

Power-Relationships in Court Societies. Marriage, Concubinage, Friendship, Kinship, and Patronage in Historical Perspective. International Research Workshop

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Early modern courts were the centres of political power of their time and the locus of the gestation of modern state institutions. Hence, they are a crucial site for historical research. In investigating the courtly power system, however, historiography has often solely focused on the person of the ruler and his (rarely her) immediate political decision-making, thus excluding the social practices rooted in interpersonal relationships, which shaped such individual decisions, as well as entire polities in their own right. With the aim of analysing those less visible relations, the German Historical Institute in Paris (GHIP) hosted a workshop on March 5th and 6th 2015 with the title „Power relations in court societies. Marriage, concubinage, friendship, kinship, and patronage in historical perspective.“¹ The organizers, Pascal Firges and Regine Maritz, invited five doctoral students from three different countries to present their research subjects for comments and discussions.

Moreover, the workshop was launched on Thursday with a keynote lecture delivered by JEROEN DUINDAM (Leiden). For Duindam, a theme as universal as dynastic power demands to be analysed with a global scope and he takes into account dynasties from all over Asia, Africa, and Europe. In Paris, he presented one aspect of his work, namely the problem of „Female Power in Dynastic History“. Women in supreme positions of power were rare in Duindam's sample of studies, and when they appeared, they were never considered the 'natural' or even the preferred ruler. Rather, they stepped in temporarily where male succession was rendered impossible. These women are often described as male, or are male-gendered, which Duindam

ascribed to a perceived contradiction between femininity and power.

The lecture was commented by CHANTAL GRELL (Versailles), who was interested in the challenge of comparing sources from different cultural contexts. The non-European cases are often transmitted to us through European intermediaries and thus come with an inherent bias. Duindam is nevertheless convinced that we cannot exclude such materials as they are often our only sources for non-Western societies, and that their critical analysis can lead to good results if built on anthropological approaches and methodologies. Grell was further interested in how Duindam integrated the findings of gender studies in his analysis of women at courts around the globe. Duindam explained that since he compiled in his book complex source material and several different case studies, he abstained from explicitly mentioning the conceptual approaches of Gender Studies. Nevertheless, they are implicitly present in his analysis, especially in those cases where women are considered to lose their femininity because of their powerful status but also when talking about the construction of masculinity through the image of the male ruler.

The opening presentation to the workshop on Friday took up the subject of gender, as PASCAL FIRGES (Paris) discussed the role of mistresses in French court politics of the 17th and 18th century. Firges is the principal investigator of the research group „Machtstrategien und interpersonale Beziehungen in dynastischen Zentren (1500–1800)“ at the Deutsches Historisches Institut Paris (DHIP), and in his talk he investigated the political and tactical relevance of concubinage relationships that formed among the members of the French court nobility. Even though the people involved in concubinage held more agency in the choice of the respective partner than they did in their choice of a spouse, one should not underestimate the influence that political interest and family strategy had on the extramarital relationship. Firges seeks to emphasise this crucial point through a structural analysis of concubinage, which forms the core of his research project.

¹ For an extended version of this report, please visit: [<http://tiesbind.hypotheses.org/>\(7.5.2015\)](http://tiesbind.hypotheses.org/>(7.5.2015)).

REGINE MARITZ (Paris/Cambridge) proceeded to engage with the theme of gender relations. She discussed the social and physical construction of gendered spaces at princely courts in the Holy Roman Empire and at the Persian court in Isfahan. The harem is often perceived as a guarded and impenetrable space, remaining static over time. This conservative perception overlooks that the Persian Shah 'Abbās changed the outline of the harem around 1600 by moving it further into the centre of the court and affording it the new function of child-rearing, which greatly strengthened its political importance. A similarly guarded space for women at court was the *Frauenzimmer*. The communication and the mobility of these women were strictly controlled and limited in order to protect their sexual honour and to secure a pious lifestyle on their part. Much like in Persia, however, the segregation of women did not automatically entail their removal from the courtly information flow and thus from political activity. Maritz showed that, in fact, the *Frauenzimmer* in Stuttgart was closely integrated into the courtly network and exchange took place across its boundaries in a way that could not be entirely controlled by the authority of the prince.

Global history was the cue for the following presentation by CALLIE WILKINSON (Cambridge), who is concerned with the role of the Munshis, Indian intermediaries and translators representing East India Company Officials at Indian courts. She is interested in the ways these agents influenced the power dynamics of the colonial reality and participated in shaping the colonial system. At the same time, she recognizes the danger of underestimating the ways in which the colonial power limited the agency of the colonized.

In the afternoon, PHILIPP HAAS (Marburg) analysed the marriage of Charlotte Amalie of Hesse-Kassel as a dynastic ménage à trois. In order to create binding ties between Brandenburg and Denmark as an alliance against Sweden, the Elector of Brandenburg initiated the marriage of his niece Charlotte Amalie of Hesse-Kassel and the crown prince Christian of Denmark in 1667. Haas defined security benefits for the negotiators Brandenburg, Denmark, and Hesse-Kassel,

not only in terms of territorial peace, but his research emphasised further the goods, values and interests these agents wanted to protect. In the discussion afterwards, Haas explained that he structures his dissertation accordingly to the defined types of security interests: protection of values, goods and interest. Thus he is also able to organise his different types of sources.

JOHANNA HELLMANN (Tübingen) then presented a part of her research on Marie Antoinette as she is portrayed in German diplomatic reports written by Prussian, Habsburg, and Saxon envoys during the Bavarian war of succession. These letters are rare sources for the understanding of Marie Antoinette as political agent and private figure: Although Marie Antoinette appears in some letters to be rather self-determined, she is often described as object of her family's interest and without influence on the decisions of Louis XVI.

CAROLIN PECHO (Paderborn) examined the relationship between Archduke Leopold of Austria and Hartger Henot, a canon of the cathedral of Cologne. She presented not only a specific type of patronage, but also gave an instructive insight into the family politics and ruling strategies of the Habsburg family from 1608-1634. As third son of the Styria line of the Habsburg family, Leopold initially was made prince-bishop of Passau and Strasbourg, despite having a distinct interest in worldly politics. Nevertheless, he pursued his own interests using non-family networks, and his advisers were mostly experienced social climbers lacking in wealth and noble lineage. One of them was Hartger Henot, who was instrumental to Leopold's taking of an important fortress during the „Habsburg-Bruderzwist“ through a cunning trick, which prevented any bloodshed. Yet, later in life, when Leopold finally achieved governance over Tirol and some other territories, the relationship to Henot offered no further benefits for him and he thus distanced himself from his servant. He did not intervene during a witch trial against Henot's sister Catherina 1626, although Hartger appealed insistently to him.

IRENE KUBISKA-SCHARL (Vienna) presented results of her research on „Institutional Structures and Personal Networks in

the Chamber Staff at the Court of Vienna (1740-1790)". She focused on persons of the higher middle class and the lower nobility, who held key-positions in the court-administration. The annual staff lists of the Court-Calendar – which Kubiska-Scharl had already analysed for the creation of a database on careers at the court – show that family networks established themselves in the court service. Kubiska-Scharl found further that while patrimony was incredibly important, the veto on the distribution of positions lay with the emperor. Other recruitment criteria were patronage, merit, and favour. For instance, chamberwomen were often widows of favoured courtiers, and the loyalty of servants was often rewarded with positions at court for their children. Marriages, which were only allowed for high court members, could be opportunities to create and stabilize family networks within the court service, although the choice of a marriage partner was influenced by preferences of the imperial couple.

With this the first workshop of the research group 'Practices of Power and Interpersonal Relationships at Dynastic Centres, 1500-1800' came to a close. It was a highly stimulating day that introduced a rich variety of research projects connected in their effort to analyse the complex web of interpersonal relationships in courtly contexts and their great significance for early modern practices of power.

Conference Overview:

Keynote lecture

Jeroen Duindam (Leiden), Female Power in Dynastic History

Respondent: Chantal Grell (Versailles)

Pascal Firges (Paris), Extra-Marital Alliances? Mistresses in French Court Politics (1660-1789)

Respondent: Irene Kubiska-Scharl (Vienna)

Regine Maritz (Paris/Cambridge), Configurations of Gender at the Early Modern Court (1580-1630). The Uses of Comparative Analysis

Respondent: Carolin Pecho (Paderborn)

Callie Wilkinson (Cambridge), The Risks and Rewards of Cross-Cultural Connections at In-

dian Princely Courts, c. 1793-1818

Respondent: Regine Maritz (Paris/Cambridge)

Philip Haas (Marburg), A Dynastic Ménage à Trois? The Marriage of Charlotte Amalie of Hesse-Kassel and the Rapprochement of Denmark and Brandenburg (1667)

Respondent: Callie Wilkinson (Cambridge)

Johanna Hellmann (Tübingen), Marie Antoinette's Personal and Political Agency as Portrayed in German Diplomatic Reports during the War of the Bavarian Succession (1778/1779)

Respondent: Pascal Firges (Paris)

Carolin Pecho (Paderborn), Cui bono? The Relationship between Hartger Henot and Archduke Leopold as an Example of Failed Patronage

Respondent: Philip Haas (Marburg)

Irene Kubiska-Scharl (Vienna), Institutional Structures and Personal Networks in the Chamber Staff at the Court of Vienna (1740-1790)

Respondent: Johanna Hellmann (Tübingen)

Concluding remarks

Jeroen Duindam (Leiden)

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