

Dynasties

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Dynasties are prominently present in world history. King lists, with individual reign names and dynastic era names, were a common form of time reckoning – a habit that persists in modern Japan. Rule across the globe most often took shape around a single person, attended by a household providing personal and administrative services, in a location that stood out from its environment. The term ›dynasty‹ did not originally relate to government by a single person or family. Greek *dynasteia* denotes lordship or sovereignty in general. In his *Politics*, Aristotle uses *dynasteia*, usually translated as ›rule of the powerful‹, when he refers to oligarchies dominated by a handful of families tending towards hereditary power.¹ Did dynasty pertain to one ›form of government‹, or should we understand it as a more pervasive social practice? This paper reconsiders the idea of dynasty by examining it in a global perspective. Different forms of kinship generate different types of dynasties. Moreover, dynasty was never based only on kinship rules and the hazards of reproduction: succession took many forms and the same holds true for the cultural representations of dynastic power. Which variants of dynasty can be found across the globe, and how were clans of royals constructed?² How important was pedigree for the authority of these dynasties?

Keywords: dynasties; succession; kinship; kingmaking.

I. Concentration versus diffusion

Women: transmitting royal power

Considering a wide range of examples of dynastic power in Africa, Europe, and Asia, I have been struck by the variation in arrangements for succession. Notwithstanding the variety, there is a common point that needs to be underlined first: only in rare cases did women hold priority as candidates for sovereign power. Women were accepted as sovereign queens in the absence of male candidates in a number of polities in Europe, Africa, and Asia, yet more often they reigned temporarily in the name of junior sons, or held power in subsidiary roles. No women formally ruled either in Ming and Qing China, or in the Safavid, Mughal, and Ottoman empires. In the millennium between 1000 and 2000, moreover, I see no cases where a long line of women succeeded to the throne – although the successful rule of one woman and the absence or weakness of male candidates did lead to a sequence of women on the throne in several cases.³

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- 1 Aristotle, *Politics*, book II, chapter 10, 11; book IV, chapter 5 presents *dynasteia* as ›rule of the powerful‹, hereditary rules of families in an oligarchy. On dynasty and its various meanings in antiquity see Martin, *Dynasteia*, 239: ›Herrschaft weniger über viele‹; oligarchy without isonomia; Bearzot, *Dynasteia*; Meier and Strothmann, *Dynasteia*. Chinese *chao* (court, government, reign, dynasty, audience) does seem to relate more closely to imperial or royal power.
- 2 This paper presents themes elaborated at greater length in Duindam, *Dynasties*; references point to relevant specialised literature or, in cases where information is dispersed, to *Dynasties*. This paper also builds on results of the Eurasian Empires research project, organised jointly with three other applicants and bringing together nine researchers, see <http://hum.leiden.edu/history/eurasia/> (retrieved on 31 October 2015).
- 3 See Duindam, *Dynasties*, 89-127, for examples of sequences of female rulers in Aceh, Patani, Japan, Korea, England, Russia, Scandinavia, and perhaps most notably Africa. For the singular example of a ca. 200 year sequence of female rule, the Lovedu rain-queens, see Krige and Krige, *The Realm of a Rain-queen*; Krige, *Divine Kingship*.

Women thus were rarely the preferred candidates for supreme power, yet succession could be organised through the female line even where men prevailed. Matrilineal descent was particularly present in the ›Malayo-Polynesian world‹, from Madagascar to South-East Asia and West India, and in the ›matrilineal belt‹ created by Bantu migration from West to South-East Africa. In matrilineal polities, women were seen as the true vessels of royal blood: the status of fathers was indifferent. Nevertheless, males still commonly held sovereign power. This led to tensions between male paramount power and legitimate succession through the female line.⁴ The king's sons were barred from succession, which necessarily should go to a male borne by a female royal – usually the king's uterine brothers or his sisters' sons. Succession, in other words, was ›sideways‹ or ›horizontal‹.⁵ Direct vertical, ›downwards‹, next-of-kin succession was barred, and there were usually multiple options for sideways succession. Matrilineal succession therefore tended to lead to competition among rivalling candidates. Interregna risked tearing apart the body politic, but, on the other hand, the prospect of future rule could help to maintain cohesion among contending parties. Candidates needed to build support for their position among stakeholders in the royal venture. The throne could be contested violently, but peaceful alternation and circulation among a number of lineages was also possible.

At the other extreme, more familiar for students of modern European history, we find male primogeniture, which defined the eldest son as the heir. Primogeniture concentrated power in the ›downwards‹ vertical line, by withholding rights of succession from younger brothers, daughters, and their offspring. Male collaterals and the offspring of women from the patriline were no longer eligible for the throne, or only in the absence of a king's son. The rights of the first-born son were strong in many places and periods. In the early modern age, primogeniture combined with the indivisibility of the patrimony gradually became the rule for sovereign families as well as for high nobles in Europe.

Concentration	Diffusion
Downwards – Vertical – Filial	Sideways – Horizontal – Fraternal
Patrilineal	Matrilineal
Fixed	Open – Contested – Alternating

The table printed here shows these two extremes. It should be noted, however, that in practice intermediate and criss-crossing forms predominated. Kings of the matrilineal Asante federation could not enforce the succession of their sons, but by marrying them to royal women, they enabled their grandsons to rule again. What in one respect appears as matrilineal succession to kingship, hence can also be understood as the alternation on the throne of two male ›patrifications‹.⁶ Patrilineal succession, moreover, was not necessarily either downwards or fixed. In numerous African patrilineal polities, the succession of the king's eldest son, or all the king's sons, was prohibited, often without stipulating any alternative fixed succession pattern. Competition among a wide group of candidates sharing a single

4 On matrilineal descent, see Schneider and Gough, *Matrilineal Kinship* with a comparative analysis by David Aberle on 655-727; see a classic description of the tensions inherent in matrilineal succession by Richards, *Some Types of Family Structure*, 246-251.

5 Goody, *Sideways or Downwards?*

6 Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century*, 327-373.

distant ancestor was the likely outcome here as in most matrilineal constellations.⁷ Until the decades around 1600, the outspokenly patrilineal Ottoman sultans, borne by slave concubines, practiced mostly downwards but violently competitive succession, with the sons of a dying sultan battling for primacy – and, notoriously, killing their brothers along with their pregnant concubines and children after ascending the throne. Mughal princes until the late seventeenth century likewise engaged in bloody competition once their father's authority showed signs of weakening. Safavid practice differed. The French traveller Chardin described at some length the presence of blinded princes at court in Isfahan, a result of the ›Politique Persane, qui ne permet pas qu'on laisse la vue à aucun enfant mâle du Sang Royal, excepté aux deux ou trois plus proches.⁸ The act of blinding was also extended to the sons of princesses: the Safavids maimed rather than killed princes and apparently considered succession through the female line a legitimate option. European royal families, limited in numbers as a consequence of monogamous marriage, did develop a clear preference for eldest-son succession, but this did not prevent the persistence of partitions. Habsburg Emperor Ferdinand I divided his patrimony among his sons; only in 1665 under Leopold I were these territories once more united in one hand.

Dynastic clans: reduction, proliferation, control

The hazards of demography were the Achilles' heel of dynastic power. Royals were necessary to safeguard dynastic continuity, yet ambitious relatives were a challenge for rulers. The need to provide for royals and to maintain the authority of the head of the house was an ongoing concern. A major difference sets apart dynasties in Christian Europe from all others: the requirement of monogamous marriage. Polygynous reproduction was the rule, although individual princes incidentally may have preferred a single favourite spouse. Polygyny entailed the rapid proliferation of princes and princesses, particularly in cases where collateral houses, likewise practising polygyny, were allowed to survive. By the 1640s the descendants of Ming founder Zhu Yuanzhang (1328-1368-1398) numbered between 100.000 and 200.000; paying their stipends presented a serious challenge for the state coffers. Scions of the upper-level collateral houses, no longer eligible for the throne, could be adopted into the main line to prevent extinction. This solution, used repeatedly in China, was also adopted by the Tokugawa shoguns and the Japanese imperial house. The Song and Qing imperial clans do not seem to have expanded as rapidly as did the Ming; yet, they too, numbered in the tens of thousands by the end of the dynasty.⁹

The Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal cases show that polygyny did not necessarily lead to the inflation of numbers in the dynasty: violent competition among the incumbent ruler's sons reduced numbers in every generation. After ca. 1600 (ca. 1700 for the Mughals) princes were allowed to live, although they had to accept confinement in the palace and the strict control of their reproduction. This changeover took shape gradually and without long-term

7 See examples in Beattie, *Bunyoro*; Drucker-Brown, *Ritual Aspects of the Mamprusi Kingship*, 135-146; Goody, *Succession to High Office*, 172-175; Ottino, *Ancient Malagasy Dynastic Succession*, 254; on contested and circulating succession among descendants of a single ancestor, and combinations of matrilineal and patrilineal descent in Europe, see Whitaker, *Regal Succession among the Dálriata*; McGowan, *Royal Succession in Earlier Medieval Ireland*; Frost, *Monarchy in Northern and Eastern Europe*.

8 Chardin, *Voyages du Chevalier Chardin II*, 50. Chardin underlines that sons of princesses were likewise blinded: this suggests a stronger presence of the female lines than in the Ottoman Empire.

9 General introduction in Wang, *Ming Prince and Daoism* and Robinson, *Princely Courts of the Ming Dynasty*; on numbers of Ming, Qing and Song princes see Rawski, *The Last Emperors*, 91-95, also note 117 on 328-329; Chaffee, *Branches of Heaven*, 271-275.

planning. Mehmed III (1566-1595-1603) was the last sultan to be sent out to govern as a youngster; his thirteen-year-old son Ahmed ascended the throne directly from the palace, and left his four-year-old brother alive.¹⁰ In 1640 Queen-mother Kösem Sultan barely managed to convince dying Murad IV (1612-1623-1640) to let live his only remaining brother Ibrahim, whose untested reproductive powers were now the only hope for the dynasty. Pruning the dynastic tree was not necessarily a violent process. In many African kingdoms royal status wore off with the generations: a king's sons held higher rank than grandsons, sons of grandsons no longer were eligible. In the kingdom of Buganda, brothers of the new king were told they were henceforth barred from succession: Their descendants became ›peasant princes‹, bamabundugu, or ›princes thrown away‹.¹¹

How was dynastic entitlement remembered and proven? This question was relevant mostly where collaterals were allowed to proliferate. In China a special bureau kept track of the dynastic clan. Everywhere, genealogies – notoriously pliable instruments – can be found. A remarkable African example underlines the relevance of performance and flexibility. In the scriptless kingdom of Mamprusi, drummers recited the names of all royals eligible for succession. However, candidates needed to be present during the performance, and they were expected to remunerate the drummers – persistent failure either to attend or to pay sufficiently could lead to oblivion.¹²

Dynastic princes appear to have been dealt with in two ways globally: either by sending them out to the frontier to prove their valour, or by concentrating them at the centre, under some sort of surveillance. The Ottoman, Mughal and Safavid cases moved from the first to the second option. A French Africanist summarises the situation of princes in similar terms: ›Ou bien ils sont étroitement associés au trône et on les retrouve dotés de fonctions importantes au sein de la cour ou bien ils sont écartés du trône quelquefois de manière violente (mutilation ou mise à mort)‹.¹³ Ethiopian sources refer to the ›Mountain of Royals‹ (*Amba Geshan*), where ›all sons of the reigning king who were eight years old or more, and all male descendants in the male line of former rulers of the reigning dynasty‹, were kept in custody.¹⁴ Throughout Africa, royals eligible for succession could choose to move away and found their own kingdoms – in the margins of their father's realm, or in more distant locations, which was one reason for the recurring waves of migration. In China, the Ming followed a middle course, by seriously restricting the movement and activities of prestigious princes in their own fiefs. The Qing required the presence of the imperial princes in and around Beijing, but did give them important tasks in government. While for Early Modern Europe, the term ›domestication‹ is an overstatement at best as a description of the position of nobles at court, it comes somewhat closer to the prestigious but constrained role of royals.¹⁵ However, many

10 Recent literature stresses the gradual and *ad hoc* nature of this changeover in the Ottoman case, see Duindam, *Dynasties*, 132-135; I thank Günhan Börekçi for allowing me to read two forthcoming papers: Börekçi, Smallpox in the Harem and *ibid.*, On the Power, Political Career and Patronage Networks. On the Safavid changeover, see Babaie *et al.*, *Slaves of the Shah*; on Safavid collaterals and their careers see Geever, Safavid Cousins on the Verge of Extinction.

11 Richards, *African Kings and Their Royal Relatives*, 148.

12 Drucker-Brown, *King House*, 177.

13 Mounier, *dynamique des interrelations politiques*, summarising on 374 Tardits, *Princes et serviteurs du royaume*, 9-21.

14 Beckingham, *Amba Gesen and Asirgarh*, quotes from 182-183 and 185; see also Haberland, *Untersuchungen zum äthiopischen Königtum*, 62, 82-89, 184-185.

15 On Norbert Elias and ›domestication‹ see Duindam, *Versailles, Vienna, and Beyond*; more generally also Duindam, *Myths of Power*.

dynastic scions served as viceroys, provincial governors, and military commanders. The extremes can be found, but there was middle ground that left more room for the royals to move; from centre to periphery seems to have been more common here.

Marriage, alliance, exchange

Concentration and diffusion were also influenced by dynastic alliances: where did princes seek their wives, and to whom did they wed their offspring? Ottoman sultans, in the course of the fourteenth century, did contract dynastic marital alliances; yet with their rising pre-eminence they dropped this habit.¹⁶ Slave concubinage in the harem now helped to underline the singular relevance of the male dynastic line. Ottoman sons did not survive the ascent of a brother to the throne in the earlier period, and could not wed or reproduce freely in the later period. Daughters, however, were increasingly wedded to leading administrators. The most successful pashas and viziers, starting out as the ›slaves of the sultan‹ ended up as sultanic in-laws. The upper echelon of state servants was connected to the dynasty through daughters whose sons could no longer claim succession rights.¹⁷ The Mughals used marriage and the harem to integrate the elites of their recently conquered and highly diverse domains. They wedded Persian and Rajput princesses and included daughters of subjected nobles in their harem. In 1581 the Spanish Jesuit Father Monserrate explained that Akbar took women ›... with him in honourable custody, both as a reminder and proof of his own victorious glory, and as hostage in order to prevent any insurrection ...‹.¹⁸ Akbar married more than the four women sanctioned by Islam: ›in order to ratify peace and to create friendly relationships with their vassal princes or neighbouring monarchs.‹¹⁹ Mughal daughters were expected to find their partners among scions of elevated houses, or remain unmarried – a common experience for patrilineal princesses, whose towering status did not fit easily in the hierarchical relationship between man and woman.

The African context is interesting here in several respects. In matrilineal settings, the sexual profligacy of princesses, often contrasting sharply with local norms, underscored the insignificance of the male line – and in practice made it difficult to assert claims of fatherhood.²⁰ Can the ›licentiousness‹ of these princesses be seen as the mirror-image of the patrilineal harem? Without a doubt, harems were an essential part of matrilineal and patrilineal polities throughout Africa. They served as a reservoir for the exchange of women cementing alliances between royal and chiefly lineages, with both parties acting as wife-receivers as well as wife-givers.²¹

Chinese emperors sought consorts among *literati* families holding high office, or among families of military commanders.²² The concentration of power in the hands of consort families in the long run convinced emperors and their advisors to select spouses from the lower echelons rather than among leading administrative and military elites. Conquest dynasties showed a strong tendency towards endogamy, seeking brides and concubines in their own

16 Peirce, *Imperial Harem*, 29-31; 38-39.

17 Peirce, *Imperial Harem*, 65-72; Dumas, *Perles de nacre du sultanat*, 125-194.

18 Monserrate, *Commentary of Father Monserrate*, ed. Banerjee, 143.

19 Monserrate, *Commentary of Father Monserrate*, ed. Banerjee, 202.

20 Duindam, *Dynasties*, 98-100.

21 Krige, *Divine Kingship* elaborates this at length for the Lovedu rain-queen, see other examples in Duindam, *Dynasties*, 114, 117, 154.

22 See Holmgren, *Imperial Marriage*; Chaffee, *Marriage of the Sung Imperial Clanswomen*; Rawski, *Ch'ing Imperial Marriage*.

group. The Qing populated their inner court with maids and consorts from the military banners, comprising Manchus with their Mongol allies and early Han Chinese supporters. Rules for succession would privilege the empress' first son, vis-à-vis younger sons and concubines' sons – yet the primacy of the male imperial line rendered these distinctions flexible in practice. The alliances of dynastic sons and daughters, on the whole, followed the example of their ruling relatives.

From the later Middle Ages onwards in Europe marriage among sovereign equals became the rule, tying together ruling houses in a dense web of succession rights. This dynastic web implicated many polities in the same expectations and rivalries: the near-extinction of one house was eagerly watched from across the frontiers. Europe's gradually more fixed forms of succession may have reduced the level of internal succession strife, but many wars were triggered here by succession disputes. Marriages contracted among rivalling houses time and again raised the issue of female succession rights. The clear preference for rule by men and succession through the male line should not obscure the marked significance of the female line for dynastic status and inheritance in Europe.²³

Overall the rights of succession appear to have caused tension, whereas kinship without this specific entitlement encouraged friendship and alliance. In African patrilineal polities, matrilineal kin were often employed in high positions and served as confidants, whereas princes holding succession rights were kept at bay. However, the opposite positions can be found in matrilineal polities: clearly, we always need to consider relatives in both male and female lines.²⁴

Kingmaking: positions and preferences

Succession procedures can be framed in time-honoured and unequivocal rules. Anybody studying succession practice, however, will note that such rules were frequently disregarded.²⁵ This was inevitably the case where the predetermined candidate was lacking; it became a distinct possibility where the candidate was physically or intellectually incapacitated. The leaps and bounds of dynastic succession were smoothed out in histories; continuities were created to cover usurpations. In open forms of succession the inbuilt moments of contention were likewise fitted afterwards into a view of permanence. It is difficult to ascertain the actions of individuals and groups involved in the process that started with the illness and death of an incumbent ruler and ended with the acclamation of his successor. Several stakeholders influenced dynastic succession, holding different positions and advocating contrasting courses of action.

Incumbent kings were not invariably happy with the priority of the firstborn son, and might have wanted to designate their preferred successor. Particularly in long reigns, the relationship between ruler and heir-apparent could sour easily. In 1676 the Qing Kangxi emperor eagerly nominated as heir apparent his eighteen-month-old son Yinreng, but gradually escalating conflict led to the downfall of Yinreng in 1708; an event wrecking the emperor's health and spirit. Eighteenth-century king Yongjo of Korea experienced a similar misfortune, ending in the enforced suicide of his son. In 1718 the protracted conflict between Peter the Great and his eldest son Aleksej ended with the unexplained death of the tsarevich in prison. Chinese emperors after Kangxi strengthened their powers of designation. Peter con-

23 See a strong example in Wolf, *Königliche Töchterstämme*.

24 See a similar statement in Hohkamp, *Transdynasticism at the Dawn of the Modern Era*.

25 On succession in general, Goody, *Succession to High Office*; Burling, *Passage of Power*; examples in Bes, *Toddlers, Widows, and Bastards Enthroned*.

firmed his right of designation, but failed to exert it.²⁶ Designation was exceptional among other European monarchs. Here too, however, numerous painful conflicts between kings and their likely successors surfaced: George II and Frederick Prince of Wales and William-Frederick and his son Frederick – later the Great – of Prussia can be cited as examples. Conversely, where other bodies served as kingmakers, ruling kings were disposed primarily to ensure the continuity of their house by arranging succession in their lifetime, *vivente rege* or *vivente imperatore*, as Leopold I did for Joseph I, or Maria Theresa and Francis Stephen for Joseph II.

While kings could cherish their powers of designation, senior administrators appreciated order and predictability, and hence preferred fixed succession or argued in favour of the rapid appointment of an heir. High *literati* officials pressed the Ming Wanli emperor to appoint an heir apparent and commence his education. At times advisors actively advocated a succession during the lifetime of the incumbent ruler: in the late 1690s Manchu grandee Songgotu recommended that Kangxi abdicate in favour of his son.²⁷ Generations of royalty often formed the nuclei of competition, with companions and mentors of the likely successor preparing for their future rule; another reason for the troubled contact between ruler and heir.

Polygynous reproduction entailed the coexistence of several women with sons who could have hopes for the throne. Hierarchies differentiated formal queens or empresses from concubines, yet nevertheless preferred concubines' sons could ascend the throne in the absence of empress' sons – and sometimes in their presence. Competition among mothers was common; numerous clashes between mothers and spouses can be found; incidentally even conflict between grandmother and mother occurred.²⁸ In China, strong patrilineal preferences, paradoxically, enabled dowagers to act as kingmakers and regents: the utter impossibility of sovereign female rule qualified these women to act as go-betweens between male incumbents.²⁹ This situation brings to mind the powerful queen-mothers at the French court, barred by the Salic Law from succession.³⁰ Appointing males who could claim the throne for themselves as temporary substitutes for the sovereign was asking for trouble: ineligible were preferred as regents and kingmakers.³¹ In many African kingdoms, queen mothers, the female counterparts of paramount kings rather than their spouses or biological mothers, were a predominant force in succession. The same can be said about the Ottoman sultan mothers from the late sixteenth century onwards. Upon the death of Mehmed III in 1603, the queen mother (*valide sultan*) took priority over the grand vizier and religious leadership in organising the succession of the boy-sultan Ahmed. Until the rise of the Köprülü grand viziers in the 1650s, the *valide sultan* would remain a dominant figure, in government as well as in

26 Wu, *Passage to Power*, 31; Spence, *Emperor of China*, 123-139; Haboush, *Confucian Kingship in Korea*, 230-232; see a portrayal of the rising tensions between King Yongjo and prince Sado from the perspective of Sado's wife in Haboush, *The Memoirs of Lady Hyegyong*, 241-336; Bushkovitch, *Power and the Historian*; Bushkovitch, *Peter the Great*, 339-425.

27 Wu, *Passage to Power*, 56-59; 69-70.

28 Among many examples: Ethiopian empress-dowager imprisoned her son's wife; Valide Sultan Turhan Hatice (Mehmed IV's mother) had Murad IV's mother Kösem Sultan strangled; see Duindam, *Dynasties*, 218 note 173, 122 and the literature cited there.

29 Ebrey, *Succession to High Office*, 56-59.

30 This argument is elaborated in Fanny Cosandey's dossier for the *Habilitation à diriger des recherches*, see for example Cosandey, *Puissance maternelle et pouvoir politique*.

31 Richards, *Social Mechanisms*, 183-184; Duindam, *Dynasties*, 146-148.

matters of succession. ›Inner court power‹, a mixture of women, eunuchs, and preferred companions emerged as a counterforce against the established powers of outside dignitaries, most notably the grand viziers whose tenure had now become short and insecure.³²

Inner court power, leaving few formal records and taking shape in quarters inaccessible to most, remains somewhat impenetrable. Who controlled the situation there? The ruler or his servants and favourites? The death of rulers could be kept secret by close attendants, pre-empting outsiders by deciding the succession before they could intervene. ›Outside‹ administrators complained about the inner court and used it as a comfortable scapegoat: rulers listening only to women and eunuchs rather than to their stern advisors inevitably fell prey to decline and dissolution. In 1666, after the death of Safavid Shah Abbas II, a court eunuch inverted these labels when he accused the leading outer court councillors of appointing a very young prince only to retain power in their own hands: his insistent plea led to the succession of a more mature prince – who in the end became a victim of inner-outer court rivalry.³³ A remarkable variant of inner court power can be found in several South African kingdoms. Competing candidates for the throne needed to be of pure royal blood as well as to have rain-making powers. However, a final test awaited them. Only the candidate able to open the door of ›a special hut in which the previous ruler had died‹ would be acclaimed as the legitimate heir. The act of ›the opening of the door‹ was seen as a divine ratification, but it was effected by a person inside the hut – an apt emblem for inner court power as seen elsewhere.³⁴

More distant groups stepped in as kingmakers. Throughout history, palace guards were a necessary weapon in the hands of kingmaking elites, and they could have their own priorities. Whether or not guards interfered in the succession process, they were likely to expect accession donatives from the new ruler. Satisfying the household troops by paying donatives was arguably the essential moment in the series of accession rites of Ottoman sultans.³⁵ The janissary household infantry, however, also formed a *trait d'union* with Istanbul guilds, crafts and, arguably, public opinion. All dignitaries needed to ensure the loyalty of the household troops – and sometimes they used the tensions persisting between the *sipahi* household cavalry and the janissaries.

Where leading officeholders, religious dignitaries, and councils of elders had established roles as kingmakers, their first priority was to maintain this position and prevent fixed hereditary procedures as well as free designation by the incumbent king. Once there was a choice, there was potential for negotiation, confirmation of privileges, and specific compensations. Acclamation traditionally formed part of the kingship traditions in Europe, either with an element of choice effected by a group of dignitaries, or as an embellishment of hereditary succession. The succession of the two supreme dignities of pope and emperor was fixed in elective procedures in the later Middle Ages. The electors of the Empire, after 1519, used every election to confirm their position vis-à-vis the new emperor, and made sure their requests were registered in print. Monarchies in Scandinavia and Central Europe alternated between heredity and election, with Poland developing the largest-scale and longest-lasting example of royal elections, whereas heredity became stronger elsewhere. In the Mamluk sultanate the election of a new sultan from among the emirs alternated with phases of hered-

32 Tezcan, *Second Ottoman Empire*, and the articles by Börekçi cited in note 10.

33 Matthee, *Persia in Crisis*, 35, 56-58; see a short version of the story in *Kämpfer, Am Hofe des persischen Grosskönigs*, ed. Hinz, 37-38, and a detailed version with speeches and letters in Chardin, *Voyages du chevalier Chardin en Perse*, ed. Langlès, 397-573, with the key speech of the eunuch-tutor at 435-437.

34 Krige, *Divine Kingship*, 60.

35 Murphey, *Exploring Ottoman Sovereignty*, 86.

itary succession. In the fifteenth century, ›one generation rule‹ and election was reconfirmed as the basis of the Mamluk state.³⁶ In the Mongol context, acclamation by the council (*kuriltai*) was a necessary condition of rule, but it mixed with the incumbent khan's powers of designation and a preference for primogeniture. The same conflicting traditions can be found in the Russian case until the early nineteenth century. Throughout Africa, many forms of kingship can be found, with greatly diverging kingly powers; yet councils were present in most polities and they expected to be consulted on succession. While the Asante queen mother (*asantehemaa*) was a powerful force deciding succession, kingship here remained contingent on the support of elders and the population. A king (*asantehene*) who was widely seen as incompetent or debauched risked destoolment. Kings handing over their stool, the symbol of their rule, voluntarily were treated graciously, while others faced a painful process of destoolment: ›... he might have his Stool suddenly pulled from beneath him, so that his buttocks came in contact with the ground; he was also liable to be dragged on the ground; he was abused and slapped by the women and children.‹³⁷

II. Legitimacy

Methods of succession, reproduction, affiliation, and the practices of kingmaking created very different types of dynasties. Each of these categories could stimulate inclusive or exclusive dynasties, engendering alternation and diffusion, or, conversely, the concentration of power and wealth. For Aristotle's view of *dynasteia* as competing families tending towards hereditary power, many examples can be cited in constellations that we normally see as typically monarchical. Indeed, in this respect the line between monarchy and aristocracy (or, following Montesquieu, between monarchy and republic) could be very gradual. Dynasties were present across the political spectrum – from the famous republics in Europe and African kingdoms with alternating paramount leadership to the Chinese empire or full-blown hereditary European kingdoms. Elective kingship, no exception in history, likewise suggests that rule by one person could go together with the alternation of competing dynasties. Extending the idea of dynasty from paramount rulers to elites, it becomes even more pervasive. Kingdoms and empires were constructed as pyramids of households, hierarchically ordered networks of families connected by ties of loyalty and the expectation of compensation. Royal power everywhere relied on the distribution of honours through these networks, centred on the court. None of the strikingly different methods of elite recruitment and elite legitimation – including heredity, enslavement, and examinations – could prevent the overall strength of patrimonialism and patronage.

Dynasty, in this wider sense, was the prevalent mould of leadership as well as the model for most elites. Yet how important was pedigree as a source of legitimacy for ruling houses? Did rulers present ancestors and genealogy as the main underpinning of their authority? Family, inheritance, and succession were not necessarily dominant here.

Dynastic longevity and cyclical views

Considering dynasties in history, we tend to concentrate on a few remarkable cases: Ottomans, Habsburgs, or the Japanese imperial line. In Africa, usually more marginal in discussions of dynasty, the Solomonids of Ethiopia or the Sefuwa dynasty of Kanem-Bornu around Lake Chad can be added. These families, it seems, were able to cling to power over many centuries. On closer in-

36 See Whitaker, *Regal Succession among the Dálriata*; McGowan, *Royal Succession in Earlier Medieval Ireland*; Frost, *Monarchy in Northern and Eastern Europe*; Wolf, *Königliche Töchterstämme*; Levanoni, *Mamluk Conception of the Sultanate*, 385.

37 Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, 146.

spection, demographic mishaps rapidly patched up by ad hoc responses can be found behind the continuity of these dynasties. Reproductive crises in the family were frequently solved by adoption, as was the case in Japan; historic continuity could be suggested by appropriating the names and deeds of earlier dynasties, as was practiced by the Solomonic dynasty. Most dynasties, as most other families, did not last very long. Elite families were always torn between safeguarding continuity by having many children and maintaining status and wealth by reducing the numbers of children – or alternatively, as we have seen, by curtailing the rights of numerous progeny. In addition, sovereign rule brought the risk of death on the battlefield or in palace coups.

Dynastic longevity was the exception. Roman imperial dynasties, created through adoption and marriage and depending on the acclamation of the soldiery, were, on the whole, short lived. This pattern continued in the Byzantine Empire: the long list of emperors reigning between 395 and 1453 includes only three dynasties able to maintain their hold on the throne for more than a century.³⁸ Several Chinese dynasties lasted substantially longer, as can be seen in the table below.³⁹

Han	202 BCE-CE 220
Tang	618-906
Song	960-1276
Ming	1368-1644
Qing	1644-1911

These five dynasties, all lasting more than 250 years, were flanked by numerous less-enduring dynasties as well as by chaotic ›times of troubles‹. Among the Islamic Caliphal dynasties, only the Abbasids matched, or trumped, Chinese dynastic longevity. Interestingly, supreme caliphal status persisted after the tenth century, even though the dynasty no longer was a major political and military actor. After the Mongol conquest of Baghdad in 1258 an Abbasid ›puppet caliph‹ was brought to Cairo, in support of the Mamluk Sultan's legitimacy. The Mamluks, Turkic slave-soldiers ruling an Arabic population, prolonged the presence of the nominal Abbasid caliph in Cairo until the Ottoman conquest of 1517. Henceforth, the Ottomans used the title in their diplomacy, though without the benefit of an Abbasid pawn.⁴⁰ In Japan imperial authority was inviolable, but actual power was wielded by others: regents, retired emperors, or shoguns. The separation of reigning and ruling, and the sacred character of the supreme sovereign, may help to explain the exceptional longevity of the imperial dynasty.⁴¹

Overall, the lifespan of a dynasty was a fraction only of longer-lasting religious and imperial traditions. Dynasties, in fact, were expected to come and go, to ascend to power through violence, restore a righteous order, gradually submit to a process of moral degeneration that entailed increasing luxury and exploitation of the people, and finally fall prey to a vigorous rebel who would establish a new dynasty, resuming the same sequence. ›Prestige‹, Ibn Khaldun stated in the introduction to his world history, ›lasts at best four generations in

38 On the Macedonian, Komnenian, and Palaiologan dynasties; see Bréhier, *Institutions de l'Empire byzantine*, 1-52; for an overview of the imperial institution, the family, and changing modes of succession; a brief discussion of the principle of dynasty in Byzantium can be found in Pazdernik, *Dynasty*.

39 Ebrey, *Succession to High Office*, 51.

40 On the Ottoman use of the caliphal dignity, mostly in competition with the pretensions of the Moroccan Sa'di sharifs, see El Moudden, *Idea of the Caliphate*.

41 Shilloney, *Enigma of the Emperors*.

one lineage.⁴² This rule, he argued, held true for royal dynasties as well as for tribal leaders and nobles, and even for urban ›houses‹; the only exception was the prophet himself. Any ruler forgetting that his personal humility and respect were the foundation for the people's obedience, Ibn Khaldun noticed, would in the end lose power. Cyclical moral-religious views were equally strong in China. Dynasties would risk losing the ›Mandate of Heaven‹ once they disregarded the well-being of the people. The Ming founder Zhu Yuanzhang feared his sons' wrongdoings would undo his mandate:

»People are the mandate of Heaven. He who has virtue Heaven will give it to him and people will follow. If he does not have [virtue], Heaven will withdraw [the mandate] and people will leave him. Now Zhou, Qi, Tan and Lu [Zhu's sons] have indiscriminately bullied and humiliated the soldiers and the people in their fiefs, will Heaven take away the mandate from them?«⁴³

Religious sanction

Dynastic power was always, in one way or another, related to a higher, religious underpinning. I cannot find examples where this element was absent, whereas it clearly occupied a central place in most kingship traditions. In the case of the caliphs and the sharifs, descent from the Quraysh and the prophet's inherited religious authority were inextricably mixed with dynastic prestige. More often dynasties strove to demonstrate their legitimacy by connecting their house to religious traditions. The Habsburgs appropriated the legend of Leopold Margrave of Austria and strove to have this imaginary forebear canonised; French royalty could look back on Saint Louis. Religious occasions, stressing the humility of all before god, made room for petitioning and pardoning in Europe as well as in the Islamic world. In Europe, traditions such as the Royal Touch and the Maundy Thursday *Pedilavium* underlined the connections between royalty and divinity. The reciting of the Friday Prayer sermon (*khutba*) in the name of the ruler (sometimes with his predecessors) accompanying the rise to power of new leaders in the Islamic world was as important as the minting of coins with their image. These practices indicated sovereign royal power: they were not typical for any particular dynasty, neither were they specifically dynastic.

The magical-religious underpinning of dynastic power was particularly strong in Africa and China. The sacrificer-emperor safeguarded the harmony of heaven and earth: seasons, floods, droughts, epidemics, and cosmic events were all seen as depending on the emperor's moral rectitude and correct performance of rites. The relative seclusion of Chinese emperors in the inner court and their curious mixture of stylised omnipotence and frequent reliance on the rule of senior advisors, bring to mind instances of African ritual kingship. The ominous powers of ritual kings made necessary many precautions: nobody should directly meet the king's gaze; the king's feet should not touch the ground and royals needed to be moved by their dignitaries, usually within a very limited perimeter. Yet the king's responsibilities for weather, harvest, and the harmony between ancestors and living were awesome.⁴⁴ Rain-making sacrifices formed part of the Chinese emperor's ritual portfolio.⁴⁵ In 1832, during a drought persisting in spite of the Daoguang emperor's zealous ritual activity, the supreme ruler considered himself responsible: ›I tremble as I consider the causes of the drought: the fault must be mine.«⁴⁶ The capacity to make rain and withhold it from rivals was seen as the

42 Khaldun, *Muqaddimah*, 105.

43 Chan, Ming Taizu's Problem with His Sons, 87.

44 See a lucid summary in Blier, *Royal Arts of Africa*, 29.

45 See a recent discussion in Snyder-Reinke, *Dry Spells*.

46 Rawski, *Last Emperors*, 227. On Carolingians and religious-moral responsibility, see De Jong, *Penitential State*.

strongest weapon in the hands of the Lovedu rain-queen, whose qualities gave rise to the only example of protracted female succession on the throne in recent history. This parallel between the status of the ritual ruler in China and Africa suggests that scale and development are not necessarily always the best criteria for comparison.

Conquerors and imperial continuity; charisma, Veralltäglichsung, and decline

The cyclical view in China fitted with a long-term and relatively consistent imperial-political culture that started with the legendary sage-kings, was rephrased and consolidated by the writers of the warring states period, to be reinvented and canonised at various points in Chinese history. Conquest dynasties undoubtedly maintained their own traditions in governing their own peoples as well as tributaries, and imposed some of their practices on the Chinese population – the Qing queue comes to mind here. Yet in ruling the Middle Kingdom, they all necessarily accepted core elements of the Chinese imperial tradition, including the ideal of unity, the central role of the emperor, the political predominance of literati advisors at the centre and in local networks, and the legitimacy of popular rebellion against an exploitative ruler, as a consequence of the mandate of heaven.⁴⁷ The combination of Roman and Christian legacies dominated the changing patchwork of kingdoms and empires in Europe. From Rome via Charlemagne to Napoleon, rulers with imperial ambitions hijacked the Graeco-Roman mythology and the imperial tradition to strengthen their legitimacy. At the same time, they were all part and parcel of the Christian tradition. This overarching framework, and the artefacts, formulae and social practices pertaining to rule in each of the smaller competing European polities, were more important than specific dynastic prestige – or, more accurately, dynasties were successful because they were able to render self-evident the connection between their house and these powerful traditions.⁴⁸

Everywhere dynastic power was a bric-à-brac of personal and familial merits with long-standing traditions and earlier examples, not necessarily coherent over time and varying according to occasions and audiences. The Qing, in particular, were *virtuosi* in the combination of many rulership styles: their dynastic communication differentiated between Han Chinese and various peripheral peoples. Whereas the dynastic cycle and the mandate of heaven allowed the consolidation of outside conquerors (notably the Yuan and Qing) as well as social upstarts (the Han and Ming founders), violent succession elsewhere was more often covered by appropriating the accumulated history of preceding dynasties. New dynasties posed as successors of prestigious earlier houses, through farfetched genealogies, by paying cultural obeisance to these dynasties, or by cultivating ties in practice. Timur employed a male Chinggisid ›puppet-khan‹ at his court and married a Chinggisid princess, adopting the title of son-in-law of his great example. Unable to claim the caliphate, he showed great respect for Islamic tradition and demonstrated his zeal by building monuments. In addition his personal legend, the hero rising from rags to world power, took precedence over the modest dynastic claims of his own Chaghadayid house.⁴⁹

The example of Chinggis raises the question how personal dynamism relates to institutional consolidation. Conquerors and founders reached power as outsiders, yet their example would be imitated – by their progeny as well as by wholly unrelated princes. Founders started out as heterodox rebels grabbing power in a moment of disorder and social mobility; moving to the throne they rewarded their companions and restored order. Once they were in power the confirmation

47 See the powerful synthesis by Pines, *Everlasting Empire*. Note that Pines presents these continuities as ideas rather than as reality, establishing a middle way between the older assumption of Chinese cultural continuity and numerous critics who rightly pointed out the immense changes and movements in Chinese history.

48 See on genealogy and other components of dynastic legitimacy Pohl, *Genealogy*.

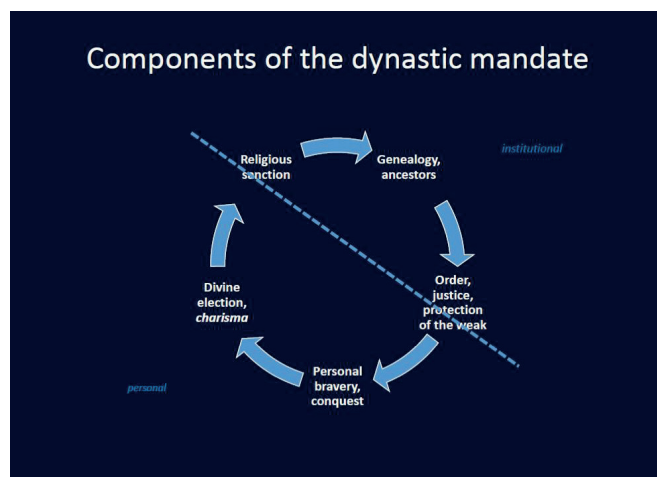
49 Manz, *Tamerlane's Career and Its Uses*; Manz, *Tamerlane and the Symbolism of Sovereignty*.

of tradition became imperative. Pacification and consolidation under succeeding generations entailed the proliferation of administrators and institutions. Administrative institutions took away a share of the burdens of ruling – and in the process also reduced the personal power of the figure at the heart of the constellation. These successors, *nourris dans le serail*, might have been at pains to emulate the personal heroism (and violence) of the founder but often lacked the mentality and the conditions. The personal charisma of individual rulers (most often founders) and the institutional legitimacy created through continuity and tradition can be found in most dynasties.

Were short-living dynasties the building-blocks of persisting imperial traditions? Did empires survive many dynasties? Although the Roman-Byzantine and Chinese traditions seem to suggest this strongly, the idea is misleading. At the political level discontinuities and change characterised empires as well as dynasties: alternating phases of expansion and retraction, integration and devolution, can be found in most empires. At the level of cultural traditions a *longue durée* was present, though it was neither uniform nor unchanging. A mixed bag of conventions, images, and artefacts, varying according to political contingencies and personal preferences, could show remarkable persistence. Conversely, the sudden rise of conspicuously successful founders – Constantine, Chinggis, Timur – could give rise to lasting legacies, even if the empires of these founders tended to collapse in one or two generations.

Forms and audiences

The dynastic mandate everywhere echoed the requirements of good rulership: religious sanction, pedigree (combined with religious sanction in the case of the caliphs and sharifs), good governance (particularly justice and the protection of the weak), bravery on the battlefield, which in the form of battle luck could be read as divine election.⁵⁰ East Asian models of rulership stressed the exemplary moral rectitude and ritual propriety of the ruler and made less room for martial heroism – but individual emperors might have disagreed and founders came to the throne through violence by definition.



50 Globally many terms relate to the European concept of charisma, with its double meaning of divine election and personal magnetism. Farr-i Izadi (divine spark, divine effulgence) is often mentioned in the context of Persian kingship, see e.g. Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs*, xxx, xxxiii, 21, 26, 132, 211; on divine blessing or charisma (*barakat*) as being hereditary see 214, 295; both terms can also be found in Mitchell, *Am I my brother's keeper?*, 45-47. A Turco-Mongol variant can be found in Turkish *kut*, fortune or battle luck, see Murphey, *Exploring Ottoman Sovereignty*, 57; Mongol *Qutlug* was included in the titles of many rulers. *Wahyu* (divine inspiration or consent) is mentioned in Moertono, *State and Statecraft in Old Java*, 60-61; *tuah* (fortune) in Andaya, »A very good-natured but awe-inspiring government«, 63; the comparable concepts of *wahyu* and *perwaba* are discussed in Ras, *Geschiedschrijving en de legitimeit*, 536.

Celebrations, festivities, and daily court rituals showed the dignity of rulership to outsiders. East Asian rulers were on the whole far more secluded and less interactive than their West Asian, South Asian, and European compeers. A similarly withdrawn style can be found in some more ritualised examples of African kingship. Neither in China nor in Japan was the image of the ruler present on minted coins, as it was in West-South Asia and Europe. There is no room to examine these differences at greater length here. Neither can I spend much time on the overstated opposition between the instrumental (>fabrication<) and the affective understanding (>mentalities<) of ritual. Contemporaries were well aware of the practical impact of a flamboyant show, even if, at the same time, they were deeply touched by it.⁵¹ Rituals in China or Japan, performed in isolation by the emperor and his staff, would be timed according to familiar calendars, and the absence of spectators did not mean that these events passed unnoticed.

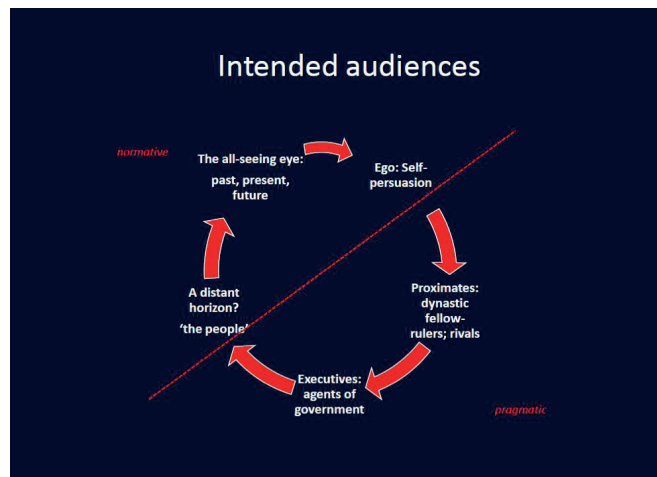
There is a certain resonance in actions undertaken by new rulers to confirm their position.⁵² Accession rites, proclamations, the granting of amnesties, donatives for key groups at the centre, visits to ancestral tombs and religious shrines, redefining the connection with intermediary elites and major urban centres (either at court or by moving to these centres) could be found across the globe. In many regions new princes would feel the need to show their prowess by engaging a major campaign – but there are important regional differences here: Chinese literati advisors would argue strongly against such >adventures<.⁵³ Everywhere the need to conclude marital alliances or in any case to rapidly produce an heir would be essential, confirming the continuation of the line. In addition to these acts, a variety of artefacts would broadcast the fame of the prince: buildings, stelae, inscriptions, coins; dynastic genealogies and *res gestae*, stories about prophecies and omens.

A listing of such acts and artefacts can continue *ad libitum*. Who were the intended audiences of this ongoing representation of royalty? This question could be answered using an image common in studies of the royal court: concentric circles. The ruler himself stands at the heart, his social proximates – close-by and more distant – form a first inner ring, followed by agents of government and intermediary elites. In the penultimate ring, the rather amorphous category of >the people< can be positioned. The people appear to be almost synonymous with the normative underpinning of the whole framework: the mandate of heaven. Finally, the all-seeing eye of heaven, ancestors, and successors, would have appeared to many rulers with great force – as an inner eye scrutinising their behaviour. Did they do justice to the people?

51 These points are discussed at some length in Duindam, *Dynasties*, chapters 3 and 4.

52 See the classic study by Hocart, *Kingship*, and this detailed typology of coronations.

53 Ebrey, Remonstrating against Royal Extravagance; Robinson, *Martial Spectacles of the Ming Court*.



The same sequence is depicted above in a slightly different way. A prince can grab power by force, compel the recognition and respect of proximates and agents of government with a mixture of force and rewards, but at some point he will need to face the normative expectations of rulership, tied closely to just government and the well-being of the people. We have seen that even powerful and violent founders such as Zhu Yuanzhang were deeply concerned about the mandate of heaven. Self-scrutiny may have come late for many of these men of action, but it was very much part of their worldview and could be expected to have an impact. They used violence and actively ›fabricated‹ their rulership, but in the end they needed to convince themselves of their legitimacy.

Montesquieu connected fear to despotism, honour to monarchy, and virtue to the republic. Honour, in Montesquieu's reading, was close to honours in plural, to the distribution of graces and privileges among a mixed group of beneficiaries; the *corps intermédiaires*. Much to Montesquieu's regret, he could no longer trace real virtue in the republics of his own age. Apparently politics could no longer be built only on the foundation of the virtuous normative compliance of their elites. Rereading these categories with a modern post-Weberian view of power and legitimacy, it seems obvious that all categories were necessarily present in all types of states: coercion or enforced compliance; interests or pragmatic compliance; and ideals or normative compliance. Surely all three were essential for dynastic legitimacy, in varying proportions and always depending on the constellation of personalities, political contingency, and traditions.

III. Conclusion

Families have been building blocks of societies throughout history.⁵⁴ Kinship, inheritance, and succession are relevant for all layers of these societies. Dynasty is the family writ large, yet when do we label a family as a dynasty? Only if the family holds sovereign power for several generations, lives in a palace, employs numerous domestics and state servants? The modern definition of dynasty, formed in a phase of European history where pedigree became more rather than less important, where heredity and primogeniture became the norm, and where a limited number of royal houses were associated with the states they had been ruling for some time, is surely too restrictive. It underlines one aspect of dynasty: the gradual *concentration* of power.

54 See the influential volume edited by Sabeau *et al.*, *Kinship in Europe*.

The first part of this paper shows the variety of kinship and succession arrangements across the globe. It highlights the *diffusion* of power where paramount rule circulated among a wider pool of candidates that can still be seen as a dynasty – or as a conglomerate of competing dynasties. It examines the various connections created through marital alliances and harems, pointing to the relevance of male as well as female lines. The prevalence of king-makers in many capacities – from formal electors to inner court agents and guards – shows that dynastic power could be a collective venture. Yet even rulers styled as omnipotent and autocratic were surrounded by a mixed group of stakeholders. These pillars of dynastic power were willing to perform their obeisance but keen to defend their position and often able to manipulate their princes.⁵⁵ All larger premodern polities relied on the active participation of *corps intermédiaires*. They can be pictured as a pyramid of families, or households, related hierarchically through ties of fidelity, service, and reward. The static and normative differentiation between monarchy and aristocracy is not very helpful here; neither does it assist intercultural comparison. Aristotle's ›rule of the powerful‹, pointing to a limited number of competing families, was relevant for many monarchies as well as for aristocracies or oligarchies.⁵⁶

Dynasty, in this sense, was broader than its classical definition allows. Yet it was always part of a larger story in which the family occupied a more modest place. No dynasty ever was a straightforward demographic fact: dynasties maintained continuity through impromptu measures and safeguarded legitimacy by stressing permanence and tradition. The second part of this paper stresses that pedigree and lineage usually were a minor component only of the ideals and practices of rulership. In many traditions there was a clear expectation of frequent dynastic change, as an inevitable and desirable reinvigoration of more lasting political and cultural models. While usurpers were at pains to establish the correct antecedents for their family, dynasties never prided themselves only on their longevity in supreme office. They were accepted as legitimate on the basis of a far more diverse portfolio of conventions and traditions. Ultimately, the key criterion of legitimate power was the well-being of the people. This standard undoubtedly was rarely achieved in practice, but as a normative horizon it was present for rulers as well as subjects. Princes may have been ruthless conquerors, virtuoso manipulators, and keen propagandists, yet in the end they could not escape the all-seeing eye.

Dynasty was ubiquitous in history and is well-suited for global comparison. It needs to be taken seriously as a category for research, but surely not only according to its own fictitious standards. This comparison does not stop before the contemporary age: dynasty is still markedly present in politics as well as in business.⁵⁷ Finally, studying the variable but remarkably consistent patterns around dynastic rulers in the premodern age may tell us something about power and representation in our own age.

55 The limited agency of rulers and the permanent intervention of others at court is one of the themes of Duindam, *Dynasties*.

56 This conclusion fits observations in Drews *et al.*, *Monarchische Herrschaftsformen der Vormoderne*, e.g. 173.

57 Examples of modern-day dynasties (apart from European constitutional monarchies or dynastic polities in the Arabic world and in South-East Asia): Montefiore, *Stalin*; Baker, *Family of Secrets*; Martin, *Under the Loving Care*; examples from the business world can be found in Pina-Cabral and Pedrosa de Lima, *Elites*; see also the thirteen business dynasties in Landes, *Dynasties*.

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