

**COURT RESIDENCES AS PLACES OF EXCHANGE  
IN LATE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN EUROPE  
1400-1700 (PALATIUM)**

Standing Committee for the Humanities (SCH)



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Cover picture:

The Sala de Batallas at El Escorial, Spain  
(© Pieter Martens, 2005).

The palace of Honselaarsdijk in the Netherlands (detail of engraving by Balthasar Florisz. van Berckerode, c. 1638).

# Introduction

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The court residence or 'palace' (*palatium*) was a prominent place of cultural exchange in late medieval and early modern Europe. The world of the courts 1400-1700 constituted a network on a truly European scale and of international character, long before the age of Versailles. The larger field of court studies or court history has generated a vast bibliography in many European languages during the last four decades, but interest in the architecture of the court (in its residence and in its architectural language) is of more recent date. Current scholarship acknowledges that the study of court residences requires an international, comparative and transdisciplinary perspective, which transcends the common boundaries of styles and stylistic periods. Attention must be given to *disposition* (spatial organisation) and to the interaction between palace architecture and the 'ceremonial' – the set of rules which regulates and codifies human interaction in this space. These aspects of court life and court architecture are documented through a variety of sources of different character (written, visual and architectural), so that methodological issues are particularly important.

With the exception of a few seminal conferences and publications, the past two decades (1988-2008) have not seen many research initiatives of a European scope and a multidisciplinary character. The architectural object with its many connotations continues to appear in the many valuable, current research programmes on the European courts, their artists and their court ordinances, but it does so mostly in a peripheral manner. Thanks to the publication of a number of (monographic) studies, essential lacunae in the knowledge of the material object – the palace and its gardens – have been filled in, but a truly interdisciplinary perspective remains rare. For the greater part of Europe, systematic inventories and reconstructions of lost key residences are still missing, let alone in-depth analysis and contextual study. One case in point is Central Europe, but even in Spain where, since the 1998 and 2000 commemorations of Charles V and Philip II, the field of court studies has reached a considerable high, more could still be done, for instance, to save the material witnesses of the early Habsburg residences from oblivion. Similarly, in Denmark and Sweden the interest in court architecture has recently been revived, but topics such as 'ceremonial and space' need further study. Generally, research questions as to the 'connectivity' between the main European courts on the architectural plane have received only partial answers or none at all. Moreover, for certain territories the connection with the larger perspective is completely lacking.

The ESF Research Networking Programme PALATIUM brings together scholars from different disciplines across Europe to promote transdisciplinary and transnational research on Court Residences as Places of Exchange in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe (1400-1700).

It aims at stimulating exchanges of knowledge and experience between historians, architectural historians, art historians and researchers from related disciplines, while building up a network of scholars and institutes from a large number of European countries, so as to mirror the international network of courts that is being examined.

The running period of the ESF PALATIUM Research Networking Programme is for five years, from June 2010 to May 2015.



**Figure 1.** 17<sup>th</sup>-century view on the Pardo palace, Spain (painting attributed to Giuseppe Leonardo, courtesy Patrimonio Nacional, Real Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, inv. 10014337).

## Aims and Objectives

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The PALATIUM network aims at creating a common forum for research on the late medieval and early modern European court residence or 'palace' from a multi- and transdisciplinary perspective. For any historian studying the period 1400-1700, knowledge of the international network of courts in Europe and of the convoluted dynastic relationships between them is a basic requirement. However, the *architecture* of the court is only rarely studied in its 'connectivity'. Here court architecture must not only be seen as a means of expression and representation, but also as a tool for communication with subjects, or outsiders, of court society. The PALATIUM network will focus specifically on the international relationships which give meaning to the architecture of the palace (or court residence in the narrower sense of that term).

The 'palace' is seen as a place for exchange where human interaction is regulated and codified by the 'ceremonial'. Its patterns are perceived by the palace's owners, inhabitants and visitors alike in many different ways and expressed in many different sources, the decoding of which is not easy. The ceremonial influences the material form of the palace. Conversely, the palace's form serves as a barometer for the major evolutionary steps of the court ceremonial, and thus of the structure and composition of court society in general. The interaction between palace architecture (tangible) and the

ceremonial (intangible, but known through a set of tangible testimonials of different types, written and visual) is one of the key questions the PALATIUM network aims to address. A particular issue is the growth of public versus private spaces, and the nature of privacy.

The palace's architecture – its space and form – carries multiple connotations. To the informed observer it represents power, lineage and tradition versus innovation. The decoding of this system of signs necessitates input not only by architectural and art historians, but also by scholars of various other fields such as archaeology, politics, literature, theatre and music.

A particular problem is the loss of the actual material object, partial in most cases and complete in a certain number of key instances. For want of evidence, many strategically important residences are insufficiently known. The PALATIUM network aims to offer supporting expertise to the many scattered archaeological or building research projects of limited scope undertaken across Europe, to provide an interpretative context for the data.

**Figure 2.** The Gallery of Francis I at Fontainebleau, France (© Pieter Martens, 2007).



# Topics and Working Parties

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In spite of the progress made during the last two decades, a reflection on method is still needed and important lacunae have to be addressed before a broader synthesis of knowledge can be attempted. These lacunae can be described geographically and chronologically. Consequently, the PALATIUM network is structured in different working parties with a regular meeting schedule, three of which will concentrate on particular problems in time and place (WP1 to 3), and three of which will establish and develop the theoretical and methodological framework (WPM1 to 3).

## **WP1 – Valois, Burgundy and Tudor (1400-1550): Exchanges and Influences?**

This working party addresses the enduring myth of the Burgundian court ceremonial and architecture by mapping the late 14<sup>th</sup> century Valois context and by addressing the unsolved question of local influence in the new ‘Burgundian’ lands acquired in the 15<sup>th</sup> century (i.e. the area of today’s Netherlands, Belgium, Northern France, Luxemburg and the Rhineland). In a comparative perspective, the courts of the last monarchs of the English house of York and of the early Tudors and Stewarts are looked at. The architecture shows features of possible French/Netherlandish/Burgundian origin, while its ceremonial equally obviously has ‘local’ features. Similarly, the same questions must be answered regarding the Portuguese court.

## **WP2 – Habsburg Spheres (1500-1650): Exchanges and Influences?**

The interaction between ceremonial and architecture in the Habsburg world has been studied based on the Flemish and Spanish residences, both inextricably linked; however, the relationship with the courts in Central Europe is so far only sketchily known. This working party, with the ongoing research on the Hofburg in Vienna as its pivot, focuses on the palaces of the Burgundian-Spanish and Austrian lines of the Habsburgs in a comparative perspective. Relations with the palaces of the viceroys of the Spanish empire (in Italy, Portugal and also in the Americas and the East); the confrontation of ‘Habsburg’ with ‘Valois’ and ‘Tudor’ in their 16<sup>th</sup>-century incarnation; and with the Ottoman palace as a rival imperial model are also addressed.

## **WP3 – Network of Courts (1500-1700)**

A dominant factor in international court life was the rivalry between Spain and France. The centuries-old quarrel between the Habsburg and the Valois/Bourbon monarchies about their seniority and precedence encouraged both sides to create a distinction in all kinds of aspects of



**Figure 3.** Rosenborg Castle in Copenhagen, Denmark  
(© Krista De Jonge, 2006).

courtly etiquette, ceremonies and the architectural setting of court life. Other courts were obliged to take sides. Thus the architecture of the ‘satellite’ courts at the ‘periphery’ of the dominant rivals represents the alliances and ambitions of the European courtly elite. Princely courts such as the court of Orange in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the courts in the Holy Roman Empire (e.g. the Palatine electors/Saxony/Bavaria), families linked with the imperial courts (e.g. lords of Hradec), the Italian courts (e.g. the Gonzaga, Savoy and Farnese linked with Habsburg; the Este linked with Valois), the courts of the Jagiellon dynasty, must have all come to terms with the dominant models (known through their ambassadors), as did the royal dynasties of Denmark, Scotland, Poland and Portugal. This working party, which indeed covers the whole of Europe, aims at examining this complex network of courts.

The following WPMs are specifically meant to attract specialists in court studies (historians, art historians) ready to work with architectural historians in an interdisciplinary perspective, and to help develop new research methods or tools.

## **WPM1 – ‘Examples’, ‘Models’, ‘Influences’: the ‘Connectivity’ between the European Court Residences**

This working party will attempt to broaden the historical approach in a transdisciplinary manner (e.g. network theory). Our interactive website <http://www.courtresidences.eu> serves as a working research tool, but also as a portal site establishing a connection between the many particular websites and databases in the field.

### WPM2 – Heuristics in an Interdisciplinary Perspective

The source material of the architectural historian is by definition diverse, but in this particular field the range of methods needed can be daunting (e.g. ambassadors' reports as a source of close reading; household and construction accounts as a source of quantitative analysis; festive representation: patterns of visual culture). A particular problem, key to the whole project, is the (non-linear) relationship between the court ordinance and the spatial structure of the residence. Another, recently developed, field of interest is the relationship between the court residence and visual media (e.g. medallions).

### WPM3 – Reconstructing the Palace as Virtual Heritage

Digital reconstructions are important interpretative tools for scholars. They have proved their usefulness in visualising, and also in clarifying data and research results (e.g. construction phases, ceremonial use). This working party will be open to researchers interested in the development of interactive 3D models (e.g. based on VRML or X3D standard), interactive websites and other mixed media forms of presentation as tools for



Figure 4. Detail of the Swiss Gate at the Hofburg Palace in Vienna, Austria (© Pieter Martens 2009).

representing palaces, with the specific aim of developing user-friendly ways of presenting the research in this field to the larger community.

Figure 5. The abdication of the Emperor Charles V at the Coudenberg palace in Brussels in 1555 (engraving by Frans Hogenberg, courtesy Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Central Library).



## Activities

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### *Court Residences*

*as Places of Exchange in Late Medieval  
and Early Modern Europe 1400 - 1700*

## PALATIUM

During its five-year running period (2010-2015), the PALATIUM programme involves a whole range of activities, from meetings and workshops to conferences and a summer school. Open calls for participation in these events will be announced on the PALATIUM website ([www.courtresidences.eu](http://www.courtresidences.eu)) and on the PALATIUM pages of the ESF website ([www.esf.org/palatiium](http://www.esf.org/palatiium)). PALATIUM also offers grants to young scholars who want to take part in these events, so as to promote their research and international mobility. All activities, grant calls, and resulting publications will regularly be announced in an online Newsletter.

1. *Working party meetings* range from one-day seminars to three-day thematic colloquia. Their (revised) papers are published online in pre-print version. The first three working party meetings are:
  - The seminar *Material Resources for Early Modern Court History. Art, Text and Space*, in Brussels (Flemish Academic Centre-VLAC) on 11 October 2010, fitting within WPM2.
  - The colloquium *Felix Austria. Family Ties, Political Culture and Artistic Patronage between Habsburg Court Networks in European Context (1516-1715)*, in Madrid (Fundación Carlos de Amberes) from 30 November to 2 December 2010, fitting within WP2.
  - The colloquium *Princes, Princesses, and their Lodgings. A Comparison of Men's and Women's Lodgings among the Elite of European Aristocracy (1450-1650)*, in Paris (Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art) from 28 to 30 June 2011, fitting within WP1.
2. In addition to the various *working party meetings*, a number of larger international symposia will be organised. Their (reworked) proceedings will be published in book form. A first symposium, on the subject of *The Habsburgs and their Courts in Europe*, will be held in Vienna in December 2011. At the end of the PALATIUM programme, in 2015, a large, concluding symposium will be organised on the subject of *The Architecture of the European Courts in Context* (locus to be decided).
3. A summer school for young researchers is in preparation and will be held in the summer of 2012. There will be an open call for participation by the end of 2011.

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