



**UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)**

**Geconserveerd koningschap: Regentes Emma en Wilhelmina's erfenis**

Diependaal, I.M.

[Link to publication](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Diependaal, I. M. (2013). Geconserveerd koningschap: Regentes Emma en Wilhelmina's erfenis.

**General rights**

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

**Disclaimer/Complaints regulations**

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

## Summary

This study is a historical reconstruction, placed within a broad historical context, of the Regency of Queen Emma (1890-1898), wife of King William (*Willem*) III (1849-1890) and mother of Queen Wilhelmina (1898-1948). In simple terms the study reveals an image of a woman who worked to preserve her daughter's legacy – the Dutch kingship. For centuries the Netherlands had been a Republic with members of the Orange dynasty as 'stadholders' in a semi-monarchical style. As a result of dynastic politics and national circumstances the country became a monarchy in 1813 with a member of the Orange family as Head of State. In 1848 the written Constitution was changed. The Ministers were given responsibility to oversee the political actions of the King. Emma's late husband had not supported the idea of a limited monarchy and had used every possible avenue to intervene in politics during his reign. In addition, his disreputable social behaviour, and that of his sons (born during his first marriage), harmed the dignity of the royal position. After William's death Queen Emma needed to clean up the mess. To do this she chose precedent, if it proved useful, but was pragmatic enough to be flexible and change direction if it was necessary. Most importantly, Queen Wilhelmina was given an education that was heavily influenced by religion, historical inspiration and morality. To be a King or Queen had to become a mission – instead of a job that could be refused or modelled to fulfil opportunistic or individualised wishes.

In historiographical terms of dynastic politics, Queen Emma was a pawn in the family politics of the dynasty which ruled the small German principalities of Waldeck and Pyrmont. During her Regency she served to honour her husband's family (her in-laws) and emphasized the historical union between the Orange-dynasty and the inhabitants of the Netherlands. Within Wilhelmina's education various factors were considered to be important: the Queen had to acknowledge, and follow, the example of her glorious ancestors; she had to know her country and its subjects. Queen Emma believed it was important to continue the royal prerogatives (the constitutional rights and privileges) from one generation to another. In this matter she was prepared to have political confrontations with Ministers (Secretaries of State) who tried to reduce the royal prerogatives or interpreted the Constitution differently. During visits she made to different areas of the Netherlands, with Wilhelmina, Emma emphasized the historical union between the Orange-dynasty and the Netherlands. She also took the initiative for the construction of a new building to house the Dutch Royal Archives. She searched for dynastic memorabilia to represent the glory and historical importance of the Orange dynasty and these were placed in a private museum within the new Royal Archives' building. These artefacts were also used for decoration within the royal palace and its annexes.

Since 1990, historians have assumed that Queen Emma intended to renew the Dutch monarchy in a nationalistic age. She is described as the ideal liberal and *bourgeois* Queen who changed the course of the monarchy after William III's failure to do so. However, this image of a purposeful and innovative Queen Regent is in contrast with the proclamation that Queen Emma issued at the start of her Regency on 24 November 1890. Her proclamation echoed King William's 1849 proclamation and is a sign that she intended continuity. In reality, she did not have many options to do otherwise. The Dutch written Constitution and two formal Acts of Parliament had formally prescribed her duties as Regent of the Netherlands and guardian of her underage daughter. Her responsibilities were outlined in detail in the Regency Act (*Wet op het regentschap*, 1884) and Act on the Guardianship (*Wet op de voogdij*, 1888). A parliamentary debate made the national wishes clear. The historical union between the Orange-dynasty and The Netherlands was very important and Queen Wilhelmina needed to have a 'Dutch education'. The proclamation, in combination with the legal circumstances, suggest that Queen Emma followed the existing royal traditions and the

national wish rather than executing preconceived ideas of her own about how to modernise the Dutch monarchy.

Despite this, it is clear that Queen Emma's Regency was successful in a period of change. Therefore, this begs the question: did Queen Emma intend to change or did she react to circumstances which forced a change? In this study, Queen Emma's Regency is examined within the broad framework of the Orange-Nassau dynasty.

Queen Emma had every reason to strive for continuity. Because of the phrasing of the written Constitution, and the debates inside and outside Parliament in the 1880's, Queen Emma was only the temporary caretaker of the royal authority. As the legal Queen's guardian she was in charge of preparing Queen Wilhelmina for her future duties. Queen Emma was a Queen Consort during her husband's reign and after his death, she became a Queen Regent. She was never a Queen in her own right. During the Regency it was Queen Wilhelmina who was Head of State in legal terms. During her Regency Queen Emma was confronted with various negative aspects of Wilhelmina's forerunners' royal legacy.

The primary sources are clear. Queen Emma wanted to place her daughter within the glorious tradition of the House of Orange and the heroic acts of some of the individuals of this dynasty. However, she was dealing with a controversial, combative history surrounding the *Stadholderate* and the monarchy. William I was offered the sovereignty in 1813 but it was in combination with a 'Wise Constitution'. In 1848, and afterwards, this written Constitution was subject to changes. This time was also a period of debate regarding the extension of franchise and the reinforcement of the parliamentary system. Socially, Emma had to deal with a self-assured social and political elite – a result of the republican history of the country. Emma's actions were critically watched by this elite. Emma shared her role as legal guardian with an official council made up of members of the political ruling class and high officials of State. This council of guardians, the *Raad van Voogdij*, was obliged, by an Act of Parliament, to control the finances of the royal household and to approve all nominations of Wilhelmina's teachers. In later life Queen Wilhelmina felt that this had been a heavy social control: she had been 'a Child of the State'.

The first chapter of this study places Wilhelmina's education within a large legacy: Wilhelmina had to match the glory of her forerunners. The maxim was: *Noblesse Oblige*. She was educated in Dutch nationalistic history, as was popular in the late nineteenth century. A modern interpretation of Dutch history is important to understand Wilhelmina's education. In line with the dynastic politics of the House of Orange, Emma aspired to a kingship in which Wilhelmina was more than a simple symbol of State. For centuries the 'stadholders' were the defenders of the political and religious freedom of the Dutch against foreign aggressors. As a result of strong dynastic politics the Orange-stadholderate obtained a semi-monarchic position. The stadholders married into important Royal Houses of Europe, held princely court and dealt in the international diplomatic traffic as if they were Head of State. The *chefs de famille* of the Orange dynasty were influenced by German traditions and after the establishment of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, they wanted to act as a 'father' to the 'people'. King William I, in particular, wanted to be a *Landesvater* who watched over the prosperity of the nation and the welfare of its inhabitants. The alliance between the Orange dynasty and the 'Dutch people' – the result of centuries of dynastic politics – was made central to Wilhelmina's education.

Queen Emma also had to deal with the negative legacies of the Orange dynasty. For centuries the relationship between the Oranges and the social elite was tense and sometimes led to civil war. King William I was offered the sovereignty but turned out to be a king who was seen as too authoritarian. He was forced to revise the Constitution and abdicated in an atmosphere of heavy demands for further restrictions of royal power. Chapter 2 reconstructs how his

successor, King William II, in 1848 (the year of international revolutions), ordered a more liberal Constitution. His son and successor was against this.

In 1849, William III inherited a limited kingship. He was obliged to rule with Ministers who were responsible for his political actions. William III was a difficult person who had many conflicts with the Dutch political elite. In 1890, at the time of his death, he was commemorated in the Dutch liberal press as a constitutional King (in the sense of the historical interpretation of the Constitution, as it was issued in 1887). Behind the scenes he had been a King who tried to use political influence. He was against a parliamentary government and the extension of the franchise. Because he was a difficult personality with strong opinions and, sometimes, irrational behaviour some Ministers tried to ignore King William III. William III also responded to appeals made by his trustees. Some of his officials used their influence for political goals or patronage purposes. Because of this, after his death, Queen Emma and her advisors were critically watched and scrutinized by the political elite.

Another negative *legacy* was the social behaviour of King William III and his sons (born in his first marriage). This is the central theme of Chapter 3. Queen Wilhelmina was given a disciplined education so she would not follow the negative examples of these members of the Orange dynasty. For the whole of her life Queen Wilhelmina was haunted by her strict education.

The first marriage of William III to Sophie of Württemberg was dynastically equal (*ebenbürtig*) and, therefore, a success in terms of dynastic politics. However, it was privately a very unhappy marriage which led to a separation in 1855. Queen Sophie knew she was socially as important as her husband and demanded a role which suited her birth and enlightened education. Her – liberal orientated – political opinions clashed with the conservative ideas of William III. Sophie quarrelled in vain with her husband about the education of their eldest son. In his adult life, Prince William spoke conceitedly about the royal ‘job’ which he did not admire and which did not suit him because of his inadequate education. He refused to marry a princess born to an European royal house, resigned from all functions in political and military institutions and went to Paris to live a life filled with hedonistic pleasures instead of royal duties.

Queen Emma married William III in January 1879 after a formal betrothal in the autumn of 1878. Their union was not popular within the Netherlands: it happened too soon after the death of the beloved Queen Sophie and the social elite was displeased by the extramarital behaviour of William III. Also, Emma’s background was critically scrutinized: the marriage was seen to be only a marriage between equal dynastic partners in name. Waldeck and Pymont were two small German principalities. Emma’s parents’ compensated for a political loss of power by arranging an ambitious marriage policy. The principalities were, in fact, ruled from imperial Berlin and the Dutch political elite feared German imperialism.

Emma’s background and her role as Queen Consort is described in Chapter 4. Emma did not make the same mistake that Queen Sophie had made. During her husband’s life she stayed in the background. On 31 August 1880, Emma gave birth to a daughter – Wilhelmina. Thanks to Emma, William III enjoyed some happy family times in his senior years. After the death of William III’s third, and last surviving, son, Alexander, in 1884, Wilhelmina became heir to the throne. All the male members of the Orange dynasty had died and it was clear that the King had also become an ill man. There was huge speculation about it. The once heroic Orange dynasty was now haunted by a curse or mental disease. At this time, too, international tensions were increasing. The Dutch political elite feared for the independence of the country and did not like the German connections to the Orange dynasty. The Constitution was changed to make sure it would be Wilhelmina who would inherit the Dutch throne instead of

a descendant of King William I by the female line. These descendants had another family name and probably had close connections to the German Emperor William (Wilhelm) II.

The Dutch political elite demanded that Wilhelmina should receive a purely 'Dutch' education. However, speculation regarding the strange behaviour of some of the male members of the Orange dynasty, and the threat of extinction, had an important consequence for Wilhelmina's education. The speculations were fed by William III's illness. In his last years he became psychotic due to a kidney disease. The King had always been a difficult person who could exhibit irrational behaviour sometimes. Between 1884 and 1890 the borderline between this irrational behaviour – speculated as inherited from the Russian Romanov dynasty – and the psychotic symptoms of the kidney disease was not clear cut. Also, almost no-one could handle Wilhelmina, who was a difficult child. The royal household became chaotic because of the strange behaviour of William III. The royal illness prevented William III and Emma from performing their public duties and communication between the King and Ministers was affected. In these difficult years, Emma tactfully chose her go-betweens whilst still deferring to her husband when he was lucid.

Because Queen Emma was a modest Queen Consort, acting 'in the background', it was difficult for the Dutch political elite to trust her as a future Regent. No one knew for sure if she was capable of it. It was evident that she had not had the education that Queen Sophie had had; nor had she the intellectual capacities that Queen Sophie possessed, or the dynastic relations and international network that Queen Sophie had had access to. Debate within and outside Parliament in 1884 was fierce and the members of the Cabinet made it clear to Parliament that Queen Emma had only been chosen as Regent because of a lack of an alternative. Queen Emma had to show that she had become Dutch and she had promised to educate her daughter as fully Dutch. The signal from the political elite was clear. Queen Emma had to be careful. Therefore, she had constitutional, political and practical reasons to strive for continuity. She would be wise to only deviate from old precedents if it served her daughter's future.

In Chapter 5, the political Regency is reconstructed. Queen Emma tried to reign according to political precedents but she was confronted with negative legacies. Ministers, members of the political Cabinet, were not docile servants of the Crown. Foreign Secretaries and Secretaries of War tried to force reorganisations upon Queen Emma which would have been impossible for them to suggest to William III. Members of the political and social elite scrutinized the role of Emma's most trusted advisors. Queen Emma succeeded – but not completely. Her private secretary had to resign from the army to maintain his court position: his position was at stake after speculation that he had played an informal role in politics. For pragmatic reasons Emma had to look for advisors within the constellation of the Dutch formal institutions. Queen Emma also felt betrayed by a Home Secretary. During extremely serious political discussion about the enlargement of the franchise, he brought her constitutional, neutral position above the political parties into jeopardy. Probably, as a result of all the political conflicts, and, in combination with a personal distrust for the person concerned, Queen Emma changed Wilhelmina's education: a professor of Dutch history was forced to leave before all his lectures were finished.

The teaching of contemporary constitutional history and constitutional law became a task for another professor. Queen Emma was the first to attend the lectures. She, herself, wrote all the draft notes. A Lady in Waiting, officially promoted to 'Sur intendant of the education', rewrote the notes in leather bound exercise books which could be used as reference books. Professor De Louter lectured both the Queens in an Orangist vision of Constitutional Law. Queen Wilhelmina needed to have both a pragmatic attitude and an *education permanente*. As reigning Queen she had to know the needs of her subjects. She had to influence her ministers to the benefit and welfare of the Dutch people.

As part of Wilhelmina's education Queen Emma travelled with her throughout the Netherlands. The visits were also part of an old tradition: royal subjects were welcome to bring their requests to the ruling prince during a royal audience. Earlier, Stadholders and Kings had visited different parts of the country; received subjects during an audience; and, were given feasts, receptions and a celebration tour of a city or region. During official dinners, Queen Emma informed the Governors of the principal cities and regions they visited, of her dynastically coloured motive: she came to confirm the historical alliance between the House of Orange and the Dutch. But the Regent did not take the initiative for all visits. Sometimes the local Governors or important inhabitants instigated a visit through the press or by sending written requests to the Queen. In individual cases Emma tried, pragmatically, to come to compromises.

Within her own household, Queen Emma worked according to old precedents to maintain old traditions, but, at the same time, she kept an eye on modern times and the wishes of the members of her household and the *Raad van Voogdij*. This attitude resulted in her commissioning a new building for the Dutch Royal Archives. It became a private place for the conservation of the archives and dynastic memorabilia of the Orange dynasty. Within the walls of the building, out of sight of critical outsiders, Wilhelmina's future mission was prescribed with a lot of royal symbols and concrete words.

Chapter 7 reconstructs the process in which Queen Emma came into conflict with the official guardians within the *Raad van Voogdij*. They had different views regarding the distinction between royal display and upholding royal dignity. The *Raad van Voogdij* was officially installed, in part, to control the financial accounts of the expenditures of the Civil List and to ensure that Wilhelmina's private fortune would not decrease. The *Raad van Voogdij* noticed some mistakes in the royal accounting and came into conflict with Queen Emma. After a few disputes – about a library meant for royal display and a pension system – Queen Emma avoided conflicts. Whenever possible she chose her own direction, taking paths that conformed to the Orange legacy and that were advantageous to Wilhelmina's future reign.

In the final Chapter a few concluding observations are made which could lead to further academic research. There are reasons to assume that Queen Emma was isolated from the Dutch social elite. Tactical conflicts were probably the result. In name, the Dutch royal court was the centre of the Dutch nobility. In reality, Queen Emma was served by only a handful of trusted servants with a low position within the Dutch aristocratic pecking order. Probably, Queen Emma stood isolated from the people who could have helped her to make her Regency more successful in social terms.

It can also be assumed that Queen Emma was isolated within the international network of the European royal families. The princely and royal dynasties formed, up to 1918, a social and political clan. The individual members helped each other for dynastic, national and international purposes. The Orange dynasty failed, in the second half of the nineteenth century, to be a successful part of this international 'family clan'. King William III was not respected, his eldest son refused to marry within a European royal family, while Emma's dynastic resources were limited as a result of her simple background. Queen Emma tried to use her dynastic contacts for Dutch national purposes, but her opportunities seemed to be limited. In the primary sources no evidence is found that Queen Emma used her international network to design a new vision for the Dutch monarchy. It is clear that her sister, Helene – married to a son of Queen Victoria – and her sister-in-law, Sophie – *Grossherzogin* of Sachsen-Weimar – were part of Emma's dynastic network. According to researched primary sources this network came into action for typical dynastic issues: marriage politics, execution of last wills and the education of the heir to a throne.

No evidence has been found in the researched primary sources to confirm the historiographical view of the ideal liberal and *bourgeois* Queen who intended to renew the Dutch monarchy in a nationalistic age. The royal visits were not a novelty invented by Emma. They were part of an old tradition and part of Wilhelmina's education. In the archives of the court departments – often, bound registration books, which were used systematically by Emma's court officials – no evidence is found for a policy that would be described in modern parlance as 'public relations'. Press communiqués were scarce during the Regency. Lack of legislation made it permissible to take pictures of the Queen at public occasions and to distribute them freely. It was not illegal for photographers to copy the work of their colleagues and to sell it independently. It was also permissible to use pictures of the Queen for merchandise products like tea cups. Emma did not have legal opportunities to prevent the commercial exploitation of her daughter's image but she did protest successfully (on moral grounds) against a manipulated photograph of Queen Wilhelmina and Queen Victoria being circulated.

It is disputable that Queen Emma had liberal ideas in the political sense. She wanted to stand above the political parties and, therefore, hid her personal opinions. Her most trusted advisors were conservative. In the researched sources no evidence is found that Queen Emma co-operated with the liberals in the main cities to 'civilise' the lower classes. Sources draw a picture of a Queen Regent who made no social distinctions and wanted to be Regent for *all* inhabitants of the Netherlands.

In summary: there is no evidence that Queen Emma attempted, purposefully, to renew the Dutch monarchy. A reconstruction through the primary sources paints a different picture. The Queen Regent was motivated by dynastic policy. She did not serve the Dutch monarchy but the Orange dynasty: the valuable Orange legacy – the Dutch kingship – had to be transferred from one generation to another. At the same time, her daughter had to be prepared for her future destiny as ruling Queen. For practical reasons, but also fed by Orangist dynastic ideology, Queen Emma responded positively to public demands. It was already the intention of earlier Kings to support the nationalistic feelings of the Dutch. This was not a new attitude. In some situations Queen Emma had even offended people because the German born princess did not understand the conventions within the higher circles of Dutch society. As a result of the reorganisation of the Royal Household she isolated herself from members of the Dutch nobility who could have helped her constructively. It is also evident that Emma did not have a high social position within the international network of the main European royal dynasties. This situation did not allow her to exchange innovative ideas. The historical reconstruction draws a picture of a pragmatic woman who was in possession of a realistic world view. She wanted to please everyone. However, sometimes she did not understand what people expected. As a consequence, she made tactical and strategic mistakes. Therefore, the outcomes of a defensive policy - and her reactions to situations or conflicts - were wrongly interpreted as an attempt to modernize the Dutch monarchy.

This historical reconstruction and examination was made possible because the author was given access to several public and private archives and historical documents in Great Britain, The Netherlands and the Federal State of Thüringen (Germany). Formulated in the Dutch language, the author has listed elsewhere her expression of gratitude to the many people who helped her with the various aspects of completing this thesis. In this Summary she restricts herself to official acknowledgements. She wants to thank Her Royal Highness Princess Beatrix (former Queen of the Netherlands), His Majesty King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands and Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for special grants to make use of their private archives.