

# Sovereign Spaces: *Mise-en-page* and the Politics of English Royal Correspondence in the Sixteenth Century\*

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## INTRODUCTION

When Elizabeth I wrote to Frederick II of Denmark on 31 March 1567, her secretariat produced an elegant Latin text, the main body of which was a mere sixteen lines long, leaving a significant amount of blank space on the page. Elizabeth's name, which opened the letter, was accentuated by being rendered in shaded majuscules with a decorative E. The English queen took her leave of the Danish king as his 'good sister and cousin' after a gap of roughly three lines from the end of the main text of the letter. The leave taking was positioned in the middle of the left half of the page and Elizabeth's oversized signature placed directly beneath it.<sup>1</sup> The decorative style of 'Elizabeta' in the invocation of this letter was unusual in the context of letters between European sovereigns, but the overall layout and materials used were entirely consonant with existing conventions of Elizabethan inter-princely epistolary practice.<sup>2</sup> How Elizabeth opened and ended the letter, where her signature was placed, and the other material features of her missive all contained cues about how she viewed her

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<sup>1</sup> Rigsarkivet, Statens Arkiver, Copenhagen (hereafter RSA), TKUA 63-1 (unfoliated) letter of 31 March 1567.

<sup>2</sup> For other rare examples of a more elaborate opening initial see The National Archives (hereafter TNA) SP 69/9 fol. 161r, 85/1 fol. 203r; British Library (hereafter BL) Cotton MS Nero BIII, fol. 65r; RSA TKUA 63-1 letter of 17 January 1566.

relationship with the Danish king. In short, the space on the page laid claims to sovereignty and to the relative position of the two rulers involved in the correspondence.

As James Daybell has observed ‘the physical characteristics of the early modern *material* letter were imbued with social codes and signs that generated meaning for contemporaries, attaining a cultural significance distant from modern-day letters and letter-writing practices, but readily understood within the context of the period’. Letter writing took place within the social and political hierarchy. Consequently, letters had to be mindful of the place of both the writer and the addressee within the social order. In part, this was achieved through the ways in which the recipient was addressed—the salutation, the language used, and any titles—and in part the layout of a letter was intrinsic to its expression of rank and status.<sup>3</sup> Recent studies of correspondence have increasingly examined material factors and the terms of address used by the writer to excavate the social and political relationships between

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<sup>3</sup> James Daybell, *The Material Letter in Early Modern England: Manuscript Letters and the Culture and Practices of Letter-writing, 1512–1635* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). Quotation at 17.

correspondents.<sup>4</sup> However, these studies have largely focussed on correspondence within a particular polity, rather than letters exchanged across political borders.<sup>5</sup>

The layout of inter-princely correspondence is an important, but overlooked, aspect of how early modern princes communicated and contested their relative status. Despite an increased awareness that diplomacy was a social, as well as a political, practice, a burgeoning interest in material texts, and substantial scholarly interest in royal writing, only a handful of scholars have turned their attention to the material features of inter-princely correspondence.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For example Daybell, *Material Letter*; Roger Chartier, ‘Secretaires for the People? Model Letters of the Ancien Regime: Between Court Literature and Popular Chapbooks’, in Roger Chartier, Alain Boureau, and Cecile Dauphin (eds.), *Correspondence: Models of Letter-writing from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Polity Press, 1997), 59–111; Heather Wolfe, “‘Neatly sealed, with silk, and Spanish wax or otherwise’: the Practice of Letter-locking with Silk Floss in Early Modern England”, in Steven W. Beal and S. P. Cerasano (eds.), *In Praise of Writing: Early Modern Manuscript Studies* (London: British Library, 2012), 169–189. The interest in epistolary etiquette has longer roots. See for example Reinhard M. G. Nickisch, *Die Stilprinzipien in den deutschen Briefstellern des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts. Mit e. Bibliographie u. Briefschreiblehre, 1474-1800* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck u. Ruprecht, 1969). Nickisch’s discussion of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries focuses on rhetoric and stylistic form (*ibid.* 21–34)

<sup>5</sup> For example Giora Sternberg, ‘Epistolary Ceremonial: Corresponding Status at the Time of Louis XIV’, *Past and Present*, 204 (2009), 33–88; Jonathan Gibson, ‘Significant Space in Manuscript Letters’, *The Seventeenth Century*, 12 (1997), 1–10.

<sup>6</sup> On recent developments in diplomatic history see Tracey A. Sowerby, ‘Early Modern Diplomatic History’, *History Compass*, 14.9 (2016), 441–456 <doi: 10.1111/hic3.12329> ; Jan Hennings and Tracey A. Sowerby, ‘Introduction: Practices of Diplomacy’, in Tracey A. Sowerby and Jan Hennings (eds.), *Practices of Diplomacy, in the Early Modern World, c.1410–1800* (London: Routledge, 2017), 1–21. On material texts see for example Adam Smyth, *Material Texts in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); James Daybell and Peter Hinds (eds.), *Material Readings of Early Modern Culture: Texts and Social Practices, 1580–1730* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); William H. Sherman, *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). On royal writing see for example

Some have focussed on the highly decorated letters exchanged between English monarchs and non-European rulers. Susan Skilliter noted the visual and olfactory magnificence of the Ottoman Sultana Safiye's letters to Elizabeth.<sup>7</sup> More recently, Maija Jansson's analysis of the Stuarts' letters to Russian and Asian rulers has excavated the processes by which they were produced and analysed their iconography, while in a previous essay I have located the impetus for the letters' decoration in the ceremonial contexts of the courts to which they were sent.<sup>8</sup> Other scholars have been more interested in English monarchs' European correspondence. Rayne Allinson has advocated that we should be more mindful of the material features of royal letters. Her primary interest was in the monarch's own handwriting and the greater prestige attached to holograph letters; she did not explore the significance of the *mise-en-page* of Elizabeth's letters.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, Jonathan Gibson has analysed the layout

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Carlo M. Bajetta, Guillaume Coatalen, and Jonathan Gibson (eds.), *Elizabeth I's Foreign Correspondence: Letters, Rhetoric and Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Peter Beal and Grace Ioppolo (eds.), *Elizabeth I and the Culture of Writing* (London: British Library, 2007); Peter C. Herman and Ray G. Siemens (eds.), *Reading Monarchs Writing: The Poetry of Henry VIII, Mary Stuart, Elizabeth I, and James VI/I* (Tempe: Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2002); Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier (eds.), *Royal Subjects: Essays on the Writing of James VI and I* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> Susan Skilliter, 'Three Letters from the Ottoman "Sultana" Sāfiye to Queen Elizabeth I', in Jean Aubin, Samuel Miklos Stern (eds.), *Documents from Islamic Chanceries* (Oxford: Cassirer, 1965), 119–57.

<sup>8</sup> Maija Jansson, *Art and Diplomacy: Seventeenth-century English Decorated Royal Letters to Russia and the Far East* (Leiden: Brill, 2015); Tracey A. Sowerby, 'Negotiating with the Material Text: Royal Correspondence between England and the Wider World', in Tracey A. Sowerby and J. Craigwood (eds.), *Cultures of Diplomacy and Literary Writing in the Early Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 203–19.

<sup>9</sup> Rayne Allinson, *A Monarchy of Letters: Royal Correspondence and Diplomacy in the Reign of Elizabeth I* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

of drafts of several letters from Elizabeth to her suitor, the duke of Anjou.<sup>10</sup> However, as Gibson focussed on drafts, rather than letters that were actually sent, there are limits to what his analysis can tell us about the ways in which Elizabeth I used the layout of her letters to communicate political messages. Despite this recent work on the material importance of letters exchanged between rulers, we still have much to understand about how the appearance of a sovereign letter added extra layers of meaning to the words found in the letter's text. Or, to put it another way, what material letters can tell us about early modern inter-princely relations. It is this issue with which this article is primarily concerned.

#### SOVEREIGN SPACES

Early modern guides to letter writing aimed to help the writer determine how to lay out his or her letter in a manner that reflected his or her social status while acknowledging his or her political and social position vis-à-vis the person to whom the letter was addressed. Not all manuals contained the same recommendations. For instance, some manuals admitted more flexibility when it came to the salutation, which could be 'made in sundrie manners, according to the pleasure of the enditer'.<sup>11</sup> However, a broad consensus emerged around several features including the placement of the salutation and subscription. It was widely understood that 'the blank space in a letter could carry important information about the nature of the relationship between writer and addressee'.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, as Jonathan Gibson's analysis of several early modern treaties on letter writing has highlighted, there were four main areas

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<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Gibson, "'Dedans la plie de mon fidelle affection": Familiarity and Materiality in Elizabeth's Letters to Anjou', in Bajetta, Coatalen, and Gibson (eds.), *Elizabeth I's Foreign Correspondence*, 63–89.

<sup>11</sup> William Fulwood, *The enimie of idlenesse teaching the maner and stile how to endite, compose and write all sorts of epistles and letters* (London: H. Bynneman, 1568), Aviii<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> Gibson, 'Significant Spaces', 3.

where the spaces on the page were commonly understood to communicate hierarchies: i) the space between the salutation and the main text; ii) the space between the main text and the subscription; iii) the placement of the subscription on the left/right axis; iv) the space between the first and second line of the superscription.<sup>13</sup> The placement of the subscription indicated the relative status of writer and addressee. The further to the right, the more superior the recipient; the further to the left, the more inferior, while a subscription in the middle of the page indicated a more equal relationship.<sup>14</sup> As shall become clear, the textual features of the letter were deemed to interact with its spatial arrangements. So, for example, the wording of the exordium or subscription might be used to augment or mitigate the claims made through the layout of a letter.

When assessing royal letters, it is important to ask whether the rules about ‘significant spaces’ as set out in English letter writing manuals would have been understood in other countries. Several of the prescriptions outlined in the English texts also featured in continental guides. In fact, many of the English discussions of letter writing either drew on much of the same canon of exemplary letters or were based on Continental treatises. William Fulwood’s discussion, for instance, was based on a French publication.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, several Latin epistolary guides dealt with issues regarding the layout, as well as the content, of different types of letters. Angel Day outlined that the margins of the page reflected the relative prestige attached to the recipient,<sup>16</sup> while Juan Luis Vives also noted that blank

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Fulwood, *Enimie of idlenesse*, Aviii<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> Gibson, ‘Significant Spaces’, 2.

<sup>16</sup> Angel Day, *The English secretorie VVherin is contayned, a perfect method, for the inditing of all manner of epistles and familiar letters, together with their diuersities, enlarged by examples vnder their seuerall tytles* (London: Robert Waldegrave, 1586), 27.

spaces on the page were calibrated to the rank of the intended recipient, such as the ‘honorary margin’, or ‘blank space between the salutation and the letter itself’.<sup>17</sup>

Most manuals describing epistolary etiquette, such as Fulwood’s *The enimie of idlenesse* (1568), were designed for individuals writing within a specific polity. They dealt with letters addressed to ‘our superiours, as to Emperors, kings, princes &c.’ or ‘our equalles as to Marchants, Burgesses, Citizens &c.’ or ‘our inferiors, as to seruants, laborers, &c.’.<sup>18</sup>

The etiquette of correspondence between princes was not included. This raises the question: were the rules of epistolary etiquette applicable in letters sent between princes? Relations between rulers took place within a framework in which they were often related to one another, for instance through inter-dynastic marriage, and where dynastic desires dictated international relations.<sup>19</sup> Monarchs enjoyed a theoretical equality as sovereigns, within a broader princely hierarchy where emperors were placed above kings, kings above dukes, and so on. In practice relations between princes were ritualistic and hierarchical, even between princes who possessed the same rank. How they interacted reflected—and could influence—their relative status.<sup>20</sup> This was usually expressed in ceremonial forms. For instance, the master of ceremonies at the papal court in the later fifteenth century recorded the order of precedence given to ambassadors there, which was determined by their ruler’s place in the

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<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Gibson, ‘Significant Spaces’, 2.

<sup>18</sup> Fulwood, *The enimie of idlenesse*, Aviii<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> See for example Lucien Bély, *La societe des princes, XVIe–XVIIIe* (Paris: Fayard, 1999).

<sup>20</sup> See William Roosen, ‘Early Modern Diplomatic Ceremonial: A Systems Approach’, *The Journal of Modern History*, 52 (1980), 452–76; André Krischer, ‘Souveränität als sozialer Status: Zur Funktion des diplomatischen Zeremoniells in der Frühen Neuzeit’, in Ralph Kauz, Giorgio Rota, and Jan Paul Niederkorn (eds), *Diplomatisches Zeremoniell in Europa und im mittleren Osten in der frühen Neuzeit* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2009), 1–33; Jan Hennings, *Russia and Courtly Europe: Ritual and the Culture of Diplomacy, 1648–1725* (Cambridge, 2016), esp. 1–110.

international order.<sup>21</sup> Letter writing was also a heavily hierarchical endeavour. The ‘significant spaces’ found in broader correspondence articulated claims to sovereignty and international status in royal correspondence. The layout of princely letters, then, have the potential to reveal much about how rulers viewed their position within the society of princes and the extent to which those claims were accepted or contested by their peers.

The letters with which this article is primarily concerned were those produced by royal secretariats and chancelleries and which were sent to or from the English monarchs Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary I, Elizabeth I, and James I. The majority of the letters examined were autograph, that is signed by the prince, and they represent the more typical letters exchanged between early modern princes. While many rulers did also exchange letters produced by their own hands, such holograph letters were rarer and more prestigious<sup>22</sup> and this prestige complicated other aspects of epistolary etiquette. Perhaps most notably, it seems that with holograph letters, the prestige of the prince’s own handwriting overrode considerations of neatness. It also created flexibility in matters such as terms of address and space on the page. As Heather Wolfe has shown, familiar letters (whether holograph or autograph) might be sealed and folded in a different manner to more ‘formal’ princely correspondence.<sup>23</sup> In contrast, less familiar letters produced by the royal secretariat tended to be professional and conform to a shared notion of propriety with regard to titles and layout.

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<sup>21</sup> For a detailed discussion see Catherine Fletcher, *Diplomacy in Renaissance Rome: The Rise of the Resident Ambassador* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 36–58. For a discussion of ceremonial matters being used in efforts to claim a new, improved status see Toby Osborne, ‘The Surrogate War between the Savoyes and the Medici: Sovereignty and Precedence in Early Modern Italy’, *International History Review*, 29 (2007), 1–21.

<sup>22</sup> For an extended discussion see Allinson, *Monarchy of Letters*.

<sup>23</sup> Wolfe, “‘Neatly sealed, with silk’”.



As in other areas of ritualized practice between early modern princes, establishing shared notions of proper behaviour also created a lexicon of behaviour, variations from which took on especial significance.

#### THE POLITICS OF THE PAGE

By the sixteenth century, when a low-ranking prince corresponded with a higher-ranking prince, it was expected that the layout of his letters would reflect his lower status. Hence when Maximilian Sforza, duke of Milan, wrote to Henry VIII in the 1510s he acknowledged Henry's superior status through the layout and text used in the letters. The letters opened with a direct salutation to the English king. Maximilian then signed the letters on the right, usually leaving a significant space between the main text of the letter and his signature.<sup>24</sup> The spacing of the letter of credence that Maximilian provided for his secretary, Michael Abbat, was particularly deferential: the Duke's signature occupied the bottom right of the page even though the main text of the letter was a mere seven lines long, leaving most of the page empty.<sup>25</sup> In two letters where Maximilian added a holograph postscript, his handwriting filled the space between the end of the scribally produced portion of the letter and his signature at the bottom right of the page. In such instances, the esteem Maximilian demonstrated by taking the time to include a personally produced message mitigated the need to include a space recognizing Henry's sovereignty.<sup>26</sup> When Henry sent credentials for his own representatives in March 1515, the spatial arrangement articulated Henry's superior status. In contrast to the epistolary protocol that the Duke adopted towards Henry, the English king's letter listed Henry's titles before saluting the duke and Henry signed off a short space below

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<sup>24</sup> See for example BL Cotton MS Vitellius BII, fol. 48r-v, TNA SP 1/7 fols. 29r-v, 40r, 1/8, fols. 97r, 175r.

<sup>25</sup> TNA SP 1/11, fol. 95r.

<sup>26</sup> BL Cotton MS Vitellius BII, fols. 52r-v, 74r-v.

the end of the letter in the middle of the page.<sup>27</sup> Seen in comparative context, the letters leave no doubt that both parties accepted Henry's higher place in the pecking order of early modern Europe.

The nature of their polity placed the leaders of oligarchies and republics in a lower position within European society than even the lower-ranking princes. Their leaders therefore had to adopt an epistolary etiquette that would allow them to claim their place within this princely society without offending their princely correspondents. Letters from the Venetian Doges to the monarchs of England demonstrate how this could be achieved. They followed the same format from Henry VIII's reign through to the end of Elizabeth I's.<sup>28</sup> These letters opened with an invocation to the English king or queen, the first letter of which was placed to the left of the left-hand margin of the main text of the letter. Venetian Doges did not sign their letters, so their signature could not be used either to offset the highly deferential opening of their missives or to suggest further deference. After the main text of the letter a significant gap was left before the time and date of writing was stated and stretched out in order to meet the margins established by the main text. Elongating the last line of the letter, which in most cases was very clearly contrived, meant no further status was conceded. There were only two areas of variation to this pattern. In several later letters, the signature of the dogal secretary was placed in the very bottom right hand corner of the page. The inclusion of a secretary's signature was not uncommon in inter-princely correspondence and usually occupied this area of the page to demarcate the secretary's inferior position. The other variation was the space

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, fols. 131v–132r.

<sup>28</sup> See for example TNA SP 1/10 fol. 44r, 1/27 fol. 136r, 68/1 fol. 67r, 69/9 fol. 161r, 70/70 fol. 89r, 70/105 fol. 127r, 102/64 (unfoliated) letters of 11/21 December 1590, 19/29 March 1591, 25 June/5 July 1591, 10/20 September 1591, 7/17 July 1592, 23 September/3 October 1592, SP 1/125, fol. 156r; BL Cotton MS Nero Bvi fos 101v–102r; Nero Bvii, fol. 184r.

between the message and the subscription. This varied from a couple of lines to spaces that took up as much of the page as the textual message itself.<sup>29</sup> The Venetian Doges, then, consistently acknowledged their place well below the English monarchs within the broader society of princes, despite their attempts to gain recognition as equal to lower-ranking sovereigns in other areas of diplomatic practice.<sup>30</sup>

Differences in status were also reflected in the use of space in the letters Henry received from the Holy Roman Emperor. The vast majority of Maximilian I's surviving letters to Henry adopted a standard format.<sup>31</sup> They opened with Maximilian's name and brief titles, before greeting the English king. The opening letter M was set to the left of the left-hand margin of the text. The combination of text and the placement of the initial M reflected Maximilian's higher status as emperor. Maximilian's sign off also articulated that Henry was his inferior. While friendly and invoking familial language (usually 'your good brother'), it began on the left-hand side of the page, with Maximilian's signature following on the same line, meaning that the Emperor's autograph was usually placed either in the middle of the page or started at its centre. It was rarely more than a few lines below the main body of text, but as Maximilian's signature tended to slant upwards the gap was often substantially narrower by its end. Although there were occasional variations within this theme—Maximilian sometimes signed directly at the end of the letter or omitted the leave taking—significant deviations appear to have been rare. Here the markers of superior status deployed

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<sup>29</sup> Compare, for example TNA SP 70/108 fol. 69, 70/120 fol. 83r.

<sup>30</sup> Roosen, 'Early Modern Diplomatic Ceremonial', 461, 457–8.

<sup>31</sup> Based on an examination of the following letters: TNA SP 1/7 fols. 67r–68v, 1/8, fol. 129r, 1/10 fols. 171r–172v, 1/12 fol. 13r, 1/13 fols. 151r–152v, 168r, 1/15 fol. 138r, 1/16 fols. 72r, 286r–287r, 1/17 fol. 10r; BL Cotton MS Vitellius Bxviii, fol. 192r; Vitellius Bxix, fols. 58r, 290r–v, 376r, Vitellius Bxx, fols. 49r, 97r.

by the Emperor were similar to those used by Henry VIII to articulate his position of superiority over the duke of Milan.<sup>32</sup>

The hierarchical relationship between the English monarch and a duke, republic, or Emperor was pretty clear, as was the associated use of space on the page. There was more room for negotiation when it came to the English monarch's relationship to other kings, as Henry VIII's epistolary relationship with the kings of Scots reveals. The English and Scottish monarchs were sovereign kings. The relative position of the two within the broader society of princes was, however, far from straightforward. England had a greater impact on the European stage than Scotland, it covered a much larger territory, including lands overseas, and its greater influence was recognized in the emerging ceremonial order in Rome. While historical claims of English suzerainty over Scotland existed, these were only revived in the 1540s, when they were used during the Anglo-Scots wars that became known as the 'Rough Wooing'. In contrast, James V's descent from Henry VII gave him a counter-claim to the English throne, should Henry VIII or his heirs be deemed illegitimate—a real concern in the 1530s and 1540s thanks to the vicissitudes of Henry's marital politics and the implications of his break with the Roman church. This familial relationship complicated their relative status in other ways too: James IV was also Henry's brother-in-law, while James V was his nephew.<sup>33</sup> Letters between the Scottish and English kings, then, are useful evidence of how monarchs who could on one level claim an equal status, but who were not equal in practical terms and whose theoretical equality was subject to contestation, might negotiate the material

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<sup>32</sup> Henry's own letters also acknowledged his lower status than the emperor. They opened with a greeting to the emperor and left several lines of space between the end of the main text and the exordium, which was placed centrally. See the (almost complete) drafts TNA SP 1/10 fol. 41, 1/13 fol. 134.

<sup>33</sup> On Anglo-Scottish relations in the 1530s see Claire Kellar, *Scotland, England and the Reformation, 1534–1561* (Oxford, 2004), 46–77.

claims to status made by their missives. The invocation and sovereign spaces in James IV's letters to Henry VIII simultaneously recognized that Henry was above him in the international order while managing not to cede too much ground. His letters opened deferentially with a salutation to the English king, but the placement of the subscription and James's autograph tended to imply greater equality: the sign off ('your brodr') and signature either began from the middle of the page, or were centred on the page, typically after a gap of two to four lines after the main text of the letter.<sup>34</sup> After attaining his majority, James V overwhelmingly adopted an almost identical practice when writing to his uncle, although his leave taking (usually your loving brother and nephew) and signature moved marginally closer to the right hand margin in the early 1530s.<sup>35</sup>

Henry's surviving letters to the Danish kings are revealing of how the king negotiated correspondence with fellow sovereigns whom he considered to hold a lower place within the princely order. The letters which survive from the earlier part of Henry's reign, during which time Anglo-Danish relations largely revolved around trade, opened by saluting Christian II and ended with the king's signature in the centre of the page only a short space below the main text.<sup>36</sup> Christian II's letters to Henry, meanwhile, typically took one of two formats. They either opened with an invocation to the English king or the Danish king's titles, but they all ended with a space of a few lines between the main text and the king's signature, placed

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<sup>34</sup> BL Cotton MS Caligula Bvi, fols. 22r, 23r, 28r, 37r, 57r, 73r, 75r, 76r, 77r; Caligula Biii, fol. 138-9; TNA SP 49/1, fols. 12v-13r.

<sup>35</sup> See for example BL Cotton MS Caligula Bi fols. 35r, 307r-308r, 327r, 328r, Caligula Bii fol. 29r, Caligula Bv fol. 221r, Caligula Bvii fols. 161r, 459r; TNA SP 1/65, fol. 176r, SP 49/3, fols. 84r, 88r, 99r, 109r, 110r, SP 49/4 fols. 8r, 15r, 16r. Epistolary practices during James V's minority will be discussed later in this article.

<sup>36</sup> RSA TKUA 63-8 (unfoliated) letters of 17 March 1514, 6 November 1518.

centrally.<sup>37</sup> By the later 1530s, when both Henry VIII and Christian III were interested in the possibility of a defensive league against Catholics, the layout of Henry's letters to Denmark had changed.<sup>38</sup> Now, the letters began with Henry's name and brief titles, with the initial H placed to the left of the margin of the main text. A personal sign off invoking a fictive kinship (e.g. your good brother and friend) was placed a few lines below in the centre of the page, followed by the king's signature which began a little further to the right.<sup>39</sup> Christian III's surviving letters to Henry suggest that the epistolary strategies of the two kings were aimed at creating equal claims by reciprocating the treatment one king received from the other: Christian's letters also began with an offset C which opened a statement of his titles and ended with a centrally placed subscription after a short space. When this was not simply the king's signature, any affectionate wishes were followed by the king's autograph on the following line a little further to the right.<sup>40</sup>

#### POLITICKING ON THE PAGE

As the case of Henry's correspondence with the Danish kings suggests, the finer points of epistolary etiquette between the rulers of two countries could evolve over time, not least as each correspondent responded to the other's spatial strategies. Another reason for this was

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<sup>37</sup> BL Cotton MS Nero BIII fol. 64r; TNA SP 1/27 fol. 278r, 1/32 fol. 203v–204r, 1/37, fol. 128r.

<sup>38</sup> Henry VIII pursued this alliance in parallel to his negotiations with the Schmalkaldic League, which the king of Denmark joined in 1538. Matters concerning trade between the two countries' merchants remained a major theme in the monarchs' correspondence during this time.

<sup>39</sup> RSA TKUA 63-8 (unfoliated) letters of 5 March 1538, 25 June 1539, 10 October 1539; RSA TKUA 63-1 (unfoliated) letters of 14 February 1536, 13 March 1537, 12 April 1538, 2 May 1538, 30 December 1538, 5 May 1538.

<sup>40</sup> RSA TKUA 63-8 (unfoliated) letter of 21 January 1537; TNA SP 1/181 fol. 77r–80v, 1/184 fol. 28r, 1/192 fol. 156r. See also SP 1/226 fol. 51r, which is lacking a signature.

undoubtedly that, despite the fact that sovereigns enjoyed equality in so far as they were sovereigns, fine distinctions such as the age of the polity and dynastic line impacted upon the prestige with which specific rulers were viewed. Another was that the theoretical hierarchy within sovereign ranks was made more complex by factors such as age, any familial ties, and the relative political power they wielded.

The complicating factors of practical politics and family relations can be seen in the letters of James VI/I to Elizabeth. After he claimed his majority in 1583, the *mise-en-page* of James's letters to Elizabeth, whether more formal or familiar, expressed deference to the English queen. They opened with a direct address to Elizabeth; the leave taking was placed in the right half of the page, often in the last quarter of the page and James's signature usually ended in line with the right hand margin of the letter's main text. In the majority of cases the leave taking was placed after a two or three line gap and a similar space separated it from the king's signature. In contrast to James IV's use of space in his letters to Henry VIII, James VI/I showed more deference to Elizabeth.<sup>41</sup> James likely ceded status to Elizabeth on the page in part because Elizabeth was his most senior relative, in part because his hopes of succeeding Elizabeth as the monarch of England depended in an extent on the queen's good will, and (at least after his mother's execution) James needed the annual pension that Elizabeth paid him and was not afraid to withhold if she felt James had misbehaved.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> These comments are based on a survey of over 100 letters in the National Archives and British Library, including over 80 in SP 52/31–52/69. In a handful of cases James added a short autograph note on the far left-hand side of the page at the same level as his signature. These also opened by addressing Elizabeth which served to mitigate the spatial aggression of the note's placement. See for example BL Cotton MS Caligula Cvi fols. 257v, 301v.

<sup>42</sup> On James's relations with Elizabeth at this time see Susan Doran, 'James VI and the English Succession', in Ralph A. Houlbrooke (ed.), *James VI and I: Ideas, Authority, and Government* (Aldershot, 2006), 25–42; Susan Doran, 'Loving and Affectionate Cousins? The Relationship between Elizabeth I and James VI of Scotland

Meanwhile the familial language that James used simultaneously suggested deference and staked James's claim to succeed the English queen.<sup>43</sup>

Minority rule was another factor that complicated epistolary etiquette. This is clear from the Duke of Somerset's Protectorate, during which time he was *de facto* regent of England. Four autograph letters sent between 13 October 1548 and 2 October 1549 bear the signatures of both Edward VI and Somerset. The ostensible hierarchy between the king and his effective regent was articulated by the space on the page. Edward's signature was placed higher, to the left of the centre of the page, while Somerset's signature came further down on the right-hand side. In all cases, there was very little space between the main text of the letter and Edward's signature, but a significant gap between Edward and Somerset's autographs, highlighting the king's superiority. The need to differentiate between the relative status of the king and his Protector in effect pushed the king's signature higher and to the left and thus implied that he was staking a claim to greater status vis-à-vis the Danish king. As the king's letters opened with a statement of his name and brief titles, the salutation did nothing to offset the implications of the spatial layout. The only mitigation came from the fact that the opening letter of the king's name did move further to the right, compared to Henry's letters, so that it was now aligned with the left border of the letter; this may have been an attempt to compensate for the more aggressive spacing lower down the page.<sup>44</sup> After the Duke of Somerset's fall, the layout of Edward's letters to the Danish king changed. They continued to open with Edward's titles preceding his greeting to Christian and there was still only a small gap between the king's signature and the end of the main text, but the absence of a counter

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1586–1603', in Susan Doran and Glenn Richardson (eds.), *Tudor England and its Neighbours* (Basingstoke, 2005), 203–34.

<sup>43</sup> Allinson, *Monarchy of Letters*, 173–83.

<sup>44</sup> RSA TKUA 63-1 (unfoliated) letters of 13 October 1548, 6 June 1549, 10 September 1549, 2 October 1549; TKUA 63-8 (unfoliated) 20 October 1549.



signature from a *de facto* regent led to Edward's signature moving to a more central position.<sup>45</sup>

During the earlier years of the regency of the Scottish king James V, the epistolary solutions to the king's absence from executive government were different.<sup>46</sup> As James was just seventeen months old when he ascended to the throne, it was implausible that it would sign the letters sent in his name for many years after his accession. These letters followed the protocol of James IV's letters in opening with a salutation to the English king, but the placement of the signature at the end of the letter shifted substantially. As the letters were now signed by a councillor, secretary, or regent, the signature moved to the very bottom right hand corner of the page.<sup>47</sup> This reflected the substantially lower position of the sender of the letter to both the English and Scottish kings, but did not create a precedent that weakened the Scottish king's status claims due to the omission of the king's signature. Once James was old enough to sign letters himself, in early 1524 (before he dismissed his regents and before his first attendance at council meetings), his regent or a councillor no longer countersigned. The exordium remained a salutation to the English king and, as would be expected, the king's subscription and signature moved up and to the left compared to those of his regents. The subscription typically began after a space of four or five lines and commenced from the centre of the page. The king's signature either followed directly on the same line or followed

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<sup>45</sup> RSA TKUA 63-8 (unfoliated) letters of 20 October 1549, 18 December 1550, 19 June 1552; TKUA 63-1 27 September 1551.

<sup>46</sup> On Anglo-Scots relations during this period see Richard Glen Eaves, *Henry VIII's Scottish Diplomacy, 1513–1524. England's Relations with the Regency Government of James V* (New York: Exposition Press, 1987).

<sup>47</sup> See for example TNA SP 49/1 fol. 102r; BL Cotton MS Caligula BII, fol. 277r, Caligula BIII, fols. 160r, Caligula BVI, fols. 114r. Most letters during the first decade of James V's reign were signed variously by either secretary Thomas Hay, Treasurer James Beaton, or James's (occasionally absent) regent James Stewart, duke of Albany.

on the line below, placed a fraction closer to the right-hand margin.<sup>48</sup> A letter sent jointly by James and his mother, Henry's sister Margaret, in November 1524 highlights that the solution chosen by Edward's government for dealing with multiple signatories was not necessarily considered suitable by others. In this case the layout followed the same pattern as James's autograph letters described above; his mother added her signature below and to the right of the king's.<sup>49</sup> While signalling the relatively lower status of Margaret compared to both her son and her brother, this did not push the Scottish king into making new claims about his own position relative to his uncle.

As with any means of political communication, the existence of a shared set of expectations meant that variations on the page from the expected norm became a further means of sending messages about status. Moreover, as Giora Sternberg's study of epistolary culture in seventeenth-century France has argued, the layout of letters was used to claim relative status, not merely to record it. Certainly, among French elites in Lousiquatorzian France, the 'significant spaces' in letters could be varied as an individual sought to assert himself vis-à-vis his correspondent.<sup>50</sup> Such textual claims to status were not confined to the French nobility—many of the Imperial cities of the Holy Roman Empire used letters and their ceremonial records to try to enhance their position within the society of princes.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> See for example BL Cotton MS Caligula BIII, 139; TNA SP 49/2 fol. 114r, 1/32, fol. 161r, 163v, 170v–171r

<sup>49</sup> TNA SP 1/32 fol. 177r. In a joint letter written just a few days later Margaret took a more dominant tone by placing her textual intervention more centrally, but again below her son's signature. See TNA SP 1/32 fol. 197r.

<sup>50</sup> Sternberg, 'Epistolary Ceremonial'.

<sup>51</sup> On the claims to status made by the Imperial cities see André Krischer, 'Ritual Practice and Textual Representations: Free Imperial Cities in the Society of Princes', in Tracey A. Sowerby and J. Craigwood (eds.), *Cultures of Diplomacy and Literary Writing in the Early Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 220–37.

Princes were attuned to the status implications of correspondence and the fact that the layout as well, even as much as, the text of their letters was a means through which they could assert their claims to sovereignty and what they believed to be their place in the international hierarchy. Viewed in isolation, the new spatial arrangement in Christian III's letters to England in the first few years appears assertive and aggressive. Seen in the context of the changes in the layout of the letters he was receiving, however, it becomes clear that the *mise-en-page* of Edward's letters almost certainly triggered changes in Christian's epistolary protocol with England. Christian continued to open the letters with his own name and titles before greeting Edward and he continued to leave a small space between the main text of his letters and his signature. But his subscription moved from the centre-right of the page to very close to the left border. Even if Christian's signature sometimes still hit the centre of the page in this new layout, the overall move to the left mirrored that found in Edward's letters and was no doubt intended to signal that Christian was not prepared to cede status.<sup>52</sup> Even after Edward's signature moved to a more central position following Somerset's fall, Christian continued to place his subscription or even his signature on the far left.<sup>53</sup> This shift in Danish protocol in the late 1540s, moreover, had implications beyond Edward's reign. Frederick II's early letters to Elizabeth continued the precedent set by his father: they opened with his titles before greeting the queen and ended with the king's signature firmly placed on the left of the

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<sup>52</sup> TNA SP 68/3 (unfoliated), 28 June 1549; TNA SP 68/4, fols. 55r–56r, 75r–78r; BL Cotton MS Vespasian FIII, fol. 143r; Nero BIII, fols. 121r–124v.

<sup>53</sup> See for example BL Cotton MS Vespasian FIII, fol. 143r. See also the placement of his signature in a letter to Mary I (TNA SP 69/12, fols. 34r–35v).

page, sometimes even aligned with the left margin of the text.<sup>54</sup> The motivation behind this persistence was probably an unwillingness to cede any ground that his father had gained.

#### POLITICS ON THE PAGE BEYOND EUROPE

As several scholars have observed, the letters that English monarchs sent to extra-European princes were most commonly physically distinct from those that they sent to their European peers: a marked feature of this correspondence was its more decorative nature.<sup>55</sup> Many of James VI/I's surviving letters to the rulers of Russia, Turkey, India and Japan, for instance, had decorative panels framing three sides in what Maija Jansson has termed a swag border.<sup>56</sup> While concerns about the magnificence of the monarch sending the letter were undoubtedly important factors determining how such letters looked, what was known about the material and visual aspects of the ceremonial environment into which political documents moved had repercussions for the material features of those very same documents.<sup>57</sup> The royal letters intended for rulers beyond Europe were produced by multiple hands. Limners were employed to provide the decoration, the secretariat (or in some cases the trading company secretary) typically produced the main text, while the queen or king supplied her or his autograph. Although the spatial conventions of the contexts into which such letters were moving may have been different—indeed on occasion was unknown—that did not make the imperative to

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<sup>54</sup> See for example TNA SP 70/5 fol. 89r–90r, 70/6 fols. 134r–136v, 70/8 fols. 90r–91r, 70/9 fol. 90r–v, 70/15 fols. 31r, 34r, 70/22 fol. 61r–v, 70/25 fols. 71r, 109r–110v, 70/63 fols. 71r–v, 73r–74v, 70/69 fols. 20r–21r, 22r–23r.

<sup>55</sup> Jansson, *Art and Diplomacy*; Sowerby, 'Negotiating with the Material Text'.

<sup>56</sup> For descriptions of Stuart letters and a discussion of the process by which they were produced see Jansson, *Art and Diplomacy*.

<sup>57</sup> Sowerby, 'Negotiating with the Material Text'.

articulate status through sovereign spaces on the page any weaker. If anything, the uncertainty involved in establishing new relationships may even have reinforced the use of existing spatial conventions to communicate hierarchies.

Certainly, the protocol used in Elizabeth's surviving letters to the Russian tsars indicate that she asserted her position through the use of space.<sup>58</sup> Her autograph—usually oversized—was placed in the centre of the page, normally after only a short space from the end of the main text of her letter. The letters opened with Elizabeth's titles, which preceded the greeting to the tsar. Embellishments on the page augmented the prominent position of the queen's name: all but one of the letters included either an illuminated opening E or majuscules or letters with cadels on the first line, or a combination of the three. Several further enhanced the majesty of the queen's name through foliate decoration arising from, or placed in a panel above, it. Elizabeth I's relationship with Ivan IV of Russia was occasionally strained due in part to the English queen's disinterest in the aggressive political alliance that Ivan desired and in part due to Ivan's occasional questioning of a queen's ability to wield power given her gender.<sup>59</sup> In 1576, for instance, he dismissively wrote that Elizabeth 'flowed in her maidenly estate like a maid' and accused her of being ruled by her merchants.<sup>60</sup> Through their layout, Elizabeth's letters to him, and to his successors, clearly articulated her claims to be recognized as equally sovereign.

While a relatively large number of letters by Elizabeth survive in the Russian archives, few of her letters to other non-European princes are extant. There are strong

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<sup>58</sup> This paragraph is based on an analysis of eighteen surviving autograph letters from Elizabeth to the tsars. The originals are in Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Drevnikh Aktov. More easily accessible are photographs in the UK National Archives PRO 22/60 2–19.

<sup>59</sup> For a discussion of Elizabeth's correspondence with Ivan IV see Allinson, *Monarchy of Letters*, 111–130.

<sup>60</sup> See for example TNA SP 70/140 fols. 94r–96r.

reasons, however, to believe that similar conventions would have been used in her letters to the Ottoman sultans and Asian princes. Certainly, by the end of her reign, Elizabeth's letters to Russia, the Ottoman Empire, Cathay, and several other Asian polities were limned and the practice was sufficiently engrained that there was an artist who was commonly entrusted with the task.<sup>61</sup> Further support for the theory that the material features of Elizabeth's letters to non-European powers likely resembled those that survive in the Russian archives can be found in an extant letter that was sent, but never delivered, to the Chinese Emperor Wanli.<sup>62</sup> In this letter Elizabeth's name and the first line of the letter are rendered in red and gold majuscules, while Elizabeth's autograph is placed squarely in the centre of the page in a spatial statement of equality between the English queen and the Chinese Emperor. Meanwhile the letter is framed by a broken border of abstract gold floriate decoration on a red background, in a manner that is not dissimilar to some of the early Stuart swag borders discussed by Maija Jansson.

The decorative embellishments that were typical of James VI/I's extra-European letters drew particular attention to their opening lines. A decorative or illuminated capital was standard, as was the rendering of the first line in majuscules. In some letters the majuscules were themselves set upon a coloured hatched background that made them stand out from the rest of the text even more.<sup>63</sup> Such features highlighted the king's name and the beginning of

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<sup>61</sup> Hatfield House, Cecil Papers (hereafter CP) 88/55; TNA SP 97/2, fol. 95v; William N. Sainsbury etc. (eds.), *Calendar of State Papers Colonial Series* (44 vols. London: Longman, Green, Longman & Roberts, 1860-), II 286, 362; Thomas Rundall, *Narratives of voyages Towards the North-West, in Search of a Passage to Cathay and India, 1496 to 1631* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 61.

<sup>62</sup> Lancashire Record Office, DDSH 15/3/1. On this letter's place in Anglo-Chinese relations see Rayne Allinson, 'The Virgin Queen and the Son of Heaven: Elizabeth I's Letters to Wan-li, Emperor of China', in Bajetta, Coatalen, and Gibson (eds.), *Foreign Correspondence*, 209–228.

<sup>63</sup> For example TNA PRO 60/22 25, 31; Christie's sale 6348, lot 321.

his titles, as he routinely opened his correspondence with these. In addition, many of James' letters also featured a decorative swag border that served to place additional emphasis on the opening salutation while also providing a frame for the king's words.<sup>64</sup> In contrast to Elizabeth, James took a more conciliatory approach to the positioning of his signature. As mentioned above, Elizabeth signed her letters to non-European princes in the very centre of the page, often without any significant space between the end of the main text of the letter and the subscription, irrespective of the layout of the rest of the letter. James, however, placed his signature in the middle of right side of the page, often after a gap equivalent to several lines of the text. While the signature was not so far to the right that it implied full deference to the addressee, the royal signature's movement further right by James did have the effect of making the spatial layout of the letter as a whole less aggressively assertive by European standards, for the claims made by the invocation and their framing were counterbalanced by the comparatively modest placement of the royal autograph.

It is tempting to speculate that the continued placement of the king's signature on the right-hand side of the page arose from the conventions of the courts into which many of his letters were sent: after all in courts using Arabic languages, writing conventions made the right, rather than the left, the dominant side.<sup>65</sup> A comparison across James's letters to Japan, India, Turkey, and Russia, however, reveals that it was more likely simply a continuation of established protocol. By the seventeenth century, English royal letters rarely arrived at courts

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<sup>64</sup> These comments are based on an analysis of the photographs of James's letters to the Russian tsars (TNA PRO 60/22 20–31) and extant letters to other non-European rulers (Bodleian MS Eng. Hist. b172, fol. 57; Christie's sale 6348 lot 321; James Ford Bell Library, University of Minnesota, 1611 oJa, 1614 oJa; BL Cotton Charters xvii 29–30; BL Add. Ch. 56456; BL IOR A/1/7B; Arcadian Library, London, ARC 16401, 16985).

<sup>65</sup> Thomas Roe, *The Negotiations of Sir Thomas Roe, in his Embassy to the Ottoman Porte, from the Year 1621 to 1628 Inclusive* (London: printed by Samuel Richardson, 1740), 270.

that had no prior experience of European royal letters: many of the rulers or their immediate predecessors had received letters from the French, Portuguese, Spanish, and/or Dutch. There is evidence to suggest that these letters were of a similar design to those sent by the English.<sup>66</sup> The knowledge that many non-European rulers would have had some familiarity with European princely epistolary practices may well have had an impact on the form of James's letters. In that context, switching the left/right hierarchy could have implied that English monarchs occupied a lower rank in the European society of princes than other European monarchs, something they would have been keen to avoid.

#### THE POLITICS OF PAPER, PARCHMENT, AND VELLUM

While the layout of royal letters was crucial to their political meaning, it was not the only material factor of political import. The material on which the letter was written could also convey information about how the sender wished to position him or herself in relation to the recipient. Most of the letters discussed above were written on paper, as it was becoming increasingly common across the early modern period for princely missives to be written on paper, rather than parchment or vellum. For instance, while the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I committed several of his letters to Henry VIII to vellum, paper became the main medium for Imperial letters to England during Charles V's reign. Princes were concerned to ensure that their missives were on high quality paper and would excuse any correspondence conducted on lower quality materials.<sup>67</sup> Elizabeth I is even known to have used specially

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<sup>66</sup> See for example the letter of the Portuguese Viceroy Dom Duarte de Meneses to Toyotomi Hideyoshi reproduced in Stefan Halikowski-Smith, "The Friendship of Kings was in the Ambassadors": Portuguese Diplomatic Embassies in Asia and Africa during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', *Portuguese Studies*, 22.1 (2006), 127.

<sup>67</sup> CP 1181.



minted paper with iconographically significant watermarks in some of her foreign correspondence.<sup>68</sup>

Nevertheless, some epistolary relationships were still conducted wholly or partially on parchment or vellum. The extant original letters from the Venetian Doges to English monarchs, for example, were typically written on parchment or vellum into the seventeenth century. Many letters that the English monarchs received from the papacy also continued to be committed to parchment or vellum.<sup>69</sup> Letters of credence were also sometimes sent on parchment or vellum rather than paper.<sup>70</sup> These included those taken by Cardinal Wolsey to France in 1527, when he was tasked with concluding an Anglo-French accord, which opened with a large foliate H.<sup>71</sup>

Just as there were visual distinctions between the typical royal letters sent within Europe and those despatched to countries further afield, so too were there material distinctions. The embellishments that became a standard feature of letters being sent to non-European rulers helped to determine the material on which those letters were written. The surviving letters from Elizabeth and James sent to, or intended for, non-European rulers were written on parchment or vellum and tended to be much larger than those sent within Europe.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Allinson, *Monarchy of Letters*, 20.

<sup>69</sup> See for example TNA SP 1/9 fols. 63r–64v, 151r–152v, 1/30 fols. 15r, 31r, 338r, 69/10 fols. 107r–108v, 191r–192v. Due to Henry VIII and Elizabeth I's breaks with Rome there are long periods in the sixteenth century during which the English monarchs did not receive papal letters.

<sup>70</sup> See for example TNA SP 1/170 fol. 103r, 69/7 fol. 81r, 69/8 fol. 67r, 69/12 fol. 71r.

<sup>71</sup> Archives Nationales, Paris, Musée des Affaires étrangères (hereafter AE), AE/III/75.

<sup>72</sup> Jansson, *Art and Diplomacy*, 36–37, 50. Other letters not discussed or referenced by Jansson were also on parchment or vellum, including Elizabeth's letter to Wanli, and several Jacobean letters in the Arcadian Library in London. Parchment and vellum also withstood the humid conditions in some of the non-European countries to which letters were sent better than paper.

These materials were almost certainly chosen because they were easier to limn and gild than paper. This consideration also explains why parchment and vellum continued to be used for other sorts of diplomatic documents that were sometimes decorated. These included treaties and the authentications that princes had sworn the required oaths to uphold the treaties. Some of the surviving illuminated copies of inter-princely treaties took the form of letters patent; others included a decorated opening page in the same manner that a book might open with an illuminated first page.<sup>73</sup> Yet many of the surviving treaties that were committed to parchment and vellum were not illuminated.<sup>74</sup> It is likely that the higher prestige of these materials prompted their continued use for ratifications and confirmations of treaties, despite the prevalence of paper at the earlier stages of negotiating and drafting these texts.

## CONCLUSION

The appearance of a prince's letter revealed much about how he or she understood his or her place in the society of princes. Royal letters, as much as other courtly letters, 'can be interpreted as an external sign of courtly culture'.<sup>75</sup> At one level this was about magnificence: impressing the recipient (or at least trying to) through the materials used in writing and

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<sup>73</sup> See for example AE AE/I/1/10, AE/III/31, AE/III/23. AE/III/35; TNA E30/1109, E30/1112; E30/1114.

<sup>74</sup> See for example AE AE/III/38, AE/III/251; BL Cotton MS Galba Bx fol. 74r; J. S. Brewer, J. Gairdner, R. H. Brodie (eds.), *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII* (23 vols., London: John Murray, 1862–1932), Vol. III.i, nos. 741, 941, Vol. III.ii, no. 2333, Vol. IV.ii, no. 1786, 3428; *Calendar of State Papers Foreign Elizabeth* (23 vols., London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts & Green, 1863–1950), Vol. 1, nos 612, 666.

<sup>75</sup> Fernando Bouza, 'Letters and Portraits: Economy of Time and Chivalrous Service in Courtly Culture', in Francisco Bethencourt and Florike Egmond (eds.), *Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe Vol. 3: Correspondence and Cultural Exchange, 1400–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 145–162, quotation at 147.

sealing the letter. At another it was about demonstrating engagement with literary and intellectual culture through the rhetoric and literary allusions the text contained. But it is crucial to remember that princely epistles expressed the rivalry and competition between princes in other ways too. The cultural processes and assumptions that underpinned the production of princely letters also meant that encoded within them were non-verbal cues as to the state (real or desired) of relations between the two princes. Some of these cues were conveyed by the material upon which the letter was written and the floss or paper used to seal it. But while there was a politics to using paper, politics also played out in the *mise-en-page* of inter-princely letters, as the spacing laid claims to relative status, even if there was no one uniform way in which princes formatted their letters.

As with other means of symbolic communication, letter writing was an area in which a prince could protect his position and even try to advance his position relative to his peers. Within the semantics provided by the choice of placement on left-right and top-bottom axes and the sovereign spaces left on the page, rulers negotiated their relative place within the international hierarchy. Moreover, the material features of the letters worked in combination with the letters' textual content producing a more nuanced language of status-claims. That princes and their secretariats understood this language is demonstrated by the ways in which rulers reacted to changes in the epistolary choices of those sending them letters. Princes responded to the strategies used by others with changes in the layout of and greetings used in their own letters, in order to ensure that any changes in their interlocutors' epistolary etiquette did not create a situation that saw them lose relative status. Paying more attention to the *mise-en-page* of royal correspondence, then, can reveal subtleties in the relationships between early modern rulers that is not always apparent just from the textual content of those same letters.

