

Royal Marriage: The Arrival of Catherine of Braganza

Professor Andrew McRae in conversation with Anna-Marie Linnell

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Andrew McRae: I'm here with Anna-Marie Linnell at the Ashmolean Museum, and we are going to think a little bit about royal consorts in the Stuart age, particularly brides of kings. And we are going to look at one in particular: Catherine of Braganza, who married King Charles II in 1662. I want to think about what the consort like Catherine brought with her: various baggage, if you like, including items like this chair here, perhaps one of Catherine's less significant pieces of baggage in itself, although it carries signs of much greater cultural and economic importance. And then think also, perhaps more importantly, about the kind of cultural baggage, the ideas she brought with her, the religion she brought with her, because marriages were opportunities weren't they? Opportunities to forge alliances. Also the women brought dowries, which could make a big difference to a country. But there were also risks. Most of the courts that really mattered across Europe remained Catholic. And the Stuarts and their people repeatedly agonized, didn't they, about the doctrinal identities of spouses, and the influence that they may have on kings in particular. Above all, though, marriages signaled the continuation of the dynasty. And this was something that mattered a lot in 1625 and in 1662 when single men took the throne and got married soon afterwards. It was an age when human reproduction was very uncertain. And, as it turned out, Catherine of Braganza proved incapable of sustaining a pregnancy. But when Charles was choosing a bride, Anna-Marie, after the Restoration, what sort of things were at stake?

Anna-Marie Linnell: Well, as you say, England had had a very unsettled political history with the turmoil in the Civil Wars, confusion at the end of the republican regime, and Charles II was invited back to England. There was a lot at stake when he was choosing his bride. There was a question of religion. So Charles had spent the last 10 years in exile relying on Catholic powers to support and hospitality. And people weren't sure what their new king would be like, what his priorities were, and how committed he would be to the English Church. And England was a Protestant country, whereas a lot of eligible brides were based in Catholic countries as well. So there was concern about who Charles choose in that regard. There was also an immediate military context. So Charles's choice of bride was delicate because broader tensions in European politics. In particular, Spain was pursuing military action against Portugal, which been independent from Spanish control since 1640. So one eligible bride for Charles, and the bride he eventually chose, was a Portuguese princess. But the Spanish also offered to back other brides with Spanish dowries. And the Spanish ambassador in England, Baron d'Batvill, warned that if Charles II married a Portuguese princess it could lead to immediate war with Spain. So there was that immediate concern: about whether the newly settled realm would enter a new

era of instability and military conflict. There was also money. Charles owed his international creditors a lot of money. But he was also continuing to rack up new debts. So after his very expensive coronation he owed more than £50,000 and the dowry that a queen consort might bring with her was also really important for Charles. And finally there was the question of dynasty. So the expected role of any queen consort was to provide a new heir for the throne. The prospect of a new bride arriving who could produce that heir gave a sense of security and stability for the future and the succession.

AMcR: Was there any sense, any expectation, that he might know the woman, or like the woman, or even like the look of the woman?

A-ML: Well it was rare with international marriages for their king and his bride to actually get to meet before. So when Charles's father, Charles I, married Henrietta Maria's, a kind of story developed that he had seen her when going through the French court and a romantic myth developed around that first sight. It was very rare for a king to actually get to do that. The marriage was more about forging formal international alliances with specific powers and bringing specific assets to the country. Charles had seen a picture of Catherine before she arrived, and that picture became very popular. It was circulated, a portrait of the Infanta was circulated in cheap print. But it wasn't expected that he would have the chance for a conformal courtship with Catherine in person.

AMcR: And Charles have exactly been saving himself for marriage had he. so how were power relations between the new Queen and Charles's open mistresses?

A-ML: One of Charles's mistresses, Barbara Castlemaine, was actually heavily pregnant when Catherine arrived. And according to Samuel Pepys, one contemporary diarist, he spent every night that week with his mistress before going to meet Catherine and he was actually late to meet her. Relations at court were strained. Catherine had been warned before she arrived that Charles had mistresses. She specifically said she didn't want to meet Barbara Castlemaine, and tried to resist seeing her at court. But Barbara managed to sneak into her entourage, and Charles insisted that Catherine made her one of the ladies of her bedchamber. She refused. There was an conflict between the king and queen at court. And, in the end, despite the best efforts of Charles's advisers and in particular his Lord Chancellor, Edward Hyde, Catherine had to give in and Charles wouldn't give way and Barbara was put on Catherine's bedchamber list. So Catherine had to come into contact with Charles's mistresses quite frequently at court, even though initially she did not want to do that at all

AMcR: And did she convert to Protestantism?

A-ML: No, Catherine did not convert Protestantism. There was a question around their marriage at the beginning. It was believed that Catherine and Charles were married in a marriage ceremony according to the rites of the English Church. In fact, it seems likely that they had a secret and Catholic ceremony, a private Catholic ceremony, before, according to Catherine's preference, and then they got married and Protestant ceremony after that. There was a lot of hostility to her once she'd been in England for a few years: moments of crisis and conspiracy theories about her and her entourage at court. But because Catherine and Charles never produced an heir to the throne, it took away some of the issues might surround her catholic bride. For example, Charles's mother Henrietta Maria was supposed to have control of her children's education to the age of 13: which would mean that they could theoretically be raised as Catholic. The following king, James II, was Catholic and the Parliament had to make

sure that he and his Catholic wife wouldn't have control of their children's education. But, because Catherine didn't produce an heir to the throne, that issue was taken away. But she never converted to Protestantism. And she eventually returned to Portugal and after Charles's death, and returned to her Catholic native country.

AMcR: It's not so very long ago in English history that a King, Henry VIII, divorced wives if they didn't produce heirs. Surely this must have crossed Charles mind.

A-ML: Yes so the question of divorce came up really very early in Catherine's career in England. So she did get pregnant several times. But she never carried a child to full birth. So people knew that perhaps she could conceive, but that she was unlikely to. And by the late 1660s, when one of Charles II's advisers (who had helped to orchestrate the marriage) was experiencing conflict court and people were trying to remove him from power, all kinds of rumours started about him picking Catharine as a bride because she was infertile. And this question of infertility comes up really from the middle of the 1660s. Partly exacerbated by the fact the Charles is evidently virile. He has got lots of illegitimate children around court with his mistresses. but also because Catherine is not producing an heir. So around 1680, in the late 1670s, this issue becomes really politically important after Charles's brother, James, converts to Catholicism. So the next heir is possibly Catholic. Parliament do try to put through bills that will force Charles to either take a new wife or exclude his heir. And lots of rumours circulate about the possibility of divorce. But its something that Charles always refuses to do. And from really 1680 that question was closed, while people were still concerned about the succession of his brother and the next heir. it was clear Charles would not divorce his wife.

AMcR: And given that there were various problems associated with this match, there must have been some very attractive aspects to it, in order to make it a reality.

A-ML: Yes. So despite all these concerns and questions and issues at stake, Catherine did bring some very real advantages to the English court, many of which as well as the hope of an heir, were economic. So she had a very large cash dowry: much larger than either of the queen consorts before her: Queen Anna of Denmark (who was married to James I), Henrietta Maria (who is married to Charles I). She brought £300,000, some of which was to be paid partly in cash, partly in goods like sugar, and Charles had actually started to spend this money before Catherine arrived to and pay off some of his substantial debts to people who provided things like costumes for his coronation.

AMcR: There was also an issue, wasn't there, in terms of economics? about the development of Britain as a trading power. what was the issue with Portugal and the decision to go with the Portuguese match in that respect?

A-ML: So England already had a commercial treaty with Portugal. This new marriage increased their position by giving them ownership of key trading port in Catherine's dowry as well. So they got trading rights and ownership in Tangier in North Africa, and Bombay in India, as well as trading privileges in Portuguese jurisdictions elsewhere. So these were really important foothold in global trading networks for England.

AMcR: And this is the first time that England actually had a foothold in Bombay. Okay. So what do you see as the long-term effect of the marriage on England status?

A-ML: The new ports helped to develop English trade, and they meant that England could compete with powers like a commercial rival, the Dutch. The Earl of Sandwich, who was the English ambassador to Portugal in 1661 and 1662, he thought that the marriage would 'rob ye

Hollanders, our mortal enemy, of a great income: business of no small consideration'. So this helps to encourage a more enthusiastic economic policy, but also a more aggressive foreign policy. and England in the 1660s engaged with a series of wars with the Dutch which can be seen as wars of trade. and texts about Catherine, representations of the incoming queen, helped to build enthusiasm for this imperial project.

AMcR: And is this also evidence, here again at the Ashmolean, of the connection that people drew between Catherine and tea drinking. Can you explain a little bit about that and the way that fits into this narrative of the development of trade

A-ML: Yeah, absolutely. So Catherine herself enjoyed drinking tea and helped to encourage a fashion for tea drinking at court. So tea was an imported good which Catherine was used to having in Portugal, and now there was the increased opportunity to have tea and to use these goods in England. So she started a fashion for drinking tea, which became associated with the queen as well as changing consumer habits. In one poem on tea, Edmund Waller wrote 'the best of queens and best of herbs we owe / to that bold nation which the way did show': thinking of Portugal and how assets and trading links with Portugal could help to create new opportunities in England. But the actual parts of Catherine's dowry, the ports that were coming from Catherine's dowry, like Bombay, gave England a presence in India and provided a new platform for the East India trading company. So this helps to boost broader traffic in exotic goods like drinking chocolate, coffee, sherbet. So the first coffee house had appeared in Oxford in 1650, in London in 1652. But it comes more and more popular in the 1660s as people start getting an appetite for these commercial consumer goods in London as well.

AMcR: So these commodities are being drawn from the east. And the connections, the networks that Catherine is part of, facilitating all this growth of trade. and that, in turn, is transforming English customs, English practice, English society.

A-ML: Yes, exactly. I mean, it would be an exaggeration to say Catherine started the trend for tea drinking in England. But the very fact that she was chosen as Charles's bride shows what the agenda or intentions were for the court and for Charles and his advisers. It shows that, for them, the future of England was in international trade and empire, and the wealth and the commodities might come with that, they hoped.

AMcR: So I can see what Charles and the English got from this marriage, but what did the Portuguese get?

Well, as England was going through an unsettled time (intensive domestic politics), so too were the Portuguese. there was a risk of Spanish invasion (which was in fact already underway) and the Portuguese were relying on England, counting on England, for military support within that conflict. in the marriage contract, Charles had agreed to give English military troops for the support of Portugal in the case of a Spanish invasion.

AMcR: So effectively they're buying military security/diplomatic relations by passing over actually an awful lot of wealth and influence, and the trade with the daughter.

A-ML: Yes, exactly. And it was also prestigious match for Portugal. So while Catherine's father had been a monarch, a crowned monarch, they also weren't recognised by all other powers as being a prestigious monarchical family. And they weren't recognised by the Pope. And the prospect of allying with England (which was internationally seen as an established power and a domestically strong power with a crown that had that sense of legitimacy) it gave Portugal a sense of prestige as well. So that too was important. It meant that Catherine was now a Queen

of England as well as a Portuguese princess. And symbolically that meant a lot, especially due to the risks and conflict that they were facing at the time with Spain.

AMcR: Was there any sense across Europe that Charles might be a risky match, given that it only just come back from so years of exile?

A-ML: While Charles was in exile he did try and to get married. his mother Henrietta Maria (who was based in France) did try to set up matches, and people didn't really want to have him or rely with him because he was so insecure, because he did not have a crown at that time. But once he was invited back to England, offers did start to come in for marriage, and the opportunities were opened up for Charles. Also other members of his family were making prestigious matches at this time. His younger sister, Henriette, married the brother of the French king; and this was an opportunity for the Stuart family to start re-establishing their links in Europe. So he had become a much more attractive marriage partner since the restoration.

AMcR: So this becomes a way that England with its still relatively young virile king to re-establish itself, re-establish its networks with continental Europe, but perhaps to re-establish them on a slightly new footing.

A-ML: Yes, exactly. And to build England's opportunities, get a sense of domestic security in the future for the English monarchy at home through and also with these new and footholds in global trade to start building a new more ambitious English foreign policy as well.

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