

*Animals at Court.* Ludwigs-Maximilians-Universität München; Society for Court Studies, 08.12.2016–10.12.2016.

**Reviewed by** Nadir Weber

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Animals were omnipresent in the daily life of late medieval and early modern princely courts. They were used for transport and for hunting, for food production and consumption, for equestrian sports and royal ceremonies, for defence and companionship, or for display as exotica. The growing interest in the history of human-animal relations invites us to take a closer look at these oft-ignored beings that lived (and died) in the direct surroundings of members of the court. The aim of this conference was to bring together scholars from different disciplines to discuss the impact of the massive co-presence of non-human species on the practical life at court and the representation of noble rank or dynastic power. The conference was generously supported by the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung. For another report on the conference, see Oliver Jungen, *Leo, was ficht dich an?*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Nr. 292, 14.12.2016, N3.

The conference was opened by two welcome speeches given by KARL-ULRICH GELBERT (Historisches Kolleg) and MARK HENGERER (Munich). In his opening lecture, PHILIP MANSEL (London), co-founder of the Society for Court Studies, pointed out the crucial impact of dynasties and their courts (defined as personal households and palaces) on the creation of capital cities, capitalist economies, culture and states. According to Mansel, the centrality of courts in history did not end with the collapse of the *ancien régime*, but

with the fall of the big empires in 1917-1918. Many topics related to the functioning of these institutions – among which the presence of animals – are still understudied, so that court historians of all countries should “unite” and draw a more complete picture of courts and their impact in history. Introducing the topic of the conference, NADIR WEBER (Konstanz) exemplified the variety of roles of animals in early modern court life. The co-presence of non-human living beings had a crucial impact on the spatial organization, the social composition and cultural life at court. For analytical purposes, he proposed to distinguish two different levels of animal presence in court life: a first level of interactions between humans and animals of different species, and a second level that covers all functions of living, dead or purely symbolic animals as media in human communication.

In the first session entitled “Animals between Courts”, ELENA TADDEI (Innsbruck) reconstructed the role of animals as living objects of exchange between Italian and German courts in the late sixteenth century. Usually presented as gifts, different sorts of animals, both game and domesticated animals such as dogs or horses of the famous Ferrarese breed, played an important role in the intensification of these political relations across the Alps. The same was true of the relations between the two Habsburg courts of Spain and Austria, as ANNEMARIE JORDAN GSCHWEND (Lisbon) pointed out. Apart from the transporta-

tion of animal gifts, the imperial ambassador Hans Khevenhüller and his agents were responsible for the acquisition of wild and domestic animals for their master's court and menageries, mobilizing commercial networks to Lisbon. Thus birds and other exotic animals from overseas, special hunting dogs and purebred Andalusian horses found their way to Innsbruck, Graz, Vienna and Prague – together with specialists who had the necessary knowledge about keeping these animals. In her contribution, CATARINA SIMÕES (Lisbon) analysed the role of non-European animals in the symbolic display of the majesty of the Portuguese kings. Already in the age before the spectacular animal gifts of King Manuel I to Pope Leo X, exotic animals such as elephants played an important role in celebrations, visualising political relations to non-European courts in Northern Africa and Asia.

The second session discussed the role of animals in the creation of the figure of the courtier. JULIA WEITBRECHT (Kiel) analysed the meanings of animals and animal-related practises such as hunting in medieval courtly literature. Concepts such as “zuht” or “noble breeding” could be applied to both animals and humans, and animal-related practises such as gutting a deer after hunting it down could exemplify noble status. Animals thus played a significant role in the self-fashioning of the late medieval nobility. The paper of MACKENZIE COOLEY (Stanford) showed that the same was true of sixteenth century Italian courts, contrasting the views on chivalry and nobility in Baldassare Castiglione's “Il Cortegiano” (1528) and Federico Grisone's “Gli ordini di cavalcare” (1550), a key Renaissance equestrian text. While Castiglione's courtier was a perfect horseman, Grisone's text on horse training exploited the reading public's desire to fit with this ideal. As ARMELLE FÉMELAT (Tours) pointed out, these symbiotic relations between nobles and their dogs or horses were also mirrored in the new genre of animal portraits which developed in the Italian Renaissance. Even if the owner was not represent-

ed in persona on the picture, as in several paintings that were made at the Gonzaga court between 1450 and 1550, the individualized portrait of a beautiful horse of noble breed remained a representation of the rank and virtues of the princely master.

The first contribution of the session on “Arenas of Competition” by CHRISTIAN JASER (Berlin) similarly pointed out that race horses served as a sort of “proxy” for the power and virtues of their princely owners in a competitive system of courts – at least if they were successful. The racehorses in the public Palio races thus served as “media animals”, to which, at the same time, a considerable degree of individual agency was attributed by contemporary observers who more readily praised the winning horse and its noble owner than the largely invisible jockey. MAIKE SCHMIDT (Trier) analysed the literary and visual representation of the royal hunting of deer at the court of Francis I of France. As the horses in the case of the horse races, the performance of Francis' staghounds that were kept and bred by a professional team served as a symbolic representation of the monarch's individual abilities and military power at a time when he was competing for the Imperial crown. The third contribution by JOHN VILLIERS (London) focused on another agonal practise that involved courtiers and animals: bullfights at the Portuguese court. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the chief *toureiros* were almost invariably noblemen and even included members of the royal family. Much more than just bloody entertainment, the bullfights served as an occasion to perform excellence in horsemanship and military virtues before the courtly public in a highly theatrical setting.

In an interlude, the music professor and harpsichord player ROBERT SELINGER (Munich) presented a “musical bestiary” of early modern compositions. The works of courtly composers such as Johann Caspar von Kerll, François Couperin and Louis-Claude Daquin aimed at rep-

representing the specific voices or behaviour of animals present at court. In his “Fuga del Gato”, the composer Domenico Scarlatti even imitated the noise of his cat walking over the strings of his harpsichord – a very immediate sensual representation of non-human agency.

In the fourth session on “Animals’ Inculturation”, ELENA TADDIA (Versailles) offered a broad picture of animal presence at the château de Versailles in the eighteenth century. This presence ranged from companions in the chambers, horses in the stables, exotic animals in the menagerie to dead animals that served as food and décor on the royal dining tables and purely symbolic animals on paintings and satiric portraits. Afterwards, MAGDALENA BAYREUTHER (Munich) focused on the ceremonial coach culture at the eighteenth-century Bavarian court. In this period, the Wittelsbach electors with royal and imperial ambitions built a vast “fleet” of representative coaches to underline their royal and imperial ambitions; when these ambitions were fulfilled at least temporarily, the coronation of Charles VII in Frankfurt served as an occasion to display the new dignity with an enormous parade of horses and coaches. The richly ornamented coaches and the horses that drew them thus represented the rank of princes. At the same time, they served as an important medium to display social hierarchies at court.

In the session on the “Limits of Domestication”, the biologist GIOVANNI FORCINA (Sevilla) presented and contextualised the results of a DNA analysis of modern and archival specimens of the black francolin, a pheasant-like bird that was once present in southern Europe. The analysis showed the far origins of these birds that were imported to Europe from the Middle and Far East to serve as hunting game for princely courts. When the strict protection by hunting regulations ceased as a result of loss of interest in this game, the black francolin rapidly became extinct in the western Mediterranean. Another “forgotten” ani-

mal present at early modern European courts was the cheetah. THIERRY BUQUET (Caen) traced the development and end of the fashion of the hunting of small or mid-sized game animals with the help of tamed cheetahs from the late medieval period up to the seventeenth century – a practise that left traces in manuscript sources, on paintings and in the creating of specific court offices, revealing political and cultural ties to non-European courts. Based on examples from the Swedish court, the paper by FABIAN PERSSON (Lund) demonstrated that the use of animals to perform royal dignity on ceremonial occasions was not always crowned with success; on the contrary, the obstinacy of these living beings could also cause severe symbolic failures. For instance, the refusal of the king’s horse to lead his master to the church where his coronation should take place was interpreted as a bad sign by contemporary observers. The animal presence at court could thus underline the sovereigns’ majesty and power to guarantee order, but also lead to an “unruly display”.

The sixth session focused on companion animals present in the chambers of early modern courts. KATHARINE MACDONOGH (London), author of the book “Reigning Cats and Dogs”, chose the examples of Isabeau of Bavaria, Madame de Pompadour and Catherine II of Russia to discuss the relations between women at court and their pets and to highlight changes in animal fashion from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century. According to MacDonogh, the richly ornamented lapdogs or exotic birds could provide “emotional solace” to women in a life that was marked by ceremonial restrictions. MARIA ARESIN (Florence) reconstructed the largely forgotten history of pet squirrels, highly popular in the aristocratic milieu from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century. In contemporary manuals, the methods of catching, taming and keeping squirrels were discussed; as pets for women and children, the swift animals that were bound to their owners by ties could serve as symbols for the attachment of male lovers or as intervening objects in education. In

his case study on a dog's life at the Dessau court, ANDREAS ERB (Dessau) exemplified the important role of pets as objects of conversation and mediators of social relations. Being aware of the special attachment of Louise of Anhalt Dessau to his Pomeranian dog Triton, the poet Friedrich Matthison praised the animal in letters, poems and silhouettes that he sent to the princess. In addition to the social function of the pet, the documents analysed by Erb reveal changes in the perception of animals around 1800, influenced by Rousseau's calls for a return to nature.

Opening the last session on "Contingency and Liminality", SARAH DUNCAN (London) focused on the architectural design and social function of horse stables in sixteenth century Italy. Stable books and other manuscript sources analysed by Duncan document the names of horses, the amounts of food they consumed and the co-presence of professional staff – including stable boys who rested in the stables overnight – and other, not always desired animals, such as insects, rats and cats. NADEIJE LANEYRIE-DAGEN (Paris) analysed the association of princes, so-called dwarfs and animals on many early modern portraits, especially from the Mantuan and the Spanish courts. The different arrangements of these figures and their bodies are indicative of paternalistic conceptions of power, but also document a persistent interest in physiognomic similarities across the boundaries between species. Finally, FABIAN JONIETZ (Florence) focused on mortuary rituals and monuments for pets. He demonstrated that commemorative practices for deceased animals had been common at least from the fifteenth century onwards in the courtly milieu, long before the opening of the first pet cemeteries. According to Jonietz, these practises provided "an intimate format of grieving and a catharsis of emotions" in contrast to the formalized and public funerary ceremonies for human beings.

The conference was closed with a comment by MIEKE ROSCHER (Kassel). Discussing the dif-

ferent papers of the conference, Roscher noted that princely courts as transculturally and transtemporally comparable places may offer an empirical key to some burning questions in animal history, illustrating the importance of practises of co-habitation, bodily entanglements and ritualized interactions between humans and other species. According to Roscher, the concept of agency that has been widely discussed in human-animal studies should be taken to mean relational agency which manifests itself in various forms of interactions ranging from loving and attending to training and riding to killing and eating. A *longue durée* perspective may help to identify continuities in practises of interaction as well as changes such as the shifting values attributed to certain species in courtly life and beyond.

### **Conference Overview:**

#### *Welcome speeches*

KARL-ULRICH GELBERG (Munich), MARK HENGERER (Munich)

#### *Opening lectures*

PHILIP MANSEL (London): The Pursuit of Courts: Courts and the Making of Europe

NADIR WEBER (Konstanz): Animals at Court: Introduction

#### *Animals between Courts*

ELENA TADDEI (Innsbruck): Animals as Instruments for Networking and Cultural Transfer at the 16th Century Este-Court

ANNEMARIE JORDAN GSCHWEND (Lisbon): Animals fit for Emperors. Hans Khevenhüller and the Creation of Habsburg Menageries in Vienna and Prague

CATARINA SIMÕES (Lisbon): Non-European Animals in the Portuguese Court in the Renaissance and the Construction of an Image of Royalty

#### *Animals and Being a Courtier*

JULIA WEITBRECHT (Kiel): Of Good Breeding: Animals and Noble Self-fashioning in Medieval Courtly Literature

MACKENZIE COOLEY (Stanford): I Would Have

Our Courtier Be a Perfect Horseman. Creating Nobility and Fashioning Horses between Mantua and Naples, 1461-1571

ARMELLE FÉMELAT (Tours): Rubino, El Serpentino, Viola, Dario et les autres. Portraits de chiens et de chevaux à la cour des Gonzaga à la Renaissance

### *Arenas of Competition*

CHRISTIAN JASER (Berlin): Ipsi equi barbarici currere tantum sciant. Racehorses and the Competitive Representation of Italian Renaissance Courts

MAIKE SCHMIDT (Trier): Staghounds and their master in Demoulins' "Commentaires de la guerre gallique" (1519/1520)

JOHN VILLIERS (London): The corrida de touros as theatre and ceremony: royal bullfights at the Portuguese court in the 17th and 18th centuries

### *Animals in Concert*

ROBERT SELINGER, HARPSICHORD (Munich): A musical bestiary – Portraits of Animals in musical composition at Versailles, El Escorial, and the Vienna Hofburg. Works by D. Scarlatti, F. Couperin, J.C. Kerll and others

### *Animals' Inculturation*

ELENA TADDIA (Versailles): The Real and the Imaginary. Animals Inside and Outside Versailles Palace

MAGDALENA BAYREUTHER (Munich): Ceremonial Coach Culture at the 18th Century Munich Court

### *Limits of Domestication*

GIOVANNI FORCINA (Sevilla): The Black Francolin. Food for Gourmets, Game for Nobles, Lust for Lovers. Reawakening the Memory and Assessing the Origin of a Prized Courtly Bird

THIERRY BUQUET (Caen): Cheetah Hunting in European Courts. From the Apogee to the End of a Fashion (14th-17th Century)

FABIAN PERSSON (Lund/Kalmar): Unruly Display. Animals at the Early Modern Scandinavian Courts

### *Courtiers' true Companions?*

KATHARINE MACDONOGH (London): A Woman's Life. The Role of Pets in the Lives of Royal Women at the Courts of Europe 1400-1800

MARIA ARESIN (Florence): Ein ganz hurtig und unrüwrig thier. Pet Squirrels in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times

ANDREAS ERB (Dessau): Ein Triton als Freund. A Dog's Life at the Dessau Court

### *Contingency and Liminality*

SARAH DUNCAN (London): The Care of the Court Horse in Renaissance Italy

NADEIJE LANEYRIE-DAGEN (Paris): Projection physiognomonico-politique ou exploration des confins humains? A propos de l'association nains – bêtes dans les portraits des grands à la Renaissance

FABIAN JONIETZ (Florence): Death and Memoria of Animals at Early Modern Courts

### *Conclusion*

MIEKE ROSCHER (Kassel): Comment

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