



*Beyond Scylla and Charybdis:
European Courts and Court
Residences outside Habsburg and
Valois/Bourbon Territories 1500-1700,*
Birgitte Bøggild Johannsen and
Konrad Ottenheim
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Beyond Scylla and Charybdis: European Courts and Court Residences outside Habsburg and Valois/Bourbon Territories 1500-1700. Edited by Birgitte Bøggild Johannsen and Konrad Ottenheim. Copenhagen: Publications from the National Museum of Denmark/University Press of Southern Denmark, 2015. ISBN: 978-8-7760-2322-5. 358 pp. \$36.

This sumptuously illustrated book brings together papers from a 2012 conference in Copenhagen, sponsored by the Palatium project on court residences. The initial premise was that early modern Europe was dominated by two ‘superpowers’, the Habsburg dynasties of Spain and Austria and Valois/Bourbon France, each of which developed distinctive and mutually incompatible systems of court architecture and ceremony. The conveners intended the conference to explore how courts that were independent of both superpowers responded to the dominant models they had established. Unfortunately, this formulation of the central problem fails to provide an entirely satisfactory framework for the collection. As several chapters point out, nearly all the courts under discussion had traditions that antedated the rise of the two superpowers, while several were also involved in regional rivalries that often seemed at least as relevant as the contest between France and the Habsburg states. Religious and regional differences further complicated the picture, as did the fact that both the French and Habsburg courts underwent complex evolutions during the period under review, which problematize efforts to use them as fixed models of opposing systems. While the French-Habsburg rivalry does provide a framework for a few of the chapters, such as Elisabeth Wünsche-Werdehausen’s on ‘The Residence of Vittorio Amadeo II in Turin (1684-1730)’, it is largely or wholly irrelevant to others that deal with developments in the Late Middle Ages and early sixteenth-century, or with courts in Russia, Scandinavia and Scotland.

Moreover, although the editors group the chapters into four sections – entitled ‘Sovereignty’s Space and its Rituals: Staging Diplomatic Interaction’; ‘Beyond the Formal Spaces’; ‘The Powers of the Past: Displaying Lineage, Kinship and Tradition’; and ‘From Invention to Construction: Building the Residence’ – they provide only a fairly cursory discussion of how these rubrics serve the purposes of broad comparative analysis. Nor do they discuss and attempt to synthesize in their introduction ideas about the comparative study of courts advanced by several individual contributors. We are therefore left with a collection of essays that never fully cohere, even though many do overlap in treating such topics as palace architecture, diplomatic protocols and material culture.

Nevertheless, probably all the chapters will interest specialists, while several are of high quality. Readers willing to tease out connections for them-

selves will discover a number of richly illustrated themes running through the collection. One is the importance of palatial building and renovation in creating increasingly complex systems of court space. Chapters dealing in one way or another with this topic include Merlijn Hurx's well-researched account of architectural planning and administration in late medieval Burgundy, England and France; Nuno Senos's chapter on palace architecture and royal visits in early sixteenth-century Portugal; Charles McKean's description of the rebuilding of Stirling Palace by James IV of Scotland; Giulio Girondi's discussion of Gonzaga palaces in Mantua; and Herbert Karner's analysis of how dynasties seeking to acquire royal titles during the seventeenth century incorporated features associated with royal residences into their own palaces. Gerhard Ammerer and Ingonda Hanneschläger's chapters on the architecture of the Archepiscopal court of Augsburg around 1600 and Charles Wemyss's account of the rebuilding of several baronial houses in late seventeenth-century Scotland extend the analysis to aristocratic and great ecclesiastical residences.

A related topic is diplomatic ceremony, which was inevitably inflected by palace topography. In a rich chapter examining the sixteenth-century Muscovite court, Jan Hennings argues that "detailed descriptions of diplomatic ceremonies were less inspired by national identity or the awareness of cultural difference than by the ritual logic of dynastic competition and the negotiation of shared ceremonial space" (58). His argument is broadly supported but also qualified by Tracey A. Sowerby's account of receptions of Russian ambassadors at the court of Elizabeth I. Elizabeth attempted to obtain trading privileges from the Czars by providing especially formal receptions and according other honors to their ambassadors, and both parties involved understood the significance of these gestures. But she also blundered on one occasion by inviting a Russian diplomat to an informal conversation in her garden. Instead of regarding this as a mark of esteem the Russian felt insulted by his proximity to a vegetable patch, an example of how cultural differences did occasionally distort understandings of the symbolic meanings of court space. Juliette Roding mentions that a Habsburg ambassador was also shocked by the frequent informality of the Danish court, a characteristic that is further documented by Poul Grønder-Hansen's description of rooms in Danish palaces where Frederik II entertained distinguished guests while pursuing his hobby of turning wood. Fabian Persson rounds out the discussion of diplomatic ceremony with a highly analytical chapter on Sweden, showing how protocols and rituals were shaped by an interplay between local traditions, international formulas, dynastic ambition and individual contributions. He argues that this complex pattern can be found throughout Europe.

Additional chapters focus on art, material culture and a few other cultural forms. Lee Prosser provides a richly detailed account of the role of for-

eign craftsmen at the court of Henry VIII of England. Mara R. Wade describes various forms of material culture and patronage, ranging from deluxe books to tournaments, used by Duchess Magdalena Sibylle in early seventeenth century Saxony to assert her feminine and dynastic identity within her husband's court. Rikke Garfield Lagersted-Olsen examines fountain statues originally commissioned to represent Danish control of the seas that were captured by Sweden and re-used as representations of the four seasons. Stephan Hoppe provides an interesting chapter on differing visual interpretations of antiquity, rooted in Italian and northern traditions, at the early sixteenth-century court of Albert of Mainz. Sally Rush shows how sculpted busts based on ancient Roman models were used in Stirling Castle to commemorate the antiquity of the Scottish royal lineage and satirize the pretensions of Henry VIII. Birgitte Bøggild Johannsen looks at the tensions between efforts to modernize Copenhagen Castle to bring it into line with international styles and the desire to preserve its anachronistic appearance as emblematic of Danish traditions. Barbara Uppenkamp demonstrates that statues and other decorative schemes in the Castle of Güstrow in Germany conveyed a Protestant eschatological message deriving from the Book of Daniel. Franciszek Skibinski explores how Sigismund III Vasa, king of Poland-Lithuania, drew upon Italian and Netherlandish networks of sculptors.

Jennifer Halton's chapter on art and music at the 1539 wedding festival of Cosimo de' Medici is an iconographical analysis focusing on the use of the image of Scylla and Charybdis in the wedding entertainments. She argues that while outwardly acknowledging the Medici's debts to Charles V, the iconography also hinted at criticism of Habsburg dominance of Italy. John Robert Christianson contributes a rich account of the spaces and rituals of royal hunts in Denmark, with particular emphasis on large royal hunting preserves.

Although there are better introductions to the comparative study of early modern courts these essays contain much of interest and the illustrations alone are worth the modest purchase price.

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