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Zur Forschungsgeschichte und Methodendiskussion

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CEREMONY AT COURT: REFLECTIONS ON AN ELUSIVE SUBJECT*

Introduction

The rituals surrounding rulership are no invention of the early modern age, though they seem to have reached new heights in the course of the seventeenth century. Following the eighteenth-century compilation of ceremonial codices by Jean Rousset de Missy¹, we may distinguish three main types of ceremony: dynastic (or dynastic state-) ceremonial including baptism, coronation, *sacre*, marriage, funeral, entry, *lit de justice*, estates, diets; domestic ceremonial regulating audiences, public dining, *lever*, *coucher*; and finally diplomatic ceremonial, fitting the complicated and quickly expanding hierarchy of foreign representatives into the other ceremonial arrangements. Rousset also gave lists of the titles to be used in correspondences, often referred to as the *Kanzleizeremoniell*. We should add the various explicitly religious ceremonies: public worship, processions, etc.; court ceremony in early modern Europe, especially at Catholic courts, was primarily based on the liturgical year².

Ceremony was never without its critics, as we shall see below. In the eighteenth century, baroque ceremonialism was seriously eroded by enlightenment and utilitarianism. The customary ceremonies continued well into the nineteenth century, but the separation of house-

* J. J. BERNS, Th. RAHN, (ed.) *Zeremoniell als höfische Ästhetik in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, Tübingen 1995, XXII, 821 p. (Frühe Neuzeit, 25); Emmanuel LE ROY LADURIE, *Saint-Simon ou le système de la cour*, Paris 1997, 635 p.; Volker BAUER, *Hofökonomie. Der Diskurs über den Fürstenhof in Zeremonialwissenschaft, Hausväterliteratur und Kameralismus*, Wien 1997, 360 p. (Frühneuzeitstudien. N. F., 1); Milos VEC, *Zeremonialwissenschaft im Fürstenstaat. Studien zur juristischen und politischen Theorie absolutistischer Herrschaftsrepräsentation*, Frankfurt a. M. 1998, X-548 p. (Ius Commune, Studien zur Europäischen Rechtsgeschichte, Sonderheft 106).

1 Jean ROUSSEAU de Missy, Jean DU MONT, *le Cérémonial Diplomatique des Cours de l'Europe ou collection des actes, mémoires et relations qui concernent les Dignitez, Titulatures, Honneurs et Prééminences... Et en général tout ce qui a rapport au Cérémonial & à l'Etiquette*, Amsterdam/The Hague 1739, I-II, Supplément au Corps Universel Diplomatique du Droit de Gens IV-V; Rousset's categories vary, in the case of the Austrian Habsburgs, for instance, he adds a section on the ceremonies of the empire, while for some courts, he does not list any ›domestic ceremonial‹. Diplomatic ceremonial surely is his main focus, whereas dynastic state ceremonial is the main focus of Theodore GODEFROY, *Ceremonial de France*, Paris 1619 and Denys GODEFROY, *Cérémonial françois*, Paris 1649.

2 The forthcoming collection of articles edited by John ADAMSON, *The Princely Courts of Europe*, London 1999, stresses this point. See also Alain BOUREAU's discussion of the ›historiographie cérémonialiste‹, ›Ritualité politique et modernité monarchique. Les usages de l'héritage médiéval‹ in: *L'Etat ou le roi. Les fondations de la modernité monarchique en France (XIV^e-XVII^e siècles)*, ed. N. BULST, R. DESCIMON, A. GUERREAU, Paris 1996, p. 9-25.

hold and state now increasingly suggested that these pursuits were a mere sideshow. Indeed, many nineteenth-century academic historians viewed court ceremony as a pointless preoccupation: in retrospect, they would have liked early modern rulers to concentrate on ›more serious‹ tasks. Likewise, source editors selected documents outlining the emerging structures of the ›modern‹ state, often omitting sections dealing with the ›irrelevant details‹ of ceremony. Historians who did study the subject risked dismissal as misguided antiquaries, though it was accepted as an idiosyncratic and somewhat obsolete part of the history of diplomacy.

Ceremony did secure a niche in French history, mainly because it allegedly enabled the Sun King to emasculate his indomitable nobles, thus assisting the formation of the modern state. Intimately connected with Versailles and with the monumental literary heritage of Saint-Simon, it remained an evident though ambiguous part of French tradition³. In German historiography, the animosity towards ceremony seemed even stronger, possibly because it could not be linked easily to a ›productive‹ process of state formation. Eduard Vehse's multi-volume ›Geschichte der deutschen Höfe‹ long stood almost isolated, and though it has obvious defects, it still cannot be ignored⁴.

In the early twentieth century, several pioneering studies sought to reanimate the study of court and rulership. The symbolic and religious dimensions of rulership were explored by, among others, Marc Bloch, while a short-lived sociological debate on the nature of courtly society occurred in Germany. Other works of importance for the study of ceremony were written, but found no readers: Henri Brocher's ›À la cour de Louis XIV‹ and Norbert Elias' ›Die höfische Gesellschaft‹. Brocher's work was soon forgotten, while Elias could not publish his study and had to flee Germany⁵.

3 SAINT-SIMON [Louis de Rouvroy, duc de], *Mémoires*, ed. A. de BOISLISLE, Paris 1879–1930; Ernest LAVISSE, *Histoire de France illustrée des origines à la Révolution*, Paris 1913, e.g. VII, 1 p. 372–386; VII, 2 p. 402–412; Marcel MARION, *Dictionnaire des institutions de la France aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles*, Paris 1923, e.g. articles ›cour‹, ›étiquette‹, ›Maison du Roi‹. This interpretation still finds support, see for instance Rudolf BRAUN, ›Staying on Top: Socio-Cultural Reproduction of European Power Elites‹ in: *Power Elites and State Building*, ed. Wolfgang REINHARD, Oxford 1996, p. 234–259, particularly p. 245.

4 Eduard VEHSE, *Geschichte der deutschen Höfe seit der Reformation*, Hamburg 1851–1860; the surprising continuity of ceremony is implicitly demonstrated by Ivan ZOLGER's *Der Hofstaat des Hauses Österreich*, Vienna/Leipzig 1917, *Wiener staatswissenschaftliche Studien* 14. The negative connotations of ceremony continue into our own age, see e.g. Hubert Ch. EHALT, *Ausdrucksformen absolutistischer Herrschaft. Der Wiener Hof im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert*, Wien 1980, *Sozial- und Wirtschaftshistorische Studien* 14, p. 8 pointing out the role of ceremony as a ›Kommunikationsbarriere‹ and its concomitant ›Untertanengeist‹. See the interesting discussion by Barbara STOLLBERG-RILLINGER, ›Zeremoniell als politisches Verfahren. Rangordnung und Rangstreit als Strukturmerkmale der Frühneuzeitlichen Reichstags‹ in: *Neue Studien zur Reichsgeschichte*, ed. J. KUNISCH, Berlin 1997, *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung*, Beiheft 19, p. 91–132.

5 Marc BLOCH, *Les Rois Thaumaturges: étude sur le caractère surnaturel attribué à la puissance royale particulièrement en France et en Angleterre*, Strasbourg 1924; Arthur M. HOCART, *Kingship*, Oxford 1927. The debate in Germany: Joseph A SCHUMPETER, ›Zur Soziologie der Imperialismen‹, *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* 46 (1919) p. 1–39, 275–310; Werner SOMBART, *Luxus und Kapitalismus*, München/Leipzig 1922; Hans NAUMANN, Günther MÜLLER, *Höfische Kultur*, Halle 1929; Alfred von MARTIN, ›Zur Soziologie der höfischen Kultur‹ in: *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* 64 (1930) p. 155–165. The two particularly interesting pioneers: Henri BROCHER, *À la cour de Louis XIV. Le Rang et l'Étiquette sous l'ancien régime*, Paris 1934; Norbert ELIAS, *Die höfische Gesellschaft. Untersuchungen zur Soziologie des Königtums und der höfischen Aristokratie. Mit einer Einleitung: Soziologie und Geschichtswissenschaft*, Darmstadt und Neuwied 1969; *Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation. Soziogenetische und Psychogenetische Untersuchungen. I: Wandlungen des Verhaltens in den weltlichen Oberschichten des Abendlandes. II: Wandlungen der Gesellschaft. Entwurf zu einer Theorie der Zivilisation*, Bern 1969.

In fact, only after the postponed publication of Elias' work in 1969, coinciding with the second edition of his ›Über den Prozess der Zivilisation‹, was the unwarranted neglect of ceremony recognised. The last three decades have seen a steadily expanding number of publications on court life and ceremony. Ceremony has now become one of the concepts dominating the recent historiography of the early modern court, clientage and faction offering the other major – not necessarily incompatible – approach⁶. Ceremony, moreover, is an habitual ingredient of concepts such as civilisation, ›Sozialdisziplinierung‹, or the emergence of a ›public sphere‹.

It is not my intention to give a detailed account of this rich harvest, though I will ponder some of its more problematic aspects. Four recent publications prodded me to write this article. Volker Bauer's and Milos Vec's learned monographs – both based on the extensive corpus of seventeenth and eighteenth-century texts discussing ceremonial, Rahn and Berns' wider-ranging collection of conference lectures (Marburg, Spring 1993), and Le Roy Ladurie's mise-au-point of his earlier works on the French court. The obvious affinity among the first three works is disturbed by the addition of Le Roy Ladurie's work – but this serves my purposes. It adds two comparative dimensions: the French court vis à vis the German courts, and ceremony as reflected by the *Zeremonialwissenschaft* versus ceremony as practiced at court – or should I say as reflected by its greatest chronicler, Saint-Simon?

I.

The ›economy‹ of the court

Volker Bauer traces the changing balance between reputation and resources in *Hausväterliteratur*, *Zeremonialwissenschaft* and *Kameralismus* – the economy of the patrimonial household, ceremonial science, and cameralism. Strictly speaking, ceremony is not Bauer's main interest: his economic perspective takes into account all activities supporting the ruler's reputation, assuredly a broader range than ceremony itself. Luxury, palaces, gardens, festivals: they all had a ceremonial component, but cannot be seen as its equivalent. Ceremony itself, we may add, was not necessarily a very costly pursuit – visitors to the Vienna Hofburg rarely failed to contrast the admirable ceremonial austerity of the court with the comparatively low level of ›conspicuous consumption‹.

Thus, Bauer charts the slow erosion of the legitimation of courtly splendour in the course of the eighteenth century, not the development of ceremony. His analysis is convincing and interesting. In the ›Zeremonialwissenschaft‹, mainly flourishing in the first three decades of the eighteenth century, the ruler's reputation was clearly the highest goal, and the economy was strictly subservient to it. From the 1730's the budget of the ruler's household (›Hofökonomie‹), was slowly integrated into the notion of a general state budget, and subjected to the same basically utilitarian rules. The ›Hausväterliteratur‹, focusing on the economy of the household, long supported many of the tenets of the ›Zeremonialwissenschaft‹, but did so from the economic perspective it shared with the cameralists: therefore it formed a bridge between them. In the 1780's, the cameralist position became part of a more open critique of extravagance at court.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, Bauer argues, the ruler's household was no longer the structure encompassing government and finances; it became a separate department within the overarching concept of the state. The costs of representation were now clearly subservient to the general needs of the state budget, and this fact was made explicit by the institution of the ›civil list‹ pioneered in England and later adopted elsewhere. The

6 See the exemplary anthology edited by Ronald ASCH, A. BIRKE, *Princes, Patronage, and the Nobility. The Court at the Beginning of the Modern Age c. 1450–1650*, Oxford/London 1991.

›table of ranks‹, constituting one overall hierarchy for the previously separated spheres of household, army, and administration, offers another illustration of this process. An ›analogue‹ ethos of representation had finally been replaced by ›digital‹ finances. Though this metaphor did not strike me as particularly helpful, Bauer has intelligently connected the different ›discourses‹ analysed, and has added a German dimension to a discussion often concentrating on the physiocrats and Adam Smith.

The classic discussions of ›luxury‹ by Thorstein Veblen, Werner Sombart, and Norbert Elias clearly structured Bauer's approach. ›Analogue‹ and ›digital‹ can be read as equivalents of *Standeskonsumethos* and ›saving-for-future-profit-ethos‹, traditionally connected with nobles and bourgeois respectively. These notions can be helpful, but only if we remind ourselves that they are an overstatement of mentalities limited neither to the chronological nor to the social compartments ascribed to them. Bauer himself makes this clear in his work, pointing to the less ostentatious customs of earlier courts. It is also evident in his typology of the German courts⁷, where he distinguishes between *hausväterlich*, *zeremoniell*, and *gesellig*. The splendid ceremonial court seems the exception, certainly in the German situation. Its decline can also be seen as a return to more moderate standards.

It has often been noted that social climbers in particular will try to secure their reputation at almost any cost: *condottieri* who usurped the *commune's* or the *signor's* power; kings who ascended to imperial status; ministers who wanted their children to marry into the high nobility – and the principalities of the Holy Roman Empire achieving semi-sovereignty in 1648. This new status had to be demonstrated by the splendour of the court, a necessity that was exacerbated by the annoying fact that the hierarchical honours granted to the German princes by fully sovereign rulers reflected their incomplete sovereignty. The sudden emergence of the *Zeremonialwissenschaft*, and the high proportions of income spent on court life in Germany (ca. 23% instead of the more conventional maximum of 10%⁸) indicate this. Bauer discusses this characteristic predicament of the German princely courts, and he tries to put it into a comparative perspective. It is a pity, though, that he chose not to include the Imperial court in his last, comparative chapter. The book as a whole, it seems to me, would have benefited from a stronger presence of the Habsburg court.

Ceremony, religion, and law

Milos Vec's study follows the arguments and vocabulary of the *Zeremonialwissenschaft* even more closely than does that of Bauer. Vec explicitly states that he discusses the emergence and decline of the ›discourse‹ on ceremony, not the practice of ceremonial forms. He consciously repeats the contemporary vocabulary: italicized words throughout the text indicate the usage of the *Zeremonialwissenschaft*. These choices allow the reader to obtain a very direct impression of the debates uniting the copious number of texts studied by Vec, and they give his book a powerful coherence – though this may have been greater still in a slightly leaner work. Vec studies ceremony from a specific perspective, the history of law, but this never leads him into alleys so specialised as to deter general historians.

The international status of the German principalities was not the only influence on attitudes towards ceremony; religious adherence was a potent factor as well. Vec shows how the Protestant revulsion both of empty ritual and ›immoral‹ *raison d'état* thinking long secured a critical attitude towards the panoply of rulership. Interestingly, Vec notes that Protestant neo-aristotelian attitudes were more common than the neo-stoicism exemplified by Lipsius and Machiavelli. Until well into the seventeenth century, he argues, the *Politica*

7 Volker BAUER, *Die höfische Gesellschaft in Deutschland von der Mitte des 17. bis zum Ausgang des 18. Jahrhunderts. Versuch einer Typologie*, Tübingen 1993.

8 BAUER in: BERNS/RAHN p. 26.

Christiana maintained a deeply critical attitude towards the logic of *Reputation* and *Decorum*. Finally, the works of Wolff and Thomasius paved the way for a wary acceptance of ceremony. Even the partisans writing between 1700 and 1730 founded their legitimation of ceremony on the inveterate impressionability and feeble-mindedness of the populace: it would obey neither reason nor virtue, and could be overawed solely by majestic pageantry. Vec's analysis puts into perspective the writings of Gerhard Oestreich, who posited a strong neo-stoicism at the centre of his concept of *Sozialdisziplinierung*.

Vec concludes that by the 1730's the ideal of the *Aulicus Politicus* was replaced by that of the merchant – or by the ideals of the early enlightenment. Thus he supports the notion of a ›crisis of the ceremonial court‹ as presented by Bauer. The books differ in style and focus: Vec stays closer to his sources, making them more accessible for his readers; Bauer's perspective is more ›external‹, and his effort is partly motivated by modern theoretical debates. Both books have little to say about ceremony itself, or about court life. Bauer devotes one chapter to the *realgeschichtliche Gewicht* of the court and its ›economy‹, and frequently refers to practice at court; Vec deliberately omits it. Therefore, these admirable books leave us with many questions, particularly pertaining to the ambiguous relationship between ›Zeremonialwissenschaft‹ and ceremony itself, an issue to which I shall return.

Ceremony and ›aesthetics‹

It is difficult to do justice to the almost thirty contributions contained in ›Zeremoniell als höfische Ästhetik‹. Taken as a whole, this is certainly a valuable work, that can be seen as the ›legitimate heir‹ of the three-volume Wolfenbüttel conference anthology published in 1979 – though the thematic scope of the earlier volumes was much wider, and the contributions were generally shorter⁹. Many of the authors studied by Bauer and Vec – Stieve, Lünig, and Rohr prominent among them – turn up frequently in ›Zeremoniell als höfische Ästhetik‹. Thus, in some respects the problems and theses presented by Bauer and Vec were anticipated by the conference, and its published complement, particularly in the contributions by W. Weber, A. Gestrich, and J. J. Berns.

Though the two monographs obviously discuss their subjects in greater depth, the earlier anthology has the advantages of a more varied approach, a longer time-span, and a wider geographical scope. Contributions range from medieval to Napoleonic history, and include various German territories, the Imperial, the French, the Burgundian, and the Papal courts. In addition to the *Zeremonialwissenschaft*, many concrete manifestations of ceremony in court life are described: funerals, coronations, dining, divertissements of various kinds, tapestries, portraits, architecture, gardens, theatre – a range that explains the title of work, further justified by the 117 well-selected illustrations. Finally, ceremony is also studied in connection with the Imperial cities and the church, the first showing that ceremony is not limited to the courtly environment, the second demonstrating the close concordance of court ceremony and Catholic liturgy. Similarly, the abhorrence of Luther and other reformers for ›Papal‹ liturgy, and therefore their ambivalence towards worldly ceremony, is well attested here.

The volume lacks an introduction, but Rahn and Berns have added a concise conclusion, discussing some basic concepts, and suggesting results unifying the contributions. They point out that courtly divertissements are not the equivalent of ceremony, discuss the

9 A. BUCK, G. KAUFMANN, B. L. SPAHR, C. WIEDEMANN (ed.), *Europäische Hofkultur im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert. Vorträge und Referate gehalten anlässlich des Kongresses des Wolfenbütteler Arbeitskreises für Renaissanceforschung und des Internationalen Arbeitskreises für Barockliteratur in der Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel vom 4. bis 8. September 1979*, Hamburg 1981, *Wolfenbütteler Arbeiten zur Barockforschung* 8.

histrionic nature of court society, and reflect on the *Ent-Machtung* (?) of ›absolutistic ceremonial‹. The high level of information of most contributions, and the interdisciplinary nature of the collection, however, call for a longer and somewhat more concrete conclusion, suggesting the outlines and changes of ceremony. But this may be asking too much, and even without such an addition ›Zeremoniell als höfische Ästhetik‹ is a valuable work for specialists in many fields. The rich detail of many a contribution brings us closer to court life – to the practice of ceremony – than the learned discussion of the *Zeremonialwissenschaft* could conceivably do. Finally, the inclusion of Catholic courts, the church, and imperial cities underlines the fact that ceremony was a dominant practice in many spheres, and again points to the characteristic position of the Protestant German courts.

Saint-Simon and the French court

In a series of articles published from the early 1970's to the early 1990's, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie gave a powerful impetus to the study of court and ceremony¹⁰. His recent book offers an elaboration of these earlier scholarly articles, adding a large section on the ›system‹ of the regency. It seems to address an audience reaching beyond the small circle of specialists, and it is written in an almost conversational, and sometimes lofty style. Saint-Simon's main topoi dictated the structure of Le Roy Ladurie's work: hierarchy and rank, court cabals, religious pursuits, and the duke's ›finest hour‹ in the regency. The author added a section – in collaboration with J.-F. Fitou – where the demographical data inferred from the ›Mémoires‹ are computed and converted into tables. Finally, in an annex, he challenges the ›hegemony‹ of Norbert Elias' interpretation of the French court.

Le Roy Ladurie's focus on Saint-Simon gives us an interesting perspective: we see the court and its population through the little duke's eyes, and even the ›hard data‹ in the tables are dictated by his caprice. At times, the sequence of names and apt portraits (certainly one of the joys of the ›Mémoires‹!) is overpowering, but Le Roy Ladurie is thoroughly convincing in his description of the impenetrabilities of hierarchical thinking and the equally unfathomable dynamics of court faction. The strongest point of this book certainly is the analysis of the permanently intertwined worlds of hierarchy and conflict. The dictates of hierarchy structured the conflicts at court, but never simply by pitting the layers of hierarchy against each other. Here, Le Roy Ladurie's analysis is indeed far superior to the cruder notions inherent in Elias' *Königsmechanismus*.

There has long been a tendency to depict the French court as a worldly, almost a-religious environment; Le Roy Ladurie effectively counteracts this by emphasising the religious component of hierarchy and ceremony, and by examining the various religious attitudes of many courtiers. The second part of the book, the ›system of the regency‹ intelligently combines Saint-Simonian hyperbole with other sources and recent publications, giving us a detailed and lively impression of the regent's political calculations. Le Roy Ladurie's well-illustrated book will open new worlds for many readers, but it is not the paradigmatic breakthrough offered by his earlier works.

10 Emmanuel LE ROY LADURIE, ›Système de la cour (Versailles vers 1709)‹, in: *L'Arc* 65, Aix-en-Provence 1973, p. 21–35; ›Auprès du roi, la Cour‹, in: *Annales ESC* 38 1, 1983, p. 21–41; ›En guise d'avant-propos: Réflexions sur les assises concrètes d'une monarchie ›par excellence‹: le système Louis XIV‹, in: *Les Monarchies*, Paris 1986, p. 5–26; ›Rangs et hiérarchie dans la vie de cour‹ in: *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture 1. The Political Culture of the Old Regime*, ed. K. M. BAKER, Oxford/Elmsford 1987, p. 61–75; LE ROY LADURIE, J.-F. FITOU, ›Hypergamie féminine et population Saint-Simonienne‹, in: *Annales ESC* 46 1 (1991).

II.

Sources and ceremony

Different sources will suggest different perspectives – on ceremony as on any other historical subject. Prescriptive sources have left their imprint on our perception of ceremony and court life. But should we take them at face value? Surely there is a strong element of propaganda in published minute ceremonial codices, though it may not be as obvious as in the lavishly illustrated prints recreating coronations and festivities. We should note that the Austrian Habsburgs did not succumb to the temptation of printing their ceremonial: its reputation was so strong that it needed no printed promotion. It is hard to ascertain whether ceremony was as rigid and dignified as these sources suggest, and even more troublesome to figure out to what extent ceremonial rules governed life at court. Memoirs and correspondences suggest an altogether less severe picture, approaching the *honnête familiarité* Louis XIV mentioned in his memoirs¹¹. The moralists who rejected pompous ceremonies were equally bothered by the appalling carnality and passions of court life. Saint-Simon's recollections, notwithstanding his punctiliousness, give us a vivacious and impromptu view of life at court. In Vienna too, more perceptive witnesses such as Justus Eberhard Passer and Esaias Pufendorf noted exceptions and relaxations of the rules – in the spring and summer residences, certainly, ceremony continued at a lower pitch, as did the machinery of government¹².

Archival sources, moreover, may not reflect the methodical approach of the *Zeremonialwissenschaft*: improvisation is a recurring element of ceremony. The codification of ceremony by precedent must have been a long and haphazard process, and ›regressions‹ were far from exceptional¹³. We can ask ourselves whether this process had a clear direction, and whether it was actively promoted and ›used‹ by rulers. Most of the authors discussed here seem to have taken these matters for granted; they concentrate on the apotheosis of ceremony around 1700, and its decline in the course of the eighteenth century – the preceding ›ceremonialisation‹, however, needs to be substantiated by archival research¹⁴.

11 Charles DREYSS, (ed.), *Mémoires de Louis XIV pour l'instruction du Dauphin*, Paris 1860, I–II, II, p. 568; in his pioneering study, Aloys WINTERLING, *Der Hof der Kurfürsten von Köln 1688–1794. Eine Fallstudie zur Bedeutung ›absolutistischer‹ Hofhaltung*, Bonn 1986, questioned the implementation of ceremonial rules.

12 L. BAUR, ›Berichte des Hessen-Darmstädtischen Gesandten Justus Eberhard Passer‹, in: *Archiv für Österreichische Geschichte* 37 (1867) p. 273–409, for instance p. 325; Oswald REDLICH, ›Das Tagebuch Esaias Pufendorfs, schwedischen Residenten am Kaiserhofe von 1671 bis 1674‹, in: *Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 37 (1917) p. 541–597, for instance p. 568; there is a far more extensive manuscript of Pufendorf's diary in the Haus- Hof- und Staatsarchiv (herein after HHStA) in Vienna (Handschriften Weiss 324). Pufendorf was shocked by Leopold's over-enthusiastic pursuit of foxes: he wildly clubbed them in the company of his dwarfs. Surprises occurred even during ceremonies: when Passer witnessed the coronation of Leopold's third wife as queen of Hungary, the Prince of Esterhazy took his hand and brought him ›backstage‹, to look at the Hungarian regalia.

13 During the seventeenth century, the Austrian Habsburg court did not harbour a Master of Ceremonies, though a *Zeremonienamt* was instituted in the early 1650s; its ›Zeremonialprotokolle‹ (HHStA, Obersthofmeisteramt) are an attempt to structure ceremony by precedent through a system of cross-references: in preparing any of the greater ceremonies, the secretary surveyed the earlier protocol until he found the right precedents, he then noted the pages and dates in a new entry. Thus, slowly, a body of accepted practice was established. Ceremony, however, retained an enormous capacity to absorb innovations.

14 The notion was accepted by many contemporaries: see MONTESQUIEU, *pensée* 1842. *Pensées* in: *Œuvres Complètes*, Paris 1964, p. 1038: *Les rois, avec tout cet attirail qu'ils se sont donné, ces gardes,*

In the 1720's J. B. von Rohr devoted separate volumes to the ceremonial of *Privat-Personen* and *grossen Herren*¹⁵. In many other works we see an even closer amalgamation of ceremony and *politesse mondaine*. *Courtoisie*, *sprezzatura*, *Höflichkeit*, *honnêteté*, *Komplimentierkunst*, and *politesse*: these and various similar notions are often presented in close connection with court ceremony. Can we indeed plausibly connect them? Insinuating manners are hardly the equivalent of the rigid rules of ceremony. In the seventeenth century, ceremonial codices and books propounding guidelines for behaviour in polite society were clearly separated. When we compare Theodore Godefroy's ›Ceremonial de France‹ with Antoine de Courtin's ›Nouveau traité de la civilité‹, we glimpse different worlds¹⁶. A preoccupation with rank and dignity is omnipresent, and formulae for speech and deportment can be inferred from both types of works, but they addressed different audiences and discussed different problems. In fact, some courts secured a reputation for worldly brilliance, others for austere ceremonial – Habsburg and Bourbon are only the obvious examples. Ceremony could be a dignified moment in a turbulent and violently hierarchical environment; it could also be a semi-permanent religious code of behaviour, or the static intermission in an ongoing sequence of polite and vivacious entertainments. The link between court ceremony and *politesse mondaine* is not inconceivable, but surely it is far from self-evident. Questioning this link, we should also reassess the prevailing connections between ceremony and larger theoretical constructions, such as *Sozialdisziplinierung* and civilisation¹⁷.

Ceremony as a component of larger processes

The most concrete role often assigned to ceremony as ›a means of power‹ is twofold: overawing the subjects and ›taming‹ the nobility¹⁸. The focus could be on either: an elite protecting its mutual interests by ›performing‹ the ceremonies for a larger and socially far removed audience, or a ruler who cleverly deflected opposition by tempting nobles to indulge in ceremonial quarrels. Contemporary accounts – the *Zeremonialwissenschaft* offering a case in point – stressed the influence ceremony had on the populace; court nobles were seen as participants rather than as ›dupes‹. Undoubtedly, astute rulers found many ways to circumvent overmighty subjects, occasionally by violent measures, preferably by a well-balanced distribution of graces. Ceremony was important because it demarcated and limited the oppor-

ces officiers, cette maison, se sont réduits à être assujettis à l'heure et à l'étiquette. Cela devient une grande louange pour un roi que d'être exact. Sa vie est devenu ses devoirs. Voilà ce qu'a gagné Louis XIV sur Henri IV: il perdit sa liberté, et son caractère de roi à été aussi attaché à sa personne que sa peau.

- 15 Einleitung zur Ceremoniel-Wissenschaft der Privat Personen, Berlin 1728; Einleitung zur Ceremoniel-Wissenschaft der grossen Herren, Berlin 1733.
- 16 Theodore GODEFROY and Denys GODEFROY (as n. 1) versus Antoine de COURTIN, Nouveau traité de la civilité qui se pratique en France, et ailleurs parmy les honnestes gens, Brussels 1675, and many other editions.
- 17 See the recent interpretations by Daniel GORDON, *Citizens without Sovereignty. Equality and Sociability in French Thought 1670–1789*, Princeton 1994, and Anna BRYSON, *From Courtesy to Civility. Changing Codes of Conduct in Early Modern England*, Oxford 1998.
- 18 J. VON KRUEDENER, *Die Rolle des Hofes im Absolutismus*, Stuttgart 1973, *Forschungen zur Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 19 is structured around a Weberian version of this distinction; ELIAS (as n. 5) concentrated on the relationship between ruler and nobles, on the example of the Sun King as expounded by earlier French historiography. See LA BRUYÈRE's remarks in *Les caractères ou les mœurs de ce siècle* in: *Œuvres Complètes*, Paris 1951, p. 216: *La province est l'endroit d'où la cour, comme dans son point de vue, est une chose admirable: si l'on s'en approche, ses agréments diminuent, comme ceux d'une perspective qu'on voit de trop près*; and Louis XIV himself in DREYSS (as n. 11) II p. 404: *Ceux qui l'approchent [le souverain] de plus près, voyant les premiers sa faiblesse, sont aussi les premiers qui en veulent profiter.*

tunities to approach the king, and ask his favours – but ceremonial rules secured access for high noble rank, and the ruler's proximity often brought power¹⁹. The traditional analysis of ceremony at the court of the Sun King, embellished by Elias, strongly overstates a short-lived and exceptional situation, and distorts our general perspective.

The instrumental role ascribed to ceremony by the *Zeremonialwissenschaft* is well attested, but it does not fully explain the phenomenon. The religious character of ceremony will not easily fit the perception that it was a ›trick‹, an obvious ruse on the part of the ruling elites to overpower the masses with courtly splendour. Though it would be unwise to suppose that Catholic rulers would not use these means – the letters of Catherine de Medici or the memoirs of Louis XIV do not leave any doubts – it is equally narrow-minded to deny the overpowering influence of the hierarchical and religious mentality. Surely, Leopold I's painstaking comments on ceremonial arrangements are more than an exercise in Machiavellism²⁰. Again, it is necessary to note that the *Zeremonialwissenschaft* gave an outsiders' perspective, reflecting Protestantism and the semi-sovereign German principalities' attempt to ›catch up‹. Moreover, the German courts were caught between the two great Catholic rivals, the French court, probably more influential on the level of fashionable habits, and the Habsburg court in Vienna, in all probability still a stronger influence on ceremony. Both the Habsburg-Bourbon competition to influence German court life and the relationship between specific creeds and court ceremony invite further research.

What does ceremony tell us about power relationships? Very much and disturbingly little. In an environment beset by factional strife, ceremony was one of the potent indicators of power – among courtiers at one court, during the preliminaries of peace conferences, or during diets. A splendidly ceremonialised court, however, did not necessarily coincide with a subdued nobility, a docile populace, a well-ordered administration, a strong army, and a solid budget. Ceremony could equally well be a desperate bid to compensate for the inauspicious absence of these assets²¹. Many dynastic states did consolidate their position in the course of the seventeenth century, and they often chose to represent their grandeur on a larger scale, but we should not see these phenomena as inseparable companions. Both processes are generally subsumed under ›absolutism‹, but the ongoing debate about this notion would benefit from a stricter separation of the intertwined worlds of presentation and practice.

How can we relate ceremony to the much grander concepts of *Sozialdisziplinierung* and particularly civilisation (in the specific interpretation of Elias, i.e. as *Affektbeherrschung*)? Religion, hierarchy) and order are the basic elements of ceremony, and thus the connection seems obvious. The fundamental analogy of king and father, of realm and household, exemplifies this. Court ordinances indeed often reflect the rulers' attempt to create a well ordered and disciplined *Hofgesinde*, though it is hard for us to ascertain the implementation of the regulations – repetition, as always, suggests limited success at best. The reception of neo-stoicism in Germany and elsewhere, admirably charted by Vec and A. Gestrich (in Berns, Rahn), does not tell us very much about a conceivably parallel social process of *Sozialdisziplinierung*.

›Civilisation‹ seems even more problematic. Elias' ›Verhöflichung der Krieger‹ assumes the imposition of a new code of behaviour on the nobles at court. In the long run, the noble

19 For the thesis that access equates power, see David STARKEY, e.g. *The English Court from the Wars of the Roses to the Civil War*, London 1987; the historiography of the English court is better served than that of most other courts.

20 Leopold's handwritten notes commenting on ceremonial arrangements are included in the *Ältere Zeremonial Akten* (HHStA).

21 See the parallel discussion by BAUER (as n. 7) on the ›Musenhof‹; and Winterling's study (as n. 11) on an isolated but splendid court.

courtiers perceived it as their own accomplishment; surrendering their political dominance, they became the ›civilised‹ example others would follow. Thus, at court a process-in-miniature prepared the greater process of civilisation. Elias' model was a stimulating challenge, and one of the factors awakening aulic history from its deep somnolence, but it leads into blind alleys, as I have pointed out at some length elsewhere²². Ceremony was not simply a ›means of power‹, and the nobles were no hapless victims. Elias did not explore the connections between ›distribution of graces‹, ceremony, and faction – the domain reconnoitred by Le Roy Ladurie. Finally he implicitly assumes the ›natural‹ link between ceremony and *politesse* I dismissed earlier.

We have inflated the court by devoting so much time to the ›meaning‹ of ceremony, and the ›role‹ of the court in large scale developments – the Reformation, the emergence of an expanding lay elite, and urbanisation²³, offer other, more convincing explanations for the phenomena discussed above. Simultaneously, little research has been done on the concrete outlines of most European courts and their ceremonial. These priorities urgently need to change places; only when we have more information, can we again fruitfully assess the relationship between the court or court ceremony, and the plethora of phenomena associated with the ›modernisation‹ of Europe.

The ›end of ceremony‹?

Bauer and Vec discerned a crisis of the ceremonial court in the 1730's; their observation fits into the more general perception of the rise of a society less dominated by the court and its cultural emanations. The ruler's household was becoming a ›department within the state‹; expanding literacy and the rise of a periodic press created more room for dissenting voices, and slowly something like a ›public opinion‹, a non-courtly ›public sphere‹, or ›civil society‹ emerged. Ceremony risked becoming a fossilised anachronism, ill-suited to these new tastes and structures.

To be sure, these changes did occur, but we should be careful not to allow either the Revolution of 1789 or the ceremonial courts of the later seventeenth century to distort our perception. A moderation of ceremonial styles and a decreasing budget did not necessarily mean a slow process of shedding these ›primitive‹ political forms – that would amount to the classic thesis of statebuilding and the rising middle class in a new guise. Ceremony adapted to new standards; such adaptations had occurred before, and ceremony with its festive accessories would surface during the Revolution, Empire, and Restoration. Nineteenth-century courts indeed were integrated into larger military, bureaucratic, and finally parliamentary structures, and the changes preceding the revolutionary turmoil continued, gaining speed in the 1830's. A remodelled, less strictly dynastic and more national, form of ceremony, however, still served its purposes, sometimes on an even grander scale.

Returning to the *Zeremonialwissenschaft*, we can well ask ourselves whether its legitimisation of ceremony – overawing an impressionable populace – is totally irrelevant for contemporary political systems. Pondering this question may also help us calibrate our perception of court ceremony as either a ›ruse‹ or a ›creed‹ somewhat more subtly.

22 Jeroen DUINDAM, *Myths of Power. Norbert Elias and the Early Modern Court*, Amsterdam 1995; and ›Norbert Elias und der frühneuzeitliche Hof. Versuch einer Kritik und Weiterführung‹ in: *Historische Anthropologie* 6 (1998) p. 370–387. Both offer a more extensive bibliography than could be given in the context of this review article.

23 In all probability, Elias (as n. 5) did not include these phenomena in his theory because he wanted to stay away from the paths trodden by Weber and Marx.