Benefit or Burden? The Balancing Act of Widows in French Princely Houses

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One of the major questions facing historians of the family is the degree to which it is possible to measure the impact of an individual on the overall health of his or her family, based on a combination of monetary and personality factors. Is it feasible to add values for real estate, houses, furniture, jewels, and bonds to a mixture of political influence, family connections, and financial savvy, meanwhile subtracting debts, pensions, and upkeep, as well as physical liabilities and personal character? Clearly such constructions cannot provide quantitative answers. Nevertheless, these disparate elements are useful to consider collectively in order to construct a full picture of the effects widows had on their families in early modern France.¹

A widow was, strictly speaking, no longer part of the business partnership she had entered into with her husband, and if her children were old enough to take over the enterprise of running the family, what then? Sometimes she was still a fairly young woman, with many years before her, and because French law stipulated certain ways in

¹ The material for this paper is extracted for the most part from a chapter dedicated to widows in the author's doctoral thesis: "The House of Lorraine in France: Princes Étrangers and the Continuity of Power and Wealth in the Later Seventeenth Century" (D. Phil. thesis, Oxford University, 2003).
which a widow could demand to be supported by her husband's heirs, an excessively long period of widowhood could be quite a drain on family finances.² In my work on the financial management of the house of Lorraine-Guise, I was struck by the sheer length of widowhood for a startlingly large number of their widows and the vast amount of money required for their upkeep. Some Lorraine wives became widows in their twenties and remained in this state for half a century.³ Yet statistics for early modern women on the whole, and especially elite women, indicate that most women remarried, and soon. This would have been especially true for a young noblewoman with a large inheritance who had not already had children from her first marriage.⁴ Within the multiple branches of the princely house of Lorraine, however, I found that there were only two remarriages of widows, out of twenty-four possible, over the three-hundred-year lifespan of the dynasty, and none at all for the seventeenth century. Why not?

The answer to this first question is fairly


³ Most significantly, Marie de Rohan-Soubise, widowed at twenty-three with no children, who survived her husband, the prince de Marsan, by sixty years.

straightforward: members of foreign princely families who lived in France during the Old Regime, like the Lorraine-Guise, were accorded privileges by the monarch which set them apart from the mass of even the highest-ranking court aristocrats. All these privileges amounted significantly to one thing: proximity to the monarch. With this proximity came access to patronage, favor, and protection and the potential to affect the organs of government and diplomacy at the highest levels. A woman who married a prince gained his rank with all its privileges and was therefore in a position of great strength for herself, her children, and also for her family of birth. But a widow who had attained princely rank would lose it if she married someone of a lower rank, and there were very few prince étranger families to choose from and even fewer whose claims were indisputable. So the choice to marry into the Lorraine clan was a choice for life.\(^5\)

With the option for remarriage thus removed, what was the impact on the family fortunes of these widows who continued to require upkeep and housing for decades? This financial outlay was immense. A princess-widow had to maintain appearances in order to support a family's visual propaganda, inspiring confidence from its allies and clients. She required a large annual dowager pension, a dowager

\(^5\) Besides the princes of the house of Lorraine, in the seventeenth century the undisputed princes étrangers were the Savoy and the Gonzaga. During the troubled years of the Regency, the crown had recognized to varying degrees the princely status of the La Tour d'Auvergne, Rohan, Grimaldi and La Trémoïlle families, while other claims, such as those of the Gramont, La Rochefoucauld, and Montmorency-Luxembourg went unheeded. For details on the privileges accorded to the recognized étranger families, see Saint-Simon in his "Brouillons des projets" (part six, 'De MM. les princes étrangers'), *Traités politiques et autres écrits*, ed. Yves Coirault (Paris: Pléiade, 1996), 12.
residence, funds for entertaining and for support of her charities, and clothes suitable for court or countryside. She maintained her own horses, officers, servants, and so on. Over several decades of widowhood, these sums could be astronomical. But was this burden balanced by the benefits a woman had brought to her marriage? A simple calculation of property and movable wealth shows the concrete fiscal benefits a woman could provide her husband's family. 6 Conversely a tally of her dowager costs

6 The table below lists the nine widows in this survey and their in/out values.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Years as Widow</th>
<th>Benefit (brought to marriage)*</th>
<th>Burden (upkeep values)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marguerite Chabot, duchesse d'Elbeuf</td>
<td>1565-1652</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>1,801,000</td>
<td>1,353,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henriette-Catherine de Joyeuse, duchesse de Guise</td>
<td>1585-1656</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5,639,100</td>
<td>3,725,512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine-Henriette, Légitimée de France, duchesse d'Elbeuf</td>
<td>1596-1663</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1,300,500</td>
<td>1,406,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie de Rohan, duchesse de Chevreuse</td>
<td>1600-1679</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>(1,240,000 potential)‡</td>
<td>1,081,748</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marguerite-Philippe du Cambout de Coislin, comtesse d'Harcourt</td>
<td>1622-1674</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>500,000</td>
<td>510,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Françoise-Marie de Valois-Angoulême, duchesse de Joyeuse</td>
<td>1632-1696</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>(2,118,275 potential)</td>
<td>414,497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne de Lorraine, princesse de Lillebonne</td>
<td>1639-1720</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6,481,362</td>
<td>725,207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elisabeth d'Orléans, duchesse de Guise</td>
<td>1646-1696</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>(2,444,500 potential)</td>
<td>1,096,654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Françoise de Navailles, duchesse d'Elbeuf</td>
<td>1653-1717</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>(3,034,500 potential)</td>
<td>500,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*values given in livres tournois, and are rough estimates based on numerous contracts and other family papers.
‡ potential values given for those women who ultimately left no Lorraine-Guise heirs, and thus contributed nil to the overall fortune.
over the years provides a tangible figure for the burden borne by the family. But these simple in/out figures cannot be sufficient to indicate the balance of such a woman's impact on the overall health of the family. Obviously, each widow was an individual, and this individuality must be taken under consideration. How much could a widow's personality and activities during her widowhood balance the input and output of sums from her family's wealth? Hence the title of this paper: Benefit or Burden?

**Benefits**

The most obvious source of benefit to a family was a bride's dowry, and the grandest aristocratic houses were adept at securing some of the wealthiest heiresses and absorbing their inheritances into their own family coffers. Total sums brought to the family are difficult to calculate: financial records are incomplete and are sometimes fraudulent or exaggerated. Multipliers for capitalizing annual sums vary from account to account, sometimes to a huge degree. But in general, the sums were vast. Dowries promised in marriage contracts for Lorraine brides between 1589 and 1723 averaged just over 600,000 livres. These were usually augmented by offices and commissions, and further by familial successions at a later date. For example, Françoise de Montault de Navailles received a dowry of 600,000 livres, but she was already the senior heiress of a fortune totaling more than two million livres. The future princesse de Lillebonne, Anne de Lorraine, was given a much larger dowry up front: well over three million livres.

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7 Spangler, 73.
8 Archives Nationales [hereafter AN], Minutier Central XCIX, 298, marriage contract, 24 Aug. 1684; Archives Départementales [hereafter AD], Meurthe-et-Moselle, Fonds de Vienne, 1 Mi 1168, état of the Navailles succession, 5 Feb. 1705.
according to accounts from which considerable data is missing. This enormous bequest was due to the questionable legality of her parents' marriage and thus potentially weak claims to their successions. Later settlements and successions augmented this figure so that it totaled nearly five million by the time of her death in 1720.9

But a woman also brought non-tangible benefits to her marriage, which continued to be assets for her husband's family during widowhood, as long as she did not remarry. Blood connections and patronage links were of utmost importance in selecting a bride, and the nine women in this group provide different examples of these sorts of beneficial links. Some were connected to, or heiresses of, leading aristocratic houses of France: Joyeuse, Richelieu, and la Guiche. Some were members of the royal family itself: the second duchesse d'Elbeuf was the natural daughter of Henri IV and Gabrielle d'Estrées, and the last duchesse de Guise was a daughter of Gaston d'Orléans. Others were linked with foreign houses: the princesse de Lillebonne was both daughter of the duke of Lorraine, and heir to several prominent families in the Spanish Netherlands via her mother. These links provided concrete benefits for a widow's family, notably positions within court, military, or ecclesiastical hierarchies. But they also gave a family more intangible benefits. Levels of prestige and influence can be directly related to proximity or kinship with the royal family. The bastard daughter of

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9 Bibliothèque Nationale [hereafter BN], Clairambault 534, fol. 313, marriage contract, 25 Sept. 1660; further details gleaned from BN, Collection de Lorraine, 626bis, 30 and 44; AD, Meurthe-et-Moselle, Fonds de Vienne, 3F 317, nos. 72, 73, 82, and 88; and AN, Fonds Rohan-Bouillon, 273 AP 74, dossiers Lillebonne, Cusance, and Vaudémont.
Henri IV and her daughter after her continued to invoke his celebrated name decades after his death in personal lawsuits against their vassals or creditors. Elisabeth d'Orléans, first cousin of Louis XIV, continued to style herself Madame de Guise for many years of widowhood, providing decades of priceless "press time" to the extended Guise propaganda machine due to her royal status.

Thirdly, a woman brought to a marriage her individual personality, which can in many cases be considered a benefit to the clan. Several of the widows in this group had particular talents for finance, politics, or legal affairs, which they used for the good of their late husbands' heirs, sometimes for many years. Marguerite Chabot, first duchesse d'Elbeuf, took on the courts and her own family for four decades, resulting in a near trebling of the amount she left to her children by the time of her death in 1652.

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10 It is significant that Catherine-Henriette signed her testament in 1663 with a symbol combining the letters C and H, followed by "L de France," without any suggestion of the names Lorraine or Elbeuf. In other words, her strongest identification was not as the wife of a Lorraine prince, nor even a member of the wider Bourbon dynasty, but as a légitimée of the kingdom itself, unashamedly the bâtarde of the great Henri IV (AN, Minutier Central, CV, no. 756, testament of 13 June 1663). This was not a novelty: a memoir from 1628 is signed "C de France" (AD, Seine-Maritime, 1 ER 1940) while her officers referred to her as the "duchesse-légitimée de France" as late as 1658 (AN, T 1995). This association was continued by her daughter, Mlle d'Elbeuf, who invoked the name of her grandfather in a lawsuit pending at the Conseil du Roi, circa 1675 (AN, T 1997).

11 The course of these lawsuits can be followed in the Armagnac family inventory, AN, T*15591, culminating in the settlement of her estate in 1658 (cote LIII, no. 8). This and other settlement documents (notably AD, Seine-Maritime, 1 ER 1047, 23 Oct. 1662) supply estimates of around 2.1 million livres. This contrasts with the 800,000 livres derived solely from those properties assigned in the marriage contract of 22 Feb. 1583 (AN, 273 AP 74, dossier Elbeuf).
Mme. de Guise is cited by Daniel Dessert as one of the leading "sources of advice" during the period of the minority of Louis XIV, offering financial solutions to the troubled Regency government in return for a percentage of the profits.\textsuperscript{12} The duchesse de Chevreuse was well known for her skills as a politician and diplomat. Long after the zenith of her influence during the Frondes, she continued to affect the manner in which Lorraine princesses were treated at court, despite the fact that her own Lorraine daughters were no longer living.\textsuperscript{13}

Some widows combined these last two factors—family links and individual skill—to perform at their utmost for the health and success of their offspring. The comtesse d'Harcourt was a niece of Richelieu, a close confidante of Queen Anne, and a skilled household administrator, who used her connections and royal favor to hold together her husband's shaky inheritance for her children.\textsuperscript{14} The Navailles duchesse d'Elbeuf similarly cultivated memories of her own mother's protection of the teen-aged Madame de Maintenon, thereby retaining a remarkable position of influence during Maintenon's reign as favorite, much to the disgust of courtiers like Saint-Simon.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{12} Daniel Dessert, \textit{Argent, pouvoir et société au grand siècle} (Paris: Fayard, 1984), 346, 364-365.

\textsuperscript{13} Her daughter Henriette did survive her - in fact she became the last living member of the house of Guise - but as a professed nun, and eventually abbess of Jouarre, she was "dead to the world" and unable to succeed to either the paternal or maternal properties.

\textsuperscript{14} Her actions can also be followed in the Armagnac inventory, AN, T*15591.

outside of the scope of this paper is the example of the comtesse de Brionne, about whom Thomas Kaiser has recently written in relation to the influence of the house of Lorraine over Marie-Antoinette. One of the most useful functions of a long-living widow, particularly one who maintained herself in a position of royal favor, was to act as placeholder. Both the Joyeuse duchesse de Guise and the princesse de Lillebonne were crucial in this capacity when their respective sons were condemned for treason. In both cases, significant Lorraine properties (including the duchy of Guise itself) were confiscated by the crown but delivered almost immediately into the hands of the widowed mothers of the condemned. These were then maintained until favor was restored or were willed to another family member. The widow as placeholder is certainly not unique to princely houses, and can be found at many levels of society.

Burdens

The downside to obtaining a richly endowed bride was, of course, supporting her as a widow. Here it is even more difficult to estimate actual costs, since the dowager pension was rarely paid as specified in the original marriage


documents, and other costs were hidden within claims made against her late husband's estate, usually in collusion with his heirs, to deflect the efforts of hordes of creditors. A standard pension stipulated in most Lorraine marriage contracts was 10,000 livres a year but went as high as 40,000 a year in the case of Elisabeth d'Orléans. This last case was in fact a family's worst nightmare, because she did not leave behind any Guise children, meaning that her vast inheritance would pass to her natural heirs in the house of Orléans, while the Guise in-laws would be stuck with a bill for nearly one million livres, for twenty-five years of widowhood. The Navailles duchesse d'Elbeuf had a dower of 20,000 livres for twenty-five years and also had no surviving Lorraine heirs, costing her stepchildren 500,000 livres with no inheritance to counter-balance this loss.

A widow frequently also had crippling debts she could claim against the heirs of her late husband, that is, her own children. Grandees routinely spent well beyond their means in the seventeenth century, recouping losses from the wars of religion, keeping up with accelerating costs of life at court, pursuing expensive lawsuits, funding rebellions, and spending years in exile away from usual revenues. Frequently the entire fortunes of both spouses were depleted, but only the paternal estate was held accountable for sums deriving from the maternal estate. When a husband died, his widow and their children had to settle this account, meaning that the children frequently owed their mother the entirety of her dowry, plus interest, and any other of the family debts she may have paid with her own funds. The extreme case of this in the Lorraine clan is to be found in the settlements between the Légitimée duchess and her Elbeuf children. Her dowry, royal

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18 Spangler, 82.
pensions, and inheritance totaled 1.3 million livres, but most of this was spent or mortgaged for various reasons, including a fruitless and embarrassing lawsuit against her brother, the duc de Vendôme. On the death of her husband in 1656 his estate was charged to repay his widow over 1.4 million livres. In later years, this sum accrued further debt through interest, and for 5.6 years of a 10,000-livre dowager pension. None of this was paid, due to complicated legal schemes and royally sanctioned delays, and by 1725 the Elbeuf estate owed her personal estate over three million livres. Interest continued to accrue on this perpetually unsettled account for the remainder of the Old Regime.\textsuperscript{19}

In this scenario, we encounter another potential form of burden: a widow's lack of ability in the arenas of politics or finance. Madame d'Elbeuf, despite her early close relationship as half-sister of Louis XIII,\textsuperscript{20} spent much of her life out of political favor and away from the court, severely crippling her ability to manage patronage and outmaneuver debt. Other widows chose to remain outside of the world of the court and of high finance, either pleading ineptitude for such work or simply preferring a life of pious seclusion. Elisabeth d'Orléans retired from court as often as she could, choosing instead the sphere of religious scholarship and

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\textsuperscript{19} AN, T 1952, arrêt of 7 Sept. 1780, in which the litigants no longer even belonged to the clan of Lorraine but were the heirs of the last prince de Guise: the duc de Fronsac (a Richelieu) and the prince de Poix (a Noailles). Much of the claims were based on documents as far back as the marriage contract of the duc and duchesse d'Elbeuf of 1619.\textsuperscript{20} The young Louis XIII sometimes slept in the bed of his half-sister, Mlle de Vendôme; he learned to dance with "Soeu-Soeu Dôme," and they remained partners in court ballets for several years. Jean Héroard, \textit{Journal sur l'enfance et la jeunesse de Louis XIII}, eds. E. Soulé and E. Barthélémy, 2 vols. (Paris, 1868), 1:79, 187, 291, 293, 296, 318.
\end{flushleft}
charity. As a petite-fille de France, she had official duties and functions at court, which she dutifully performed as long as she had a Guise child to raise. But soon after his death, she spent increasingly more time at her apartments at Montmartre (where the abbess was a Guisard cousin, and where her sister the Grand Duchess of Tuscany also maintained a residence), the monastery of La Trappe, and her estates in Normandy where she built hospitals and converted Protestants and Muslim captives. But this duchesse de Guise may have desired retreat from the court for reasons other than piety; most contemporaries commented on her physical disfigurement (probably through scoliosis or a childhood accident), and her lack of "esprit" hindering her from taking on a larger official role at court. It is here where the humanity of our subject forces us to consider the role of mental fortitude or even

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22 The marquis de Sourches remarks on her overwhelming devotion to piety and good works, "taking care to compensate for a very mediocre wit (esprit) through serious devotion." But when the Queen died in 1682, and Mme de Guise attempted to take over her filles d'honneur, she soon realized the burden was too great for her, and the Queen's household was dismantled. Louis-François du Bouchet, marquis de Sourches, *Mémoires sur le règne de Louis XIV*, eds. G.-J. de Cosnac and A. Bertrand de Broussillon, 13 vols. (Paris: Hachette, 1882-93), 1:12, 132.
physical weakness in the functioning of an aristocratic house. Marie-Françoise de Valois was known to be a mental invalid from about age nine. A later legal dossier even stated that she was considered beyond the ability to receive the sacrament. Yet as heiress of three major dynastic fortunes—Angoulême, Montmorency, and La Guiche—she was married to a younger brother of the duc de Guise and produced two children before becoming a widow at age twenty-two. For forty-two years of widowhood, she was kept hidden from view, while her vast inheritance, which I estimate at over two million livres, was kept in abeyance. The vultures circled and waited while she accumulated an annual pension of 10,000 livres. A widow who was unwilling, or in this case unable, to look after the administrative and political affairs of her family was indeed a great burden.

Another burden on a family arose if the widow had children from a previous marriage. This proved to be the most serious danger for the Lorraine clan in the seventeenth century. Unlike simple inability or incapacity to work for the good of the clan, this situation could result in calculated efforts against the health of the family as a whole. None of

23 AN, 273 AP 74, dossier Angoulême, no. 66, arrêt of Parlement, 4 Feb. 1686; See BN, Ms. Fr. 16566, 517, for "preuves de sa démence."
24 There is so much more of this story that needs to be told concerning the troubled life of a mentally challenged aristocrat and heiress who was kept far from the public eye by her mother and her in-laws and a lawsuit involving some of the most powerful princes in Europe, including the duchess of Hanover, the princes of Rohan, the king's brother, and the prince de Condé, who conveniently found himself on both sides of the litigation - her guardian and lawyer was also one of the Condé household officers. See materials in the archives privées of the houses of Rohan-Bouillon (AN, 273 AP 74 and 276) and Orléans (AP 300 I, no. 107) and the ultimate settlement after her death in 1696 (AN, Minutier Central, XCII, no 252).
the Lorraine-Guise widows remarried, but widows with children did marry into the family. These children and their rights to a portion of their mother's property proved to be the most difficult obstacles to overcome in the family's financial security. Because the rank of the bride was high, the rank of the children of her first marriage was generally elevated as well, meaning that their claims could not be brushed aside in the courts. The duchesse de Montpensier, better known as La Grande Mademoiselle, challenged the will of her grandmother, the former dowager duchesse de Montpensier, who had attempted to preserve her inheritance intact for the children of her second marriage to the duc de Guise. The duchesse de Chevreuse also had no surviving heirs by her second marriage, so she and her son the duc de Luynes combined their claims and their resources to complete the buy-out of her second husband's properties from his creditors. The duke's entire estate, including the duchy of Chevreuse itself, was thus lost to the collective Lorraine fortune.

**Balance**

By combining many of the above-named factors in different forms to best suit their individual situations, members of elite families, their advisors, and the widows themselves sought the means to establish a balance between benefit and burden to the family as a whole. This is not to

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25 BN, Factums 14858-14860. By the time the case was finally resolved, both litigants were deceased. The claims of the heir of Mlle de Montpensier, Philippe d'Orléans, were finally settled with the heirs of Mlle de Guise (including Orléans himself) in a transaction of 26 April 1698 (AN, R3 117, pp. 85, 105; and 300 AP I, no. 103).

assume blissful harmony between the various members and branches of the dynasty. Indeed, discord was a carefully managed asset in the legal and financial machinations of a grandee family. We have seen how a widow’s financial skills and political favor could be used to her family’s advantage, but even the lack of such skills could sometimes be manipulated for advantage. Set up collectively by senior family members and their major creditors to manage those properties perpetually held in lawsuits surrounding the claims of the Légítimée duchess against her late husband, the Elbeuf Directorate used this very scenario to keep the lands within the family. By means of a perpetual postponement of any conclusive resolution, they avoided final judgment that would certainly have called for the complete dissolution of the family estates. Those who administered the Directorate were creditors themselves, but they saw the value of securing themselves tightly to the name Lorraine for use in their own personal affairs.\(^{27}\) In this maneuvering we see clearly the importance attached to the maintenance of the prestige of a great aristocratic house. It was not solely for the family alone, nor even for its direct household officers and clients, but for the wider net of merchants, artisans, and musicians, potentially thousands of individuals, whose fortunes were tied up in the fiscal health of the princely dynasties of the Old Regime.

Some of the widows whose financial drain seemed the most detrimental to the family contributed to its health in a different, possibly more important way: by keeping the name in the public eye and lending the prestige that was essential for maintaining confidence among the family's

\(^{27}\) Much of the paperwork of the Elbeuf Directorate has survived in AN, series T 199.
lenders and merchants. Madame de Chevreuse was of course famous in her day, yet long after her political intrigues ceased, she continued to hold sway at the French court, consulted by men like Colbert and courted by diplomats such as Saint-Maurice from Savoy. The association of Elisabeth d'Orléans with the name Guise and her reputation for piety and dévot Catholicism lent credence to the most important aspects of Lorraine family propaganda: its princely status and its indefatigable support of the Roman Church. Foreign observers noted this devotion as well. As foreign princes, this international element of Lorraine propaganda was no less important to the dynasty and critical in securing privileges they enjoyed at home. Since status engenders power and money, a goal of family strategy was to enhance its status by whatever means available. The close ties of several of these widows to members of the royal family, or to other sovereign European dynasties, were beneficial in the on-going effort to define the Lorraine-Guise as superior in rank to other aristocratic families and to ensure that their privileges were

28 Thomas-François Chabod de Saint-Maurice, *Lettres sur la cour de Louis XIV, 1667-70*, ed. J. Lemoine, 2 vols. (Paris: C. Lévy, 1911-12), 1:11, 33, 217, 411. Saint-Maurice also claimed that "everything is driven by the intrigue of Mme de Chevreuse, la vieille, . . . who directs everything, and obtains all she can from the Queen for the princesses of the house of Lorraine, because she is one of them; and thus, old and decrepit as she is, without ever budging from her chambers, she governs the court." (1:510-12).

29 See above, note 21. Ranum warns, however, against assuming too much public knowledge of the Guise women's activities. Their activities were known only by connoisseurs until their deaths, at which point they were more apt to be lauded in the press (personal communication, Autumn 2003).

not shared with the strictly "French" families surrounding the monarch.\textsuperscript{31}

A full understanding of the health of any family, elite or peasant, should include consideration of the matriclan. A mother's relatives were often just as important, or more so, than a father's. Many historians have stressed the importance of the family alliance in power and faction at the French court,\textsuperscript{32} but it is far too easy to consider a family as only the people who share the same paternal line. The princesse de Lillebonne's sons both predeceased her, and creditors claimed much of their inheritance. By pressing her claims as a dowager against her late husband's estate, and through personal favor she enjoyed in the circle of the Grand Dauphin, she succeeding in removing most of these estates from the hands of creditors, preserving them intact for her daughters.\textsuperscript{33} Many of these same properties had in

\textsuperscript{31} For example, the fact that Henriette-Catherine de Joyeuse had been a \textit{princesse du sang} when married to her first husband, the duc de Montpensier, enabled her to keep this rank as duchesse de Guise, as seen in orders of processions for the funeral of Henri IV and the \textit{lit de justice} of 1614. Note the seating plan for the latter, in which Mme de Guise occupies a position equal to the two \textit{princesses du sang} (Conti and Soissons), printed in Sarah Hanley, \textit{The Lit de Justice of the Kings of France. Constitutional Ideology in Legend, Ritual and Discourse} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 286.


\textsuperscript{33} She even makes this unusually direct statement in her will: "I do not believe that I wrong my [male] heirs, since, having been left as a widow with more than 500,000 livres in debts, I acquitted more than three-quarters of these by my savings, and thus prevented the forced
fact already passed once through female succession, via the unmarried daughter of the Légitimée duchesse d'Elbeuf who had willed her possessions to the eldest son of the princesse de Lillébonne. In time these properties passed through her daughters into the hands of the Rohan and Epinoy families, then back again into Lorraine hands in subsequent generations. A new pattern was set that continued across the eighteenth century, in which Lorraine, Rohan, La Tour, and other prince étranger families married in and out, keeping the same properties safe within their circle through a vast matriclan established in the last years of the seventeenth century. The longevity of many of the widows in this matriclan was essential in its maintenance because they acted as guardians of the privileges of the extended clan, not just an individual family. Perhaps the most significant factor to consider when analyzing the structure of aristocratic society in Old Regime France is the strength of this dual allegiance, embracing both a woman's family of birth and the family of her husband and children. Some of the most constructive builders and maintainers of family prestige and power in the house of Lorraine were its widows, women who, with one exception only, were not members of the dynasty from birth.

**Conclusion**

We have seen that Lorraine widows came with sizeable dowries and that individual personality played a large part in the retention of these sums for their offspring. No Lorraine widow married a second time in the seventeenth century. But the manner in which they spent their widowhood varied from woman to woman. Much depended on whether or not they had Lorraine heirs whose
inheritance needed to be safeguarded. Those who did had to make sure they were in favor in court and had sound financial advice from those who served them. Those who did not could either toil on behalf of more distant kin or children from a previous marriage, or they could retire from the world into a life of piety. Lorraine widows placed themselves strategically throughout the court, finding positions of favor with the king, his queen, his heir, or his mistress. A mental invalid, however, was kept out of sight for decades.

Most Lorraine-Guise widows, or teams of agents working on their behalf such as the Elbeuf Directorate, found ways to safeguard matrilineal successions, whether by means of quickly resolved financial settlements or protracted legal battles in which perpetual litigation permitted a legal fiction to prolong a family's bankruptcy for over a century. Other long-ranging projects included the establishment of matriclans, forming tight clusters of princely wealth to provide advantages to the whole. These strategies imply neither a happily united family, nor do they suggest the typicality of this family within the upper strata of French society—notably in the lack of dangerous second marriages. The evidence is convincing, however, that personal family differences were kept far from official family business, and that the majority of intra-clan lawsuits were carefully calculated for general dynastic benefit. The family as a whole could act if necessary to balance the burden of a widow's longevity, but the individual widow who brought a large personal sum to her marriage, maintained it wisely, and navigated the corridors of monarchical favor with skill was a benefit to the family, no matter how long she lingered.