



Tapestries at the court of Munich

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In my dissertation project I examine the use of tapestries in political contexts. I ask how tapestries were used in courtly ceremonies and what consequences this use had for the political culture. The subject of my research is the House of Wittelsbach. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in particular, the Bavarian dukes built up an important collection of tapestries, which played a prominent role in the interiors of the Munich Residence.

Only a few studies have addressed the way that the reception of tapestries changed according to the occasions on which they were displayed. But as very easily transportable works of art, tapestries were used to bestow temporary importance on the particular place where they were being presented. In this context, the theatrical practices involved in court ceremonial played a significant role. Given the dynastic character of the court, it is necessary to examine the use of tapestries over several generations. Until now, the tapestries of the Munich collection have only been examined individually.

The ways in which tapestries were used in general at court need to be investigated. Here I focus on the questions of which tapestries were shown on which occasions and of how this presentation was perceived by guests and commentators. To this end, I am using sources such as inventories, travelogues, letters, and festival reports to reconstruct the history of the collection of tapestries at the Munich court and their use and reception. Many of these artworks still exist and can be examined more closely.

The aim of my work is to gain a better understanding of political culture in the early modern period. Here tapestries played a significant role since such objects constructed sites in which politics were played out. These places were not neutral: religious and dynastic beliefs lay at their core. They thus defined the thinking patterns of the court, which also bound the prince who presented the tapestries. I argue that the courtly interior had a considerable impact on the political space and was not merely a shell or a site for political propaganda.