard behaviour, this will help to understand the evident inconsistencies of normative rules and practical application.

Early modern laws and legal practices regarding (especially) male-male sexual intercourse will be contrasted with the results of an analysis of Emperor Charles VI's affairs and intimate relationships based on new evidence which has been found in his private diaries. Lastly, the article will offer a possible explanation for the seemingly incompatible behaviours of Emperor Charles VI, namely his devout Catholic practices, his adulterous affairs, and his intimate relationships with men.

The era of Charles VI and his biography are still lacunae in historical research. More war-torn periods of Habsburg history, for example the War of the Austrian Succession during Charles's daughter's time, have received far greater interest than this emperor's reign. His biography remains hidden due to a scarcity of easily accessible sources on Charles's life because of his own hand-writing, the use of a multitude of languages during his reign, and, perhaps, contemporary or later efforts to conceal his personal history.

Even though his rule was the basis for the composite monarchy as the *monarchia austriaca*, which became the multi-national imperial Austria and Austria-Hungary in the nineteenth century, researchers of the period mostly regarded it as the time of Prince Eugene, one of the most powerful ministers in Charles's secret council.¹⁷ In recent decades, there have been an increasing number of studies concerned with the Court of Vienna in the first half of the eighteenth-century.¹⁸ Members of the Austrian National Archives organised a small exhibition for the three hundredth anniversary of Charles VI's election and edited a collection of short essays on the ruler's life, politics, and court in 2011.¹⁹ Moreover, in 2018, Franz-Stefan Seitschek published his dissertation on the diaries of Charles VI, a work that touches for the

¹⁶ Wolfgang Reinhard, *Lebensformen Europas: eine historische Kulturanthropologie* (München: C.H. Beck, 2006), 59.

¹⁷ Max Braubach, *Prinz Eugen von Savoyen: Eine Biographie*, 5 vols. (München: Oldenbourg, 1963-1965).

¹⁸ See, for example: Franz Matsche, *Die Kunst im Dienst der Staatsidee Kaiser Karls VI.: Ikonographie, Ikonologie und Programmatik des "Kaiserstils"* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1981); Jeroen Duindam, *Vienna and Versailles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); and Andreas Pečar, *Die Ökonomie der Ehre: Der höfische Adel am Kaiserhof Karls VI. (1711-1740)* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2003).

¹⁹ Franz-Stefan Seitschek, Herbert Hutterer, and Gerald Theimer, eds., *300 Jahre Karl VI. (1711-1740): Spuren der Herrschaft des "letzten" Habsburgers. Begleitband zur Ausstellung des Österreichischen Staatsarchivs* (Vienna: Österreichischen Staatsarchiv, 2011).

first time on the private life of Charles VI, including his extramarital and marital relationships.²⁰ Nonetheless, in scholarship, the affairs and relationships are mostly only mentioned in a way that was deemed to be acceptable to the readers of each published work.²¹ For example, nineteenth-century onlookers only accounted for a foreign lady of noble birth as a possible mistress to the then king, who married her to “his closest special friend and inseparable companion,” Michael Johann Count Althann.²² This notion of a mistress who married a courtier, and rose to power as a consequence, fits with the nineteenth-century understanding of the baroque era.²³ In the middle of the twentieth century, historians hinted at a possible male-male relationship between Charles and Count Althann, but never expressly stated it. At most, they mentioned a very close friendship between the two men,²⁴ referred to Charles’s favouritism of the count over his wife,²⁵ or implied that Charles had same-sex desire only late in life.²⁶ In the 2000s, Charles was even portrayed as a weak, passive person and unfit ruler due to his homosexuality.²⁷ On the contrary, more recent scholarly research has emphasised the emperor’s active participation in policy making and administration, and his assertiveness with advisors and counsellors.²⁸

Pietas Austriaca, Adultery, and Sodomy

Historians have questioned the idea that a deeply devout monarch like Charles VI, who was one of the monarchs to strengthen the Habsburg *pietas austriaca*, could have committed adultery and sodomy.²⁹ The *pietas austriaca* was the concept of personal piety which was observed by members of the Habsburg family, especially since the time of Charles’s parents.³⁰

²⁰ Seitschek, *Die Tagebücher Kaiser Karls VI.*

²¹ For an in-depth review of the historiography, see: Charlotte Backerra, “Intime Beziehungen Kaiser Karls VI. (1685–1740) in Historiographie und Quellen,” in *Hof und Homosexualität*, ed. Christian Mühling and Norman Domeier (forthcoming).

²² Eduard Vehse, *Geschichte des österreichischen Hofes und Adels und der österreichischen Diplomatie*, 11 vols. (Hamburg: Hoffmann & Campe, 1851–1853), 6.2:207. See also: Franz Pichorner, “Die ‘spahnische’ Althann: Maria Anna Josepha Gräfin Althann, geb. Marchesa Pignatelli (1689–1755). Ihre politische und gesellschaftliche Rolle während der Regierung Karls VI. und Maria Theresias,” (Diploma thesis, University of Vienna, 1985).

²³ Contemporaries also negatively viewed similar behaviour at courts of reigning monarchs. See: Frank Bösch, *Öffentliche Geheimnisse: Skandale, Politik und Medien in Deutschland und Großbritannien 1880–1914* (München: Oldenbourg, 2009), 367–382.

²⁴ For an example of an author who only hinted at Charles’s sexuality, see: Hugo Hantsch, “Die drei großen Relationen St. Saphorins über die inneren Verhältnisse am Wiener Hof zur Zeit Karls VI.,” *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichte* 58 (1950): 627–628. A clearer picture is painted by Alphons Lhotsky, “Kaiser Karl VI. und sein Hof im Jahre 1712/13,” *Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 66 (1958): esp. 63, 66.

²⁵ Hanns Leo Mikoletzky, *Österreich: Das große 18. Jahrhundert. Von Leopold I. bis Leopold II.* (Wien: Austria-Ed., 1967), 105.

²⁶ Mikoletzky, *Österreich*, 106.

²⁷ Helmut Neuhold, *Das andere Habsburg: Homoerotik im österreichischen Kaiserhaus* (Marburg: Tectum, 2008), 305–334. The entire work is based on a modern, bilinear understanding of hetero- and homosexuality, which is not necessarily helpful when analysing premodern behaviour.

²⁸ See, among others: Charlotte Backerra, *Wien und London, 1727–1735: Internationale Beziehungen im frühen 18. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018).

²⁹ Seitschek, *Die Tagebücher Kaiser Karls VI.*, 120–121.

³⁰ Anna Coreth, *Pietas Austriaca: Österreichische Frömmigkeit im Barock*, 2nd ed. (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1982), esp. 61–63 for the imperial mothers’ role in transferring religious values.

It was based on the belief in the power of the Eucharist, the Cross, the Virgin Mary, and the saints and encompassed “the Habsburgs’ self-image as preservers of the Roman-Catholic faith.”³¹ As emperor Charles lived according to the *pietas austriaca*.³² Its importance to members of the Habsburg family can also be seen in Charles’s diaries. For nearly all days, mass or church service, regular confession, and pilgrimages are mentioned via abbreviations.³³ Since his time in Spain, Charles had a personal confessor, Vitus Georg Tönnemann SJ, who was responsible for daily services.³⁴ Tönnemann was an important advisor for the emperor’s spiritual needs, and was sometimes involved in foreign affairs by foreign diplomats or rulers.³⁵ But unlike other advisors, Charles did not mention him in his diaries,³⁶ which can be seen as a sign that Tönnemann might not have been as important.

In the times of Charles VI, there were regular processions of the court through Vienna from the imperial palace, the Hofburg, to various churches and monasteries around the city, and extensive religious celebrations at court, for example for Pentecost or St Mary’s days.³⁷ He further increased the expressions of religious devotion by supporting various religious confraternities.³⁸ The *pietas austriaca* also included almsgiving, charity, the support of religious orders, the founding of new orders, or the building of churches, such as St. Carl Borromeo’s in Vienna by Charles VI.³⁹ With the re-modelling of Klosterneuburg Monastery, he wanted to combine his residence with a cloister in the style of the Spanish El Escorial.⁴⁰

Emperor Charles VI saw himself as temporal leader of the Roman-Catholic Church, who had to protect Catholics all over Europe, support and preserve the Catholic faith in any way possible, and to further its reach.⁴¹ This image was also spread in the media with frequent reports of the emperor’s and the imperial family’s participation in religious services and

³¹ Elisabeth Garms-Cornides, “Pietas Austriaca – Heiligenverehrung und Fronleichnamsprozession,” in *300 Jahre Karl VI. (1711-1740): Spuren der Herrschaft des “letzten” Habsburgers. Begleitband zur Ausstellung des Österreichischen Staatsarchivs*, ed. Franz-Stefan Seitschek, Herbert Hutterer, and Gerald Theimer (Vienna: Österreichischen Staatsarchiv, 2011), 197.

³² Coreth, *Pietas Austriaca*, 64–67.

³³ Seitschek, *Die Tagebücher Kaiser Karls VI.*, 83–95.

³⁴ Georg Korting, *Vitus Georg Tönnemann (1659-1740). Ein Paderborner Jesuit am Kaiserhof in Wien* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2011). Tönnemann had been responsible for overseeing Elisabeth Christine’s conversion (91–111). For conversions at the imperial court in general, see: Ines Peper, *Konversionen im Umkreis des Wiener Hofes um 1700* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2010).

³⁵ Korting, *Tönnemann*, 118–150.

³⁶ Seitschek, *Die Tagebücher Kaiser Karls VI.*, 85.

³⁷ Ines Lang, “Die Marienfesten und die Pfingstfesten am Wiener Hof im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert,” in *Der Wiener Hof im Spiegel der Zeremonialprotokolle (1652-1800): Eine Annäherung*, ed. Irmgard Pangerl, Martin Scheutz, and Thomas Winkelbauer (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2007), 467, 469, 472.

³⁸ Geraldine M. Rohling, “First Vespers of the Titular Feast of the Saint Cäciliabruderschaft in the Domkirche of Saint Stephan in 1726,” in *Sakralmusik im Habsburgerreich 1570-1770*, ed. Tassilo Erhardt (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2013), 255.

³⁹ Friedrich Polleroß, “Augusta Carolinae Virtutis Monumenta: Zur Architekturpolitik Kaiser Karls VI. und ihrer Programmatik,” in *300 Jahre Karl VI. (1711-1740): Spuren der Herrschaft des “letzten” Habsburgers. Begleitband zur Ausstellung des Österreichischen Staatsarchivs*, ed. Franz-Stefan Seitschek, Herbert Hutterer, and Gerald Theimer (Vienna: Österreichischen Staatsarchiv, 2011), 223–224.

⁴⁰ Elisabeth Ollinger, ed., *Der Traum vom Weltreich: Österreichs unvollendeter Escorial. Ausstellungskatalog* (Klosterneuburg: Mayer & Co., 1999).

⁴¹ Müller, *Das kaiserliche Gesandtschaftswesen*, 272.

processions.⁴²

The political implications for him as emperor meant that he saw himself as *defensor et advocatus ecclesiae*.⁴³ This meant ‘Defender and Advocate of the Church,’ a role which included continuation of the fight against infidels,⁴⁴ against heresy in the form of Protestantism,⁴⁵ partly with efforts to re-catholicize the Habsburg territories,⁴⁶ as well as supporting and helping suppressed Catholics in Protestant territories, for example the Catholics in Ireland.⁴⁷

All in all, the *pietas austriaca* demanded that a Habsburg ruler must live a strictly Roman-Catholic life in legal terms, respecting thereby the sanctity of marriage vows and condemning sodomy by church laws. The Sixth Commandment states—based on Exodus 20:14 and Deuteronomy 5:18—“You shall not commit adultery.” Adultery was seen as an offense against the dignity of marriage; it might only be forgiven in case of true repentance and against the promise not to sin again. The catechism of the Council of Trent explicitly excluded adulterers and sodomites from church: “Neither fornicators nor adulterers, nor the effeminate nor sodomites shall possess the kingdom of God.”⁴⁸

In the eighteenth century, sodomy—most often understood as male-male intercourse—was seen as religious deviation, a deadly sin requiring death by fire.⁴⁹ Sodomy was also forbidden by secular law in the Holy Roman Empire, for example by the sixteenth-century *Carolina*, which stated in section 116 that male-male or female-female sexual intercourse and bestiality were punishable by death.⁵⁰ Contemporary regional laws, such as those of Upper Austria, penalized in one and the same paragraph bestiality, male-male intercourse, rape, and adultery.⁵¹ In the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth century, the *Carolina* paragraph was

⁴² See: Franz-Stefan Seitschek, “Religiöse Praxis am Wiener Hof: Das Beispiel der medialen Berichterstattung,” in *Frühneuzeitforschung in der Habsburgermonarchie: Adel und Wiener Hof – Konfessionalisierung – Siebenbürgen*, ed. István Fazekas, Martin Scheutz, Thomas Winkelbauer, and Csaba Szabó (Vienna: Kódex Könyvgyártó Kft, 2013).

⁴³ Werner Goetz, “Imperator advocatus romanae ecclesiae,” in *Aus Kirche und Reich: Studien zu Theologie, Politik und Recht im Mittelalter. Festschrift für Friedrich Kempf zu seinem fünfundsiebzigsten Geburtstag und fünfzigsten Doktorjubiläum*, ed. Hubert Mordek (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1983), esp. 328 for the eighteenth-century use in electoral capitulations.

⁴⁴ Karl Otmar von Aretin, *Das Alte Reich, 1648-1806. Volume 2: Kaisertradition und österreichische Großmachtpolitik (1684-1745)*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2005), 70–71.

⁴⁵ For the Austrian Netherlands, see: Elisabeth Kovács, “Die südlichen Niederlande innerhalb der Österreichischen Monarchie des 18. Jahrhunderts,” in *Unité et Diversité de l’Empire des Habsbourg à la fin du XVIIIe siècle*, ed. Roland Mortier and Hervé Hasquin (Brüssel: Éditions de l’Université de Bruxelles, 1988), 27–28.

⁴⁶ Elisabeth Mansfeld, “Juristische Aspekte der Ketzerverfolgung im Erzherzogtum Österreich in der Regierungszeit Karls VI.” (PhD dissertation, University Vienna, 2008), esp. 187–241; and Regina Pörtner, “Policing the Subject: Confessional Absolutism and Communal Autonomy in Eighteenth-Century Austria,” *Austrian History Yearbook* 40 (2009): 75–77.

⁴⁷ See: Backerra, *Wien und London*, 405.

⁴⁸ Jeremiah Donovan, ed., *Catechism of the Council of Trent: Translated into English, with Notes, etc.* (Dublin: J. Duffy & Co., 1917), 373.

⁴⁹ Angela Taeger, *Intime Machtverhältnisse: Moralstrafrecht und administrative Kontrolle der Sexualität im ausgehenden Ancien Régime* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1999), 20.

⁵⁰ Charles V. *Des allerdurchleuchtigsten großmechtigste[n] vnüberwindtlichsten Keyser Karls des fünfften: vnnd des beyligen Römischen Reichs peinlich gerichts ordnung, auff den Reichszügen zu Augspurgk vnd Regenspurgk, in[n] jaren dreissig, vn[d] zwey vnd dreissig gehalten, auffgericht vnd beschlossen [=Constitutio Criminalis Carolina]* (Mainz: Ivo Schöffner, 1532), <http://mdz-nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb00029222-8>, 25, § 116.

⁵¹ Susanne Hehenberger, *Unkensch wider die Natur: Sodomieprozesse im frühneuzeitlichen Österreich* (Vienna: Löcker, 2006), 49.

adapted by new laws for Austria, the so-called *Ferdinandea* and *Leopoldina*.⁵² Adultery was punishable with fines, corporal punishment, or imprisonment, and, for persons of high rank, death.⁵³ In the Habsburg lands as well as in cases brought before imperial high courts, the emperor was the highest judge.⁵⁴ This role also meant that he was the highest judge in cases of sodomy. Interestingly enough, a study on Austrian legal proceedings against sodomy has shown that most cases in sixteenth to eighteenth century Austria concern bestiality,⁵⁵ and only two cases of male-male sodomy went to court in the reign of Charles VI. For those two court cases, however, no ruling is known.⁵⁶

The Diaries of Charles VI

The most explicit narrative of Charles's sexual relationships is based on his private and personal diaries, but they remain unpublished in the Austrian State Archives.⁵⁷ Konstantin Pachner von Zobor started to work with the diaries in the 1930s and 1940s.⁵⁸ He transcribed the first diaries partly, and the ones for the years 1739 and 1740 nearly completely. After the Second World War, he wrote an introduction to the diaries and his transcriptions.⁵⁹ Pachner's meticulous work shows a solid knowledge of historical methods, even though not much is known about his motivation, apart from a wish to know more about Charles's cause of death.⁶⁰ In the commentary, Pachner von Zobor also mentions the sexual relations of Charles VI, stating that:

Like his brother Joseph, Charles had a carnal nature and was not picky in his love affairs; in addition, he had an abnormal predisposition. Even though he felt a strong attraction to his beautiful and lovely wife, at the same time, he had unnatural relationships with his friend Althan (!), who was also married since 1709, and after his death, the mentioned affairs with women. And, in the last year of his life, he was again involved in a sick, passionate affair including petting with a hunter's boy.⁶¹

Pachner von Zobor does not refer to Charles' religiosity in this context, but that the emperor was one of the major contributors to the *pietas austriaca*, or Austrian piety, can be shown by

⁵² Hehenberger, *Unkeusch wider die Natur*, 51.

⁵³ Susanne Hehenberger, "Sexualstrafrecht und Geschlechterordnung im frühneuzeitlichen Österreich," in *Hat Strafrecht ein Geschlecht? Zur Deutung und Bedeutung der Kategorie Geschlecht in strafrechtlichen Diskursen vom 18. Jahrhundert bis heute*, ed. Gaby Temme and Christine Künzel (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2010), 105–107.

⁵⁴ See: Thomas Winkelbauer, "Separation and Symbiosis: The Habsburg Monarchy and the Empire in the Seventeenth Century," in *The Holy Roman Empire, 1495-1806: A European Perspective*, ed. Robert J. W. Evans and Peter H. Wilson (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 172.

⁵⁵ Hehenberger, *Unkeusch wider die Natur*, 161.

⁵⁶ Hehenberger, *Unkeusch wider die Natur*, 216.

⁵⁷ Charles VI, "Tagebücher," *Österreichisches Staatsarchiv* (hereafter *OeStA*), *Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv* (hereafter *HHStA*), *Hausarchiv* (hereafter *HA*), Sammelbände 2.

⁵⁸ See: Konstantin Pachner von Zobor, "Auszug aus dem Tagebuch Kaiser Karls VI. 1739/40," hand-written Ms., Vienna 1938, *OeStA*, *HHStA*, *HA*, Abschriften Tagebücher Kaiser Karls VI.

⁵⁹ Konstantin Pachner von Zobor, "Aus den Tagebüchern Kaiser Karls VI. Anmerkungsheft," typewritten Ms., Vienna 1946, *OeStA*, *HHStA*, *HA*, Abschriften Tagebücher Kaiser Karls VI.

⁶⁰ Pachner von Zobor, "Anmerkungsheft," 1.

⁶¹ Pachner von Zobor, "Anmerkungsheft," 6. Original in German, translated by the author. I have translated all quotes from Pachner von Zobor into English.

other parts in his diaries.⁶²

Charles VI kept a regular note of his daily life and his emotions. In the early modern period, diaries were seen as a necessary tool for memorising, soul-searching, and reflecting on one's own behaviour.⁶³ The Habsburg ruler took nearly daily notes, which he then transferred to quarto-sized booklets. The notes are written in his own, nearly illegible hand-writing, proving his personal authorship and indicating that they were never meant for publication.⁶⁴ In addition, he frequently used abbreviations and symbols. Some parts, especially since 1738, are encrypted with a numbered cipher he developed himself.⁶⁵

The way the notes are written show that Charles intended them as a tool to hold himself accountable for his actions. The topics cover religious, social, and political events and bodily functions. The ruler noted important meetings with ministers or diplomats, topics like peace treaties or the Pragmatic Sanction, his and his wife's health, and his participation in mass, prayers, and processions. In his book about the diaries, Seitschek states "that Charles VI used the diaries as personal statements of accounts, documenting himself as [a] hard-working and devout monarch."⁶⁶ But Charles VI also noted his intimate relationships in these diaries.

Charles VI's Intimate Relationships

The entries in the diaries show that Charles had affairs with various women of unknown origin and standing and—late in his life—with a hunter's boy, but they also reflect the emperor's relationships with his closest confidant, Count Althann, and with the empress. During his time in Spain and before his marriage, Charles VI seemed to have had an affair with a Spanish woman from March to September 1707. Like other women mentioned in the diaries, she is simply called "Madl"—"girl"—which does not help to identify her. According to the way the entries are set, she might have had a non-noble background. She received a yearly pension of 8.000 pesos,⁶⁷ perhaps to support a child as a result of the affair.⁶⁸

While his wife remained regent in Spain after 1711, Charles had sexual intercourse with "trulls" already on the ship on his way out,⁶⁹ writing "unfaithful [to] wife" in his diary.⁷⁰ On his way to the election to be named as his brother's successor as emperor, he again had a week-long affair with a woman from Innsbruck.⁷¹ There is evidence to suggest that he had regular affairs, and indeed sexual intercourse, with women of low descent.

And, yet, Charles's closest relationship—in an emotional sense—was with a person of much higher status, Michael Joseph Count Althann (1679-1722). As mentioned above, Althann

⁶² See: Seitschek, *Die Tagebücher Kaiser Karls VI.*, 99–115.

⁶³ Rudolf von Khevenhüller-Metsch, Hanns Schlitter, Maria Breunlich-Pawlik, and Hans Wagner eds., *Aus der Zeit Maria Theresias: Tagebuch des Fürsten Johann Joseph Khevenhüller-Metsch*, 8 vols. (Vienna: A. Holzhausen, 1907-1972).

⁶⁴ Seitschek, *Die Tagebücher Kaiser Karls VI.*, 17, 22.

⁶⁵ Konstantin Pachner von Zobor, "Schlüssel zu der von Kaiser Karl VI. in seinen Tagebüchern angewandten Geheimschrift," in Pachner von Zobor, "Auszug," 2.

⁶⁶ Seitschek, *Die Tagebücher Kaiser Karls VI.*, 26.

⁶⁷ Pachner von Zobor, "Anmerkungsheft," n1, n2.

⁶⁸ Seitschek, *Die Tagebücher Kaiser Karls VI.*, 116.

⁶⁹ Pachner von Zobor, "Anmerkungsheft," n2, n6.

⁷⁰ Diary entry for 8 October 1711, quoted in Pachner von Zobor, "Anmerkungsheft," annotations, 2, ann. 6.

⁷¹ Pachner von Zobor, "Anmerkungsheft," annotations, 2, ann. 6.

was one of the grooms of the bedchamber, who accompanied Charles to Spain in 1703. Althann became privy counsellor and stayed with Charles as his closest confidant until his death in 1722. Count Althann is already mentioned in the first diary of 1707 as “eternal friend” and “eternal love.”⁷² After Elisabeth Christine’s arrival in Spain, tensions rose until Charles had to conciliate his wife and his friend.⁷³ In 1709, Althann married the aforementioned Maria Anna Josepha Marchesa Pignatelli, Duchess of Belriguardo (1689-1755), one of Elisabeth Christine’s ladies-in-waiting.⁷⁴ But in January 1710, Charles and Althann travelled through Catalonia on “leave,” as Charles wrote in his diary, while their wives remained in Barcelona.⁷⁵ In a nineteenth-century account, it is falsely claimed that the royal couple undertook this journey.⁷⁶ One of the first entries reads: “Sleeping with Althann, good, love, all heart.”⁷⁷ They regularly slept together in one bed, and assured one another of their “eternal love” and mutual affection.⁷⁸ In light of the explicit evidence of a later male-male sexual relationship, these entries point not only to a—in modern terms—homosocial, but also a sexual relationship. Regardless of Charles’s and Althann’s married status, their relationship remained close and intimate. In later years, the diary entries show them teasing and confiding in each other.⁷⁹ This was especially important for Charles, who, because of his rank, was isolated from the people at court; Althann filled the position of an emotional—and intimate—life partner.

After Emperor Joseph I’s death in 1711, Althann left Spain with the future emperor. Charles gave him and his family the so-called ‘Spanish House’ in Vienna, and offered him the position of Master of the Horse.⁸⁰ The count was clearly the emperor’s favourite, even though he rarely accepted high offices or ceremonial benefits.⁸¹ The diaries and contemporary diplomatic reports show that the pair maintained a very close friendship. The British resident at the Court of Vienna went so far as to write “that we have never had an example of a more perfect favour than that [enjoyed by] Count [Althann]; it has risen to a degree that cannot be expressed.”⁸² Seitschek proves this by the diary entries, showing that Charles VI and Althann met almost daily in the late afternoon to discuss decisions and political strategy.⁸³

⁷² Diary entry for 17 December 1707, quoted in Seitschek, *Die Tagebücher Kaiser Karls VI.*, 224.

⁷³ Seitschek, *Die Tagebücher Kaiser Karls VI.*, 116–117.

⁷⁴ See: Pichorner, “Die ‘spahnische’ Althann.”

⁷⁵ Quoted in Seitschek, *Die Tagebücher Kaiser Karls VI.*, 119.

⁷⁶ Jacob Falke, “Fürst Anton Florian von Liechtenstein in Spanien 1704-1711,” *Österreichische Revue* 3, no. 6 (1865): 67.

⁷⁷ Quoted in Seitschek, *Die Tagebücher Kaiser Karls VI.*, 119n548.

⁷⁸ Quoted in Seitschek, *Die Tagebücher Kaiser Karls VI.*, 119, 119n548.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Seitschek, *Die Tagebücher Kaiser Karls VI.*, 119.

⁸⁰ Carlo Morandi, ed., *Relazioni di ambasciatori sabaudi, genovesi e veneti (1693-1711)* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1935), 119–120.

⁸¹ Andreas Pečar, “Favorit ohne Geschäftsbereich: Johann Michael Graf von Althann (1679-1722) am Kaiserhof Karls VI.,” in *Der zweite Mann im Staat: Oberste Amtsträger und Favoriten im Umkreis der Reichsfürsten in der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Michael Kaiser and Andreas Pečar (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2003), 331–344.

⁸² Report of François Louis de Pesme, Seigneur de Saint-Saphorin, British resident at the Imperial Court, 12 September 1719, T[he] N[ational] A[rchives], S[tate] P[apers] 80/39, quoted in Pečar, *Ökonomie der Ehre*, 65. Original in French, translated by the author.

⁸³ Seitschek, *Die Tagebücher Kaiser Karls VI.*, 186. See for example the entry for 17 March 1721: “Althann friend, love, talked about England, peace,” quoted in Seitschek, *Die Tagebücher Kaiser Karls VI.*, 228. Althann’s wife is also mentioned, but only when accompanying her husband (202–204).

Disagreements over political matters had no effect on their trust in each other.⁸⁴ In the evenings, they played at cards⁸⁵ or visited each other's dinner receptions.⁸⁶ On the frequent hunting trips, the Master of the Horse rode in the Emperor's carriage.⁸⁷ Althann had most likely the greatest influence on Charles VI; besides him, only the highest ministers and counsellors were mentioned as advisors (*qua office ex officio*).⁸⁸ Althann's sway was higher precisely because it was based on his personal relationship with the emperor.

In times of illness, Althann was cared for by the imperial doctors, while the emperor himself regularly visited him and wrote to him.⁸⁹ In the last two weeks before Althann's death on 16 March 1722, Charles was beside himself with worry, he felt "more dead than alive" because of his fear of losing his closest friend and partner.⁹⁰ The two men managed to say goodbye before Althann's death,⁹¹ but it nevertheless hit Charles hard:

my only heart, my comfort, my most faithful servant, my soul mate, who loved me dearly as I did him for 19 years, [we] had a true friendship, we were one heart and one soul, and we never concealed anything from one another ... he will always be in my heart, [my] beloved friend ... I have lost everything.⁹²

St Saphorin wrote of the favourite's death that the painful lamentations of the emperor for his beloved and unique friend and sole confidant were the most touching moments he had ever seen.⁹³ Charles appointed himself the legal guardian of his friend's children,⁹⁴ and he cared for them like for his own.⁹⁵ He also paid Althann's debts, financially supported his widow, and the sons gained offices at the imperial court.⁹⁶ Count Althann was his life partner, sharing an emotional and bodily bond, notwithstanding the need for both of them to adhere to social and dynastic standards by marrying the right women and producing legal heirs.

After the death of his closest friend and advisor, Charles VI first turned to his ministers for political advice, and to his wife for emotional support and life partnership.⁹⁷ Regarding his wife, Charles at first wrote in his diary of "love,"⁹⁸ which has to be seen as sign of a "close bond of trust and friendship."⁹⁹ He later regularly mentioned his "wife," or the

⁸⁴ Seitschek, *Die Tagebücher Kaiser Karls VI.*, 229.

⁸⁵ Seitschek, *Die Tagebücher Kaiser Karls VI.*, 229–230; and Backerra, *Wien und London*, 198–199.

⁸⁶ Braubach, *Prinz Eugen*, 4:85.

⁸⁷ Seitschek, *Die Tagebücher Kaiser Karls VI.*, 230; and Pichorner, "Die 'spahnische' Althann," 31, 55.

⁸⁸ Seitschek, *Die Tagebücher Kaiser Karls VI.*, 242–247, 248–267.

⁸⁹ Seitschek, *Die Tagebücher Kaiser Karls VI.*, 231–232.

⁹⁰ Diary entries for March 1722, OeStA, HHStA, HA, Sammelbände 2, Tagebuch 12 (1722–1724), quoted in Seitschek, *Die Tagebücher Kaiser Karls VI.*, 232.

⁹¹ Entry for 12 March 1722. See: Seitschek, *Die Tagebücher Kaiser Karls VI.*, 232.

⁹² Diary entry on Althann's death, 16 March 1722, OeStA, HHStA, HA, Sammelbände 2, Tagebuch 12 (1722–1724), fol. 6r., quoted in Seitschek, *Die Tagebücher Kaiser Karls VI.*, 233.

⁹³ Report of St Saphorins, TNA, SP 80/46, quoted in Pečar, *Ökonomie der Ehre*, 319n266.

⁹⁴ Pichorner, "Die 'spahnische' Althann," 43–44.

⁹⁵ Seitschek, *Die Tagebücher Kaiser Karls VI.*, 238.

⁹⁶ Pečar, *Ökonomie der Ehre*, 121.

⁹⁷ Seitschek, *Die Tagebücher Kaiser Karls VI.*, 129; and Franz-Stefan Seitschek, "Die Tagebücher Kaiser Karls VI. (1720–1725)" (PhD dissertation, University of Vienna, 2017), 189.

⁹⁸ Mikoletzky, *Österreich*, 102.

⁹⁹ Seitschek, *Die Tagebücher Kaiser Karls VI.*, 120.

“empress.”¹⁰⁰ At the beginning of their married life, the dynastic succession—or the failure to produce children—determined their relationship. Their marital relations definitely suffered from his frequent absence owing to the war effort and other causes, as explained above. From 1713 onwards, when Elisabeth Christine arrived in Vienna, unlike other monarchical rulers of the time, the couple shared a bedchamber.¹⁰¹ The hoped-for son was born in 1716, but died after a few weeks. The following year, Maria Theresa was born, followed by two more daughters, of which the youngest died as a child. Throughout his life Charles VI kept hoping for sons.

After she had proven her ability to produce heirs, Elisabeth Christine was able to strengthen her position against the two widowed empresses at the imperial court, her mother-in-law and sister-in-law. She supported her husband’s politics with her networks, was a successful regent in Spain, and in later years a trusted advisor in Vienna.¹⁰²

The quote at the beginning of this article demonstrates that contemporaries saw Charles VI and Elisabeth Christine as a comparably happy couple, and their marriage as a success according to dynastic standards. Charles VI obviously cared about his wife enough to mention her in his diary, besides her beauty and her good behaviour, her pregnancies, illnesses, and her participation in hunts, court festivities, and religious celebrations.¹⁰³ He also discussed dynastic politics with Elisabeth Christine, who had a say, for example, in the marriage plans for their daughters.¹⁰⁴ This was all part of a normal, but successful “working couple’s” life, especially for a ruling couple.¹⁰⁵

Some years after Althann’s death, they also seemed to have enjoyed their sexual relationship, as can be shown by an anecdote set during a court journey in 1728. Elisabeth Christine stayed with the court in Graz, while Charles travelled with a small entourage to Northern Italy to inspect the new free port in Trieste. On the way back, the Emperor went ahead and arrived late at night at the palace in Graz, surprising the guards and his wife. He knocked on her bedroom window and—as the British envoy at the imperial court wrote to a friend—“the empress was ... overjoyed when she found the emperor.”¹⁰⁶ Charles wrote about it in his diary: “[I] entered quietly through the outer bastion’s gate, went in alone, knocked heavily, Empress quite ravished ... I [arrived] early, all merry.”¹⁰⁷ The next day, it was noted by the British observer that it was a happy occurrence—for the devout (or superstitious), even a sign of God—that, as the couple had spent the night together in “conjugal affection,” part of the ceiling fell down in the emperor’s bedchamber, which would have hurt or killed him in his sleep, had he not stayed with his wife.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁰ Seitschek, *Die Tagebücher Kaiser Karls VI.*, 50.

¹⁰¹ Seitschek, *Die Tagebücher Kaiser Karls VI.*, 95n398; and Christian Benedikt, “Die Wiener Hofburg unter Kaiser Karl VI.: Probleme herrschaftlichen Bauens im Barock” (PhD Dissertation, University of Vienna, 1989), 139.

¹⁰² Charlotte Backerra, “For Empire or Dynasty? Empress Elisabeth Christine and the Brunswicks,” in *Royal Women and Dynastic Loyalty*, ed. Caroline Dunn and Elizabeth Carney (New York: Palgrave, 2018), 168–171.

¹⁰³ Seitschek, *Die Tagebücher Kaiser Karls VI.*, 128–129.

¹⁰⁴ Pichorner, “Die ‘spahnische’ Althann,” 41.

¹⁰⁵ Backerra, “For Empire or Dynasty.”

¹⁰⁶ James, Baron Waldegrave, British envoy to the Imperial Court, to Undersecretary of State, George Tilson, Graz, 2 October 1728 (ns). TNA, SP 80/63, fol. 148–148v.

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in Seitschek, *Die Tagebücher Kaiser Karls VI.*, 130.

¹⁰⁸ Waldegrave to Tilson, Graz, 2 October 1728. TNA, SP 80/63, fol. 148–148v.

But the good marital relationship did not mean that Charles VI ceased to have affairs with women, as he frequently mentioned in his diaries.¹⁰⁹ And in 1739, a hunter's boy caught his attention. It was probably a youth of common birth whose task it was to help with deer stalking. Pachner von Zobor, who seemed to have had more information about the boy, suggested that his initials might have been "R" for the first and "Z" for the last name, possibly standing for "Zifer."¹¹⁰

The diary entries regarding the youngster are nearly all in cipher and some are only written on paper slips. Charles VI clearly tried to conceal this relationship even in his private diaries, which suggests that he was aware of acting against accepted behaviour. The first note is from April 1739, saying "<... I really love [the] second hunter's boy>."¹¹¹ Later that year, Charles approached the boy and told him about his interest.¹¹² In December, the young man worked in the palace: "Z well-behaved <serves me I told him about my love >."¹¹³ During the following months, the boy apparently suffered from depression,¹¹⁴ perhaps because of his official duties or the emperor's attention,¹¹⁵ and had to be treated by the imperial doctors.¹¹⁶ As he grew more confident, he behaved pretentiously and was unwilling to work normally, which nearly led to his dismissal by the empress.¹¹⁷ Charles VI continued to note their affectionate exchanges,¹¹⁸ and stated "<[the] boy [is my] greatest love>."¹¹⁹ Until his death on 18 October 1740, Charles continued to comment on his strong attraction to the hunter's boy. It was clearly sexual attraction; emotional support or intimacy like that with Count Althann ought to be discounted because of the differences in rank and age.

According to Pachner von Zobor, only very few people knew of the affair at court,¹²⁰ one of which was the Keeper of the Privy Purser, Karl von Dier. He was responsible for caring for the young lover in financial matters, who besides regular monthly payments, might have been one of the main benefactors after Charles's death.¹²¹ In his last will and testament, Charles VI wrote as a last paragraph:

Fifthly, We command that Our Privy Purser, Karl von Dier, who We know to be a trustworthy steward,

¹⁰⁹ See the diary entries for 1730 (1 January, 5 April, 28 October, 31 December). Pachner von Zobor, "Auszug."

¹¹⁰ Konstantin Pachner von Zobor, "Überblick zu dem in beiliegendem Hefte behandelten Zeitabschnitt aus dem Leben Kaiser Carl VI.," in Pachner von Zobor, "Auszug," fol. 5.

¹¹¹ Pachner von Zobor, "Auszug," 5. The words in brackets are in cipher.

¹¹² Pachner von Zobor, "Auszug," 5.

¹¹³ Pachner von Zobor, "Auszug," 6.

¹¹⁴ This can be assumed based on entries like the one for 24 January 1740, in Pachner von Zobor, "Auszug," 13.

¹¹⁵ Pachner von Zobor, "Überblick," fol. 4.

¹¹⁶ Diary entry for 11 April 1740, in Pachner von Zobor, "Auszug," 51.

¹¹⁷ See the diary entries for 16 February or 4 March 1740, in Pachner von Zobor, "Auszug," 21 and 28, and Pachner von Zobor, "Überblick," fol. 4v.

¹¹⁸ "<I kissed him love heart>." Diary entry for 5 February 1740, in Pachner von Zobor, "Auszug," 17.

¹¹⁹ Diary entry for 23 June 1740, in Pachner von Zobor, "Auszug," 71. Earlier, Charles wrote "<he [is] ever more my love>." Diary entry for 10 April 1740, in Pachner von Zobor, "Auszug," 50.

¹²⁰ These were the Master of the Horse Franz Count Starhemberg, two personal physicians, Jauß and Von Lebzeltern, who had to treat the boy's depressions, the Privy Chamberlain Count Cervellón, and the Keeper of the Privy Purser, Karl von Dier. Pachner von Zobor, "Überblick," fol. 5, and Pachner von Zobor, "Auszug," *passim*.

¹²¹ See the diary entry for 13 June 1740—"want to <give money> monthly <to the boy>"—in Pachner von Zobor, "Auszug," 71.

will not have to give an account, and that of the cash money in the small treasury he is to be given one hundred thousand guilders for himself, and two hundred and fifty thousand guilders to pay them out according to Our will that he knows.¹²²

The Keeper of the Privy Purse therefore received a general pardon and 100,000 fl., but was, in turn, obliged to keep the emperor's (financial) secrets, and to spend 250,000 fl. for a cause only known to him and the emperor. Pachner von Zobor expressed his belief, founded on contemporary rumours, that this substantial sum of a quarter million guilders was meant for the emperor's last amour.¹²³ He went further in his assessment of this last affair, also showing typically mid-twentieth-century sentiments regarding male-male love and intercourse. By his testament, Charles had shown that "his young love to a boy erased all feelings for his consort and life partner and for his own dignity."¹²⁴

Disregarding Norms

Given these religious and legal concepts of *pietas austriaca*, adultery, and sodomy, the inevitable question that arises for modern scholars is how a devout monarch such as Charles VI could reconcile frequent adultery and male-male relationships with his conscience.¹²⁵ It can first be assumed that Charles VI was able to adapt to changing roles and to adhere to different norms in different settings, because this was normal for premodern people, no matter their gender, political, social, or economic status, as stated by the concepts of norm competition and ambiguity tolerance. With his diary entries, he reaffirmed his Catholic piety and role as defender of the Church of Rome when he nearly daily wrote about going to confession and taking holy communion. This self-assurance was a common feature of diarists in premodern times, as has been noted by Wolfgang Schmale with respect to masculinity.¹²⁶

Regarding Charles's adulterous behaviour, he expressed remorse when it concerned affairs with women, writing for example on New Years' Eve 1730: "change life seriously especially use [of] women."¹²⁷ Nonetheless, he still had these affairs throughout his life. As he did not reflect on his role as male ruler or masculinity in general in his diaries or according to contemporary sources, we cannot know if he thought it his due or duty as male or as monarch to have affairs with women. But the example of a contemporary, King George II of Great Britain (1683-1760, r. 1727-1760), supports such a view. George II, as crown prince and king, regularly had mistresses, but "seemed to look upon a mistress rather as a necessary appurtenance to his grandeur as a prince than an addition to his pleasures as a man."¹²⁸ For Charles VI, for a long time married without children, these affairs might also have been a way

¹²² Charles VI's last will, 18.10.1740, OeStA, HHStA, Urkunden, FUK, 1902.

¹²³ Pachner von Zobor, "Überblick," fol. 5v.

¹²⁴ Pachner von Zobor, "Überblick," fol. 5v.

¹²⁵ See, for instance, Seitschek, *Die Tagebücher Kaiser Karls VI.*, 120–121, who questions if especially the male-male relationships could even be fact.

¹²⁶ Wolfgang Schmale, *Die Geschichte der Männlichkeit in Europa, 1450-2000* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2003), 36.

¹²⁷ Charles VI, "Tagebuch 15," entry for 31.12.1730, OeStA, HHStA, HA, Sammelbände 2, transcribed using Pachner von Zobor, "Anmerkungsheft," 12.

¹²⁸ Romney Sedgwick, ed., *Some Materials towards Memoirs of the Reign of King George II by John, Lord Hervey*. 3 vols. (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1970), 1:40n42.

of showing his virility.¹²⁹ The adulterous affairs with women would therefore fall under the norms for either men in general or men in powerful positions, representing masculinity.

On the other hand, it might be argued that Charles VI's behaviour showed a blatant disregard for the norms he otherwise supported and defended. This disregard is most obvious when analysing his male-male relationships. He was clearly attracted to the same sex. Neither religious nor legal norms allowed him to exercise this disposition.¹³⁰ That the emperor followed his preferences in his relationship with Count Althann and his affair with the unnamed hunter's boy can therefore only be explained if he—consciously or not—ignored the accepted rules for intimate relationships. Unfortunately, in his diaries he did not reflect on any difference between his male-female and male-male relationships. Further research is needed to expand the concept of disregarding norms to other examples of non-normative behaviour regarding intimate relationships (for example, the relationship of the French King Louis XIV's brother) and regarding other norm-based, early modern behaviour.

Conclusion

Emperor Charles VI (1685-1740) followed his parents in the Habsburg devout Catholic principles of the *pietas austriaca*. As emperor, he saw himself as guardian of the Church of Rome. His private diaries, which he kept for most of his years as reigning monarch, show the importance he placed on religion through daily religious services. His intimate relationships have not been the focus of analytical research. Earlier historians mentioned a pre-marital relationship with a Neapolitan duchess and later wife of the emperor's closest friend, Michael Johann Count Althann (1679-1722). An emotional and sexual relationship with Althann himself was hinted at by contemporaries and confirmed as a long-term partnership by the transcripts of Charles's diaries. In the diaries, Empress Elisabeth Christine (1691-1750) is first shown as a dynastic partner. Only after Althann's death, did his wife take over the role of emotional partner. By the end of the 1720s, their relationship seemed close and intimate. Before and during his marriage with Elisabeth Christine, Charles VI had regular affairs and one-night stands with women of low birth. Regular, enciphered diary entries for 1739 and 1740 prove that, late in his life, Charles had an affair with a hunter's boy that was driven by bodily desires.

This article has shown that Emperor Charles VI most likely had sexual relationships with both sexes; he found emotional support with his long-time lover and soulmate Count Althann and his wife Elisabeth Christine. Charles's behaviour regarding sexual and intimate relationships shows that his preferences were not supported by contemporary norms and thus he chose to disregard them. Applying the concept of disregarding norms to other cases will help historians to explain seemingly contradicting behaviour of early modern monarchs and to understand some of the foreignness of premodern times.

¹²⁹ For the explicit presentation of masculinity by the French King Henry IV, who like Charles VI had to worry about dynastic continuation, see: Katherine B. Crawford, "The Politics of Promiscuity. Masculinity and Heroic Representation at the Court of Henry IV," *French Historical Studies* 26 (2003): 225–252.

¹³⁰ As the contemporary concept of homosexuality saw it as an action, not a state of being, male-male sexual acts were forbidden. Jonathan Dewald, *Aristocratic Experience and the Origins of Modern Culture. France, 1570–1715* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 119.