

Memoirs (1630–1680)

SOPHIA OF HANOVER



Edited and translated by

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Princess Louisa Hollandina of the Palatinate (1622–1709): Princess Sophia of the Palatinate [later duchess and electress of Hanover] dressed as an Indian (detail). Fürst Salm-zu-Salm, Anholt, Germany.

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Introduction

The Other Voice

The sky above Herrenhausen palace and garden portended rain, but the eighty-three-year-old chatelaine, Dowager Electress Sophia of Hanover, was determined to take her early evening walk. She set out, still somewhat weak from the malady (severe stomach pain) and remedy (two enemas) she had endured the day before. She was accompanied by two good friends, the countess of Bückeberg and Princess Caroline, her grandson's wife. The melodic lines of the trio's conversation rose and fell above the delicate percussion of their steps on the garden's gravel paths. The coin struck to commemorate the day—June 8, 1714—describes their pace as brisk (“vegeto et strenuo passu deambulans”).¹ As they approached a fountain in the middle of the garden, the rain came, and Sophia, overcome by renewed stomach pain, began to totter. With her friends' support she managed a few more steps but then collapsed, unconscious, in their arms. They laid her on the ground, loosened her bodice, removed her hairpiece, kneeled next to her, and prayed. They watched as Sophia's face reddened, then paled. The countess of Bückeberg called it the most peaceful, beautiful death imaginable.²

In Sophia's case, beginning with the end is appropriate. Death is never timely, but Sophia's was particularly untimely. This, in fact, is the main reason why her voice has gone largely unheard in the English-speaking world. For just seven weeks later, on August 1, 1714, Queen Anne of Great Britain and Ireland, Sophia's first cousin once removed, died in her sleep in Kensington Palace, London. Had Sophia lived just two months longer, she would have succeeded Anne as queen (in the event, it was Sophia's son George Lewis who, as George I, became Britain's first Hanoverian monarch). Had she lived long enough to be queen for just a year or two, she would occupy a much

1. Johann Georg Heinrich Feder, *Sophie Churfürstin von Hannover im Umriß* (Hanover: Hahn, 1810), 181.

2. *Correspondance de Leibniz avec l'électrice Sophie de Brunswick-Lunebourg*, ed. Onno Klopp (Hanover: Klindworth, 1874), 3: 457–62.

2 Introduction

more prominent place in the English cultural landscape. Her life, from penurious youth to august senectitude, would be a much more familiar story (and likely would have been accorded one of popular culture's highest forms of ennoblement: serving as the subject for a BBC miniseries). But having never acceded to the throne, Sophia gradually receded from memory.

Sophia's memoirs can help recall her to a modern readership. They appear here in English for the first time in their entirety.³ They recount the first fifty years of Sophia's life: her childhood and teens in Leiden and The Hague; her years as a young woman at her brother's court in Heidelberg; her married life in the north German towns of Iburg, Osnabrück, and Hanover; and her trips to Italy in 1664–65 and to France in 1679. A contemporary declared Sophia, a German princess, to be France's greatest *bel esprit*.⁴ It is no surprise, therefore, that her memoirs (which Sophia wrote in French) abound with insightful, entertaining, and occasionally acerbic accounts of her meetings with prominent leading men and ladies (a young Charles II, a middle-aged Louis XIV, Pope Alexander VII, Queen Christina of Sweden) and with long-forgotten bit players (cavaliers, concubines, clerics, coachmen, and quacks). As such, they offer detailed insights into the public and private lives of early modern European nobles (their codes of etiquette, habits of dress, entertainments, fights, and amours) and of these nobles' small army of attendants, servants, and hangers-on. They complement, and indeed serve as a prequel to, Lloyd H. Strickland's fine translation of letters between Sophia, her daughter, and Gottfried

3. The translator of the only previous English edition expurgated about one-tenth of the text as "distasteful to our modern ideas." *Memoirs of Sophia, Electress of Hanover, 1630–1680*, trans. H. Forester (London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1888), xiv.

4. Urbain Chevreau (1613–1701), author, personal secretary to Queen Christina of Sweden, and tutor to the duke of Maine (one of Louis XIV's natural children). He added that Sophia's sister Elizabeth was France's greatest savant (quoted in Feder, *Sophie*, 8). The translator of the German edition of the memoirs conceded that Sophia could express herself more felicitously in French than in German but felt compelled to add that this did not detract in the least from her innate Germanness. *Die Mutter der Könige von Preußen und England. Memoiren und Briefe der Kurfürstin Sophie von Hannover*, trans. and ed. Robert Geerds (Munich: Langewiesche-Brandt, 1913), 7–8.

Wilhelm von Leibniz, which was recently published in this series.⁵ The memoirs cover the period 1630–80; the letters, 1691–1713. Together, they give us a fairly complete picture of Sophia's life in her own words.

Throughout much of her life Sophia was among the highest-born Protestant princesses in continental Europe. Throughout all her life she was a true celebrity, feted and fussed over wherever she traveled. Among the roughly fifty other women in this series, there are only three—Margaret of Navarre, the duchess of Montpensier, and Sophia's own sister Elizabeth—who held similarly stratospheric positions in the social hierarchy of early modern Europe. This position—and the experiences and personalities to which it gave her access—makes Sophia something of an other voice among the other voices. It is a voice worth hearing, both for the remarkable story it tells and for the remarkably entertaining way it tells it.

Historical Background and Biography

Sophia's parents—the Lady Elizabeth, daughter of King James I of England, and Frederick V, palgrave of the Rhine and elector Palatine—were married in London on Valentine's Day in 1613. Frederick was the sovereign of the Lower Palatinate (situated along the Neckar and Rhine rivers in southwestern Germany, with Heidelberg as its residence) and the Upper Palatinate (situated north of the Danube and west of Bohemia in what is today northern Bavaria).⁶ Several nuptial masques and hundreds of epithalamia celebrated the union of two of Europe's most important Protestant families, the houses of Stuart and Palatine, as the marriage of Thames and Rhine.⁷ In April 1613 the newlyweds—accompanied by a retinue of more than seven hundred

5. *Leibniz and the Two Sophias: The Philosophical Correspondence*, trans. and ed. Lloyd H. Strickland (Toronto: CRRS, 2011).

6. It has become a historiographical bromide to assert that, prior to the nineteenth century, Germany is an anachronism and that the proper term is the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. Although not a political entity in Sophia's day, Germany was common parlance for that part of Central Europe where German was spoken. Sophia's mother, for example, refers repeatedly to "Germanie" in her English correspondence. *The Letters of Elizabeth of Bohemia*, ed. L. M. Baker (London: Bodley Head, 1953), 24, 100, 133, 138, 167, and 197.

7. Some of the music from the masques is available on I Ciarlatani, *Fly Cheerful Voices: The Marriage of Pfalzgraf Friedrich V & Elizabeth Stuart*, recorded June 13–15, 1997,

courtiers and attendants—sailed to Holland, continued up the Rhine, and installed themselves in the grand pink Renaissance palace overlooking Heidelberg and the Neckar.

Frederick was the leader of the Union, an alliance, formed in May 1608, of German Protestant principalities and free imperial cities. Its purpose was to check what it saw as the erosion of Protestant rights by the emperor (a Catholic from the House of Habsburg) and by the empire's legislative and judicial institutions (in all of which Catholics held a clear majority). In August 1619 the predominantly Protestant estates of Bohemia, as part of their revolt against Habsburg rule, elected Frederick to be their king, a crown that had perennially gone to a Catholic Habsburg prince. Against the advice of the majority of his councilors and most allied Protestant princes (who saw that the Palatinate lacked the military power to defend itself against the inevitable Habsburg riposte), Frederick accepted and was crowned in Prague on November 4, 1619.

His undoing was swift. In August and September 1620 a Spanish army captured Heidelberg and occupied the Lower Palatinate west of the Rhine. Ten weeks after losing Heidelberg, Frederick lost Prague. On November 8, 1620, an imperial army routed Frederick's forces on White Mountain outside the city. The emperor had won the first major battle of what would become the Thirty Years War. Frederick, whose reign as king of Bohemia lasted almost exactly one year, had spent just one winter in Prague Palace, whence his epithet: the Winter King.

Sophia's parents fled Prague in such disarray that they almost left behind one of her siblings. Parents and children—Frederick Henry (born in 1614), Charles Lewis (1617), Elizabeth (1618), Rupert (1619), and Morris (1621, born while they were on the run)—sought, with little success, refuge at allied courts in Germany. Finally, in April 1621, they found a warm welcome and secure exile in The Hague, where they had ties familial (Frederick's mother was a princess of the House of Orange) and religious (Calvinism). In the beginning they received generous subsidies: 10,000 guilders a month from the States General

Christophorus, 77214, 1998, compact disc. For an example of the epithalamia, see Thomas Heywood, *A Marriage of Triumph* (1613; repr., London: Percy Society, 1842).

and £26,000 from England. Over time the welcome grew cooler and the subsidies scantier.

In their Dutch exile Frederick and Elizabeth continued to style themselves king and queen of Bohemia and continued to have children at a nearly annual rate: Louisa Hollandina (1622), Lewis (1624), Edward (1625), Henrietta (1626), Philip (1627), Charlotte (1628), Sophia (1630), and Gustavus Adolphus (1631). To judge from the couple's steadfastly adoring letters to one another, their fecundity was as much a product of an enduring erotic enthusiasm as of dynastic duty.⁸ It was partially offset by childhood illness and mishap: Lewis and Charlotte died as infants, Gustavus Adolphus as a child, and Frederick Henry (the oldest) as a teenager. The Winter King himself died, probably of bubonic plague, in 1632. He was only thirty-six, his daughter Sophia at the time only two. On Frederick's death, Sophia's brother Charles Lewis became palgrave of the Rhine and elector Palatine—if he could ever win back his territory and titles, which the emperor, as punishment for Frederick's Bohemian adventure, had transferred to Duke Maximilian of Bavaria in 1623.

Sophia was born in The Hague on October 14, 1630, and soon moved to the private boarding school in Leiden that the exiled Palatines had established for their sizeable brood and the hundred-strong staff of governesses, teachers, valets, and other servants who attended to the children's schooling and other needs. The standard of the children's education, for both the boys and the girls, was extremely high, and all became prodigious polyglots. Sophia spoke French, German, and Dutch fluently, could converse in English and Italian, and had rudimentary knowledge of Spanish and Latin. On reaching their midteens the children were retrieved from the school, the boys to travel and the girls to keep their mother company.

The Hague in the 1640s, a place of exile for Sophia's family and for royalists chased from England by the parliamentarians, was a hotbed of spying, scheming, and skullduggery. Sophia found herself in the middle of it. The scheme (cherished by her mother) was for Sophia to marry the Prince of Wales, the future Charles II. The skullduggery (cherished by Princess Amalia of Orange-Nassau) was for a

8. *A Collection of Original Royal Letters*, ed. Sir George Bromley (London: John Stockdale, 1787), 1–66.

prince of Orange-Nassau to seduce Sophia so that, with her reputation tarnished, one of Amalia's own daughters could marry the Prince of Wales. To escape the intrigue and gossip Sophia moved to Heidelberg, the residence of her brother Charles Lewis, to whom the Lower Palatinate had recently been restored by the Treaty of Westphalia. She arrived in the late summer of 1650, two months before her twentieth birthday.

The eight years Sophia spent in Heidelberg centered around marriage: the arrangement of a suitable one for her and the unraveling of Charles Lewis's. The first serious suitor (a mere Portuguese duke had been rejected out of hand) was the recently widowed Prince Adolphus John of Zweibrücken. He had a prognathous face and a pugnacious temperament (he was rumored to have beaten his wife). Sophia did not like him. It was Sophia's good fortune that the prince made promises regarding her future income that his older brother, King Charles VI of Sweden, was unwilling to keep and that the next, much more desirable suitor was already on the scene.

In 1657 Sophia became engaged to Duke George William of Brunswick-Lüneburg (1624–1705). But the groom, realizing that he was too wedded to his sybaritic bachelor lifestyle to actually wed, soon rued his decision. Although the marriage contracts had already been signed, George William hoped to extricate himself by making a novel proposal: what if his favorite brother, Duke Ernest Augustus (1630–98), married Sophia in his place? George William would simply sign a document in which he pledged to remain a bachelor, to leave his demesne to Ernest Augustus on his death, and to support Ernest Augustus and Sophia financially in the interim.

Charles Lewis, who negotiated on Sophia's behalf, told her that he considered the younger brother to be more amiable and sensible than the elder but left it up to her to decide. Sophia, who had met Ernest Augustus several times, told Charles Lewis that all she wanted was a financially solid arrangement suitable to her rank and that if the proposed match would achieve this she would not mind swapping grooms. In April 1658, George William signed a renunciation of marriage; in June, Ernest Augustus and Sophia signed their marriage contract; and in October, their wedding was celebrated in Heidelberg.

The newlyweds moved into George William's palace in Hanover. At times George William seemed to regret ceding Sophia to his younger brother. Indeed, the early years of Sophia's marriage were marred by her brother-in-law's continued flirtatiousness and her husband's jealousy. This tense situation was resolved in 1661 when Ernest Augustus was made secular bishop of Osnabrück, and he and Sophia established their own court at Iburg castle, located eight miles south of Osnabrück.

A few months after the wedding Sophia wrote to Charles Lewis that, "miracle of the century, I love my husband."⁹ Perhaps she was just trying to reassure her brother about the marriage he had arranged for her. But the memoirs and her correspondence suggest that she remained passionately devoted to her husband, despite his serial infidelity.¹⁰ Nearly two decades into Sophia's marriage, her sister Elizabeth writes of her: "the world and her husband do still possess her heart. God will in his due time touch us both."¹¹

Ernest Augustus had two other older brothers besides George William. Their father's will stipulated that as long as two of the brothers (or their male heirs) were alive, the family domains—the duchies of Lüneburg and Calenberg in what is today the federal state of Lower Saxony in north-central Germany—were not to be united under a single sovereign. Instead, the oldest brother would get the duchy he preferred, the next oldest would get the duchy that was left over, and

9. *Briefwechsel der Herzogin Sophie von Hannover mit ihrem Bruder, dem Kurfürsten Karl Ludwig von der Pfalz, und des Letzteren mit seiner Schwägerin, der Pfalzgräfin Anna*, ed. Eduard Bodemann (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1885), 9; letter dated February 6, 1659.

10. Ernest Augustus at times wrote for—and received—Sophia's permission for his adultery. "Briefe des Kurfürsten Ernst August von Hannover an seine Gemahlin, die Kurfürstin Sophie," ed. Anna Wendland, *Niedersächsisches Jahrbuch* 7 (1930): 234; letter dated October 8, 1671. But Sophia was not above *Schadenfreude* in her dealings with her husband's bedmates. She would sometimes require Countess von Platen, her husband's official mistress, to accompany her on long walks in hot weather, leaving the corpulent countess bathed in sweat, her heavy makeup streaming down her face. See Georg Schnath, *Geschichte Hannovers im Zeitalter der neunten Kur und der englischen Suzession 1674–1714*, 4 vols. (Hildesheim: Lax, 1938–82), 2: 487.

11. *The Correspondence between Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes*, trans. and ed. Lisa Shapiro (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 203; letter dated July 16, 1677.

the rest would have to wait their turn (when Sophia married Ernest Augustus he was one of the latter: a domainless duke). The tax revenues in Lüneburg were much higher, so it was always the first choice. The two sovereign dukes were customarily referred to by the name of their duchy's principal town: the duke of Celle (for Lüneburg) and the duke of Hanover (for Calenberg).

What had seemed unlikely at the time of Sophia's marriage actually transpired. Two of her brothers-in-law died without male issue, and her husband became, in 1679, duke of Hanover. The other surviving brother was none other than George William, her erstwhile fiancé. In the interim he had finally given up bachelorhood and entered into a civil union with Eleanor Desmier d'Olbreuse (1639–1722), a former lady-in-waiting who came from a minor noble family in Poitou in western France. In keeping with the pledge to Ernest Augustus, this union was not, until 1676, a marriage. George William and his mate had one child, Sophia Dorothea (1666–1726).

The two surviving brothers sought to consolidate the House of Brunswick-Lüneburg's political power by ending its choose-your-duchy policy and establishing primogeniture over all its domains. To seal this deal they arranged a marriage to unite their families. The bride was Sophia Dorothea, the groom George Lewis, Ernest Augustus and Sophia's oldest son (and the future King George I of Great Britain and Ireland). It was a *mésalliance* with a capital *M*.¹² George Lewis was the great-grandson of King James I of England and related to the royal houses of France and Denmark and to the premier princely houses of Germany and Holland. Sophia Dorothea was the love child (later legitimated) of a German duke and a complete nobody. The marriage contract was signed on October 24, 1682. Sophia and Ernest Augustus

12. Some might say it was also endogamy with a capital *E*, since Sophia Dorothea and George Lewis were first cousins. But first-cousin marriages were common in early modern Europe. Sophia herself was briefly courted by her first cousin Charles Stuart (the future Charles II of England), a courtship enthusiastically supported by her mother. Brunswick consanguinity was intensified in 1706 when Sophia Dorothea and George Lewis's daughter (also named Sophia Dorothea, 1687–1757) married her first cousin, Frederick William (1688–1740), the future king of Prussia. Their oldest son, and the result of two generations of endogamy, was Frederick the Great (1712–86).

grinned and bore it as the most effective way to ensure their son's eventual inheritance of both duchies.¹³

But Sophia did not know all. Her husband had kept the primogeniture law, which received imperial sanction in 1683, a secret from her until the documents had been signed and sealed. When she found out, she was heartbroken. The new arrangement effectively disinherited all her other sons: Frederick Augustus (1661–90), Maximilian William (1666–1726), Charles Philip (1669–90), Christian (1671–1703), and Ernest Augustus (1674–1728). Now it was highly unlikely that any would ever become sovereign dukes. Unlikelihood became something close to impossibility when, in 1683, George Lewis's wife bore him an heir.¹⁴

Enemy fire solved the primogeniture problem for two of Sophia's sons. Charles Philip died in combat in 1690 in Albania, Frederick Augustus in 1691 in Transylvania. Christian died on active service in 1703, drowning while attempting to ford the Danube. But primogeniture had created a rift between Sophia and her husband, one that never closed. When a plot by Maximilian William to overthrow primogeniture was thwarted, he was put on trial for treason and Sophia briefly under house arrest for not revealing her foreknowledge of the plot. On a happier note, in the interim a good match had been found for Sophia's beloved daughter Sophia Charlotte (1668–1705), who married Prince Frederick of Brandenburg (1657–1713), the future King Frederick I of Prussia, in October 1684.

The purpose of consolidating Brunswick-Lüneburg's power was to achieve a stature that would enable the house to obtain a higher dignity in the empire; namely, for the duke of Hanover to become an elector.¹⁵ This purpose was achieved in March 1692 when the emperor,

13. Their grins were perhaps rendered slightly less forced by the contract's financial provisions. George William agreed to pay Ernest Augustus an annuity of fifty thousand imperial dollars, a balloon payment of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars within six years of the marriage, and the entire amount of the subsidy payments owed to Ernest Augustus by Spain and Holland. *Memoiren der Herzogin Sophie nachmals Kurfürstin von Hannover*, ed. Adolf Köcher (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1879), 190.

14. George Augustus, the future King George II of Great Britain and Ireland (1683–1760).

15. To all but the specialist, the workings of the Holy Roman Empire are as opaque as those of the European Union. A good primer on the empire, its institutions, and politics in the

in exchange for Brunswick money and troops to use in the war against the Ottoman Empire, conferred the electorship on Ernest Augustus.¹⁶ Sophia was now an electress, the highest female dignity in the empire after empress.

But upwardly mobile Brunswick-Lüneburg was soon embarrassed by a scandal. Ignored by her husband, Sophia Dorothea took a lover, Count Philip Christoph von Königsmarck, colonel of the Hanover guards regiment. They were eventually found out, Königsmarck was murdered by overzealous courtiers, and Sophia Dorothea was placed under house arrest in perpetuity. She spent the rest of her life (from September 1694 to November 1726) in a small, moated palace in Ahlden, about twenty-five miles north of Hanover.¹⁷ Sophia, never fond of her daughter-in-law, did not lift a finger to help her.

There was little she could have done anyway. At this or any other time, she had neither access to the Hanover privy council nor knowledge of its deliberations. Women with real political power were rare in seventeenth-century Germany. Sophia had none.¹⁸ But she did have connections, which she used when she could. For example, she helped negotiate a number of politically motivated marriages (her daughter's, for instance); she arranged for her husband to send a small

early modern period is Peter H. Wilson's *The Holy Roman Empire 1495–1806* (London: MacMillan, 1999); on the emperor and electors specifically, 34–45.

16. Because several existing electors steadfastly opposed the conferral, the duke of Hanover's representative did not officially join the college of electors until 1708. The correct nomenclature would actually be "elector of Brunswick-Lüneburg," not "elector of Hanover." But the latter was common usage by the early eighteenth century and has become the standard title. See Georg Schnath, *Streifzüge durch Niedersachsens Vergangenheit: Gesammelte Aufsätze und Vorträge* (Hildesheim: Lax, 1968), 112.

17. Now mostly forgotten, the story of Sophia Dorothea's love affair and punishment was repeatedly retold, in fictional form, from the late eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century. For an overview of the affair itself, see Schnath, *Geschichte*, 2: 121–204; for its literary and filmic echo, see 2: 206–12.

18. Schnath says that Countess von Platen, Sophia's husband's official mistress, did not have any either, despite suggestions that she was a sort of Madame de Pompadour *avant la lettre* (Schnath, *Geschichte*, 2: 484). In her memoirs Sophia briefly mentions two women who did wield real political power as regents during their respective sons' minority: Landgravine Hedwig Sophia of Hesse-Kassel (regent from 1663 to 1670) and Princess Christina Charlotte of East Friesland (regent from 1665 to 1690).

contingent of troops to support her brother Charles Lewis in one of his conflicts with neighboring principalities; she asked for Charles Lewis to lobby the emperor on matters affecting her husband and brothers-in-law; she wrote letters (included verbatim in the memoirs) to her brother-in-law George William to complain about him allowing his low-born wife to be styled “duchess”; she did a little PR for her husband with Louis XIV while she was at the French court; and she intrigued, insubstantially and unsuccessfully, with several courts on behalf of her younger sons in the primogeniture dispute. But Sophia never influenced a significant domestic or foreign policy during the reign of her husband or of her son George Lewis. The latter, for example, frequently ignored her in his negotiations with English diplomats regarding the Protestant succession, even though it was she who was first in line.

The death of Sophia’s husband, on February 2, 1698, inaugurated the final stage of her life. In 1694 her future widow’s income had been increased to twelve thousand imperial dollars a year, making her financially secure. Her dower residence was Herrenhausen palace and its garden, a few miles northwest of Hanover’s wall-enclosed old town. The large, rectilinear Dutch garden was her joy and her ongoing project.¹⁹ She spent many hours walking in it and improving it. Her other chief occupation was her correspondence, mostly notably with her niece Elizabeth Charlotte at the French court (Sophia’s half of the correspondence is, unfortunately, lost) and Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz, who was in the Brunswick dukes’ service in various capacities (librarian, historian, councilor, and envoy) from 1675 to his death in 1716. Several thousand of Sophia’s letters have been published.²⁰ Her letters to Charles Lewis and Leibniz certainly constitute the

19. Herrenhausen looked like a classical French garden to me on my visit (regrettably on a chilly, blustery October afternoon). But Schnath states that mine is a common misconception and that the style is actually Dutch (Schnath, *Streifzüge*, 107–108).

20. Sophia, *Briefwechsel; Briefe der Königin Sophie Charlotte von Preussen und der Kurfürstin Sophie von Hannover an hannoversche Diplomaten*, ed. Richard Doebner (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1905); *Briefe der Kurfürstin Sophie von Hannover an die Raugräfinnen und Raugrafen zu Pfalz*, ed. Eduard Bodemann (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1888); Leibniz (*Sophie*); Bromley (*Collection*), Feder (*Sophie*); and *Die Briefe der Kinder des Winterkönigs*, ed. Karl Hauck (Heidelberg: G. Koester, 1908).

richest mine of anecdote and wit. Regrettably, only a small selection of Sophia's letters exists in English.²¹

The Protestant succession arrived in Hanover—symbolically anyway—on August 14, 1701, when the earl of Macclesfield, the son of a royalist cavalry commander who had fought alongside Sophia's brother Rupert in the English Civil War, appeared to present Sophia with an illuminated copy of the Act of Settlement. The act, which had been passed on June 12, 1701, stipulated that

the most excellent Princess Sophia, electress and duchess of Hanover, daughter of the most excellent Princess Elizabeth, late queen of Bohemia, daughter of our late Sovereign Lord King James the First of happy memory, be and is hereby declared to be the next in succession in the Protestant line ... after his Majesty [King William III] and the Princess Anne of Denmark and in default of issue of the said Princess Anne and his Majesty respectively.²²

There had been no default of issue of Princess Anne. Sadly for Anne, however, her issue was ill-fated. Although she had seventeen pregnancies in the first seventeen years of her marriage, many ended in miscarriage, and only one child survived infancy: William Henry, duke of Gloucester, born in 1689. His death, on July 30, 1700, set in motion the legislative process that resulted in the Act of Settlement. When King William III died on March 8, 1702, Anne became queen. Sophia, now seventy-one years old, was next in line to the throne. By order of Queen Anne's council, Sophia's name was inserted into the Book of Common Prayer. But as already stated at the start of this introduction, Sophia died seven weeks before Anne. In the words of the Act of Settlement, it was therefore one of the "heirs of her body," her

21. Lloyd Strickland includes about two dozen of Sophia's letters (most of them to Leibniz) in Sophia, *Leibniz*. Josephine Duggan includes several of Sophia's letters in their entirety and quotes extensively from more than twenty in her biography, *Sophia of Hanover: From Winter Princess to Heiress of Great Britain, 1630–1714* (London: Peter Owen, 2010).

22. *English Historical Documents, 1660–1714*, vol. 8, ed. Andrew Browning (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), 132.

oldest son George Lewis, who acquired “all the honours, styles, titles, regalities, prerogatives, powers, jurisdictions, and authorities” belonging and appertaining to the monarch of Great Britain and Ireland.²³ When the court moved from Hanover to London, Sophia’s favorite place, Herrenhausen garden, was made open to the public, as it remains today.

The Memoirs

1680, in which Sophia turned fifty, was to be a year of loss. Her sister Elizabeth died in February, followed in August by Charles Lewis, her brother, surrogate father, and closest friend. Sophia called her correspondence with him, which began in 1658 when she left Heidelberg after her wedding, one of the greatest pleasures in her life. In late October 1680 Sophia experienced another loss when her husband Ernest Augustus left Hanover for one of his many extended stays in Italy. It was in the four months following his departure that Sophia wrote her memoirs, the last page of which is dated February 21, 1681. In a way, Sophia’s memoirs and Descartes’s method were created under similar circumstances. Like Descartes, Sophia was in Germany at the beginning of winter, had no conversation to divert her (Charles Lewis was gone permanently, Ernest Augustus temporarily), stayed alone all day, and had the leisure to entertain herself with her own thoughts.²⁴ Deprived of epistolary dialogue with Charles Lewis, she turned to the monologue of life-writing. She asked for her letters to him to be returned to her and used them to refresh her memory as she wrote. Yet what was so personal for Sophia—a time of mourning and relative isolation—in fact constituted fairly common circumstances under which early modern nobles (both male and female) drafted

23. *Historical Documents*, 8: 132.

24. René Descartes, *A Discourse of a Method for the well guiding of Reason, and the Discovery of Truth in the Sciences* (London: Thomas Newcombe, 1649), 15. Of isolation, the duchess of Montpensier writes: “Alone is of course relative for a duchess.” We can assume that even while writing her memoirs Sophia had one or more of her ladies-in-waiting in the room with her. “Not only is this state highly conducive to recalling events in order, but one finds the necessary leisure to write them down” (Anne-Marie-Louise d’Orléans, duchess of Montpensier, *Memoirs*, trans. Philip J. Yarrow, ed. William Brooks, London: MHRA, 2010, 1).

their memoirs. Henri de Campion (1613–63), for example, had recently lost his granddaughter; Catherine de La Guette (1613–76), her husband, two daughters, and a son.²⁵ Although Sophia would survive her brother and sister by thirty-four years, in the last paragraph of the memoirs she writes that a chronic pain in her spleen suggests she might soon follow them to the grave. The proximity of death and, concomitantly, a more intense awareness of one's own mortality were (and likely are) typical triggers for life-writing. Bernard Beugnot describes memoir writing as a response to loss and lack as the expression of a "will to reconstruct."²⁶ This, I think, can be taken in two senses: the will to reconstruct one's past life as a text and, by doing so, to begin the process of constructing a new life under altered circumstances.

It is hardly surprisingly, therefore, that Sophia saw the practice of life-writing as life-preserving. She states at the beginning of the memoirs that her aim is to "amuse myself during my husband's absence, to fend off melancholy, and to buoy my spirits. For I am convinced that cheerfulness preserves health as well as life, which is very dear to me."²⁷ The act of recalling and transcribing the past is a form of self-prescribed mood therapy and, ultimately, self-preservation. Yet this seemingly intensely personal justification is itself a topos. For self-diversion (*se divertir*) and self-amusement (*s'amuser*) are typical stated aims of the early modern memoirist (the first paragraph of Henri de Campion's memoirs reads much the same as that of Sophia's).²⁸ Frédéric Briot points out that the verb "divert" should be read to some degree literally. Life-writing marks a caesura in the early modern memoirist's life, a point at which it diverts from its previous path and takes a new direction.²⁹ In the case of Sophia and a number of other contemporary life-writers, this change is brought on by the death of close family members.

25. Frédéric Briot, *Usage du monde, usage de soi: Enquête sur les mémorialistes d'Ancien Régime* (Paris: Seuil, 1994), 227–28.

26. Bernard Beugnot, "Livre de raison, livre de retraite," in *Les valeurs chez les mémorialistes français du XVII^e siècle avant la Fronde*, ed. Noemi Hepp and Jacques Hennequin (Paris: Klincksiek, 1979), 51.

27. Page 33.

28. Henri de Campion, *Mémoires*, ed. M. C. Moreau (Paris: Jannet, 1857), 1.

29. Briot, *Usage*, 237.

As a rule, early modern memoirs were not written for a wide readership and certainly not for publication. They were by nature private and intended for a small, select group—until a member of this group ignored the author’s wishes and gave the manuscript (or a copy) to a publisher.³⁰ Henri de Campion and Théodore Agrippa d’Aubigné (1552–1630), for example, intended their memoirs for their children. In Sophia’s case there was no intended readership. She states in the first paragraph that her memoirs are for herself alone. Admittedly, this statement is to some degree posturing (if one is writing only for oneself then why state that fact?) and to some degree a disavowal of liability (potential readers should know that they are reading something not meant for them). But she was also drawing a distinction between her memoirs and writing intended for publication. And, with a single exception, she seems to have meant it. She never mentions the memoirs in her correspondence and is known to have shown them to only one person: Leibniz. He made a copy in his own hand (the original in Sophia’s hand is lost), and it was this copy that was found in the Hanover archives in 1850.³¹ The evidence therefore suggests that after writing her memoirs Sophia gave little thought to them. So in this sense the project was what she said it was: a four-month antidote to melancholy.

With self-amusement the putative purpose of Sophia’s project, it may therefore seem curious that she is so anxious to set the historical record straight on a whole range of issues relating to herself and the houses of Palatine and Brunswick-Lüneburg. On some, she goes to the trouble of providing documentary evidence: she painstakingly transcribes the entire text of letters and contracts that support her contentions. On others, the memoirs serve as her own deposition. In

30. Briot, *Usage*, 33 and 31.

31. Here are Leibniz’s somewhat pedantic, but ultimately complimentary, “Reflections on the duchess’s memoirs”: “1. The orthography is irregular, although in truth this hardly matters and can be remedied by a [corrected] copy being made. 2. The style seems simple but has a wonderful power and, despite its apparent nonchalance, has something of what Longinus calls the sublime. Even when the subject matter seems ordinary, it is rendered in a certain admirable way ... 3. The tenses (for example, the perfect tense and the imperfect tense) are often mixed up” (Sophia, *Memoiren*, 3; my translation). Van der Cruysse contends that Sophia’s orthography was generally better than Leibniz’s (Sophia, *Mémoires et lettres de voyage*, ed. Dirk Van der Cruysse. Paris: Fayard, 1990, 19).

one sense, the gesture of providing documentary evidence is an index of how important an issue is to Sophia (for example, the contract under which her one-time fiancé pledged to remain unmarried for the rest of his life and to allow his younger brother to marry Sophia in his place). In a broader sense, however, correcting the historical record is a central motive of early modern (and many present-day) memoirs: I was there; I know the truth.³² Yet if Sophia is writing for herself alone, why not just assert her point of view and refer to documents instead of dutifully (obsessively?) transcribing them verbatim? After all, before 1850 no one besides Leibniz benefited from her high evidentiary standards. One possible explanation is that Sophia, in her desire to shape posterity's (or at least a potential reader's) opinion, is like other early modern female memoirists, whose "private musings" may not seem to be "destined for public consumption" but who "clearly inscribe a public into their works and advance them as additions to the collective memory."³³

Scholars have identified a greater focus on the private sphere as one of the defining—and innovative—characteristics of early modern female memoirists:

They situated the roots of personhood in the experiences of childhood (a phase of existence that men memoirists almost never described). They delved into their relationships with parents and siblings, the physical and psychological changes of adolescence, and the pivotal significance of marriage. Abandoning the pursuit of history that characterized masculine memoirs,

32. Briot, *Usage*, 86; Patricia Francis Cholakian, *Women and the Politics of Self-Representation in Seventeenth-Century France* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1990), 37–38.

33. Faith E. Beasley, "Altering the Fabric of History: Women's Participation in the Classical Age," in *A History of Women's Writing in France*, ed. Sonya Stephens (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 76–77. As Briot points out, however, memoirs by both men and women were in most cases intended as "private musings" and not for publication (Briot, *Usage*, 33).

they turned from the public sector to the private, creating a new kind of life-writing.³⁴

This characterization also applies to Sophia, although, in my view, with some restrictions. Yes, she writes about her childhood and youth, about her relationship with her mother and siblings, and about private matters like her physical suffering during childbirth, her miscarriages, and her husband's infidelity. Yet I can discern no self-analytical moment in which Sophia asserts, or even hints, that she is including an anecdote because it shaped her personality (or personhood). Rather, her principle for selecting an anecdote for inclusion would seem to be its dramatic or entertainment potential; her reminiscences of her childhood in particular amount to one humorous scene after another. Also, it would be incorrect to infer that writing about private (and even extremely private) matters was unique to early modern women. Like Sophia's own letters, those of her brothers (particularly those of Charles Lewis to Sophia, his mother, and his second wife) are filled with the minutiae of family and private life.³⁵ And although it is indeed unlikely that Charles Lewis would have included these intimate details in his memoirs, the distinction loses some of its precision when one considers that early modern memoirs (typically written for a restricted social group, such as the author's children) constituted an only marginally more public type of writing than letters (typically written for one person, although often read by several; Sophia, for example, likely shared at least portions of her personal correspondence with her husband, ladies-in-waiting, and possibly other courtiers). In this sense, Sophia's letters—which at least had a readership during her lifetime—were more public than her memoirs.

At the beginning of her memoirs Sophia describes each move in the ornate choreography of bows and curtsies that she and her

34. Cholakian, *Women*, 43. See also Beasley, "Altering," 76: "In contrast to previous examples of the genre, women's memoirs have a more interiorized perspective, are occasionally introspective, and focus on aspects of life considered unimportant for the historical record—women's activities in the 'private' and public realm."

35. Charles Lewis's letters to Sophia are printed in Sophia, *Briefwechsel*; to his mother, in Bromley, *Collection*; to his second wife, in *Schreiben des Kurfürsten Karl Ludwig von der Pfalz und der Seinen*, ed. Wilhelm Ludwig Holland (Tübingen: Litterarischer Verein, 1884).

sibling princesses and princes performed every day before dinner at their boarding school in Leiden. She even announces her cumulative curtsy count—nine—for this ritual. Although the dinner hour provided Sophia with a break from her lessons, it also drilled her, relentlessly, in court etiquette and protocol. It is not surprising, then, that protocol—precedence and deference—is a central theme in her memoirs. Just as her description of the children's preprandial ritual is a catalog of curtsies given and received, the memoirs as a whole are a catalog of the honors Sophia gives (or refuses to give) and those she receives (or is denied). Briot finds early modern memoirists' preoccupation with matters of precedence to be "the most impersonal" sections of their writing.³⁶ I disagree. Such matters are central to, and in a real way constitutive of, a noble's identity. To paraphrase Norbert Elias: a duchess who is not treated like a duchess is almost no longer a duchess.³⁷ In the case of Sophia and other female memoirists, the preoccupation may even be more pronounced. Unlike her husband, Sophia cannot achieve glory as a soldier or statesman. But she can—and does—revel in the glory of her rank and the honors she receives at courts across Germany and Europe. Owing to the centrality of rank and honor to Sophia's sense of self, it is worthwhile, I believe, taking a closer look at some of the nuances of protocol (and its temporary suspension), which might otherwise escape a modern reader's notice.

When Sophia writes that a duke or other noble anticipated her arrival in a town by riding (usually with a large entourage) some distance outside the town to meet her, she is not just narrating events in the order they occurred. She is drawing attention to the fact that her host exceeded the requirements of protocol in order to demonstrate esteem or affection for her.³⁸ The same applies to a range of other

36. Briot, *Usage*, 117.

37. "Ein Herzog, der nicht wohnt, wie ein Herzog zu wohnen hat, der also auch die gesellschaftlichen Verpflichtungen eines Herzogs nicht mehr ordentlich erfüllen kann, ist schon fast kein Herzog mehr." Norbert Elias, *Die höfische Gesellschaft: Untersuchungen zur Soziologie des Königtums und der höfischen Aristokratie* (1969; repr., Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1994), 99.

38. The duchess of Montpensier announces proudly in her memoirs that her father, Gaston of Orleans, "came as far as Chambord, ten miles from Blois, to meet me" (Montpensier, *Memoirs*, 7).

symbolic acts that Sophia recounts with precision and pride: when nobles of superior rank rise and cross a threshold to receive her, when they accompany her to her room when the audience is finished, or when they refuse to allow her to accompany them back to their room (which would normally be her duty). The degree of meticulousness with which Sophia catalogs these details correlates to the renown of the court she is visiting and reaches its apogee in the account of her visit to the French court in 1679. Among the highlights were Sophia being allowed to take precedence over—that is, walk ahead of—royalty and higher-ranking nobles during a tour of St. Cloud palace and gardens; the queen of Spain (the duke of Orleans's daughter) sitting on a simple taboret in Sophia's presence instead of on the armchair due her rank; and the king of France entering a room, brushing aside members of the royal family, and announcing that it is Sophia he has come to talk to.³⁹ Each rule of protocol purposely suspended, each prerogative purposely foregone, adds to Sophia's glory and is therefore proudly recalled and documented.

Two other suspensions of protocol are frequent features of Sophia's memoirs: the court game known as *Wirtschaft* (the German word for "inn") and the practice of traveling incognito. In a *Wirtschaft*, the host and hostess at a court (for example, the duke and duchess of Württemberg at a gathering in Stuttgart in 1651 that Sophia describes) pretend to be an innkeeper and his wife, and their guests pretend to be travelers who have stopped at the inn. For the time and space circumscribed by the game, no one takes precedence, no one shows deference, and everyone can sit, stand, or circulate where and as they like. Indeed, the game temporarily inverts the symbolic order: the host and hostess personally serve the guests their drinks, something they would of course never do under normal circumstances. A *Wirtschaft* provided welcome relief from the constraints of court

39. For a detailed explanation—including a helpful matrix—of who had the right to sit in what type of chair (and who had to remain standing) in the presence of the different members of the French royal family and ranks of nobility, see Henri Brocher, *À la cour de Louis XIV. Le rang et l'étiquette sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1934), 24–34.

etiquette through a fiction—travelers meeting at an inn—that clearly marked the relief as temporary.⁴⁰

If fictional travel offered relief from etiquette, actual travel often made it prudent to seek relief. Outside Germany Sophia usually traveled incognito. This does not mean she was wearing a disguise (although during carnival in Italy she, like everyone else, was often masked). It meant she was traveling not as what she was (a duchess of the Holy Roman Empire) but simply as a person of quality. This was sensible for several reasons. First, it saved money by obviating the need for taking along an entourage commensurate with one's rank or dignity. Second, it simplified encounters with other nobles by eliminating potential sources of affront. Third, it prevented precedents from being set. For example, German princes saw the king of France and the Holy Roman emperor as rough equivalents and therefore believed they ought to receive the same honors from the king that they received from the emperor, such as the right to sit in an armchair in the king's presence. But the king of France did not recognize titles conferred by another sovereign and therefore did not grant the honors that appertained to them.⁴¹ The solution, chosen by Sophia and hundreds of other foreign nobles, was to visit France incognito. By not claiming their title they could avoid the insult of not receiving the honors they believed they were due. Conversely, the king of France could grant an honor—as he did to Sophia—without setting a precedent, since he was granting it to an individual person of quality rather than to a certain rank of foreign nobility.

Something else Sophia frequently did while traveling was to attend the seventeenth-century equivalent of a beauty pageant. Then, no less so than today, women's faces and bodies were continually the objects of a variety of gazes: aesthetic appraisal, aesthetic appraisal combined with (or serving as an excuse for) sexual stimulation,

40. A similar, but more narrowly circumscribed game was played at the royal court of Denmark, which Sophia visited several times. Here, the guests drew lots to determine the seating order at supper, which otherwise would have been determined by rank. The queen drew a lot like everyone else, but the king did not and always took his place at the head of the table. Perhaps he was uncomfortable with the symbolism of his divinely ordained place being occupied by someone else.

41. Brocher, *À la cour de Louis XIV*, 18–19.

undisguised sexual stimulation, and so forth. But in an era that did not have the technology to mass-produce and mass-distribute images of women, would-be gazers (unless they were content with a painting or drawing) sought out places where gazing opportunities were maximized through aggregation: dances and convents. Sophia recounts her participation in women-watching rituals in Rotterdam, Osnabrück, Milan, Vincenza, Bologna, and Venice. Arriving in Milan, for example, she learns that a ball is being held at which she might appraise the beauty of the town's female nobility; curiosity winning out over fatigue, she attends the ball and finds the ladies worth the exertion. In Bologna a ball is organized for the express purpose of mustering the town's ladies for Sophia's inspection.⁴² In Venice she is taken to a convent to see several girls who, in their parents' opinion, are too beautiful to be seen by men before they are married.⁴³

On a smaller scale than a dance or a convent, Sophia's own entourage is a gaze-attracting aggregation of young women. For although her ladies-in-waiting also fulfilled other functions (like serving as entertaining conversational partners for Sophia and as a pool of potential wives for senior Hanoverian ministers and military officers), one of their main functions was to look good. At the start of Sophia's trip to Italy, for example, her husband tasks her with hiring two new and comely ladies-in-waiting in order to upgrade the pulchritude of her entourage so that it will make a bigger splash in Italy. The noble tourist, then, avidly views local large-scale displays of female beauty and also travels with her own small-scale display.

If such an entourage and ritualized gazing imply competition with other women, such competition was explicit from the beginning of Sophia's life and is a prominent theme of her memoirs. It started within her own family when she was retrieved from their boarding school in Leiden to join her mother's court in The Hague. She asserts that she was "not at all disconcerted to take my place beside three older sisters, all prettier and more accomplished than myself," although she reports a few paragraphs later that she was highly gratified to overhear English noblemen say that she would, when grown up,

42. This also serves to indicate Sophia's celebrity: when she arrives, the local nobility organizes the equivalent of a beauty pageant for her entertainment.

43. Sophia, *Mémoires*, 187.