



Research Networking Programmes

Short Visit Grant or Exchange Visit Grant

(please tick the relevant box)

Scientific Report

The scientific report (WORD or PDF file – maximum of eight A4 pages) should be submitted online within one month of the event. It will be published on the ESF website.

Proposal Title: "Making Room for Order. Court Ordinances as a Source for Understanding Space at Early Modern Princely Residences"

Application Reference N°: 6888

1) Purpose of the visit

The workshop "Making Room for Order. Court Ordinances as a Source for Understanding Space at Early Modern Princely Residences" (Kalmar, 2-3 October 2014), organized by the ESF Research Networking Programme PALATIUM and the Linnaeus University, represented an important occasion for me to learn more about the different methodologies of approaching court ordinances and similar kinds of regulations in order to make it possible for me to compare them critically with other sources I had already started to examine for my PhD research, such as ambassadors' letters and coeval treatises.

The central topic of my PhD research is the circulation and exchange of marriage portraits between the main European courts of the sixteenth century. Aristocratic marriages, in fact, often took place between courts far from each other and portraits of the betrothed were often exchanged before the wedding. As diplomatic agents, people in charge of conveying these portraits from one court to another were ambassadors.

Thanks to the role played by ambassadors, different kinds of sources can be used to provide information on the exchange of these portraits. First of all, of course, and probably the most important source we

have, are the letters written on a daily basis by ambassadors themselves to their rulers, who described carefully several aspects of the hosting court such as habits and traditions, political and religious matters, ties with other kingdoms as well as the development of negotiations and any important news about the hosting court.

However, these letters are not our only source of information. Once abroad, in fact, ambassadors were received by the hosting ruler with lavish ceremonies which took place both inside and outside the court residences. These events were considered important moments in courtly life and, as a consequence, were recorded in great detail in chronicles, journals and treatises of the time.

Nevertheless, court ordinances and regulations can also give us a quite different point of view which help to complete the frame and to understand how ambassadors moved and negotiated inside the court.

That is the reason why the two-day workshop organized by the ESF Research Networking Programme PALATIUM in Kalmar was an extremely interesting opportunity for the research I am carrying out at the moment. In the Cinquecento, in fact, the diplomatic system was well established in most of the European courts and the reception of ambassadors as well as their stay at court had to be regulated in the same way as every other aspect of courtly life. Thus, it was my intention to use the workshop in Kalmar as an unique occasion for learning much more about court ordinances and regulations as sources for retracing different aspects of courtly life.

2) Description of the work carried out during the visit

The two-day workshop in Kalmar covered many areas. Scholars from different countries discussed the importance of court ordinances and regulations as sources for understanding courtly life in princely residences, bringing examples and case studies from almost all the European regions. In addition to attending the lectures, ESF grantees were asked to present their research during the workshop.

To give a brief summary of my presentation, I began my analysis from Florence, comparing what is known about Tuscan courtly regulations with the main European kingdoms of the sixteenth century. Florence is an example of how all the different kinds of sources available to us need to be studied jointly and not in isolation. It was not until the Gran-duke Ferdinand I had risen to power in 1587 that a court with a proper ceremonial was set up. As reported in 1561 by the Venetian ambassador in Florence, Vincenzo Fedeli, Ferdinand I's father, Cosimo I, had chosen a more private life-style than other rulers. For this reason, the main sources used for retracing ambassadors receptions in

Florence in the period before the setting of a court in 1580s are ambassadors' letters, journals and printed records of public festivities. However, from 1589 Ferdinand I introduced the new ceremonial form to the Florentine court, taken from his previous experience as cardinal at the papal court in Rome, and this ceremonial called for written regulation of courtly life: the so-called *Diari di etichetta*. As is well known, these are memorandum where *maestri di casa*, who were the highest-ranked officers in charge of controlling life at the Florentine court wrote a description of banquet menus, public festivities and the reception of noble guests.

The *Diari*, in fact, clearly mentioned how ambassadors, together with other foreign guests, were received and lived at the Florentine court. The *Diari di etichetta* provided a detailed account of what gifts were due to each incoming guest. Differences in the type of gift existed in relation to the rank of the guest and also if he was in charge of public function or he was just acting as a private citizen. Strict regulation was in force as well about the place where it was convenient to host guests, whether in the princely palace, a nobles' residence or whether it was considered sufficient simply to pay his bill in one of the Florentine osterie.

However, not much more information about ambassadors exists in court ordinances if we look outside of Italy. Examples such as the French and the English courts testify that clear references to the reception of foreign ambassadors are quite few in court regulations before the turn of the century. Nevertheless, court ordinances have been extremely important in helping scholars to retrace how ambassadors moved inside the hosting court. In fact, understanding the development of State apartments in royal buildings thanks to the precious information reported in court ordinances has made it possible to give a spatial context to the events recounted, for example, in chronicles and journals.

This brief analysis of the issue was the starting point for a discussion with the several scholars attending the workshop. This gave me the opportunity to collect different insights and suggestions which will be extremely important for the future development of my research.

3) Description of the main results obtained

The analysis made in view of the workshop presentation made it clear that whilst the information in court ordinances concerning ambassadors was scarce during the sixteenth century, on the other hand the fact that chronicles and treatises were considered in some

way as having a “ruling effect” allows us to use these to supplement the information we have from court ordinances themselves.

As is well known, in fact, courtly ceremonial was ruled and fixed by common usages and practices and consuetudinary laws have for centuries been the basis of the power to rule. For this reason it became extremely important for rulers and their secretaries to know what had been done before. When a noble guest was expected to come, the most simple way to deal with preparations was to look at previous receptions of a guest of the same rank.

Thus, for a sixteenth-century courtier a journal recording the past treatment of guests had the same power in regulating the future reception of guests as court ordinances had for other aspects of courtly life. The journal could record, for example, the lavishness and the nobles’ procession of a past reception, the route followed by the ambassador inside the court, the way he was received - including detailed information about how many people and who within the courtiers was in charge of welcoming him, the exact point - at the foot or at the head of the stairs - as well as how many steps divided the ambassadors from the ruler in the audience room. All this information was fundamental to the courtier when preparing to receive a guest from a foreign court.

The discussion with other scholars was extremely fruitful, clarifying that some of my general considerations about regulations of ambassadors’ life at court could be extended as well to the main European courts of that period. In addition, interesting examples concerning the use of exchanging portraits between the betrothed were suggested for the sixteenth-century court in Buda and the Habsburg circle.

Of course, many questions are still open and my future research will try to answer matters such as how marriage and betrothal portraits circulated, which ceremonies were related with their exchange and whether it is possible to retrace when and where portraits were exchanged.

From a more general point of view, the ESF grant helped me to make important steps forward in the analysis of the social, ritual and political functions that marriage portraits were expected to fulfill in the sixteenth century and of the influence that their frequent exchange could have had on court artists.

4) Future collaboration with host institution (if applicable)

- 5) **Projected publications / articles resulting or to result from the grant (*ESF must be acknowledged in publications resulting from the grantee's work in relation with the grant*)**

The research carried out for the workshop "Making Room for Order. Court Ordinances as a Source for Understanding Space at Early Modern Princely Residences" is part of my wider PhD project on the circulation of betrothal and marriage portraits in sixteenth-century Europe, at the end of which I will submit my thesis to the three Universities of Florence, Pisa and Siena (Italy), which jointly organized the PhD Programme.

- 6) **Other comments (if any)**