

The Politics of Bodies at the Early Modern Court

Veranstalter: Regine Maritz, Cambridge / Paris; Eva Seemann, Zürich; Tom Tölle, Princeton

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The organisers of the conference opened the discussions with a thematic introduction highlighting the interest taken in corporal knowledge and bodily practices in recent historiography. They identified two perspectives that they felt would benefit from further study. Firstly, they asked to what extent courts could be described as reproductive regimes. Furthermore, they proposed to advance our understanding in how knowledge concerning the body and bodily practices circulated at and between courts, who had access to courtly bodies, and who observed their everyday performances. The conference papers were grouped into three sections, the first of which focused on extra(ordinary)bodies and the production of bodily norms. The second section discussed gendered bodies while the third section focused on health(-care) in courts, that often transcended the medical profession and involved the production of corporeal knowledge by members of court society.

BÉNÉDICTE LECARPENTIER-BERTRAND (Paris) opened the first section by exploring the redefinition of the royal body during the reign of Henri IV. Noting that the king was known for the relative simplicity of his attire, Lecarpentier-Bertrand argued that Henri IV constructed the image of a masculine, politically active warrior-king to meet the expectations of France's elites within the context of the restoration of royal authority after the Wars of Religion. She also proposed that the king sought to provide a positive contrast to his predecessor Henri III, who had been attacked as an effeminate 'roi de cabinet'. Working with a variety of sources, such as contemporary descriptions of Henri IV's appearance, official portraits, and, most prominently, court records de-

tailoring the expenses for the king's clothes, Lecarpentier-Bertrand showed that contrary to the popular image of the king as little concerned with his appearance, Henri IV actually spent larger sums on clothing than some of his predecessors.

MONETT REISSIG's (Berlin) presentation in the same section addressed the subject of beauty as it was discussed in 18th century self-narratives. Reissig focused on Margravine Sophie Wilhelmine of Prussia and the French queen Marie-Antoinette, who both left behind extensive correspondences with their respective mothers, as well as with a multitude of other courtly actors. These writings offer insights into various contemporary beauty practices and the moral codes that writers charged them with. Reissig discussed the importance of the pleasing feminine body for economic as well as a social success at court and she showed that female beauty was considered a crucial resource for instigating and fostering the all-important interpersonal relationships at court. According to her, corporeal beauty in its various manifestations could be used both, as a legitimising argument for the elevated status of a certain actor, as well as a discrediting factor, particularly when beauty was judged to be artificially obtained.

EVA SEEMANN (Zurich) dealt with the phenomenon of 'court dwarfs' at early modern courts. Seemann argued against the popular view of court dwarfs as 'playthings' or mere curiosities whose primary role was to entertain members of the court, and who were considered more like children or even objects than as adult members of court society. Instead court dwarfs fulfilled different functional roles at court and since they inhabited the center of power, they often had access to the ruler and/or his consort. Building on sources from the courts of Vienna, Stuttgart and Dresden, Seemann focused on the dwarfs' integration into court society and emphasised the often extensive education that dwarfs received when arriving at court. Overall, the paper stressed the ambiguous role of court dwarfs who faced paternalism, but at the same time were close to the ruler and members of his or her family, which made them important members of the court.

Opening the second section, PIERRE COUHAULT's (Paris) paper focused on the gendered aspects of court tournaments in France during the 16th century. Noting that the organisation of tournaments became increasingly dependent on the royal court as opposed to local initiative by high-ranking noblemen, Couhault analyzed the courtly tournament as a 'masculine space' dedicated to forming and training the male body. While the tournament aided the self-fashioning of noblemen as warriors, it also threatened the body. Courtly tournaments resulted in multiple deaths, including that of king Henri II. Noblemen who participated in them were thereby embodying gender roles both by their acceptance of voluntary exposure to danger and by 'serving their lady' through their participation in tournaments.

VALERIO ZANETTI (Cambridge) explored women's participation in sport at early modern courts, focusing on the example of the increasing participation of women in horse riding and hunting at the French court during the reign of Louis XIV. Zanetti argued that the 17th century saw the development of a new sport culture in which sporting activities were no longer restricted to male members of court society. Zanetti argued, while men sport was considered as training for public service, especially for service in the army, women used sports to challenge gender norms. Analysing visual representations of courtly 'amazons' and comparing them to the representation of politically active women during the French Revolution a century later, Zanetti also argued that the change of gender roles within court societies represented by female exercise was a first step in the reshaping of modern notions of femininity.

MONICA AZZOLINI (Edinburgh) presented her research on the (pre-)marital physical examination of noblewomen and the sharing of information about the female body in Renaissance Italy. Focusing on the cases of Maddalena de' Medici and Dorotea Gonzaga, Azzolini analysed the correspondence between male relatives and other 'experts', who communicated bluntly about the young women's physical and mental constitution, giving detailed insights in their bodily hygiene, sexual health, and menstrua-

tion. What seems like an inappropriate treatment of [U+02BB] intimate [U+02BC] information, Azzolini argued, points to the importance of female health for the fulfilment of reproductive duties in marriage. As women were above all expected to bear healthy children and guarantee dynastic continuity in this way, there was nothing private or personal about their bodies. The paper thus challenged the narrative of all-female oversight over female courtly bodies, and suggested that corporeal knowledge about dynastic women was traded far more openly than has so far been acknowledged.

The evening lecture was held by STANIS PEREZ (Paris), who presented his research on a short, but popular episode of early modern French history – the mysterious illness that king Louis XIV contracted in 1658 while he was staying in Calais. Perez analysed the treatment of the dangerously ill king against the background of conflicts between the University of Paris' academic physicians in the tradition of galenic medicine and the remaining defenders of alchemy at court, who by then worked under a cloud of suspicion. The king's physician Antoine Vallot, having been educated at the medical school of Montpellier and thus being a strong supporter of its chemical doctrines advised the medication with antimony even though it was declared illegal in 1566. The use of antimony escalated the ongoing dispute, that was finally settled in favour of the chemical treatment as the king recovered from his illness. Following this medical success, alchemists gained access to the *jardin royal* and were encouraged to demonstrate and promote their practices under the observance and protection of the monarch as Perez highlighted.

Opening the last section SUSANNE HELENE BETZ (Vienna) offered a closer look at the modalities of Habsburg-Medicean marriage negotiations in the early 17th century. She analysed the matchmaking between Cosimo II. de' Medici and the two sisters Archduchess Maria Magdalena and Archduchess Konstanze of Austria. Betz argued that in cases where physical appearance did not fall short of contemporary norms, bodily health and sexual capability of the future wife were the more crucial factors in marriage ini-

tiations. As exchanged portraits could not be trusted and only offered limited information about the body, the future husband's family gathered more detailed descriptions of Maria Magdalena's and Konstanze's corporeal constitution through an extensive matchmaking network. In the presented case the potential bride had to meet even higher demands. Cosimo II. de' Medici was considered far from fulfilling masculine ideals of the time and his future female counterpart was meant to compensate for his weak and sickly constitution.

JULIA GEBKE (Vienna) addressed the topic of female melancholia and its instrumentalisation for political purposes in the House of Habsburg in the 2nd half of the 16th century. Generally attributed to Jews by contemporary theologians, melancholia also became a more and more widespread disease among European nobles. Physicians at the time such as Amato Lusitano linked female melancholia particularly to menstruation, pregnancy and child-birth, thus placing mental indisposition within a distinctly physical context. The presentation focused primarily on the case of Maria of Austria who suffered from a state of severe melancholia when she returned to her native Spain as a widow. According to Gebke the pious regent instrumentalised her weakness to influence her relatives and to compel them to frequent visits. Considering that Maria of Austria had an extensive influence over her sons, the future Emperors Rudolf and Matthias of Habsburg, this practice carried enormous political weight.

Closing the last section, RAFAEL MANDRESSI (Paris) presented a paper on Jean Riolan fils, the personal physician of Maria de Medici, who also served as an informant to Richelieu. Riolan passed on information concerning the queen mother and her court in exile alongside comments on the political situation in the places they stayed. His correspondence reveals a wide network of informants, whose information was summarised in reports that were then transmitted to Richelieu. Mandressi noted that the queen mother's health played a crucial role in Riolan's reports. He discussed how these reports influenced her decisions whether to stay in exile or return to her native Florence, and suggested how Riolan took on a central role in the polit-

ical power struggle between the exiled Queen and the French court.

In the concluding discussion the organisers underlined again the great plurality in the field of body history combining aspects of medical history, the history of knowledge and gender studies. As the conference has shown, the body formed a central political resource at early modern courts. The participants concluded that integrating the body in political history remains a crucial task for present and future research. In addition to this, the further investigation of the mutual impacts of space, beauty, reproduction, and age was highlighted as a primary concern of the conference but also for continued research.

Conference Overview:

Welcome and thematic introduction

Regine Maritz (Paris) / Eva Seemann (Zürich)
/ Tom Tölle (Princeton)

Section I: (Extra)Ordinary Bodies

Chair: Regine Maritz (Paris)

Bénédicte Lecarpentier-Bertrand (Paris), *Renouveler l'image du corps royal. Apparences et réalités politiques sous le règne d'Henri IV*
Monett Reissig (Berlin), *Narrating and Negotiating the Rulers Body. Beauty and Power in Early Modern Self-Narratives*

Eva Seemann (Zürich), *Integrating the Extraordinary Body. Dwarfs as Court Officials at Three German-speaking Courts*

Section II: Gendered Bodies

Chair: Martin Dinges (Stuttgart)

Pierre Couhault (Paris), *Corps exalté, corps en danger. Risques et profits des tournois de cour à la Renaissance*

Valerio Zanetti (Cambridge), *The Birth of the Sporting Women. Courtly Amazons of the Grand Siècle*

Monica Azzolini (Edinburgh), *Sexual Politics. Prying into the Body of Italian Renaissance Princesses*

Evening Lecture

Stanis Perez (Paris), *Le corps alchimique du Roi. Louis XIV, les médecins de la Cour et la maladie de Calais en perspective (1658)*

Section III: Frail Bodies

Chair: Tom Tölle (Princeton)

Susanne Helene Betz (Wien), *Bodies of Hope. Habsburg-Medicean Marriage Negotiations between Ideal Brides and Male Counterparts*
Julia Gebke (Wien), *Woman, Melancholia and Politics. A Case Study in the House of Habsburg*

Rafael Mandressi (Paris), *La cour, le corps, l'exil. Jean Riolan fils, premier médecin de Marie de Médicis et informateur de Richelieu*

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