5 Luise Ulrike of Prussia, Queen of Sweden, and the search for political space

Elise Derminque and Svante Norrhem

It is a common assumption that the queen consort of a ruling sovereign did not have any overt political power and responsibilities. She had no dynastic rights in her adoptive country, nor had she been elected to rule. Indeed, her primary duty lay mainly in the continuity of the dynasty through the production of an heir — in most politics a male heir — to the crown. But many queens consort used their privileged position to convey their own political agenda through informal channels, and therefore challenged the traditional norms and expectations of what can be called ‘consortship’. Among these informal channels, culture and cultural patronage, satellite organisations and networks were not only key instruments in the challenge to the traditional order and to the norms of the court but also gendered spaces of expression and influence located on the margins. Some historians have referred to this phenomenon as soft power, or parallel diplomacy, and have shown the strategies deployed by certain women at court.

In this chapter, we discuss Lovisa Ulrika of Sweden (1720–1782, Queen Consort 1751–1771), born Princess Luise Ulrike of Prussia, as an example of how a royal consort who wished to play a political role could find ways to circumvent obstacles that were attributable to her gender. Indeed, more was expected of her than being the passive wife. Her brother Frederick II of Prussia expected her to represent Prussian interests, and Voltaire, a family friend, expressed a wish that she would further the Enlightenment in Sweden. In her new country, there were other people who hoped that a new princess would bring them social, cultural and political opportunities. Since 1741, when Queen Ulrika Eleonora died, there had been no female member of the royal family, which in 1744 consisted only of King Fredrik I (1676–1741) and the Crown Prince Adolf Friedrich of Holstein-Gottorp (1710–1771). The arrival of a crown princess led to the appointment of court officials and the refurbishment and redecoration of the palaces. This, along with other expectations, brought with it hopes of social advancement within both the nobility and among the artisans. Others may have feared the possible influence of a Prussian princess at the Swedish court. Adolf Friedrich had been elected after much political turbulence only the year before he married Luise Ulrike. One faction had strongly advocated the election of the Danish crown prince as Swedish heir. To manage the disappointment among this group, as well as mollify the Danes, Sweden had suggested that the new heir should marry the Danish princess Luise, a plan which failed because of opposition from Luise’s father. With the marriage between Adolf Friedrich and Luise Ulrike the advocates of a Danish union were even further from their goal. While Luise Ulrike’s appearance in Sweden raised hopes for some, for others it caused concern. The expectations people had of her could therefore work both to her advantage and against her.

This chapter argues that from her arrival in Sweden in 1744 up to the failed coup d’état in June 1756 (which aimed at increasing royal prerogatives by force), Luise Ulrike used and created cultural spaces in order to garner support for a change in the Swedish political system. She created alternative spaces, which she controlled and used for her own political agenda and to draw followers around her. She aimed to make herself an omnipresent actor in a field that did not limit her actions because of her sex.

What has been called the spatial turn in historical studies has led to a great discussion of the use of space. Many scholars make a distinction between ‘space’ and ‘place’ but the terms are often defined differently. For our purposes we use the term ‘space’ for entities that are not bound to a specific locality, such as the court, whereas ‘place’ is used for physical places, such as a palace.

In this essay we wish to explore what Luise Ulrike’s role was: an agent acting mostly independently, an instrument of others, or a catalyst who created the opportunity for others to act. We explore how she used cultural structures to obtain political goals, and how her actions relate to those of other contemporary queens consort.

Politics in the Age of Liberty in Sweden

Luise Ulrike arrived in Sweden in the summer of 1744. There, the old and childless King Fredrik I had reigned for nearly 24 years. Luise Ulrike’s new husband, the Crown Prince Adolf Friedrich of Holstein-Gottorp, recently elected to the Vasa throne by the four Estates of the kingdom, would succeed him at his death and be crowned King of Sweden. The Swedish monarchy, however, had been confronted by a complex and difficult situation since its defeat in the Great Northern War (1700–1721) and found itself in a delicate position, deprived of many of its traditional royal prerogatives. Defeat had precipitated the fall of absolute monarchy and its replacement by a parliamentary monarchy. This had no equivalent in 18th-century Europe: in England and the United Provinces, for instance, the monarch shared power with parliament, whereas in Sweden the parliament was elective, its representatives drawn from the four estates of the nobility, the clergy, the burghe and the peasants. The parliamentary assembly — the Riksdag — met every three years and, with the nobility, held power. Because the king had little in the way of independent power the position of Adolf Friedrich, and therefore that of Luise Ulrike, was uncomfortable: the monarch’s hands were tied by the constitution that had been drafted after the defeat, reducing his prerogatives to almost nothing, and the four estates decided most of the kingdom’s affairs. A survey of the complex political situation is critical in order to understand Luise Ulrike’s political agenda and aims.
Sweden in the long 17th century

In the 17th century, Sweden had emerged as a key actor on the European stage. Several Baltic territories were conquered during the reign of Gustav II Adolf (1594–1632), and the Thirty Years War in particular turned Sweden not only into a champion of the Protestant cause in Europe but also into an empire—albeit an exclusively European one, with the exception of a few short-lived possessions overseas. The conquered Baltic territories, although modest in size, proved to be both economically significant and a rampart against Sweden's neighbours. The combined effect of this expansion, the victories earned on the battlefield, the necessary centralisation of resources and the personality of the Swedish monarchs in the 17th century led to a stronger monarchy, a system often referred to as Swedish absolutism.

This golden age of the Swedish monarchy did not last very long, however, mostly because of the hostility of Sweden's neighbours. Swedish expansion and control in the Baltic region caused much resentment in Russia, Poland and Denmark, who engaged in negotiations for the formation of a triple alliance against Sweden. The Great Northern War began in 1700 and ended 20 years later with the defeat of Sweden and the death of King Karl XII (1682–1718) on the battlefield. All hopes of preserving Sweden's status and empire had now completely vanished.

Domestic politics after the defeat

After the heavy defeat Sweden ceded its rich provinces around the Baltic to Russia in the Treaty of Nystad (1721) and the major part of Pomerania to Prussia and Bremen-Verden to Hanover in the Treaties of Stockholm (1719–1720). The death of King Karl XII in 1718 created a serious political crisis which centred on two issues. First, Karl XII died childless, and two contenders for the throne rapidly emerged: his nephew Karl Friedrich, Duke of Holstein-Gottorp (1700–1739), and the king's sister Ulrika Eleonora (1688–1741). The young duke was the most legitimate heir apparent because of his gender, but his aunt moved faster and claimed the right to succeed her brother. Her husband Friedrich, Landgrave of Hessen-Kassel (1676–1751), an officer in the army of Karl XII, obtained the army's support for her.

The second issue in the crisis was the end to absolutism in Sweden. The power vacuum following the unexpected death of Karl XII led to a strong reaction from the four orders making up the Riksdag, most notably the nobles. After a long period of 'forced lethargy' during the absolutist reigns of Karl XI and Karl XII, and resentment caused by the Great Reduction (1680), the four orders were now resolved to seize power. As Ulrika Eleonora's rights to the crown were contestable, the four estates played the role of mediator and dictated a new constitution in exchange for her election. On 21 February 1719 the Riksdag proclaimed Ulrika Eleonora queen of Sweden at the price of encroachment into several royal prerogatives. The new constitution allocated considerable legislative power to the Estates, which were to meet every three years.

Early on, the queen, who was inclined to be both haughty and inflexible, failed to get along with the councillors of the riksråd (royal council). To resolve the crisis, Arvid Horn (1664–1742), lantmarskalk and chancellor, invited her to abdicate in favour of her spouse, Friedrich of Hessen-Kassel, a course of action which she assented to reluctantly after much pressure. On 4 April 1720 Friedrich was elected to the Vasa throne and became King Fredrik I. A new constitution was adopted, reducing the monarch's power yet further and leaving him only president of the council (in which he had two votes and the deciding vote in the case of a stalemate) and reduced his role to simply signing the decrees voted by the Riksdag. This switch from autocracy to constitutionalism opened a period often referred to as the Age of Liberty (1719–1772). King Fredrik I accepted the new state of affairs and never found himself in a position to claim greater rights or to restore a more powerful monarchy.

The war against Russia (1741–1743)

As the four estates decided on most of the kingdom's affairs, a new political landscape ultimately saw the emergence of a dual political party system. The two political parties, the Hats (hatter) and the Caps (mössor), rotten with corruption and showered with foreign gold, fought one another violently throughout the period to control Swedish institutions, especially the royal council. In this 'Age of Liberty', the monarchy, exposed to both foreign intrusion into its affairs and to a restrictive constitution, had very little power or room for manoeuvre. In the Riksdag of 1738 the Hats came to power largely due to French subsidies. The Hats' international policy was aimed principally at revenge on the Russians and towards retaking the lost Baltic territories. Many of these young Hats dreamed of washing away the insult of the Great Northern War and of recovering Sweden's past glory.

When the War of the Austrian Succession broke out, therefore, the Hats responded enthusiastically to the French offer to attack Russia, which was experiencing great internal turmoil. Tsarina Anna (1693–1740) had just died in October 1740, leaving the throne to her adopted heir Ivan VI (1740–1741), her three-month-old-nephew. In December 1741, Ivan VI's other aunt, Elisabeth (1709–1762), overthrew him after a coup d'état. The Swedes took their chance and declared war in July 1741, but endured a heavy defeat in battle. By the end of 1742, the Russian troops occupied almost all of Finland and had definitively ruined the Hats' dreams of glory.

News of this shameful defeat plunged Stockholm into a climate of near civil war. The Riksdag convened an emergency assembly and difficult peace negotiations opened with the victors. Russia was in a position of strength and saving Finland appeared to be a most arduous task for the Swedish negotiators. Meanwhile, the Hats, responsible for the defeat, tried to create a diversion and brought to the table the subject of the succession, all the more so because queen
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when the peasants of Dalarna rose against Adolf Friedrich's election and began to march on Stockholm, asking that the throne be given to the crown prince of Denmark instead. The revolt was quelled only by the use of force. Adolf Friedrich thus found himself in an uncomfortable situation; he had made enemies abroad who were contesting his election but he also had enemies within his own new country. Both his position and his promised crown were undoubtedly fragile. One obvious solution to affirming his rights was to deliver an heir to the throne as quickly as possible. This was the most obvious way in which Luise Ulrike could contribute. In addition to securing the dynasty, a defensive alliance with Prussia would discourage and prevent foreign intrusion and bring stability in the region. In 1744, on the eve of her departure for Sweden, Luise Ulrike was asked by her brother Frederick II to help in the alliance negotiations.

Second, after extensive conversations with Frederick II and his advisors, Luise Ulrike became absolutely convinced that political dissension in Sweden could be mended through a stronger monarchy. The two parties of the Hats and Caps and their ferocious political opposition had had a deleterious effect on Swedish politics for several years now, which had led not only to disastrous decisions (the war against Russia and its ensuing defeat in 1743, for example) but also to a definitive loss of status on the European stage. Additionally, both political parties received much financial support from abroad that fuelled their divisions further and reinforced their corruption. The princess was convinced that the monarch should stand above them and provide unity (most often referred to later on as 'union') and concord.8 The notion of union and concord is a recurrent theme in Luise Ulrike's vision of the monarchy. One can find these terms frequently appearing in her letters, especially her letters to her family in Prussia. She also used the notion of union and concord through visual representation – see, for instance, the chivalric order discussed below. But in order to bring concord to the country, the rights of the monarchy had first to be widely reinforced, and this could not happen if the royal family found itself isolated. Luise Ulrike, therefore, did not waste time and began to gather support around her and the crown prince. Loyalty from key political actors and courtiers would help to strengthen the monarchy but would also contribute to securing Adolf Friedrich's crown.

Political ideology

Luise Ulrike's appeal for a stronger monarchy can be explained by her authoritarian personality, and also by her upbringing and background. The princess was born in 1720, a military state where her father King Friedrich Wilhelm I exercised supreme control over the kingdom, and for whom the sovereign's authority could not be subject to any opposition.9 Fluent in French and tutored by Huguenots, Luise Ulrike immersed herself in the history of the French monarchy, an example of absolutism in Europe since Louis XIV. In her library at Drottningholm, Luise Ulrike collected many French history books including several biographies of French kings. For the young princess, therefore, a monarchy with the executive, legislative and judicial powers in the hands of

Luise Ulrike: From Prussia to Sweden

In 1744 Luise Ulrike married the newly elected crown prince of Sweden Adolf Friedrich of Holstein-Gottorp by proxy. When she disembarked in Sweden, she found the Swedish monarchy powerless, its most influential political actors corrupt, a country that had become a minor power with very little influence in international affairs and which was indebted to Russia. The glorious days of the Thirty Years War were gone for good. This was a situation that Luise Ulrike intended to change radically.

The young princess left Berlin with two clear objectives in mind. First, Luise Ulrike had to contribute to securing Adolf Friedrich's promised crown. The successor to the throne owed his election largely to the pressure exerted by Russia on the Swedish Estates after a fierce competition between several foreign pretenders. To make things worse, strong discontent emerged within the kingdom

consort Ulrika Eleonora had died in November 1741, leaving her childless ageing husband on the throne with no successor. Heated debates surrounded the issue of the succession at the Riksdag. Foreign powers exerted pressure, putting forward their own candidates, and their ambassadors worked intensively behind the scenes. France favoured the candidacy of one of Luise Ulrike's former suitors, the duke of Zweibrücken. Denmark dreamed of seeing their crown prince on the Swedish throne with the prospect of reviving the Kalmar union, i.e. three Scandinavian crowns on one head. Finally the King, Fredrik I, lobbed for a Hessen-Kassel candidate, putting forward his brother Wilhelm and his nephew Friedrich. England supported Friedrich, because he had married a daughter of King George II of Great Britain. It became clear that the succession question had the potential to help settle the issue of Finland, so the Riksdag deputies adroitly decided to offer the throne to Karl Peter Ulrich of Holstein-Gottorp (1728-1762), nephew of the Russian Empress.7 He was also the son of Karl Friedrich of Holstein-Gottorp, who had died in 1739, and grandson of Hedvig Sophia, the elder daughter of Karl XI. By electing him, the Riksdag would put on the throne a descendant of one of their former kings, but also the nephew of Elisabeth of Russia, the son of her sister Tsarina Anna. A special embassy was dispatched to Moscow to announce the good news to the lucky candidate who was then rejoicing at his aunt's court.

But as the Swedish envoys arrived in Russia, they learned, much to their surprise, that Elisabeth had just chosen Karl Peter Ulrich to succeed her on the Russian throne as the future Peter III. Always resourceful, the Tsarina put forward the name of her own cousin Adolf Friedrich of Holstein-Gottorp (1710-1771), Prince Bishop of Eutin. It became clear that, if he was to be elected king of Sweden, Elisabeth would be accommodating at Åbo (Turku) where peace was being negotiated. In August 1743, the peace between the two countries was signed. Sweden would retain most of Finland and lose territory only in the southern provinces; Adolf Friedrich was chosen to succeed the old Swedish king with the hereditary right to the throne for his heirs.
the monarch was nothing more than an expression of the natural order of society, something she expressed in her correspondence with her family.16

In her eyes, the political system in place in Sweden since the death of Karl XII represented a monstrous and unnatural abomination that needed to be corrected by all means. Her concept of monarchy was strongly linked to glory acquired through warfare. She had much more sympathy for the great Swedish warrior kings such as Gustav II Adolf, the hero of the Thirty Years War, knight of the Protestant cause, whose reputation remained high in 18th-century Prussia. She had his biography by Pufendorf (1697) in her library.11 Also in her library at Drottningholm was Voltaire’s biography of the Swedish king, Karl XII, the last absolutist monarch, which aroused her interest in Swedish history and its warrior kings.12 Luise Ulrike had read Voltaire’s work and it probably constituted the basis of her knowledge of Swedish history.13 Frederick II, incidentally, echoed Voltaire and wrote an essay on the Swedish king himself, an essay that his sister was likely to have read. In this piece, the concept of sovereignty is closely related to military success, an approach that Luise Ulrike embraced and would encourage while in Stockholm.14

A political goal

This idea of increasing royal prerogatives and power was an ideal which Luise fervently pursued throughout her life in Sweden. But exactly what kind of royal powers did she envision? Many of her detractors have accused her of aiming to restore absolutism. Her correspondence with her family in Berlin shows that she did have in mind royal prerogatives amounting to a form of absolutism and that her models were Prussia and Sweden under Karl XII, a sort of enlightened absolutism.15

It is worth noting, however, that she never stated clearly what she intended to do once that goal became concrete. Did she have a deeper political agenda or a programme for the country? If she did, she never set it out clearly. It seemed nonetheless that the princess understood the necessity of restoring the traditional rights of the monarch in order to avoid what she called ‘disorders’. Indeed, the flux of subsidies coming from different directions (France, England and Russia, for instance) exposed the country to foreign interference and corruption and left very little room for Sweden to design its own foreign policies, a royal prerogative in Luise Ulrike’s mind. Additionally, the incessant feud between the two main political parties engendered much disorder and disunion and reflected badly on the country’s image. Mending the political dissension between them through the absolute supremacy of the monarch over the two parties would not only restore the king’s supreme authority but also pacify the country, too often subjected to the convulsions of the Riksdag every three years. Luise Ulrike made the motto of ‘union’ recurrent both in her discourse but also in the symbols she chose during her reign.

Gender and absolutism

To Luise Ulrike these goals were not incompatible with her sex. Absolutism reinforced the exclusion of queens consort from any political authority and relegated them to strictly reproductive and domestic functions.16 As she pushed to turn this idea into a reality, she did not foresee herself as politically inactive once her plan had taken shape. She was convinced that Adolf Friedrich, in whose hands all political power would lie, would still listen to her sound advice, allowing her to act from behind the scenes or perhaps jointly with him.17 Such ambition lurks beneath the surface of Luise Ulrike’s abundant correspondence. Therefore, when her son Gustav III (1771–1792) managed to increase royal authority and prerogatives in 1772, we can explain the friction between son and mother as the result of Gustav’s will for political independence, which led to Luise Ulrike’s political ostracism. But before this non-violent revolution, his mother prepared the ground for change. What were the political tools she used in order to pursue her goal?

The political tools of a consort: Spaces and places

A power base at court: The first supporters

One of the major problems in 18th-century Swedish politics was the lack of noble support for the crown. In Luise Ulrike’s opinion, the nobility could and should protect the interests of the monarchy.

A rapprochement with the dominant Hats party constituted the core of Luise Ulrike’s strategy. Since 1738, the Hats had dominated Swedish politics and controlled both the Council and the Secret Committee of the Riksdag. The Secret Committee was a group of one hundred representatives of the Riksdag (50 nobles, 25 burghevers and 25 clergymen). It served as an executive branch of the plenum, the full assembly, and handled particular matters. Traditionally pro-French, just like her, and open to change, the Hats embodied Luise Ulrike’s best chance to succeed. Thanks to her new allies, she imagined that upon Adolf Friedrich’s accession, he would swear a different oath to that sworn by Fredrik in 1720 and which would guarantee more rights and latitude for action. With royal prerogatives restored, the king would protect his people from foreign invasion and would make concord prevail over division. Turning the Hats into allies would consequently give her a door into Swedish institutions and a legal channel to implement her political schemes. Moreover, their traditional partnership with France would constitute, she thought, a rampart against Sweden’s bellicose neighbours.

The princess imagined that her plan would be just as appealing to the Hats. In her mind, the attachment to the fatherland and loyalty to the monarch were natural noble values prevailing over any other conceivable concern. Yet, jealous of their prerogatives cropped by the monarchy for decades now, many nobles attached to the Hats party did not have a strong reason to be loyal to their king instead of to a foreign power, which generously showered them with money. There was one exception. These patriots, as they were sometimes called, were
still resentful of the shameful defeat by Russia in 1743 and were willing to free themselves from its grip and tutelage. Additionally, if Adolf Friedrich were to recover some royal prerogatives, they imagined they would still have the right to control appointments to various offices which would mean that they could benefit from the monarch’s increased power by filling the ranks of the new appointees. For the time being the deal appeared quite advantageous.

Luise Ulrike needed a way into the Hats party. She did not even wait to settle in Sweden to search for potential political allies. In Berlin, she met the councillor and count Carl Gustav Tessin (1695–1770), a special Swedish envoy, on the occasion of her proxy wedding, and one of the leaders of the Hats party. The count was undoubtedly one of the most powerful men in Sweden in the 1740s. He had made a lightning ascent in Swedish politics, first as a competent ambassador successfully negotiating important subsidies in Versailles, and then as a political actor. In 1738, he was chosen to become Marshal of the Riksdag on behalf of the Hats party. Because of his multiple appointments, his numerous contacts all over Europe, his political experience, and his widely acclaimed skills as an orator, Tessin was undoubtedly a powerful ally to have. He not only had significant political experience, but also a wide network reaching beyond the Swedish borders. In him, Luise Ulrike recognised immediately both his intelligence and his usefulness and enthusiastically declared him to be ‘the greatest genius’ in Sweden.

Making the most of their journey to Stockholm together, Luise Ulrike and Tessin, both Francophiles, discovered a common passion for the arts and literature. The princess was greatly diverted by his conversation, amused by his humour and extravagance, and deeply touched by his sensibility and the respect he immediately showed for her status. Tessin, in turn, was impressed by the princess’s personality and intelligence and was not completely insensitive to her beauty. A somewhat old-fashioned courtier who had a deep sense of etiquette thanks to his extended stay in Versailles, he never missed an opportunity to please the princess and remind her of the incomparable dignity of her status. The letters they occasionally exchanged for a decade after her arrival in Stockholm show the extent of the count’s deference to her. He spared no effort with the princess, who in turn learned to trust him very quickly. ‘Le comte Tessin est si fort de mes amis que je crois qu’il se ferait brûler plutôt pour moi’ [Count Tessin is very much my friend and I think he would throw himself into the flames for me], she confided to her sister Amalia only a few weeks after she had met him.

Politically, the two quickly agreed on the necessity of protecting Sweden’s integrity and the power of the crown. Perhaps to please the princess and in a moment of courtly chivalry, Tessin exceeded her expectations and lured her with the prospect of a stronger monarchy once Adolf Friedrich ascended the throne. She enthusiastically wrote to her brother Frederick that:

Le comte Tessin, comme vous saurez, est l’idole de la nation et le seul capable de soutenir ce qu’il commence. Il est certain que, si le Prince fait la moindre démarche pour lui qui puisse l’attacher, il fera tout pour changer le gouvernement et le rendre souverain.

[The count Tessin, as you know, is the idol of the nation and the only one capable of finishing what he starts. It is certain that, if the prince makes the smallest effort to attach Tessin to himself, he will do everything to change the government and make it sovereign.]

Whether Tessin was sincere or not is unknown. Luise Ulrike fully succeeded in ‘attaching’ count Tessin to her husband. Not only had the count become the incontrovertible master of amusements at court, but he also managed to gain the confidence of the crown prince. Tessin participated in all-important court events and was invited to all informal gatherings to keep Luise Ulrike and Adolf Friedrich company. In January 1745, only a few months after the princess’s arrival, Tessin was nominated ‘grand maître de la cour’ in the service of her husband. This constituted a double victory for Luise Ulrike: she had placed her best ally in the highest position at court, securing his loyalty in rendering him indebted to her and her family, and she had additionally succeeded in convincing her reluctant husband of Tessin’s loyalty, attachment and usefulness. Incidentally, Tessin’s wife, Ulla Sparre, who had become an intimate friend of the princess, benefited from her husband’s rise and was nominated överhovmästarinne (Mistress of the Princess’s Household) in 1751 to replace Hedvig Elisabeth Strömfelt (1687–1751). The couple’s niece Lotta Sparre also benefited from Tessin’s rise at court and became one of Luise Ulrike’s favourite ladies-in-waiting. Within the court, Tessin and his family became key actors and prime favourites.

The young court, as it was labelled, assembled around Luise Ulrike and Adolf Friedrich rapidly found its style. Tessin fulfilled the role of minister of pleasure and laughter, entertaining the young court with his extravagances.

Il n’y a point un jour où mes filles d’honneur ne soient attirées par quelques niches que le comte Tessin leur fait et, quoiqu’elles soient secrètement dévouées, elles ne peuvent s’empêcher de s’en venger.

[There is not a single day my maids of honour are not caught by some of count Tessin’s wiles; and even if there are seven of them, all very determined, they cannot manage to get their revenge.]

Luise Ulrike had bet on the right ally in Tessin and his party. Upon Carl Gyllenborg’s death (1679–1746), Tessin became the uncontested and able leader of the Hats party and in December 1747, he was nominated president of the chancery, the highest political position in the Swedish kingdom. As such, he could not only direct Swedish policy but also lead his entire party to support Luise Ulrike’s aims, or at least so she thought. When Tessin succeeded Gyllenborg as the head of the chancery, a treaty of alliance with Prussia at last became a reality.
on 29 May 1747. In Berlin, Frederick was delighted and wrote to Luise Ulriken "at last, here is this useful and advantageous treaty concluded [...] we mutually reinforced each other".25

Early modern courts were in essence polycentric.26 Luise Ulrique's efforts to ally herself with one of Sweden's political parties not only extended her circle of sociability through Tessin and his friends, but also polarised the court in inclining it towards one side rather than the other. The princess intended to make herself and her husband the centre of gravity of the political sphere towards which interested courtiers and political allies gravitated, thereby creating a space for their political aims. If the efficiency of this strategy can be recognised, it should nonetheless be noted that it lasted only a few years. Luise Ulrique and the Hats would quarrel upon Adolf Friedrich's accession to the throne and grew apart from there on. In the meantime, however, other attractive sub-centres, mostly cultural in essence and all controlled in one way or another by Luise Ulrique and her political allies, sustained this political space and supported her schemes. Indeed, much more was left to be achieved and the princess did not spare her energy. The attachment of the nobility to the monarchy on the one hand, and the need to convey a positive image of the royal pair on the other, were the key objects of Luise Ulrique's enterprises.

Creating spaces

To understand how Luise Ulrique worked towards a stronger monarchy one needs to take into account both gender and space. As a woman, Luise Ulrique's access to the formal political institutions - the spaces where formal political decisions were made in Sweden - was restricted. However, her sex does not seem to have put any restraint on what either she or her husband felt she ought to do. As consort of a future monarch with limited political power, the possibilities for Luise Ulrique to exert influence through her husband were almost non-existent. She therefore needed to create spaces which would allow her to act even though she was a woman or which could act on her behalf. Support for the arts, science and learning was both allowed and expected from a queen consort and it is therefore not surprising that Luise Ulrique engaged herself in these areas in several ways. She gathered artists and artisans around her by redecorating palaces; she gathered scientists around her by creating collections of natural specimens, minerals and coins; and she gathered nobles around her by developing a rich court culture. By doing this she created spaces in which she was the protagonist. In what spaces, or in what places, she could act as an agent is important for our understanding of her strategy to achieve her goals. In what follows we discuss three selected spaces that Luise Ulrique involved herself in: the chivalric orders, a school for noble women - the Vadstena school - and the Academy of Letters.

The chivalric orders

When Tessin was ambassador in Paris, he observed with great interest the interaction between the monarchy and its nobles, particularly as expressed through orders of chivalry. The court of Versailles mostly awarded nobles of great merit military orders, a decoration in exchange for good service and fidelity to the king. In most early modern courts, acquiring and keeping royal favour was perceived as strategic, both for the sovereign and for the nobles. It had been pointed out to Tessin that only two countries in Europe did not yet have chivalric orders, the Netherlands and Sweden. In the same vein, when Frederick II ascended the throne in Prussia he created an order called 'Pour Le Mérite', which rewarded the nobles serving in his army, after the French model of the Croix de Saint Louis.27

A first attempt was made to establish an order in 1745. It found its genesis in an incident in 1744 on her arrival in Sweden that Luise Ulrique recounted to her brother August Wilhelm:

C'était une badineerie qui se fit en chaloupe avant que j'étais mariée, et le jour avant les noces. Le Prince était avec; en entrant dans la chaloupe je cassai mon éventail. Sur cela, comme il faisait encore le galant, il en releva les morceaux et les distribua aux dames et dit qu'il fallait en faire un ordre. Je n'ai pas voulu dans les commencements, mais à la fin j'ai cédé, et vous verrez que tout dans la croix est une allégorie à ce badinage, la chaloupe en étant. Les branches qui sont aux côtés, sont les branches d'un éventail, et l'étoile est celle du Nord pour marquer la Suède. La devise est ce qu'il y a de plus joli, convenant fort bien à ce pays-ci; c'est: la division me perd, et de l'autre côté: l'union fait ma valeur.

[It was a joke in a rowing boat before I was married and the day before the wedding. The Prince was with us; on entering into the rowing boat I broke my fan, whereupon, still playing the gallant, he [Adolf Friedrich] bent down, gathered the different pieces, and distributed them to the ladies-in-waiting and declared that an order should be created. I didn't want this at the beginning, but in the end I gave in and you will see that everything on the order is an allégorie relating to that joke in the rowing boat. The branches at the sides are the sticks of the fan and the star is the Northern Star to symbolise Sweden. The motto is what is most beautiful about it and suits this country perfectly, it is 'if divided I am lost' and on the other side 'if united I am strong'.]28

The order, called Solljordersorden, was indeed established a year later, but was given strong political connotations and a political motto - and a union - dear to the princess. The order had 22 members, among them the king; the crown prince; Luise Ulrique herself; the King of Prussia, August Wilhelm; the Prince of Prussia; Tessin; and the close circle of the royal couple, including all the ladies-in-waiting. The inclusion of the King of Prussia and his heir apparent underlined
not only the significance of the order but also the strong ties of the future queen to her native land, possibly a decisive aspect when in the midst of negotiating a possible alliance. This order also rewarded the queen’s close circle and was a first step in securing fidelity. After 1746, the order was no longer awarded, presumably because Russia looked upon it with suspicion.\(^{29}\) The queen and Tessin, however, did not give up – not least because securing faithful supporters through the system of orders was cheap – so they initiated an alternative to the **Sollfjärdersonen** order.

When the **Sollfjärdersonen** order had to be abandoned in 1748, Anders Johan von Höpken then drafted a proposal for the creation of chivalric orders in Sweden. The proposal insisted that they be established as soon as possible, especially because the future king, Adolf Friedrich, was a knight of the order of St Andrew, a Russian order, and Höpken did not fail to emphasise that this could be interpreted as an act of submission on the part of Sweden if Sweden did not have its own decoration. This was largely a strategy to scare the council and get the proposition passed. Fredrik I is generally credited with the establishment of these orders but Tessin and his networks were the main driving force in the process. The role of Luise Ulrike in creating these three orders remains unclear but it is worth noting that Von Heidenstam argues that the princess and her brother Frederick II worked together on the elaboration of these orders and even wrote down their statutes.\(^{30}\)

Höpken proposed the creation of the order of the Seraphim (the highest), the order of the Sword, and the order of the Polar Star, all of which were designed to encourage and gather the political support of the nobility, but also possibly to counter the appointment process for various offices which the monarch did not fully control. Incidentally, Frederick the Great congratulated his sister on the creation of the new chivalric orders. He also implied that these orders would bring concord.\(^{31}\) Later on, the orders were also used as a diplomatic tool to encourage cordial relations with neighbouring countries. The order of the Seraphim comprised not only nobles supporting the royal family but also important men from the opposing political camp. It is worth noting that there is a painting in the palace in Stockholm representing Fredrik I wearing the newly created Seraphim Order. He carries a light sword different from the very large sword awarded with the order, explained by the fact that, a few months before the ceremony, he had suffered a stroke. The health of the ageing king indicates indeed that his role in this initiative may have been significantly reduced, if not non-existent. By rewarding political opponents, Tessin and Luise Ulrike not only envisioned the creation of a court party with members of all the political camps united under the monarchy and defending its values and ideals, but also the taming of strong opposition. Luise Ulrike wrote to Frederick in 1748:

> On est occupé à présent avec les ordres. C’est une vraie frénésie; car ceux qui ne sont pas sûrs de le recevoir, en perdent le manger et boire d’inquiétude. Je regarde tout cela d’un œil philosophique, riant sous cape de la folie des hommes, heureuse quand cela ne se bome qu’à ces bagatelles.

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[We are busy at the moment with the orders. It is a real frenzy because those who are not sure about getting one worry to the point of losing their appetites. I look on this with a philosophical eye, laughing at men’s foolishness, happy that the whole thing is only limited to these trivias.\(^{32}\)]

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### The Vadstena school

Following the same idea of gathering noble support, Luise Ulrike revived a forgotten boarding school for impoverished noble girls, **Vadstena Adliga Jungfrusäll** (1747–1758). The project was initially launched in 1739 but the financial endowment fell short of what was needed. Then, as she explained, ‘the project was proposed on several occasions’ but always met with opposition. I have proposed it again to the Riksdag and because of my interest, it has been agreed upon.\(^{33}\) In May 1747, Luise Ulrike was finalising the project and related the details to her mother:

> Je suis occupée présentement pour l’établissement d’un chapitre de filles de qualité. Il y a déjà un fonds pour en placer douze. J’ai soumis à l’attention de la reine les projets, et je lui donnerai le cordon bientôt. Le projet est fort grand, mais il sera très avantageux quand il sera à sa perfection. Il doit y avoir cent quatre-vingt-six filles, l’abbaye y compris. Chacune aura deux cents écus de pension, la table, le bois et les bougies. L’abbaye aura deux mille écus ; chaque chanoine aura trois mille écus, et quatre pensionnaires, enfants de qualité, qu’elles doivent éléver. Ils pourront apprendre à danser, à lire, à écrire, l’histoire et la géographie ; tous ces maîtres sont gratis.

> [I am presently busy with the establishment of a school for girls of quality. There are already funds for 12 girls. I have signed their patent letters today and I will give them the agreement on Thursday. The project is considerable but I am sure it will be advantageous when it is perfected. There will be 186 girls, and an abbess. Each will receive 200 écus as pension, with food, wood and candles provided. The abbess will receive 2000 écus; each nun will take care of three or four pensioners, girls of quality, whom they will raise. The girls will learn to dance, write, read, learn history and geography; all the masters are provided for free.\(^{34}\)]

Luise Ulrike’s godmother, Queen Ulrika Eleonora, had supported the establishment of a similar school in Barth, Pomerania, in 1720.\(^{35}\) Luise Ulrike may have been inspired by this.

In any case, Luise Ulrike re-launched the school for several reasons. First, she was concerned about the morality of noble women, as she explained:

> Je crois que ces établissements sont les seuls moyens de soutenir les familles. La noblesse est fort grande ici, et pour la plupart surchargée d’enfants. Quand il n’y a pas de quoi doter une fille après la mort des parents, elles...
examples of women who had been instrumental in the creation of academies in other countries.\textsuperscript{41} Since Luise Ulrike in many ways took her brother Frederick as an example it is likely that she was also inspired by his academy in Berlin. Just like his, her Academy became an institution where the queen could gather under her benevolent wing not only artists and scholars, but also figures from both the Han and the Cap parties. The Academy can therefore be seen as being in line with her wish to become a unifying force, standing above the daily bickering. Among the members there were royalists such as the poet Olof von Dahlen (1708–1763) and the historian Sven Lagerbring (1707–1787), Hats such as Anders Johan von Höpken (1712–1789) and Carl Fredrik Scheffer (1715–1786) – who in turn opposed von Höpken – and Caps such as Gustaf Bonde (1682–1764). There were other lines of conflict: while Olof von Dahlen embraced enlightenment, Gustaf Bonde was already in his lifetime ridiculed for his outdated research. Being controversial was by no means a hindrance to being elected: the linguist Johan This (1707–1780), a harsh critic of the Hat party, was controversial for his anti-clerical criticism and had been both warned and fined for his political activities before he became a member of the Academy.\textsuperscript{42}

Academies as phenomena were highly political. Whether they aimed at promoting science, culture, language or history they were created to develop and strengthen states and it was no coincidence that powerful ruling families such as the Medici in Italy and monarchs such as Catherine the Great and Frederick the Great not only supported but wanted to control academies.\textsuperscript{43} Doubtless Luise Ulrike had hopes that her Academy would become a political instrument. In a letter to Frederick II she made it quite clear that she would use it with the intention of restraining antagonism. However, she also made it clear that her support of the Academy was only the start of something more important:

\begin{quote}
Je fais tout mon possible pour encourager les arts et les sciences, qui sont propres à adoucir les mœurs, et il faut surmonter pour cela bien des difficultés. J'ai aussi, avec la permission du Roi, établi une Académie de Belles-Lettres, qui n'est qu'un commencement bien faible. Ce qui vous étonnera, mon cher frère, c'est qu'on s'est servi de cette voix pour m'envoyer des libelles. Cependant je ne me décourage point, et je vais toujours mon train.
\end{quote}

[I am doing my very best to encourage the arts and the sciences, which are very suitable to civilise manners, and one must overcome a lot of difficulties to do this. I have also, with the King's permission, established an Academy of Letters, which is only a meagre beginning. It will surprise you, my dear brother, to know that some people use the Academy in order to send me libels. I am not discouraged, however, and I continue to advance.\textsuperscript{44}

By taking an active part in the creation of an Academy she aroused strong feelings among those who would rather see a passive queen consort.\textsuperscript{45}

Others hoped that the Academy would restrict her political ambition. President von Höpken in his first speech as president addressed the queen directly, wishing...
that she would encourage the arts and belles-lettres and thus approach the throne with dignity, rather than with the intrigues and foul play that belonged to the politics of the male sex.\textsuperscript{46} In March 1754 Carl Reinhold Berch expressed yet other hopes: that the queen would bring up her eldest son to love the sciences and peace, and that she would keep to her promise that her heart was entirely Swedish ("aldeles Swenskt"). Berch reminded the audience that although Queen Christina had once gathered learned men around her, they had been foreigners, while Luise Ulrike had chosen Swedes.\textsuperscript{47}

Simply by establishing herself at the centre of the Academy, she strengthened the role she had in public, and forced people to relate to her whether they feared her ambition or embraced it. The speeches that were made on different occasions at the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters give examples of the expectations that different people had of her. Some wanted her to be politically withdrawn, others to use her influence but in specific ways. The activities of the Academy can also be seen as political per se. For the 1754 poetry competition 'Gustav II Adolf' was chosen as a topic. Gustav II Adolf, the only Swedish monarch who had formally been given the attribute 'the Great', had, ever since his death on the battlefield in Germany in 1632, been regarded as a national hero: a king who fought Catholicism and laid the groundwork for what is still referred to as Sweden's age of greatness. However, his reign was very different from that of his later successors Fredrik I and Adolf Friedrich: as a monarch he was at the centre of national politics whereas Luise Ulrike's husband was not. Among the extant contributions several contain what must be seen as critical allusions to the political system and the widespread corruption in the mid-18th century. The most striking of these are the contributions that talk about the absence of corruption during Gustav Adolf's reign, and how offices were awarded on merit. In other contributions the authors talk about Gustav Adolf as an example for future monarchs.\textsuperscript{48} The following year, the theme of one of the competitions was 'A description of a hero'. In his winning entry, Jacob Mörk made a point of how people could become heroes for different reasons, but that it was absolutely clear who could not be a hero: a person who takes bribes or falls for flattery.\textsuperscript{49} Criticising corruption struck directly at the political system of the time and emphasising Gustav II Adolf as a model for future monarchs made the Academy a mouthpiece for those who wished to advocate a different political system and a stronger monarchy. Themes such as the ones above would easily invite poems from people who could feel confident of being well received if they were to criticise the political system indirectly by paying tribute to the national hero. Since the Academy enjoyed freedom from censorship it was also easier to speak more freely under its aegis.

The Royal Academy of Letters, or the Queen's Academy, went into hibernation after the failed coup d'état in June 1756 and was not revived until the early 1770s. Luise Ulrike's involvement in the coup and its failure put an end to her possibility to create spaces from which she could act politically. The fact that the Academy stopped meeting as a result of her involvement in the coup is yet another example of how it was perceived as a cultural institution created for political reasons.

**Places: Drottningholm and its surroundings**

As mentioned above, the statutes of the Academy established that its members would meet in rooms determined by the queen. Luise Ulrike settled on her palace of Drottningholm, of which she had the usufruct. While the Academy can be seen as an important alternative space to the Riksdag or the Royal Council, Drottningholm, and her rooms within the palace, represented physical places of equally great importance. At Drottningholm the surroundings offered the possibility to entertain followers and give them a glance at how life could be, and to mobilise support. Plays, masques, literary salons, outings full of surprises — all part of a glittering court life — aimed at enchanting the nobility and gaining its loyalty. Favourite places for informal outings were Svartsjö palace, Malmslätt and not least the Chinese pavilion at Drottningholm, built by her husband as a surprise for Luise Ulrike's birthday in 1753.

As a young couple Luise Ulrike and Adolf Friedrich had each received a palace from King Fredrik I. Adolf Friedrich received the palace of Ulriksdal just north of Stockholm and on the occasion of her wedding in 1744 Luise Ulrike received the palace of Drottningholm, a royal summer residence located a few kilometres away from the centre of Stockholm. The original mansion had been built in the 16th century for Queen Kata Zaryna Jagiellonka (1526–1583) (see Chapter 2) but the existing building put at Luise Ulrike's disposal was the creation of Queen Hedvig Eleonora (1636–1715).\textsuperscript{50} After her death, and up until 1744, Queen Ulrika Eleonora and King Fredrik I often spent time at Drottningholm. In August 1744, Luise Ulrike could write to her mother:

> le Roi m'a donné Drottningholm. C'est un présent qui est fort considérable et qui m'a fait beaucoup de plaisir. L'endroit est magnifique, et c'est, aux onil-dire de tout le monde, la plus belle maison de plaisance qu'il y est en Suède.

[the king has given me Drottningholm. It is a very considerable gift and pleases me very much. This place is magnificent, and, according to everyone, it is the most beautiful mansion in Sweden.]\textsuperscript{51}

Drottningholm became for many reasons and without any doubt the most important place for Luise Ulrike, culturally as well as politically. First of all it was hers in the sense that she had control of it and had the opportunity to create informal gatherings out of reach of the strict protocol of the court: she decided who had access to these informal meetings and in which way to socialise. Here, at a distance from Stockholm where the despicable and yet powerful Riksdag held its sessions, she ruled. Drottningholm soon became larger: the palace was expanded, a theatre, a Chinese pavilion and a village with manufactories were built — all at the royal couple's own expense. Even though the house was impressive by Swedish standards, Luise Ulrike found it a bit out of date and
undertook to modernize it and design it to her taste with the help of architect Carl Hårleman and her faithful Tessin. As she wrote to her mother:

Je suis occupée à faire omme Drottningholm, ce qui m’a empêchée d’y demeurer jusqu’à présent. La maison est magnifique, mais, comme les ornements sont antiques, cela suggère beaucoup de changements. Je fais bâtir aussi deux galeries, qui seront ornées de tableaux que j’ai fait venir de Paris, C’est Boucher et Chardin qui en sont les maîtres.

[I am busy at the moment decorating Drottningholm, which has prevented me from staying there. The house is magnificent, but as the decoration is antique, a lot of changes are required. I also gave the order for two new galleries, which will be decorated with paintings by Boucher and Chardin that I have ordered from Paris.]³²

After a few years of renovation, the settings at Drottningholm, in particular the new additions, impressed visitors with their splendour and conveyed a message of authority and strong monarchical identity. One of the two new galleries she added to the palace was intended to house her collections of numismatics, antiquities, paintings, books and objects of natural history. A sumptuous library was built to gather a large collection of books and manuscripts. The sovereigns’ collection reflected not only a strong and genuine interest in the arts and sciences but also sent signals about their own wisdom, and, as Merit Laine puts it, ‘in the miniature realm of Drottningholm they could appear as the enlightened despots they aspired to be in the realm of Sweden in its entirety’.³⁵

Luise Ulrike and her husband also intended to use Drottningholm as a visual tool for their political views. Drottningholm has often been referred to as the Swedish Versailles. True, the French influence was strong: how the garden was laid out and decorated was in fact inspired by French royal palace gardens and under Luise Ulrike the garden was also used in much the same way as were the gardens of Versailles.³⁴ The use of informal spaces away from the main palace resembles, for instance, how the French monarchs withdrew to Marly or the Trianon. Drottningholm turned quickly into an alternative centre not only for courtiers’ gatherings and entertainments but also as a place to nourish political aspirations. There, Luise Ulrike and her husband controlled the small community of courtiers whom they selected, gathered and entertained. As Drottningholm was distant enough from the centre of Stockholm, courtiers also often had to spend the night there, which incidentally strengthened Luise Ulrike’s control over them. As soon as Luise Ulrike arrived in Sweden, the number of court entertainments rose significantly. Balls, masquerades, theatre performances, concerts, and parties were given almost ceaselessly in the summer. The presence of new ladies-in-waiting at court revitalised social life there and kept young male courtiers entertained. The weddings of several ladies-in-waiting were organised at Drottningholm and the palace brought the young Swedish nobility together.

At Drottningholm Luise Ulrike and Adolf Friedrich could also be open about their political aspirations. Among the new additions, one room featured the portraits of the Prussian royal family, siblings of the princes, honouring her proud origins and reminding the visitor of her pedigree. Many small details also reflected their political vision: for example, the engravings of allegories praising virtue or the representations of various Greek muses to be found in the library.³⁵ In another room several paintings by French artists were not only a mark of contemporary fashion but could also carry a political message, as the queen favoured the support of France over that of any other country — at least at the beginning. According to Merit Laine, under Luise Ulrike ‘Drottningholm gradually became a means for visual political communication and persuasion’.³⁶

Theatre also played a role in political communication. At both Drottningholm and at Ulriksdal Luise Ulrike and her husband had theatres built as places for amusement and political mobilisation. In a letter to her mother she wrote: ‘La noblesse, qui aime les plaisirs, est charmée de trouver quelqu’un qui les favorise, et elle ne demande pas mieux que de se divertir [the nobility, which loves pleasure, is charmed to have someone who favours them and they do not ask for better entertainments].’³⁷ At Drottningholm, several French plays were given in the evenings throughout the high season, performed by a hired French theatre company.³⁸ The actors were paid from the royal couple’s privy purse and the plays were carefully chosen. It is likely that Luise Ulrike used her summer theatre to transmit a political message to an audience made up mainly of courtiers.

Other amusements, intended not only to entertain but also to gather supporters around her and create opportunities for meeting, were masquerades. Luise Ulrike very much enjoyed these events and organised many of them in her first years in Sweden:

J’ai introduit les bals masqués, et je me flatte qu’insensiblement tout changera de face, ce qui ne coûte pas beaucoup de peine, la noblesse ne demandant pas mieux que de pouvoir se divertir, et le clergé est si hâte des premiers qu’il n’y a pas beaucoup à risquer en le laissant crier, tout le soutien qu’ils ont ou leur ayant été enlevé par la mort de la Reine qui les protégeait in finiment […]

[I have introduced masquerades, and I flatter myself that this will insensibly change everything, it does not cost a lot of effort, the nobility ask no better than to be entertained, and the clergy is so hated by the nobility that there is nothing to risk in letting them protest about it, as all the support they got from the old queen is now gone …]³⁹

The palace of Drottningholm gradually became a place that reinforced Luise Ulrike’s identity in several ways. First, by redesigning the interior and paying for her palace herself she conveyed an image of strong independence and sovereignty. Second, the decoration served to emphasise the noble character of her lineage, her dynastic standing, in other words her royal pedigree. Finally, her well-known Francophilia asserted her political preferences. At Drottningholm,
the private and the public sphere intersected and it was a place where Luise Ulrike could both gather support and display her political ideals.

**Conclusion**

The princess chose to use such traditional spaces of the consort as benevolence and culture to sustain her network of supporters and give the monarchy greater political capital and a positive image. In various cultural places, she made the royal presence and its authority incontrovertible. She intended not only to assemble and to control her supporters, but also to give the monarchy back its lustre. She used these different cultural and social spaces as levers of support and politicised them. The princess could in addition use various places where visual communication served the same purpose.

Luise Ulrike’s case underlines not only the capacity of women to create political spaces to support their own agenda but also their ability to create the means and resources for their intended goals. The privileged position of queens consort at the top of the societal pyramid allowed them to evolve as political agents without the constraints usually attached to the female sex. In fact, Luise Ulrike encountered resistance mostly because of the radical nature of her project, not because of her gender. In theory, queens consort and ladies at court were deprived of institutional and official power but in practice most of them served as agents or instruments and catalysts of political ideas and projects thanks to their strong ability to lobby. Some women were used and manipulated by a faction or by their families as instruments. Others, such as Luise Ulrike, had strong ideals and fought for their ideas and turned into political agents.

Did her industrious efforts to obtain greater royal prerogatives and power pay off? The question may be answered with both a yes and a no. In the short term she did manage to mobilise supporters who were willing to challenge the political system. However, the coup d’état in June 1756, which was the peak of her political actions in the 1750s, failed completely. As a result several of her followers were executed while she herself got away with a humiliating failure. In the longer run, on the other hand, the monarchy did become stronger. Her son, the future Gustav III, was brought up by his mother to defend the ideals of a strong monarchy. She had the satisfaction of witnessing her life’s goal achieved through his own coup in 1772.

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Figure 4.1 Martin van Meytens, Emperor Franz I and Empress Maria Theresia with their Children (1754), oil on canvas, © Vienna, Schönbrunn Palace