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Noble Strategies
Marriage and Sexuality in the Zimmern Chronicle
Judith J. Hurwich

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I first became fascinated by the *Zimmern Chronicle* when I was assigned to write a paper on it in a graduate seminar on the Renaissance given by Felix Gilbert as a visiting professor at Princeton. My first reaction to the colorful chronicle of the spectacularly dysfunctional Zimmern family was "how typical are they?" At that time, this question was impossible to answer, since little research had as yet been done on the history of the family and virtually none on the German noble family. As a student of Lawrence Stone's at Princeton, I was introduced to the pioneer work in the history of the family and I resolved to return to the *Zimmern Chronicle* once the field was sufficiently developed to allow me to place the chronicle in a broader German and European context.

Since I have spent my career outside the university, I am particularly grateful to members of the Sixteenth Century Society and Conference who encouraged me to continue with my research, including Raymond Mentzer, Merry Wiesner-Hanks, and Gerald Strauss. Karl-Heinz Spiess helped me obtain recent articles from German publications and kindly allowed me to use his unpublished research on the German princes. Raymond Mentzer and the anonymous readers for the Truman State University Press gave me much-needed help in editing the manuscript. I would especially like to thank Kathryn Reichard for her invaluable assistance as listener and sounding board over the many years of this project, and for her editorial suggestions. Lastly, I would like to thank my husband, Bob, for his patience and practical advice.
CHAPTER 1

The Zimmern Chronicle and the Zimmern Family

In the mid-1560s, the Swabian Count Froben Christoph von Zimmern sat down to write a chronicle of the history of his family, which had made a remarkable comeback from political and economic disaster. Looking back over generations of happy and unhappy marriages and extramarital affairs, births (both legitimate and otherwise), family honors and family scandals, he left a remarkably frank and detailed account of the Zimmern family. Largely unknown for two centuries, the Zimmern Chronicle, or Chronicle of the Counts of Zimmern, came to light in the late 1700s. Since that time, it has been regarded as a unique and valuable source of cultural history in Germany in the sixteenth century. It has a well-established “reputation for being one of the most colorful representations of Swabian noble culture” and for giving an unparalleled “glimpse into the minds, habits, and bedrooms of the premodern nobility.”

The Zimmern Chronicle is unique among the chronicles of German noble families not only for its great length (1581 pages of manuscript, of which three-quarters are devoted to the period from the 1480s to the 1560s) but also for its inclusion of a large amount of incidental material drawn from popular culture, including many Schwänke, or bawdy “merry tales.” It is this incidental material, rather than the narrative of the Zimmern family itself, that has made the Zimmern Chronicle famous since the eighteenth century as a source for the study of German literature, popular culture, and law.

Until recently, however, little attention has been paid to the chronicle as a source for the history of the noble family in early modern Europe. German nobles

Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by the author.

1Bastress-Dukehart, The Zimmern Chronicle, 11, 27.

2See, for example, Franklin, Die freien Herren und Grafen von Zimmern; and Nadler, “Die Herren von Zimmern.”
of the fifteenth and early sixteenth century left few diaries, autobiographies, or personal letters giving glimpses into their motives and personal feelings. Although such sources are available for this period for the English gentry and nobility and for the German urban patriciate, they do not become common for the German nobility until the end of the sixteenth century. The Zimmern Chronicle helps to fill this gap through its inclusion of much material that was either autobiographical or handed down orally within the family.

Froben Christoph von Zimmern's richly detailed account of his own marriage negotiations, for example, demonstrates that a young nobleman did not merely acquiesce in a candidate selected by his elders, but could manage the negotiation process himself and reject a candidate he disliked. The Zimmern Chronicle is remarkably candid about tensions within the family, portraying fratricidal quarrels over the inheritance, estrangements between fathers and sons, and separations between husbands and wives. The chronicler has more than one occasion to echo Ovid's lament that "love or unity between brothers is a rare bird" (ZC 2:329; similar sentiments are expressed at 2:134, 3:291–92). While warnings against the damage quarrels between brothers could inflict on the wealth and reputation of the lineage can also be found in other noble house chronicles of the period, the Zimmern Chronicle stands alone in its emphasis on emotional relationships within the nuclear family and especially in its condemnation of the extramarital sexual relationships noblemen took for granted. "Their wives had to see it, live with it, and keep quiet, even if it stabbed them to the heart," exclaims the chronicler (ZC 3:389). Froben Christoph himself confronted and became permanently estranged from a father who neglected his wife and legitimate children in favor of a concubine.

The Zimmern Chronicle strongly emphasizes the lineage (male line of descent) and relegates women to secondary roles. It evaluates them according to the benefits they conferred on the Zimmern lineage by bringing large dowries, providing valuable alliances with other noble families, bearing sons to continue the male line, or defending the Zimmerns' claim to their estates. By the chronicler's criteria, for example, his aunt Apollonia von Henneberg was a distinct disappointment. The Zimmerns had initially expected that the status of their lineage would be enhanced

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3For the English gentry, the most important such source is the fifteenth-century Paston letters: Gairdner, The Paston Letters, 1422–1509; and Bennett, The Pastons and Their England. For the peerage, the most important collection of correspondence is that of the Lisle family in the early sixteenth century: Byrne, The Lisle Letters. Studies of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century German patriciate draw primarily on the letters, diaries, and family account books of families in Augsburg and Nuremberg. See Beer, Eltern und Kinder, and the works of Ozment, including Magdalena and Balthasar, Three Behaim Boys, and Flesh and Spirit. Studies of the German nobility based on similar sources include Hufschmidt, Adelige Frauen im Weserraum zwischen 1550 und 1700 (on the lower nobility); and Bastl, Tugend, Liebe, Ehre (on the nobility of the imperial court from the late sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries).

4For example, the early sixteenth-century Truchsessenchronik, the house chronicle of the Waldburg family, "over and over again emphasizes the destructive effect of divisions of estates and family quarrels as the greatest deficiency in the family history." Wolf, Von der Chronik zum Weltbuch, 84.
by the marriage in 1511 of Gottfried Werner von Zimmern to this “countess of princely rank” (gefürstete Gräfin), who belonged to one of the wealthiest and most powerful noble families of Franconia. But Apollonia’s dowry proved to be less than her husband had hoped for and she bore him only daughters. Worst of all, she failed to outlive her childless brothers, so the eagerly awaited Henneberg inheritance never came to the Zimmerns after all.

Despite its male bias, however, the chronicle provides valuable insights into the lives of noblewomen in an era when they left few records apart from formal appearances in legal documents. A careful examination of the women in the Zimmern family shows the variety of roles they played at different times in their lives. As daughters, they were assets or burdens in their parents’ inheritance strategies, dutifully following their parents’ wishes in marriage or resisting an unwelcome union. As wives, they may have been valued for the money, property, and prestige they brought, but they often ended up trapped in an unhappy marriage, tied to a man more loyal to his concubine than his wife. As for the nonnoble women who were concubines of nobles, their position and that of their children grew increasingly precarious as public attitudes became less tolerant, and ecclesiastical and secular authorities sought to enforce stricter sexual morality.

Until recently, the history of the family received much less attention in Germany than in France and England, where two new approaches to the field were established by the 1960s. The first approach was historical demography, which used the new methodology of family reconstitution, based on parish registers, to analyze household size, age at marriage, and the life cycle. This methodology was developed in the years after World War II by the Institut National d’Études Démographiques in France and the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure in England.\(^5\) The second new approach was the study of mentalités, or “mental habits,” which drew not only on family documents, but also on literature and art to illuminate attitudes toward the family. Popularized by Philippe Ariès in L’Enfant et la vie sociale sous l’Ancien Régime (1960), this approach led to a spirited debate over the structure of the family and over the emotional relationships among its members. In his Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500–1800 (1977), Lawrence Stone proposed a model of the stages of development of the European family that provided the framework for the next decade of studies of the European noble family. In Stone’s view, the family before the eighteenth century (especially in the upper classes) was characterized by patriarchal structure, focus on the extended kin rather than on the nuclear family, and weak ties of affection between family members.\(^6\)

\(^5\)Early studies in historical demography that were especially influential in shaping views of the early modern European nobility include Hajnal, “European Marriage Patterns in Perspective,” which set forth the hypothesis of a distinctive European marriage pattern; Peller, “Births and Deaths among Europe’s Ruling Families”; and Hollingsworth, “The Demography of the British Peerage.”

\(^6\)Ariès, Centuries of Childhood; and Stone, Family, Sex and Marriage. Other important contributions
Neither family reconstitution nor the analysis of mentalités was applied to Germany until the 1970s, when German scholars published works on the peasant family using both of the new approaches. In the 1980s, research on the early modern German family focused primarily on the cities and on the impact of the Reformation. The noble family did not receive as much attention from scholars of early modern Germany as it had from scholars of France and England.

By the 1990s, however, the German noble family began to attract greater attention from both American and European scholars. At a theoretical level, Paula Sutter Fichtner argued that the inheritance and marriage strategies of German Protestant princes were affected by their religious ideology. At the same time, concrete evidence to test prevailing assumptions about family structure and marriage strategies became available in a series of regional studies of the nonprincely nobility spanning the period from the High Middle Ages to the nineteenth century. Studies of women and gender roles since the early 1990s have also examined marriage patterns and attitudes toward marriage and sexuality in the nobility.

The Zimmern Chronicle itself has attracted new attention as an example of the genre of the German noble house chronicle. Until 2002, only one monograph on the chronicle existed: Beat Jenny’s biography, Graf Froben Christoph von Zimmern (1959). That year witnessed the publication of two more: Gerhard Wolf, Von der Chronik zum Weltbuch, and Erica Bastress-Dukehart, The Zimmern Chronicle. Both authors explore how sixteenth-century noble family chronicles “used literary tropes, strategies, and invented elements in the service of their vision of history,” creating works that glorified the family and sought to legitimize its claims to prestige and power.
of southwest Germany." Bastress-Dukehart, on the other hand, emphasizes the historical content of the chronicle and sets it in political context. She focuses on the feud between the Werdenberg and Zimmern families (1488–1504) as the key event that defined the Zimmern family's perception of itself and its history.

The present study will draw chiefly on the portions of the *Zimmern Chronicle* that recount the family's history after the end of the feud. These biographical and autobiographical chapters, interspersed with chapters of "merry tales," make up about two-thirds of the entire chronicle. They focus on the lives of the chronicler, Froben Christoph von Zimmern (1519–66), his father, Johann Werner II (1480–1548), and his uncles, Gottfried Werner (1484–1554) and Wilhelm Werner (1485–1575). It will utilize both the *mentalités* approach and the historical demographic approach; in addition to analyzing the chronicle's depiction of the values of mid-sixteenth-century Swabian nobles, it will undertake a demographic analysis of the family strategies of the Zimmerns and the families with whom they intermarried. Not surprisingly, actual behavior did not always reflect the ideals expressed in the chronicle.

Since modern scholarship in the history of the family began with scholarship on England and France, these countries have generally been taken as the norms by scholars dealing with other countries. Comparative studies of European nobilities in the late Middle Ages and early modern periods rarely discuss German nobles except as conspicuous exceptions to the norms of England and France. While other European aristocracies were moving toward primogeniture or other inheritance systems that consolidated wealth in the hands of a single male heir, German nobles remained stubbornly attached to a system of partible inheritance that divided lands among several sons. German historians of the noble family, for their part, tend to ascribe the inheritance and marriage patterns of German nobles to regional factors and to draw relatively few comparisons to other European nobilities. But did German nobles actually differ in their attitudes and behavior from other European nobles? Recent research on the noble family in other European countries in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries has questioned the generalizations made by pioneering scholars like Stone, and has made it possible to set the behavior of German nobles in a broader European context.

In drawing comparisons among European nobilities with respect to marriage and sexuality, three issues deserve particular consideration: the kinship system and its effects on inheritance and marriage strategies; the concept of equality of

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14 Wolf, *Von der Chronik zum Weltbuch*, 130.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Judith Hurwich received her PhD from Princeton University and taught for thirty years in independent secondary schools in the New York City area. After retiring from secondary school teaching, Dr. Hurwich has taught as an adjunct professor and lecturer at several colleges, including Fordham University, the University of Connecticut at Stamford, and Purchase College of the State University of New York. She has written numerous articles for journals. *Noble Strategies* is her first book.
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