In the summer of 1520, Henry VIII and Francis I met at Balinghem, close to Calais. At the famous Field of the Cloth of Gold, a summit was held: the King of France aimed to receive help from the Tudors against the emperor Charles V. Both the French and the English diplomatic machines worked exhaustively to secure a renewal of the Treaty of London (1518). This confirmed their mutual intention of a marriage between the very young French Dauphin to the equally young Mary Tudor, Henry’s only child from his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. Despite these agreements, the marriage contract was eventually rescinded and, many years later, Mary married Philip II.

Philip’s grandchild was, in turn, involved in a matter of failed diplomatic negotiations for marriage. In 1610, the treaty of Bruzolo, signed by the French king Henri IV and the duke Charles
Emmanuel I of Savoy, provided for a dynastic alliance between their children: the chief goal of the treaty was a Franco-Savoyard coalition against Spain, but it was also established that Elisabeth de Bourbon would marry Prince Victor Amadeus of Savoy. Nevertheless, the assassination of Henri IV in that same year upset those equilibria. Maria de’ Medici sought a rapprochement with Spain, this marriage was not concluded (Perrens 1869; Merlotti 2009), and Elisabeth was eventually wed to the Spanish infante, the future King Philip IV. (Elliott, 2013)

And in the Spring of 1623, Charles, Prince of Wales travelled to Madrid along with his friend the duke of Buckingham, hoping that his presence there would help to conclude the negotiations of his proposed marriage to the Infanta Maria Anna, the young Philip IV’s sister. The Price of Wales’s arrival was a big surprise not only for the Spanish Court, but even more for the Stuart ambassador to Spain, John Digby, earl of Bristol. As is commonly known, the visit did not end well: Philip IV had no intention to form any dynastic alliance with the Stuarts, the Infanta herself openly protested against the prospect of marrying a ‘heretic’, and Charles went back to England without his bride. Soon afterwards the negotiations with the French started, that resulted in Charles (newly crowned) marrying Louis XIII’s sister, the princess Henrietta Maria, in 1625. This so-called “Spanish Match” is still very much the subject of historians’ interest (see, for instance, Samson 2006; Nardone 2020), and it is often recalled as the most prominent example of failed marriage diplomacy – plans for a dynastic marriage of significant political importance as part of a wider geopolitical jigsaw puzzle, that usually for the very same reasons never materialized or did materialize but failed spectacularly to meet the expectations of those involved.

Following these few examples, and while marriage diplomatic strategies have very often attracted historians’ attention (e.g. Sluga and James 2016; Watkins 2017; Caldari and Wolfson 2018), this special issue of Legatio seeks to contribute to the existing knowledge on premodern planned dynastic alliances that were meant to be confirmed by a dynastic marriage but never came into existence for whatever reason — political, economic, even astrological, of course (on this point, one can see Carey 2012; Azzolini 2021). We would like to invite further discussion of how dynastic policy was formed, performed and how it translated into wider political and socio-cultural context of the premodern era. Therefore, we will welcome submissions on topics and approaches that include, but are not limited to, the following:

- case studies of failed marriage negotiations
- marriage negotiations as a trump card in international politics
- the role of medicine and astrology in defining and deciding a good match
- failure to find the bride/groom – difficulties in securing a proper match
- information, gossip, formal and informal news networks and the ‘royal marriage market’
- “fictional” marriage diplomacy in plays and other writings

Please send the expressions of interest or abstracts of 300 words to legatio@ihpan.edu.pl by 31st May 2022. Notification of acceptance will be no later than 10th July 2022. If accepted, full papers should be due by 15 February 2023.
Selected bibliography


