



“Mit köstlichen tapetzereyen und anderer herrlicher zier” – Interiors for Court Festivals and Ceremonies

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For centuries, court festivals and ceremonies such as weddings, coronations, the reception of princely guests or ambassadors, and the celebration of anniversaries, of victories gained, and of treaties concluded, offered most welcome occasions for aristocratic representation on a grand scale. These celebrations required the construction of ephemeral architecture (such as tents or pavilions at a border or on neutral territory; theatres and courts for games or tournaments) and the furnishing and decoration of existing palaces and residences, especially their throne and audience rooms, banqueting halls, guest apartments and chapels. In the design and construction of these interiors, the primary concerns were the festivities that were to take place inside them and the protocol that had to be observed during these events. Court artists and artisans received specific orders as to the themes they had to communicate, the materials they should use, and the effects their patrons wished to achieve. Occasionally, artists from outside court circles were commissioned to create novel objects for the furnishing of a room. But court festivals not only spurred the creation of new works and settings; they also called for the bringing out of objects made or acquired in the past. Such objects, inherited from earlier generations, were considered as material proof of the historic merits and the longevity of a dynasty. In carefully constructed ensembles, ancient and new furnishings were brought together to express both sacred tradition and innovative power, attributes that were often of equal importance for a successful ruler.

From the early sixteenth century until about 1800, a great number of court festivals and ceremonies were recorded in detailed descriptions. The modern term *festival book* refers to those accounts that were printed (and occasionally illustrated) in order to lend permanence to an otherwise evanescent event and to impress the readers to whom they were addressed. Such texts name the persons taking part in the celebrations and describe the spaces, their decoration, and the objects used during the events; occasionally they even record the preparations made before the festival proper, thus drawing attention to the extraordinary care taken and the generosity bestowed upon the guests invited. For our research project, these accounts provide particularly valuable insights into the organization of court festivals and their sequences of events.

This is not to say, however, that festival books may be considered as historically accurate and reliable sources. Constituting mainly a particular form of panegyric, they require a critical reading,



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and the information gained from them must necessarily be complemented by other documentary evidence, namely account books, contracts, court orders and related material.

While historians and literary scholars have already analyzed a substantial amount of these written sources and, for a number of court festivals, convincingly identified the rules and interests governing such events, the interiors in which they were acted out have not received equal attention. Also markedly neglected have been the individual objects that constituted the particular setting for each ceremony. Considering that numerous individual works of art, and sometimes even entire ensembles, that played significant roles in aristocratic celebrations still survive, this material evidence should be taken into account by scholars: If the patrons of such festivals insisted on having apartments, banqueting halls and churches fitted out with series of tapestries and embroideries in silk and gold, furniture and lighting strategically placed, tables laid with silver and decorated with ephemeral sculpture made of wax, colored sugar and folded linen, and horses adorned with costly trappings and footmen with liveries and armor to match, it seems crucial that we understand the value placed on the materiality of these furnishings and the effects created by their organization in elaborate designs. Our project aims at going beyond a mere tracing of the sequences of ceremonial acts and the iconographic programs of individual images or objects, and analyzing instead the complex interaction between spaces, the furnishings defining their characters and purposes, the objects used in the proceedings, and the persons acting out their roles in these settings.