



Call for Papers

Towards a New Political History of the Court, c. 1200–1800 Delineating Practices of Power in Gender, Culture, and Sociability

International Conference

14–16 November 2018, German Historical Institute Paris

Organized by

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Deadline: 13 May 2018

Dynastic centres, or courts, played a pivotal role in the state building processes out of which developed our modern political practices and institutions. Yet, for a long time, the court was regarded primarily as the field of anecdotal ‘petite histoire’ and consequently neglected by scholarly research. In recent years, however, the exploration of the dynastic centre made considerable progress, as historians sought to build on, and go beyond, the venerable sociological models of Norbert Elias. The exploration of symbolic communication, patronage, micro-politics, gender, the body, materiality, and transculturality are only some of the innovative approaches that have been brought to bear on the subject of court history and they have produced remarkable results. We now understand that the court was a multifaceted space for innovation in the arts, and sciences, in religious and political thought, as well as a central hub for the deployment of power relationships. But how do these different aspects interact? And how do these new approaches modify our current understanding of, for instance, state-building narratives? Do they suggest new chronologies, and do we consequently have to rewrite traditional textbook narratives in order to reflect these new impulses?

Building on such questions, this conference invites its participants to reflect and discuss on how to conceptualise the political dimension of courtly culture and sociability in the context of a new political historiography of the court. We envisage that the discussion could be structured around five thematic axes, which we understand to be interrelated. The contributions might address some of the following questions or propose their own approaches to the topic:

1. *Family, household, state:*

What is the relationship between these entities?

What was the influence of specific families and their networks on practices of power in dynastic centres?

Under which conditions is it possible to compare micro-politics and patronage at the early modern court with similar phenomena in present-day organizations?



2. *Gender:*

In which contexts does gender difference have an influence on practices of power?

Was the continuous construction and renegotiation of gender at court part of the practice of power?

What was the role of gender segregated spaces at court?

Can the court be read as a gendered system and what advantages might such readings have?

What is the political role of staged gendered interactions such as, for instance, the audience/performer relationship during court festivals and tournaments?

3. *Religion, intellectual production, and material culture:*

Why were monarchs interested in knowledge production?

Which roles did court clerics play in the practice of power?

When and how could material objects serve rulership?

4. *Global historical and transcultural perspectives:*

What are the advantages of transcultural approaches to the history of the court?

How can we integrate global approaches with empirical studies of specific historical settings?

Can we integrate findings from local studies into a transcultural theory of pre-modern courtly governance?

How do we conceptualize the challenges of pre-modern rule over extended territories from a global perspective?

5. *Bodies, sexuality, and emotions:*

What differentiates royal bodies from 'regular' bodies?

What was the role of beauty for rulership?

Were courts specific types of 'emotional communities' (in the sense outlined in Barbary Rosenwein)?

Which emotions did royal (and other) propaganda seek to stir and how does that change over time?

Departing from their own court-related research, the participants of this conference are invited to reflect on how the political dimension of their area of expertise could best be framed in the context of a 'new political history of the court' that aims to overcome a one-sided focalisation on major events, primarily male power holders, and oversimplified and often anachronistic conceptions of political institutions or a strict divide between 'political' and 'private' spheres.

In our conference, we would like to bring together scholars who are working on all aspects of court history, including historians of diverse periods and regions beyond early modern Europe. Our aim is to both take stock of the recent developments in court history, as well as to reflect on its challenges and areas in need of further development.



If you would like to join us in this endeavour, please apply with an abstract of the planned presentation of no more than 250 words, as well as a short biographical note (research interests, past and current academic affiliations, major publications, 3-4 sentences) to Regine Maritz (regine.maritz@gmail.com) and Pascal Firges (pfirges@dhi-paris.fr). We intend to publish both the paper abstracts and biographical notes of all participants on our conference blog. Presentations will have a length of no more than 20 minutes. Work-in-progress is welcome. The working language is English. Depending on successful funding applications, travel costs and accommodation for participants may be covered fully or partially.