

Court Factions and Female Political Networks: Elite Women at the Danish Court during a Time of Turmoil, 1784–1797

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Five years before the Storming of the Bastille in France, the British envoy to Copenhagen, Hugh Elliott, wrote to the Foreign Secretary about a palace ‘revolution’ at *Christiansborg*, the Danish royal palace in Copenhagen in the spring of 1784. Elliott described a change of power from the ‘Queen’s party’ to the young crown prince and his supporters.¹ This turmoil, as it were, was a bloodless palace coup, carried out by a group of elite men in support of the crown prince, sixteen-year-old Frederik. Others also shared news of the event.² The new privy councillor and finance minister’s wife, Charlotte Schimmelmann, together with her sister, Sybille Reventlow, had both been present at the royal castle during the coup.³ Taking the women’s account of the palace coup as a point of departure, this chapter investigates female social networks, courtly social networks and political manoeuvring at the Danish court in a time of turmoil. It focuses on a group of women at court who did not hold formal positions; yet as the wives of the ministers of the royal Privy Council who advised the crown prince after the 1784 palace coup, they formed the female side of one political network or ‘party’.⁴

- 1 Miinto Papers, National Library of Scotland, MS. 13021, Hugh Elliott Correspondence 1–14: To Lord Carmarthen (Foreign Secretary Francis Osborne, Marquess of Carmarthen, 1751–1799), 24 April 1784: ‘I do not at this moment hesitate to pronounce his [the Crown Prince’s] victory complete. I hope, however, that a separation will soon take place between the two Courts, as the most certain means of giving stability to this revolution.’ See also: MS. 13021, Hugh Elliott Correspondence 15–34: Hugh Elliott to Lord Carmarthen, 1 September 1784: ‘My Lord. I have no other apology for having so long delay’d transmitting to your Lordship a full account of the late total revolution of the government of this country, than a chain of circumstances’.
- 2 Louis Theodor Alfred Bobé, *Efterladte papirer fra den Reventlowske familiekreds i tidsrummet 1770–1827*, 10 vols., vol. IV (Copenhagen 1900) 88–89: Excerpt of letter from Charlotte Schimmelmann to Louise Stolberg, 27 April 1784.
- 3 Bobé, *Efterladte papirer*, vol. 4, 85–87. Charlotte Schimmelmann to Louise Stolberg, 19 April 1784.
- 4 Louis Bobé, *Efterladte papirer fra den Reventlowske familiekreds i tidsrummet 1770–1827*, 10 vols. (Copenhagen 1895–1931); Claus Bjørn, *Den Gode Sag: En Biografi Om Christian Ditlev Frederik*

Women's political agency in European court life has seen a renewed interest in recent years' scholarship, not least with the publication of a range of books on women at court.⁵ By focusing on the women's relations with other female courtiers, and with male and female members of the royal family, this chapter aims to broaden our understanding of how politics were practised by women at court in a time of turmoil. Understanding the machinations of informal courtly social networks, or *cabals*, as Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie called the parties at court in his seminal book on the court of Louis XIV, is central to understanding court politics. As Le Roy Ladurie found, court women were often central actors in these *cabals*.⁶ The *cabals* would be centred around branches of the royal family, and the royal family's members and their supporters would also 'contend with one another based on their estimates of when and how the monarchical succession would take place'.⁷ That, too, could be said of the Danish court at Copenhagen at the end of the eighteenth century.

Another aspect of court politics might be useful to understand the courtly intrigues. The relationship between old and new nobility, ministers of state and courtiers implied, as Leon Horowitz has argued in a study of the courts of France and Brandenburg-Prussia, competing strengths. The old court elite held prestige through dynastic power and offices at court, while the newer *noblesse de robe* represented administrative power and updated, educated knowledge – this was the ministerial elite.⁸ The advisers who came into power with Crown Prince Frederik's coup in 1784 were also members of a 'new', or at least 'German' nobility: The Schimmelmann and Bernstorff families had both been called into service by the Danish monarchy in the 1700s, and the

Reventlow (Copenhagen 1992); Anne Scott Sørensen, ed., *Nordisk salonkultur: et studie i nordiske skønånder og salonmiljøer 1780–1850* (Odense 1998); Kristine Dyrmann, *Salondiplomati og politisk selskabelighed* (PhD dissertation, Aarhus University, 2021).

5 See for example: Charles E. Beem, Carole Levin eds., *Queenship and Power*, book series published Palgrave Macmillan; Susan Broomhall, *Women and Power at the French Court 1483–1563* (Amsterdam 2018) and Fabian Persson, *Women at the Early Modern Swedish Court: Power, Risk, and Opportunity* (Amsterdam 2020) – both of these books have been published in the series *Gendering the late Medieval and Early Modern World*, eds., James Daybell, Victoria E. Burke, Svante Norrhem, and Merry Wiesner-Hanks; Elena Woodacre, Yuki Terazawa, Simon Doubleday, eds., *Gender and Power in the Premodern World*, book series published by ARC Humanities Press; Elena Woodacre, Louise Wilkinson eds., *Lives of Royal Women*, book series published by Routledge.

6 Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Saint-Simon and the Court of Louis XIV*, (Chicago 2001) see for example 121–161 on 'Cabals, Lineages, and Power', particularly 128–131.

7 Le Roy Ladurie, *Saint Simon and the Court of Louis XIV*, 124.

8 As Leonhard Horowski has put it in a recent article. 'Useful Ink-Shitters and Decorative Excellencies: The Difficult Relationship Between Ministers of State and Courtiers in Brandenburg-Prussia and France, c.1650–1800', *The European History Quarterly*, 53, 3 (2023) 407–426.

Schimmelmanns had been ennobled only in 1762, whilst the Reventlows had been members of the Danish nobility since before the Lutheran reformation – the differentiation between ‘old’ and ‘new’ nobility, or ‘Danish’ and ‘German’ parties was therefore never quite as clear-cut as the terms might imply, but the Reventlows, Schimmelmanns, and Bernstorffs were still associated with the ‘German’ side of court politics and criticised for being of German background by their contemporaries, and they also represented an agenda of reforms.⁹ The ‘reformer’ faction as they became known, may therefore be understood as a new, ministerial elite, now entering the circles of power at court. How did their wives, who possessed neither court positions nor ministerial offices themselves, navigate this change?

Two of the new advisers to the crown prince, whose wives also participated in court life, were Ernst Schimmelmann, Finance Minister to the king, and Johan Ludvig Reventlow, who would shape a set of land reforms carried out in the late 1780s and 1790s. The study presented here is based on a collection of 2,900 pages of correspondence between Charlotte Schimmelmann, Sybille Reventlow, both née Schubart as the two women were also sisters, and Sybille Reventlow’s sister-in-law Louise Stolberg (née Reventlow), and Ernst Schimmelmann, today kept in different branches of the Danish State Archives, and dating from 1789–1797. In addition to these archival sources, I have drawn on an edited collection of published excerpts from the early 1900s, including letters from the years 1784–1789 which are no longer to be found in the archives.¹⁰

A central female political figure at court was the queen.¹¹ Maternity, pregnancy, and childcare were entwined with dynastic policies and therefore were matters of high politics, argues Pascale Mormiche. For the nobility, securing marriage alliances for their daughters and sons mattered, but securing the lineage of the royal family mattered to their political interests; without a

9 On the differences between ‘old’ and ‘new’ nobility, or the ‘Danish’ and ‘German’ party, see: Ole Feldbæk, *Der er et yndigt land 1789–1848. Dansk Identitetshistorie* (Copenhagen 1991), vol. 2, 39; Claus Bjørn, ‘Den Jyske Proprietærfejde: En Studie over Godsejerholdninger Og Bondepolitik Omkring 1790’, *Historie/Jyske Samlinger* 13, 1–2 (1981).

10 Kristine Dyrmann, ‘Salondiplomati og politisk selskabelighed: Charlotte Schimmelmann i dansk historieskrivning fra Louis Bobé til New Diplomatic History’, *1700-tal. Nordic Yearbook for Eighteenth-Century Studies* (2020) 99–124.

11 The study of eighteenth-century queenship was pioneered by Clarissa Campbell-Orr in the early 2000s: Clarissa Campbell-Orr: *Queenship in Britain: Royal patronage, court culture, and dynastic politics, 1660–1837* (Manchester 2002) and *Queenship in Europe: The role of the consort, 1660–1815* (Cambridge 2004).

future heir, another branch of the royal family might inherit the throne, and the noble families supporting the current ruler might lose their positions and influence.¹² Women at court usually depended on a partnership with their husbands. Katrin Keller and Pauline Ferrier-Viaud have demonstrated for the Habsburg and French courts, respectively, that women were able to expand, support, and consolidate their husbands' social networks. For example, as Ferrier-Viaud has shown, the ministerial wives rarely had formal positions at court, but they nevertheless participated in courtly social life. At moments of strategic importance to their husbands, the wives might receive a certain honour from a member of the royal family – e.g. being invited to dine at a royal table, or receiving a *tabouret* seat during the Duchess of Bourgogne's toilette – mirroring and thus consolidating their partner's position at the pinnacle of power.¹³ Maintaining personal relations with members of the royal family was one aspect of maintaining their minister husbands' influence, or that of their family and political group.¹⁴

Surprisingly little work has been done to shed light on women at court in a Scandinavian context. Of the work that has been published, Swedish and Finnish historians of the court in Stockholm and the Swedish elite take the lead.¹⁵ In contrast, the only published work to date exploring women at the eighteenth-century Danish court has been Michael Bregnsbo's work on Danish

12 As argued in a recent volume on pregnancy at the eighteenth-century French court, Pascale Mormiche, *Donner Vie au Royaume: Grossesses et maternités à la cour, xvii^e–xviii^e siècle* (Paris 2022) see for example 10–12. Katrin Keller, 'Mit den Mitteln einer Frau: Handlungsspielräume adliger Frauen in Politik und Diplomatie' in *Akteure der Außenbeziehungen* (Cologne 2010) 219–44.

13 Pauline Ferrier-Viaud, *Épouses de ministres: Une histoire sociale du pouvoir féminin au temps de Louis XIV* (Ceyzérieu 2022) 154–162.

14 Pauline Ferrier-Viaud, *Epouses de ministres*.

15 The first comprehensive study in English of women in service at the Swedish court is: Fabian Persson, *Women at the Early Modern Swedish Court*, deepening the insights offered in a 2017 article by Finnish historian Johanna Ilmakunnas on noblewomen in service at the Swedish court: 'From Mother to Daughter: Noblewomen in Service at the Swedish Royal Court, c.1740–1840,' in *Early Professional Women in Northern Europe, c.1650–1850* (London 2017) 69–90. On a royal woman – the duchess and later queen Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta, see also: My Helsing, *Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotta: Hertiginna vid det gustavianska hovet* (Stockholm 2015). My Helsing, *Hovpolitik: Hedvig Elisabeth Charlotte som politisk aktör vid det gustavianska hovet* (PhD dissertation, Örebro University, 2013). On Privy Councillors' wives, see Svante Norrhem, *Kvinnor Vid Maktens Sida, 1632–1772* (Lund 2007).

eighteenth-century queens.¹⁶ The female side of the court elite thus remains unexamined.¹⁷

1 The Palace Coup and the Dowager Queen

The 14th of April, to return to this day, Sybille, Ludvig, Numsen, and Münster dined with us. Your eldest brother arrived and found us at the table, at 4 o'clock all the gentlemen left us. Münster thought a tarantula had bitten them, you can imagine that we had not invited him. You might imagine our state, as we found everyone in the same room. Sybille was agitated, and I was mostly upset by the efforts of appearing calm. We talked about other things, and finally, we threw ourselves to the illusion: At 5 o'clock I dressed myself, and at 6 we got in the carriage to go and take our tea with Mrs. Sperling, who was wholly unaware of the importance of this day.¹⁸

The day of reference in Charlotte Schimmelmann's letter to Louise Stolberg was the palace coup carried out at the Danish court on 14 April 1784. On this day, Maundy Thursday, the Danish *dauphin*, known as the crown prince, was to take his seat in the royal Privy Council, beside his father, King Christian VII. The king had been unfit to rule for years, and since 1772, the Dowager Queen Juliane Marie of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel; her son, the king's younger half-brother; and her adviser and secretary, Ove Høegh-Guldberg; had been the *de facto* rulers of the conglomerate kingdom. A group of noblemen in their thirties had for years been planning to take over power from the dowager queen in alliance with the young crown prince.¹⁹ Their names were Ernst Schimmelmann – married

16 Michael Bregnsbo, 'Danish Absolutism and Queenship: Louisa, Caroline Matilda, and Juliane Maria', in: Clarissa Campbell Orr, ed., *Queenship in Europe 1660–1815* (Cambridge 2004) 344–67.

17 As highlighted by Nina Koefoed, 'Kvinder og politik 1500–1800: forskningens status i Danmark', in: *Kvinnor och politik i det tidigmoderna Norden: rapport til 26:e Nordiska historikermötet i Reykjavik den 8–12 augusti 2007*, Ritsafn Sagnfræðistofnunar, vol. 40 (Reykjavik 2007) 15–34.

18 Charlotte Schimmelmann to Louise Stolberg, 27 April 1784. Sybille Reventlow and Johan Ludvig Reventlow were the sister and brother-in-law of Charlotte Schimmelmann. Numsen was master of ceremonies at the Danish court, whereas Friedrich Münster was a scholar and theologian – as the quote says, he was not involved in the coup. Harald Jørgensen, *Fra Christiansborg til Amalienborg: En begivenhedsrig periode i den danske hofforvaltnings historie* (Herning 1996).

19 Engberg, 'Kuppet' in *Den standhaftige tinsoldat*, 97–100.

to Charlotte Schimmelmann; Johan Ludvig Reventlow, called 'Ludvig' by his family members – married to Sybille Reventlow; Christian Ditlev Reventlow, Ludvig's brother; and the senior statesman Andreas Peter Bernstorff, as the group's informal leader (see Chart 5.2). Bernstorff had many years of political experience as a diplomat and minister, having been discharged as foreign minister in 1780.²⁰ The course of events is well-known in Danish history: The coup was to be carried out on the day of the crown prince's confirmation and entry to the Privy Council. During the council meeting, the sixteen-year-old Crown Prince Frederik placed a document in front of his father, King Christian VII which the king immediately signed. Signing whichever documents were placed before him was habitual for the king.²¹ The document was an authorisation of the crown prince, requiring his signature, along with his father's, on future declarations. This action led to tumultuous scenes, as the king's half-brother tried to wrestle the document from the young prince, followed by the Hereditary Prince – who was the dowager queen's son, and the king's half-brother, and therefore also the young crown prince's uncle (see Chart 5.1) – taking the king into another room as hostage.²²

Meanwhile, Charlotte Schimmelmann and Sybille Reventlow took their tea in the apartment of one female courtier, Sophie Magdalene von Sperling (1743–1814). Von Sperling was, notably, a lady-in-waiting to the dowager queen, but she was also a member of the Reventlow family and seems to have been an ally of the reform group.²³ The three women waited for the action to end, just like their husbands, who were also waiting for the young crown prince to complete the coup against his uncle, the hereditary prince:

Setting foot at the castle, everything seemed darker than usual, I felt captured with every step. We spent an hour at Sperling's, in this condition of almost crying. Sybille had the hiccups, I felt feverish, and we relieved our tension by informing Sperling of the situation. Then we could talk, at least. Finally, close to 8 o'clock, the door of Sperling's apartment opened, and the Giant [C.D.F. Reventlow, one of the advisers] appeared, very pale, but very happy, a moment later, Ernst appeared in the same state, and

20 Claus Bjørn, *Den gode sag: En biografi om Christian Ditlev Frederik Reventlow* (Copenhagen 1992) 73, 94–111.

21 Edvard Holm, *Danmark-Norges historie 1720–1814*, vol. 6: 1 (Copenhagen 1907) 2–3; Claus Bjørn, *Den gode sag*, 82–91.

22 Ole Feldbæk, 'Kronprinsregenten' in *Gyldendals og Politikens Danmarkshistorie*, vol. 9 (Copenhagen 1990–2003) 234–238.

23 'Sophie Magdalene von Sperling (1743–1814)' in Louis Bobé, Albert Fabritius, eds., *Danmarks Adels Aarbog* (Copenhagen 1943) 153, 5.

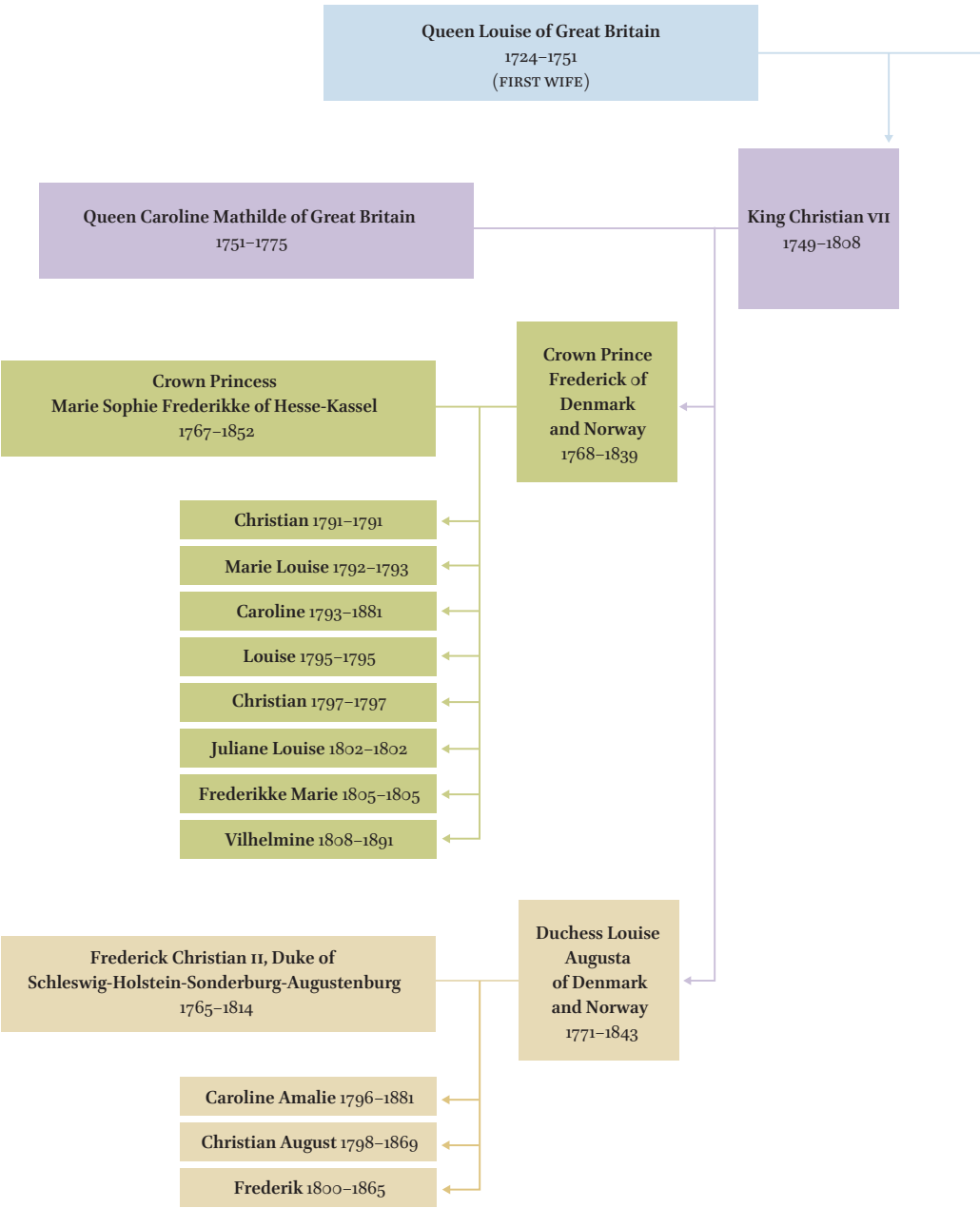
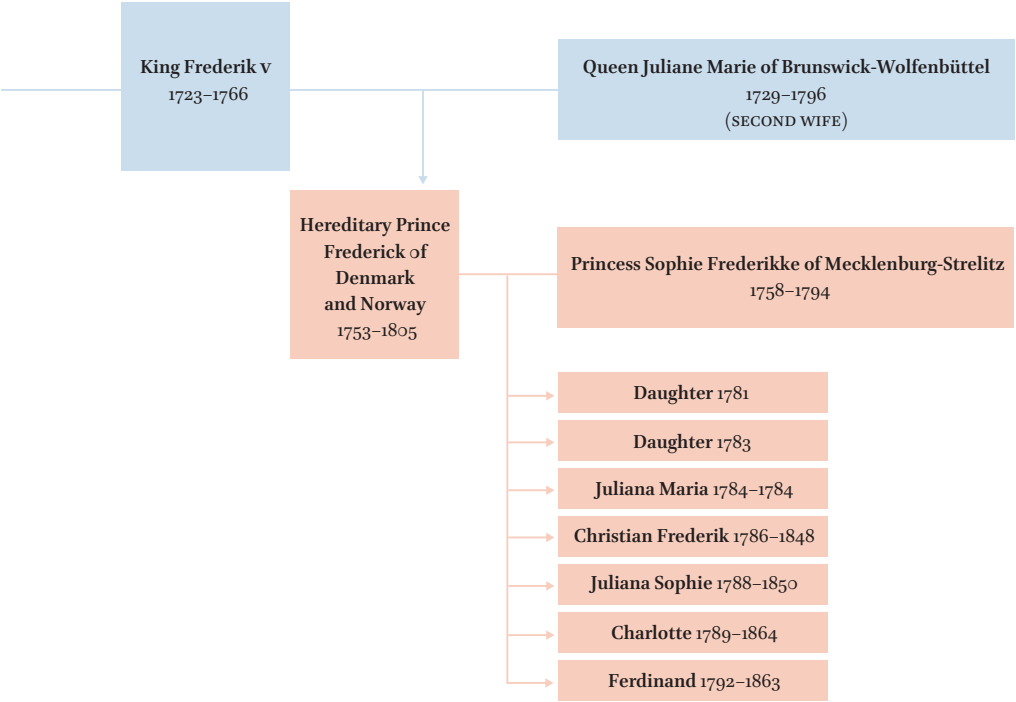


CHART 5.1 Genealogical table showing the three branches of the Danish royal family that were most directly connected to the throne at the end of the eighteenth century. King Christian VII was ill and unfit to rule, and from 1772–1784, his stepmother and half-brother, Dowager Queen Juliana Maria (1729–1796) and the Hereditary Prince Frederick (1753–1805) therefore ruled – albeit unofficially – on his behalf. The question was, if the king died, who would inherit the throne? The king had two



children; Crown Prince Frederick (1768–1839), who had no male offspring. His sister, Duchess Louise Augusta (1771–1843) and her husband had no children until 1796. The line of succession followed the principles of agnatic-cognatic primogeniture, and the ‘Hereditary’ Prince Frederick’s children would therefore be next in line to the throne, should the Crown Prince die or not have any sons. The Hereditary Prince did indeed have a son – named Christian Frederick (1786–1848). He ascended the throne as king Christian VIII in 1839

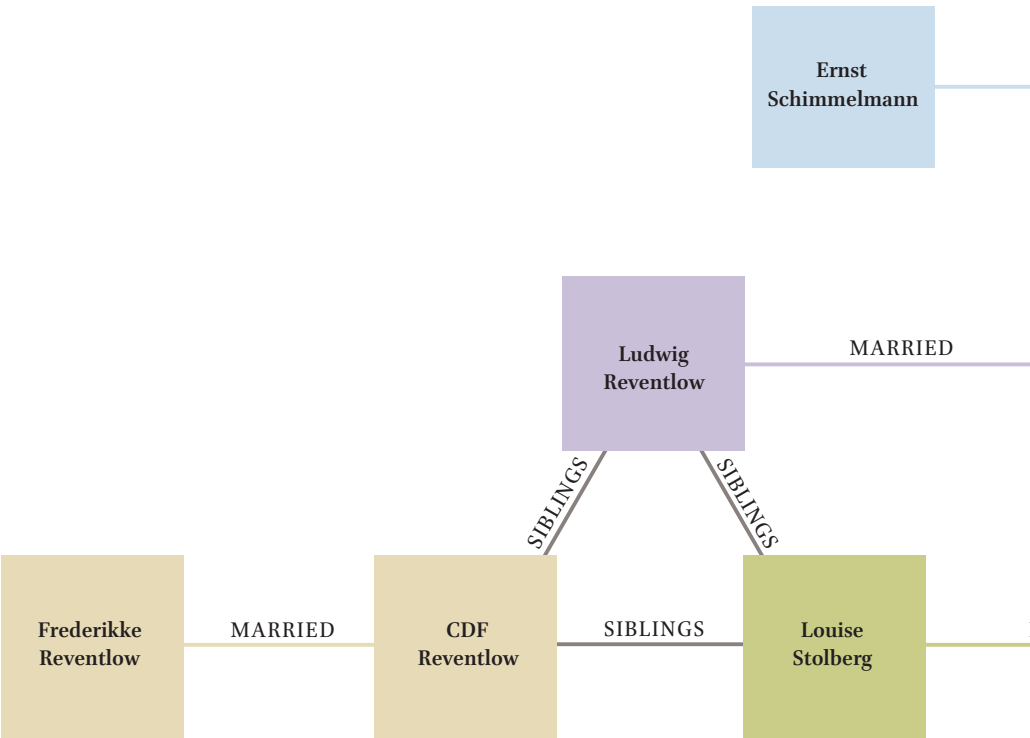
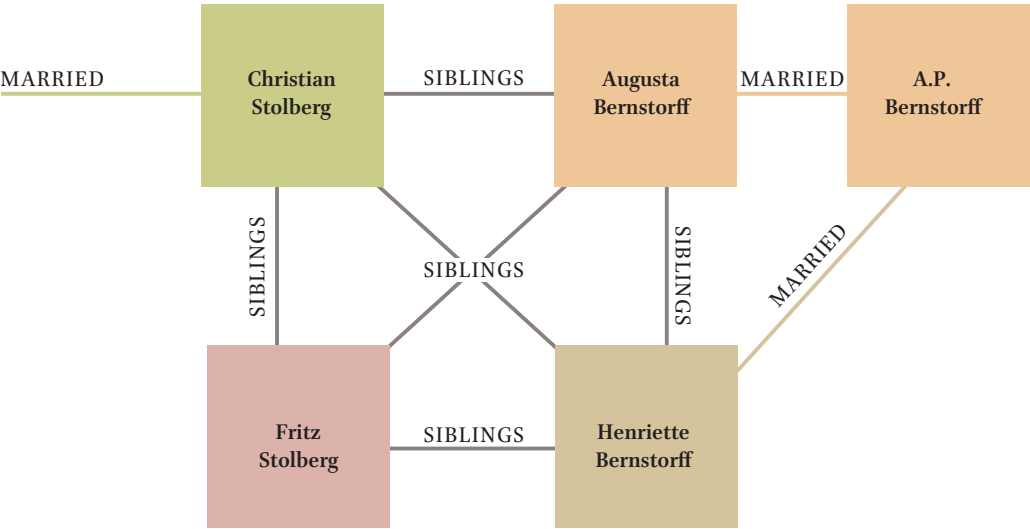
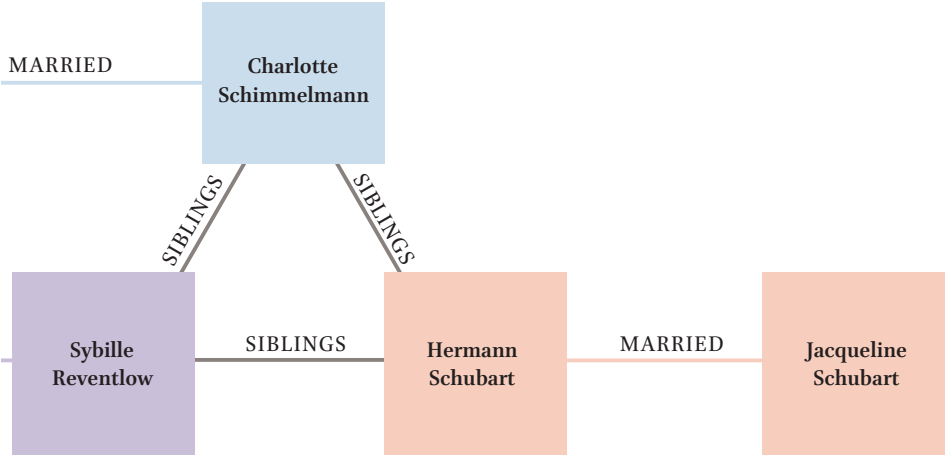


CHART 5.2 The 'reformer' family network. The coloured squares mark marriage alliances, lines mark relations between married partners or siblings. The families Reventlow, Schimmelmann, Bernstorff, and by extension Schubart and Stolberg were married into each other, forming a closely knit network that was central to their party or 'cabal' at court. And central to the family network itself were three women: Charlotte Schimmelmann (1757–1816) and Sybille Reventlow (1753–1828), both née Schubart, and Sybille Reventlow's sister-in-law, Louise Stolberg (1746–1824), née Reventlow



I found myself around his neck, in his arms, I do not know how. Some feelings cannot be described.²⁴

This emotional account of events relating to the palace coup lets its reader feel the drama of the day, with words like 'darker' and 'captured' alluding to the potential punishment for conducting a palace coup. One of the two sisters also wrote about the events that she had feared imprisonment at Munkholm, a Norwegian fortress used to harness seventeenth-century traitors, thus implying that the palace coup could have resulted in punishment for high treason, had the sixteen-year-old crown prince not been successful in securing his father's signature, thereby taking power in the Privy Council.²⁵ The men, who had been waiting in another room adjacent to the Privy Council chambers, were now the new men in power: 'The Giant', mentioned in the quote, was Sybille Reventlow's brother-in-law, Christian Ditlev Reventlow, and he would soon become Chancellor of the Exchequer, while Ernst Schimmelmann would become Finance Minister. The political group, later known as the 'agrarian reformers', the 'reform group', or 'reform reign', was a family network, and the Bernstorff-Schimmelmann-Reventlow group has therefore also been called the 'family circle' by the archivist who published excerpts of their letters around 1900.²⁶ Despite this apparent connection between family relations and political interest, the participation of the group's female members in the 'family circle's political project has hitherto not been examined²⁷ – including their presence at the palace during the coup. Like their husbands, who were not present in the Privy Council chamber during the coup, but had to wait in an adjoining room. Charlotte Schimmelmann and Sybille Reventlow were present at court during the coup, ready to take their punishment, should events have gone wrong.

Following the 1784 palace coup, the Danish court was without a queen; the Dowager Queen Juliane Marie of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel had been ruling the country – though informally, as she still did not possess a seat in the royal Privy Council – through cabinet orders, from 1772–1784.²⁸ The dowager queen no longer was a leading political actor, yet she remained a central figure in the

24 Charlotte Schimmelmann to Louise Stolberg, 27 April 1784.

25 Charlotte Schimmelmann to Louise Stolberg, 19 April 1784.

26 Claus Bjørn, 'De fornemme, de rige, de sejrende' in *Den Gode Sag*, 98.

27 Kristine Dyrmann, 'Salondiplomati og politisk selskabelighed', 99–124.

28 Ole Feldbæk, *Den lange fred: 1700–1800*, ed., Olaf Olsen, Gyldendal og Politikens Danmarkshistorie, vol. 9 (Copenhagen 1990) 234–242; Edvard Holm, *Danmark-Norges Historie Fra Den Store Nordiske Krigs Slutning Til Rigernes Adskillelse (1720–1814)* (Copenhagen 1891)

court's social hierarchy. The young crown prince who had taken power in the coup was only sixteen years old and still unmarried.²⁹

A few days after the palace coup, Charlotte Schimmelmann attended a drawing-room, or *appartement*; this was a weekly social event at court. This event was held every other Monday, involving card games orchestrated by the court's master of ceremonies, C.F. Numsen.³⁰ Numsen had been present at the Schimmelmann residence on the day of the coup, but according to Frederik VI's biographer, the master of ceremonies does not seem to have been involved in the planning.³¹ After the event – or the 'revolution', as the English envoy extraordinary called it – the dowager queen and her adviser, Ove Høegh-Guldberg, were both dismissed from court, and the new men behind the transition took their seats in the Privy Council and in government: C.D.F. Reventlow would be Chancellor of the Exchequer; Ernst Schimmelmann took the post as Minister of Trade, then later Chancellor of the Exchequer; and Andreas Peter Bernstorff was again head of the Foreign Office (called the 'German Chancery'), and informally known as the Prime Minister.³² The 'cabinet', through which the dowager queen had been able to rule the country, was discontinued. The new Privy Council would meet twice a week, and even minor decisions on domestic policy or foreign policy matters would be discussed in the Council.³³

On 18 April 1784, four days after the Privy Council meeting, Charlotte Schimmelmann found herself placed at the table of the previous leader at court: the Dowager Queen, Juliane Marie of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel.

The Queen asked me yesterday to play on her team, an honour that would not have been bestowed on me this past winter, the Prince Hereditary was there, he had as much fun as a dog. He is no longer the master. The Queen said to me: Now, Madame Schimmelmann, you must surely be back on your feet, you already look much better tonight – I felt the heat

2–3. See also: The National Library of Scotland: Miinto Papers: MS. 13021, Hugh Elliott Correspondence 15–34: Hugh Elliott to Lord Carmarthen, 1 September 1784.

29 Ulrik Langen, 'The Great, the Pages and the End of Eighteenth-Century Danish Court Culture', in: Pasi Ihalainen et al., eds., *Scandinavia in the Age of Revolution* (Farnham 2011) 67–79.

30 Harald Jørgensen, *Fra Christiansborg til Amalienborg: En begivenhedsrig periode i den danske hofforvaltnings historie, 1784–1808* (Herning 1996) 81–82.

31 Engberg, 'Kupplaner' in: *Den standhaftige tinsoldat* (Copenhagen 2009) 88–92.

32 H.M. Scott, 'Elliot, Hugh' in: *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford 2004, updated 2008) <https://doi-org.ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/10.1093/refodnb/8664>.

33 Jens Engberg, 'Efter kuppet' in: *Den standhaftige tinsoldat* (Copenhagen 2009) 97–102.

of the many people present. I answered her that it was too hot to not take on some colour, but surely springtime would allow me to find my feet.³⁴

In metaphoric language referring to Charlotte Schimmelmann's health, the two women exchanged words about the transfer of power; *bonmots* were frequently referenced at court, and the game of cards was also referenced by Charlotte Schimmelmann's sister, Sybille Reventlow, in one of her letters, underlining the significance of the conversation.³⁵ The crown prince may have formally taken over power, but members of court, including its master of ceremonies and the 55-year-old dowager queen, were well aware that he had been supported by a circle of advisers and their wives – Ernst Schimmelmann, Ludvig Reventlow, Christian Ditlev Reventlow and their older mentor, Andreas Peter Bernstorff, together with their wives Charlotte Schimmelmann, Sybille Reventlow, Sophie Frederikke Reventlow, and Augusta Bernstorff. At sixteen, the crown prince was unmarried, and his sister was just fourteen years old. Though princess Louise Augusta was in principle the new, leading female royal at court, the conversation between the dowager queen and Charlotte Schimmelmann alluded to her new position as the leading female figure among the courtiers. As the dowager queen remarked, she would have to live up to the responsibilities of her new position.³⁶ The twenty-seven-year-old social hostess promised that she would – perhaps saying so with more confidence than she felt. Using a conversation on playing cards as a metaphor, the dowager queen acknowledged Schimmelmann's advanced position in the court's social hierarchy. The political significance of the change, and Charlotte Schimmelmann's position in it seem to have been clear to all parties present. The 'revolution' was indeed reported by diplomats such as Elliott, the English envoy to the court of Copenhagen, and in Berlin, the Emperor Joseph II spoke to the Danish representative about the palace coup. The English envoy did mention the name Schimmelmann as part of his correspondence on the events, but neither the male diplomat's letter, nor the conversation between the emperor and the Danish envoy, mentions the wives of the crown prince's advisers.³⁷ In

34 Charlotte Schimmelmann to Louise Stolberg, 19 April 1784. Edvard Holm refers to this conversation as the dowager queen's politeness towards Charlotte Schimmelmann, without citing it directly in: *Danmark-Norges historie 1720–1814*, vol. 6:1, 9.

35 Sybille Reventlow to Louise Stolberg, [From Copenhagen] 20 April 1784.

36 Nina Koefoed, 'Kvinder og politik 1500–1800: forskningens status i Danmark' in *Kvinnor och politik i det tidigmoderna Norden: rapport til 26:e Nordiska historikermötet i Reykjavík den 8–12 augusti 2007*, v Ritsafn Sagnfræðistofnunar (Reykjavík 2007) 32–33.

37 Charlotte Schimmelmann to Louise Stolberg, 18 May 1784.

a patriarchal system, the female courtiers were not part of official reports on political change, but the women's correspondence indicates that their positions were also affected by the upheaval.

The coup had been successful, and Charlotte Schimmelmann wrote down her description of the palace coup, thirteen days after the event.³⁸ She had now been assured that the 'reform reign', the group who had supported the crown prince in carrying out the coup, would not be persecuted. In the weeks following the coup, the dowager queen would show up at court *appartements* again, and played cards with Charlotte Schimmelmann on one occasion. For a dinner, another woman from the new reigning circle, Sophie Frederikke Reventlow (1747–1822) was seated across from the dowager queen, together with a military general and new member of the Privy Council. As Ferrier-Viaud and others remark, dining at the royal table was an honour, and general Huth's presence at dinner would also have reminded those present, including the dowager queen, of the military's support of the new leadership.³⁹ The new leadership could not, however, tolerate the dowager queen's presence at court: she was too politically significant for that. Later that summer, she left the capital, after allegedly begging the crown prince for permission to stay; moving to the castle of Sorgenfri outside of Copenhagen, where she would remain until her death in 1796. 'I pity such a life in old-age', wrote Charlotte Schimmelmann when the queen was exiled.⁴⁰ Members of the dowager queen's faction at court were also sent away from court by the crown prince – this was recorded by the courtiers in their letters.⁴¹ The dowager queen's Lord Chamberlain Høegh-Guldberg was appointed bailiff to Aarhus, Denmark's second city located far from Copenhagen on the Jutland peninsula.⁴² Charlotte Schimmelmann noted that the dowager queen had pleaded with Bernstorff, the group's senior member and informal leader, for permission to stay in the capital, thus indicating that the advisers were involved in the decision for her to leave.⁴³ One letter from Sybille Reventlow's husband, Johan Ludvig Reventlow, also indicates that the decision to demote Høegh-Guldberg to the position as bailiff was reached in a meeting between the crown prince and the leader of the adviser group,

38 Charlotte Schimmelmann to Louise Stolberg, 27 April 1784.

39 Frederikke Reventlow to Louise Stolberg, 18 May 1784 – excerpt of letter translated and published in: Christian B. Reventlow, *En dansk Statsmands Hjem omkring Aar 1800*, vol. 1 (Copenhagen 1902) 91.

40 Charlotte Schimmelmann to Louise Stolberg, 3 July 1784.

41 Charlotte Schimmelmann to Louise Stolberg, 24 May 1784 and 3 July 1784.

42 Charlotte Schimmelmann to Louise Stolberg 18 May 1784.

43 Charlotte Schimmelmann to Louise Stolberg, 24 May 1784.

A.P. Bernstorff: 'Bernstorff [...] was yesterday at the Privy Council, and thereafter spent three hours with the crown prince. "Pomade"-Schack will go to Flensburg and become a bailiff, Guldberg will go to Aarhus as a bailiff, that has taken quite an effort.'⁴⁴ Exactly *how* absolutist politics were shaped in practice is often hard to decipher, but the internal correspondence of the Reventlows, Schimmelmanns, and Bernstorffs give an indication of their group's efforts to consolidate their new position as the crown prince's supporters at court.

The social networks at court did not only centre on separate branches of the royal family; the networks, or *cabales*, also represented different political interests.⁴⁵ This would become visible in the following decades, when the crown prince's faction would introduce new land reforms, (including the enclosure of land, hereditary tenancy, and a gradual transition to freehold); and new school reforms. The land reforms met with fierce opposition from a group of landowners, known as the 'Jutland proprietors'. These landowners would collect signatures and submit a petition to the crown prince, stating their wish to change the land reforms.⁴⁶ The 'Jutland proprietors' included among the 103 signatures on the petition countess Krag-Juel-Vind-Frijs, a female landowner of one of the country's largest estates. She was also a member of the household of the dowager queen, who had given her the 'Ordre de l'Union Parfaite'.⁴⁷ although the links between the 'proprietors' and the dowager queen's faction at court were not necessarily clear-cut. As one historian of English eighteenth-century politics has remarked, 'even women's politics was not solely the politics of self- (or family) interest'. Nominations and family matters intertwined with 'high' politics in many ways, as noted in the introduction to this volume.⁴⁸

Apart from these political differences, the 'proprietors' also included relatively older noble families among their number – creating a distinction between 'older' and 'newer' nobility, and between different branches of the royal family. In this situation of turmoil, a central tension between the factions

44 Johan Ludvig Reventlow to Louise Stolberg, 22 May 1784: 'Bernstorff ist itz ziemlich wohl, war vorgestern in Bernstorff, gestern im Staats Rath und drey Stunden mit dem Kron Prinzen nachher. Pomaden Schack reist nach Flensburg, wird dort Amtmann, Guldberg geht als Stift- Amtmann nach Aarhus, das hat viele Mühe gekostet'.

45 Le Roy Ladurie, *Saint-Simon and the Court of Louis XIV*, 121–161.

46 Elaine Chalus, *Elite Women in English Political Life c.1754–1790* (Oxford 2005) 11; Lewis Namier, *The Structure of Politics at the Accession of George III* (London 1929).

47 Claus Bjørn, 'Sophia Magdalena Vind' in *Dansk Kvindebiografisk Leksikon*. Accessed online via: https://kvindebiografiskleksikon.lex.dk/Sophia_Magdalena_Vind. See also: Claus Bjørn, 'Den Jyske Proprietærfejde: En Studie over Godsejerholdninger og Bondepolitik Omkring 1790', *Historie/Jyske Samlinger* 13, 1–2 (1981).

48 See Jeroen Duindam's introduction to this volume.

also centred on the absence of an heir, consolidating the next generation of the ruling family. The crown prince couple had not yet conceived a living son, and without this consolidation of the couple's position in the line of succession, their advisers' power base as supporters of the next generation of rulers was still unstable. Participation in the social events of the capital, and attending court drawing-rooms, balls, and dinners, became important elements in maintaining political capital against the other faction. As Charlotte Schimmelmann's sister Sybille Reventlow phrased it, writing about her own presence in Copenhagen with her husband during the coup: 'But he [her husband, Johan Ludvig Reventlow] is often told, and I have been, too: "who knows, your presence might be necessary here, it is all about preserving the terrain that we have won".⁴⁹ The palace coup and the dowager queen's removal from court meant that the Bernstorff-Reventlow-Schimmelmann circle had gained power – most tangibly through seats in the Privy Council and the chanceries, but also less formally in high society and courtly social life. Card games and dances at court balls always had political significance, and this aspect was exacerbated by the ongoing turmoil.

2 Personal Networks: Introductions at Court

Court life, marriage and lineage mattered in the circles of nobility. Presenting a daughter at court and demonstrating her social success during the winter season's balls were demonstrations of social and political power. Introducing a daughter at court therefore required preparation and management by the women of the family. This coming-of-age ritual was important for all elite families, but perhaps especially for rising ministerial families, intending to marry their offspring into older, court nobility, as Pauline Ferrier-Viaud has remarked in her study of French ministerial wives.⁵⁰ 'It is a tiresome job for

49 Sybille Reventlow to Louise Stolberg (written in continuation of Charlotte Schimmelmann's letter), 27 April 1784: 'je suppose que Ludvig vous aura écrit lui même de quelque part en chemin. A peine la poste fut elle arrivée samedi passé qu'il n'y tint plus, commanda sa voiture et partit, il comptoit pouvoir passer quelques heures chez lui à Trolleborg et puis atteindre Bernstorff à Assens lundi au soir, et s'il ne le trouvoit pas là, pousser plus loin jusqu'à lui. Je me suis mille fois repentie d'avoir été du nombre de ceux qui l'ont retenu car il a eu ce voyage en tête du moment que la révolution fut heureusement passée. Mais on lui disoit toujours et moi aussi : qui sait, si votre présence ne sera pas nécessaire ici, il s'agit de conserver le terrain gagné. Je crois bien qu'il n'a pas été sans utilité ici'.

50 Pauline Ferrier-Viaud, *Épouses de ministres*, 13–21; see also Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Saint Simon ou le système de la cour* (Paris 1997) 292.

a weak mother to present to the *monde* a young amiable girl, who is wanted *everywhere*, and who should not go there by herself,' [emphasis in the original] wrote Charlotte Schimmelmann in May 1792, as her niece made her debut at court.⁵¹ *Charlottine*, or 'little Charlotte', was Sybille and Ludvig Reventlow's eldest daughter, named after her aunt and godmother.

The following spring, as the young girl grew closer to her official entry into society, efforts to prepare Charlotte Reventlow's successful integration at court and in high society increased. Upon their arrival in Copenhagen in April 1793, Sybille Reventlow paid for her daughter's private lessons in dancing, posture and drawing offered by the dancing master Antoine Bournonville.⁵² Classes were given daily, lasting two hours at a time. 'His methods are excellent, making her grow [taller] by loosening her knees and shoulders. He finds that her size is well, and her feet are good, though not small. He is a good master' her aunt noted, adding a week later that Charlottine's natural movements and noble manners 'distinguish her from the young *Easles* of the city' [emphasis in the original].⁵³ Sybille Reventlow, the young girl's mother, was unimpressed by her daughter's dancing skills: 'Bournonville is an excellent teacher, much better than Laurent [their dancing master at home], much more fundamental, but she will, alas, never exceed the basic levels,' she sighed.⁵⁴ Her aunt countered this by adding to their shared letter that Charlottine's greatest talent

51 Danish State Archives: Stolberg, Louise: Box 29.26: Letters from Charlotte Schimmelmann: vol. 2: 1789–1793. Hereafter: Charlotte Schimmelmann to Louise Stolberg, [date].¹ May 1792: 'C'est un Metier fatigant pr: une Mere faible, de presenter dans le Monde, une jeune fille aimable qu'on veut avoir partout [insertion: meme le Pr: Roy: a fait gouté Charl:], et qui ne doit pas aller seule.' Sybille Reventlow was suffering from a raging toothache and went to the dentist during her stay in Copenhagen – this might explain why Charlotte Schimmelmann described her as weak.

52 Charlotte Schimmelmann to Louise Stolberg, 6 April 1793: 'Charl: a fort grandie et a gagnée. Bournonville lui a donné 2 heures de cours et viendra tous les jours.' Antoine Bournonville was a French-born ballet solo dancer employed by the Swedish court in 1782, and living in Copenhagen from 1792/ 1794. He was also the father of August Bournonville. See: August Bournonville, *Mit Teaterliv*, vol. 1 (Copenhagen 1979) 16–19.

53 Charlotte Schimmelmann to Louise Stolberg, 6 April 1793: 'Sa Methode est excel: cela le fera bien grandir, et lui degageant les genous, les epaules, il trouve sa taille tres bien et son pied bon, quoique pas petit. C'est un bon maître.' Charlotte Schimmelmann to Louise Stolberg, 13 April 1793: 'Charl: plait beaucoup ici, son aise, son air naturel, sa bonne physiognomie, son port noble, fait quelle se distingue de toutes les jeunes Osles de la ville'.

54 Charlotte Schimmelmann/Sybille Reventlow's addition to the letter to Louise Stolberg, 13 April 1793: 'Bournonville est excellent maître à danser, bien plus foncier que Laurent. Mais elle ne restera malheureusement aux premiers elemens'.

was drawing, also an accomplishment trained by Bournonville.⁵⁵ Training a young girl in the arts of dancing, drawing or music aimed at distinguishing her from the other girls of her age, as Charlotte Schimmelmann's rather rude comment about the young girls of the city indicates. The purpose was to make young Charlottine stand out from the crowd, as finding a good husband was a matter of securing the girl's future, and perhaps of linking additional families to the reformers' family circle.

Later that spring, Charlotte and Ernst Schimmelmann hosted a 'youth ball' at their suburban country villa outside the capital. Dedicating the ball to the 'youth' and hosting it outside the usual schedule of social life at court provided an opportunity to introduce young Charlottine Reventlow, their niece and god-daughter, to the court elite, even though she was still too young to be properly introduced at court. In the autumn, another ball was held in honour of the Foreign Secretary A.P. Bernstorff's daughter, Louise. Charlotte Schimmelmann wrote about members of the diplomatic corps, and of her own court faction, dancing and amusing themselves, 'turning younger with the children'.⁵⁶ This successful social event might create the basis for Charlottine's success in high society when she would be properly introduced at court.

The young girl's mother also wrote about the efforts to present her daughter formally at court and in the city, court season after court season: 'I am at the end of my *corvée*, two days spent on the stairs at the palace and terminated by late-night suppers [...] my knees are in a sad state, they refuse to curtsy and straighten any more'.⁵⁷ Presenting her daughter to high society was a duty, which required Sybille Reventlow to spend time away from her country estate. The young girl's father, Ludvig Reventlow, had also come to the city, while the couple's other children stayed at home. Two years later, Charlotte Reventlow completed her confirmation ceremony.⁵⁸ She was now fifteen, and her parents let their daughter stay in Copenhagen with Charlotte Schimmelmann.

55 Charlotte Schimmelmann to Louise Stolberg, 13 April 1793: 'Bournonville lui donne des leçons admirables tous les jours [...] il est très content d'elle, son dessin va parfaitement bien'.

56 Charlotte Schimmelmann to Louise Stolberg, 22 April 1793: 'Nous avons donné un bal avant hier à la jeunesse qui a réussi à mieux car tous ont rajeunies avec les Enfants'. See also: Kristine Dyrmann, 'The Court in the Countryside: Privacy and Political Sociability in the Suburban Villas of Copenhagen's Late-Eighteenth century Court Elite', in *The Court Historian*, 28, 1 (2023) 32–48.

57 Sybille Reventlow to Louise Stolberg, 15 April 1793: 'Je suis à la fin de mes corvées, deux jours passés sur les escaliers du château [sic] et terminés par des soupers dans la nuit m'avoient mis sur les dents et mes genoux sont en triste état et se refusent également à se plier et se redresser'.

58 Charlotte Schimmelmann to Louise Stolberg, 16 April 1795.

Her aunt wrote of Charlotte Reventlow's fifteenth birthday that it was celebrated with an embroidered muslin gown and a trip to '*the city*, hats, belts, chiffon etc. in the name of Charlottine' [emphasis in the original].⁵⁹ Charlotte Schimmelmänn had also given her niece another month of lessons by Antoine Bournonville. This time math lessons were added to Charlottine's continued education, preparing her for life as a wife and head of an elite household.

Investing their time and money in the preparation of Charlottine's introduction at court, her mother and aunt were not just thinking about her entry into high society for personal reasons. When inviting members of the court and diplomatic corps to an informal ball, and writing about Charlottine's dancing with the crown prince, Charlotte Schimmelmänn was emphasising the young girl's role as a representative and potential link between the Reventlow and Schimmelmänn family network and other elite families.

When Charlotte Amalie, or 'Charlottine', Reventlow did marry, however, her partner was not a prominent member of court. Perhaps, despite her aunt's and mother's efforts, the many dancing lessons and preparations had not been enough to secure a courtier husband for Charlotte Reventlow – or perhaps there were also other interests to take into consideration. It seems that Charlottine Reventlow's marriage in 1799 was not made to protect political interests at court in the sense of faction. Instead, other factors may have come into play in the choice of a suitor: Erik Skeel, Count Schaffalitzky de Muckadell was the only son and sole heir to a series of neighbouring country houses on Funen – the estates of Brobygaard, Gelskov, and Arreskov. Like the Reventlows, the Schaffalitzky-de Muckadell, the Juel and the Skeel families belonged to a range of noble families known as 'old nobility', meaning they could trace their noble status back to the fifteenth century, or before the Reformation. The marriage of eighteen-year-old Charlotte Amalie to twenty-four-year-old Erik Skeel von Schaffalitzky-de Mucadell thus ensured that the Reventlows retained and strengthened their status as belonging to the 'older' noble elite, whilst also consolidating their relationship with neighbouring grand estate owners on Funen. Marrying into an older, landowning family might not be directly linked to a political cause, but in the grander scheme of consolidating the Reventlows' power base at court, an alliance with another established, noble family might reap social recognition. The couple would go on to have seven children

59 Danish State Archives: Stolberg, Louise: Box 29.26: Letters from Charlotte Schimmelmänn: vol. 3: 1793–1797. Hereafter: Charlotte Schimmelmänn to Louise Stolberg, [date]. 3 July 1795: 'le jour de n: de Charl: nous l'avons données, en bonnes Tantes – surtout Jacq; une belle robe de Moussel: brodée – je donne a Charl: un Mois de lecons de Bournonville qui loge avec sa famille a Ortrup'.

together, securing the continuation of the Reventlow line and consolidating their landed estates.

3 Personal Matters, Political Networks: Adoption and Advice on Bringing up Children

While the Reventlow letters show a concern about introducing their daughter at court, Charlotte Schimmelmann and Ernst Schimmelmann may have had another concern. After fourteen years of marriage, they still did not have children, nor did Ernst Schimmelmann have any children from his first marriage. In 1796, the couple therefore decided to adopt. Their first adoptive daughter, Louison (born Louise Wesselhöft, 1790–1844), first appears in their correspondence in 1796, when Charlotte Schimmelmann was discussing with her husband how formal the adoption should be: ‘Ernst absolutely refuses to have Louison (were she born a princess, he says) call us parents – as *we are not*. I do not entirely agree’. She continued, ‘all this means that we have decided against this title – but we have decided *for* the sentiments and devotion of Mother and Father’ [emphasis in the original]. Louise would not be formally adopted by the Schimmelmanns until years later.⁶⁰ The Schimmelmann couple’s letters do not state clearly why this was the case, but she did also comment on Louison’s biological siblings, indicating that perhaps the couple were concerned that formally adopting the child would extend inheritance rights to her family members. Lineage and inheritance mattered, but displaying motherly affection and devotion was increasingly necessary to an elite woman such as Charlotte Schimmelmann. Not only were both the royal princesses, Duchess Louise Augusta and Crown Princess Marie Sophie Frederikke, now preoccupied with their own children, attending to children’s education and welfare was also increasingly idealised as a female responsibility in the 1790s.⁶¹

Charlotte Schimmelmann’s two daughters were invited to a supper party with the crown prince couple’s four-year-old daughter, Caroline, who was a

60 Charlotte Schimmelmann to Louise Stolberg, 16 July 1796: ‘Ernst ne veut absol: pas que Louison (fut elle née Princesse dit-il) nous donne le titre de Parents. Comme nous ne le sommes pas. Je n’ai pas tout a fait ce sentimt [...] mais Elle a une petite vilaine soeur, un vaut rien frère, encore un autre tout petit frère – tout son Cousinage [...] tout cela fait que nous somes decidés contre ce Titre – Comme nous sommes decides pour les sentimt et devotion de Mere et Pere.’ Anne Scott Sørensen, ‘Charlotte Schimmelmann’ in: *Dansk Kvindebiografisk Leksikon*, accessed online via: https://kvindebiografiskleksikon.lex.dk/Charlotte_Schimmelmann.

61 Tine Damsholt, *Fædrelandskærlighed og borgerdyd* (Copenhagen 2000) 183–188.

few years younger than Louison and Josephine, both seven years of age, in the spring of 1797: 'This little children's supper was held in the rooms of the crown princess, and the crown prince played with them and served the little company, engaging them with pleasantries, singing, laughter.'⁶² The crown princess had been pregnant for five out of the seven years of her marriage to the crown prince, yet the couple still had only one living child – their daughter. They preferred family life to court ceremony – the crown princess's many pregnancies also may have affected her withdrawal from court life. Charlotte Schimmelmänn, in her letters, suddenly emphasised family life and her engagement as a parent as well – and her newly adopted daughters were brought to the palace to play with the royal child.

Through the children, Charlotte Schimmelmänn finally achieved access to the crown prince couple, and particularly the crown princess. In spite of Charlotte Schimmelmänn's position as a social hostess in the capital, she had not previously been able to form a close relationship with the crown princess, who would often refrain from participating in social life, isolating herself in the palace. During the children's supper party, the princess had spoken to Charlotte Schimmelmänn about her daughter's education and her fear of spoiling little princess Caroline. 'I could assure her with conviction that there was no risk until now, but it is true that the difficulties augment with their age at this stage, you see, I told her quite frankly',⁶³ and she continued, 'how she mentioned Ernst to me, how her heart appreciates him!'⁶⁴ Improving her relationship with the crown princess through their children might also be beneficial to Ernst Schimmelmänn's position – being able to mention his name, or his policies, to the crown princess, in a situation where the influence of the adviser circle would soon be undergoing change. The historiography on the crown prince's rule often describes how he removed himself from the influence of his advisers, after the leading adviser, foreign minister A.P. Bernstorff, died in 1797, a

62 Charlotte Schimmelmänn to Louise Stolberg, 19 April 1797: 'le petit souper de ces enf: se passoit dans les Chambres de la Pr: Roy: et le Pr: Royal tout en plaisantant servoit la petite société et les egajoit par des folles, des chants, du rire'.

63 Charlotte Schimmelmänn to Louise Stolberg, 19 April 1797: 'La Pr: Roy: me fit venir des larmes aux yeux en parlant de l'éducation qu'elle donne et veut donner a cette petite, et cette peur extreme de la gater. Jusqu'ici je puis par Conviction la rassurer – mais il est vray que les difficultés [sic] augmentent avec l'age dans cet état et voila ce que je lui disois tres franchement.'

64 Charlotte Schimmelmänn to Louise Stolberg, 19 April 1797: 'Comme Elle m'a nommé Ernst, comme *son Coeur* l'aprecie! Mais il est impossible etre pl: ange que ne l'est cette femme'.

month after the children's supper party at Frederiksberg. After Bernstorff's passing, Crown Prince Frederik turned from his Privy Councillors advice to a support base dominated by military advisers. A second member of the adviser group, Johan Ludvig Reventlow, died in 1801. Ernst Schimmelmann and Christian Ditlev Reventlow were now the only remaining advisers from the palace coup.⁶⁵ These changes in the crown prince's advising circle also led to a changed foreign policy, taking Denmark-Norway from a defensive to an active neutral trade policy – and ultimately, in 1807, to active war.⁶⁶ While access to the crown prince through the more formal channels of the Privy Council and the chanceries was becoming more limited, achieving access to the ruler through informal channels, such as visits with his wife, may have had increasing value. Cultivating a better relationship with the crown princess was thus a way for Charlotte Schimmelmann to help the success of her partner's policies.

Five years later, in a letter about another playdate between now nine-year-old Caroline and Schimmelmann's now two daughters Louison and Josephine, Charlotte Schimmelmann would emphasise the crown princess's interest in how she, Schimmelmann, educated her daughters so well – and the crown prince's tenderness in playing with the three children, adding 'but behind closed doors, you see the difference'. This remark hints at the crown prince's image as a military man, well-known among the public, and at the increasing tension with or withdrawal from his advisers. By mentioning this difference between front-stage and back-stage behaviour, Charlotte Schimmelmann conveyed to the reader that the playdate provided access to a privileged intimate connection with the crown prince couple. She further enhanced this by adding a caveat to her anecdote, 'but burn this and do not mention it to anyone'.⁶⁷ Still, there were limits to the intimacy of the relation between the ministerial wife and the crown princess, as she noted at the end of the letter: 'how [well] we understand each other – oh, if she could only come to me – as I can only seldom come to Her! But this wish is useless – She is the future sovereign, and my Husband is a minister – [there is a] dividing line'.⁶⁸

65 See for example: Jens Engberg, *Den standhaftige tinsoldat: en biografi om Frederik 6.* (Copenhagen 2009), 271–276; Claus Bjørn, *Den gode sag*, 230–232.

66 Engberg, *Den standhaftige tinsoldat*, 262–267.

67 Charlotte Schimmelmann to Louise Stolberg, 30 May 1802: 'mais v – brulères cela et v- n'en parlères pas –'.

68 Charlotte Schimmelmann to Louise Stolberg, 30 May 1802: 'que nous nous Comprenons – ah si elle pouvoit venir vers moi – Comme je puis si peu aller vers Elle! mais ce souhait est inutile – Elle est la future souveraine et mon Mari est ministre – ligne de demarcation'.

Paradoxically, the male advisers' diminishing influence through formal channels such as the Privy Council may have reinforced the importance of seeking access to the royal leader through other channels. In a time of turmoil, the Finance Minister's wife's connection to the crown prince through *his* wife and their children became one of few options for the advisers to reach the central figure in power at court. The two occasions where the children played together show that Charlotte Schimmelmann had advanced from a position of access to the royals through card games at court *apartements* as one amongst a range of courtiers; to hosting balls for members of the court, the diplomatic corps, and the royal family, signalling her improved rank and proximity to the centre of power; to what was now presented as an intimate friendship with the royal couple, as they bonded over their children's play. After eighteen years of navigating the inner circles at court since the 1784 palace coup, the ministerial wife was apparently aware that the fine 'dividing line' between her husband's professional duties and the personal relationship with the crown prince couple should not be overstepped – and perhaps, as the first 'children's supper' conversation with the crown princess indicated, she was also well aware of the possibilities for political influence that came with such a relationship.

Adopting their two daughters Josephine and Louise, or Louison, was a personal decision for the Schimmelmann couple. They discussed whether the daughters would take the family name and decided against it; family lineage mattered as it did for the Reventlows, but in this case it led to exclusion, keeping the daughters from inheriting. The couple did, however, also agree that their emotions as adoptive parents would match those of biological parents. As members of court, having young daughters of the same age as the crown prince couple's only surviving child turned into an opportunity to meet with the crown prince couple and confirm their relationship with one of the advisers and ministers, Ernst Schimmelmann. Through her meetings with the crown prince couple, conversing with the crown princess about childcare and her husband's position, Charlotte Schimmelmann was able to make use of the intertwinement of family relations and political interest.

4 Conclusion

The beginning of Frederik VI's reign, while he was still a crown prince, was a time of turmoil. Through the letters of women at court, writing about sociability such as card games and dinners, the everyday practices of court politics emerge. After the 1784 palace coup, a new political faction came to power

at the Danish court. The crown prince's supporters became the new members of the Privy Council, but the 'revolution' also caused turmoil in social life at court. The dowager queen and leading members of her faction were soon required to leave court. A new faction had taken over, bringing to light the divide between a new political network in power and the old one that had been removed, between the noble advisers to the crown prince's branch of the royal family, and the supporters of the dowager queen and her son, the hereditary prince, who had now been removed from power. This change was reflected in the formal positions in the Privy Council, the Exchequer, and the German Chancery (the Foreign Office), where the new advisers now took their seats, as well as in courtly social life, including occasions at court as well as in the capital.

From being one courtier among many, but one who was invited to play cards with the dowager queen after the palace coup, Charlotte Schimmelmann rose with the reformer group to being a central social hostess, with access to hosting balls that included the crown prince among the guests in a display of the alliance between the *de facto* ruler and his advisers. As the crown prince became more independent from the advisers in the Privy Council, seeking alternative avenues to access may have become increasingly important. As a minister's wife, Charlotte Schimmelmann emphasised her children's good relationship with the crown prince couple's daughter, and she used the children's playdates to confirm her husband's proximity among the crown prince's advisers – while at the same time expressing her awareness of the fine, yet perhaps permeable, line between his official duties and the personal relationship with the crown prince couple she had forged through their children.

The new advisers together formed a family network. Strengthening the position of its families through marriage remained important, and preparing daughters for marriage was the task of the female members of the network. Charlotte Schimmelmann and her sister, Sybille Reventlow, worked to introduce the eldest Reventlow daughter, called Charlottine by the family, at court and in high society. Her mother and aunt did not always agree on how well their protégée was doing, but their efforts, stretching over several years before Charlottine would formally enter society through a presentation at court, are an indicator of how important a young daughter's entry into society was for elite families. Her marriage to a young nobleman from a neighbouring estate shows that whilst courtly social networks were important to the Reventlows' political interest, consolidating the family network and strengthening their position as landowners and members of the established elite were also important considerations.

In a setting where royal rule was embedded within a family line, even a playdate between children became an opportunity to confirm political relationships, and political and landed interests were enmeshed in the introductions of a daughter to high society, or in finding a suitable husband. Court faction, family interest, and personal relationships were embedded in each other, and understanding how these intricate social relationships entwined may provide an insight into the practices of court politics.