

Scientific Report on Short Visit Grant

The purpose of the visit to Antwerp was to attend the conference entitled *'The Key to Power? The Culture of Access in Early Modern Courts, 1400-1700'*, held between 8-9 November 2012 in the Hof van Liere, the University Campus of Antwerp, Belgium. The event, hosted by Dries Raeymaekers, was organized within the ESF Research Networking Programme called *PALATIUM 'Court Residences as Places of Exchange in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe (1400-1700)'*.

The work carried out during the visit

I feel very fortunate for the opportunity to have participated at this event. It was interesting to hear all 19 presenters' papers approaching subjects similar to my area of interest, but from different perspectives. The case of a vast number of courts were covered from both Eastern and Western Europe, as well and some aspects of the more exotic courts of India and that of the Ottoman Sultan. The papers were divided in four sessions, each representing approaches to the subject from slightly different points of view. The first speakers explored the way in which palace architecture, the iconology of the interior decoration of certain public or private chambers, as well as the use of certain objects, like the symbolic or actual door keys to the palace rooms, reflected the accessibility of the monarch. The second session analysed how the household ordinances, religious issues, diplomatic ceremonial regulated and influenced the access to the monarch. A paper investigated the special case of the Polish court of Sigismundus III, which was different from the Western European ones even in this regard. The third and fourth sessions were quite close concerning the subjects of the papers, as most speakers focused on the contrast between 'official' and 'unofficial' ways of access to the monarch – and/or to power – that certain courtiers or foreign ambassadors and diplomats experienced within Europe as well as in India and the Ottoman Empire. I found the paper titled *'Accessing the Shadow of God on Earth: Gifts, Feasts and Humiliation in Ottoman Diplomatic Ceremonial'* particularly interesting. This is due to the fact that I worked quite a lot with reports describing the reception of Turkish ambassadors at the court of Alba Iulia, thus it was very interesting to hear the 'reverse' stories, the receptions of Christian diplomats at the

court of the Sultan. Besides the subject, the outstanding communication skills of the speaker made his argumentation very convincing.

And finally a fifth session was dedicated to 4 early career researchers, among which I had the opportunity to present a paper on the Transylvanian princely court: *Access to Power at the Confines of Europe. The Case of the Princely Court of Alba Iulia in Transylvania in 16th and 17th Centuries*. The paper approached the frame-theme of the conference from a similar perspective as the speakers of the first two sessions mentioned above. Being an art-historian I chose to study the relationship between the architecture and the notion of access in the case of the princely court of Alba Iulia, trying to demonstrate the ways in which the fortification works of the town, the spatial arrangement of the town and palace, as well as the princely ceremonies from the beginning of the 17th century reflected the different levels of the access to the prince himself. My researches were very much restricted by the quite scanty historical evidence on the subject, however the main sources I based my arguments on were a few reports on certain public ceremonies that took place in the court (2 ambassadorial receptions and 1 wedding), the results of researches on the topography of the town, and the ordinances given by Gabriel Bethlen to his major-domo in 1622. As all speakers of this last session I received feedback on my paper from Dr. Hans Cools from the University of Leuven. He suggested a deeper analysis on the relation between the religious issues from the Transylvanian princely court and the changes that occurred in the historical topography of the town, included the access of the courtiers of different confessions to the prince. He also recommended a more subtle investigation of the overlapping formal and informal ways of access to the prince, instead of a linear approach of the subject.

Concerning the religious context of the subject the professor pointed out a very significant component of the princely court of Transylvania. Certain researches have been conducted before regarding the confessional ties between the princes and their courtiers, but so far nobody has examined to what extent did these relations reflect in the ever-changing historical topography of the town, influencing for example the changing of the house owners from around the palace. As for the questions I received from the public, the first one brought on the potential connections between the ideal city plan of Palmanova and the 'utopian' town-planning ideas of Prince Gabriel Bethlen; the second one was an inquiry concerning the connections between the Transylvanian palace and the Hofburg in Vienna. In the first case any direct

connection is quite improbable, however the very laconic source, that mentions the plan of Gabriel Bethlen doesn't allow much interpretation on this aspect. Answering to the second question I tried to demonstrate the permanent relations between the two courts through some relevant examples from the period discussed in the paper, relations that implied also the lending of royal architects to Transylvania, which could explain the similarities between the arrangement of the state apartments within the palaces of Vienna and Alba Iulia.

Although the papers covered a very broad chronological span and geographical area, the contributions were somehow all linked to each other, as they brought up pretty much the same questions. Actually it was due to this fact and to the generous time allotted for discussions that we could have interesting debates after every few papers, which clarified certain questions and highlighted somewhat the main shortcomings of the researches on the topic so far. Thus as a general conclusion – as Dries Raeymaekers explicitly pointed it out, after several speakers had suggested it – a future research subject within the general frame-theme of access to the monarch would be to explore that among those who enjoyed physical access to the person the monarch, who were those who could actually influence his decisions, in one word: what 'quality' of access did certain courtiers, favourites, family members or even courtesans enjoy? In this context it is important to mark off more clearly the formal and informal, public and private ways of access, and to analyse the actual significance of the variety of models of access and communication. Certainly this sort of approach to the subject requires a more subtle analysis of the sources, that should always confront the norms and regulations of the time with the practice.

Main results and projected publication

The Antwerp conference was the first international conference on court history I attended so far, and the first conference I attended, that was of such a specialised subject area. It offered me the opportunity to situate the Transylvanian researches, and, of course, my own researches on the subject within the state of the art in the field. The papers I listened to and the discussions revealed new research methods and new approaches to types of sources that I utilized myself as well (e.g. household ordinances, ambassadorial reports), highlighting also the limitations of certain methods, like again that of the interpretation of household ordinances. Last but not least, I really appreciate the constructive feedback received on my work. The remarks

of the respondent to my paper and the discussions I had with some participants to the conference will certainly help me improve my paper before publishing it and to improve my research methods for the future.

Future collaboration

The conference was a great opportunity to meet scholars interested in the same subject as me, to exchange experience with, to discuss certain common aspects of our researches. Some of them I have already collaborated with in the past (Dr. P. Martens, Ms. L. Cosnean), others I met for the first time in Antwerp and I won't hesitate to contact them in future (Dr. J. Jansen, Dr. Réthelyi O., Dr. C. Antenhoffer).

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to have been part of it!

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Dr. Pakó Klára