

Cambridge University Press

0521822629 - Vienna and Versailles: The Courts of Europe's Dynastic Rivals, 1550-1780

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Excerpt

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PART I

Prelude

CHAPTER I

Introduction

HOUSEHOLD AND GOVERNMENT

A court, Furetière noted in his 1690 dictionary, is ‘the residence of a king or sovereign prince’, but also ‘the king and his council, or ministers’, and ‘the officers and the suite of a prince’. To the trinity of palace, council, and retinue, he added a range of meanings connected with either courts of law or refined manners. The 1694 *Dictionnaire de l'Académie*, listing the same associated meanings, primarily described the court as: ‘la Maison, les Officiers, les Principaux Seigneurs, & la Justice Ordinaire d'un Roy, d'un Prince’ – ‘maison’ covering dynasty, household, and house. Johann Heinrich Zedler preceded the lengthy discussion of ‘Hof’ in his *Universal-Lexicon* with the succinct but comprehensive traditional formula: ‘Hof wird genennet, wo sich der Fürst aufhält’.¹ All contemporary definitions include both household and government. Indeed, more often than not the officers and attendants following the sovereign and catering for his table, bed, chapel, and stable, had a significant share in the administration of the realm. Moreover, the greater nobles in the vicinity of the court had the right and duty to help and advise the ruler, and the latter was expected to listen to them. From the later Middle Ages until the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries the staffs of most courts expanded – this growth was as relevant for the household as for the administrative services operating within its compass. During and after this phase of expansion, however, household and government slowly but perceptibly drifted apart, a process accompanied by changes in the nature and status of rulership.

¹ Antoine Furetière, *Dictionnaire Universel contenant generalement tous les mots françois . . .* (Paris 1690); *Dictionnaire de l'Académie* (Paris 1694); *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, ed. Diderot and D'Alembert (Paris 1756), VI, p. 355, opens with the same description, but soon turns into a critique of courtly vanities; Johann Heinrich Zedler, *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexikon aller Wissenschaften und Künsten . . .* (Leipzig and Halle 1732; repr. Graz 1961), XIII, pp. 405–406; a parallel Spanish description is cited in Glyn Redworth and Fernando Checa, ‘The Courts of the Spanish Habsburgs’, in J. Adamson, ed., *The Princely Courts of Europe: Ritual, Politics, and Culture under the Ancien Régime 1500–1750* (London 1999), pp. 42–65, here at p. 43: the court is ‘the place where the king is to be found with his vassals and his own officials, who constantly advise and wait on him, as well as the great men of the kingdom, who are present’.

Thus, when Louis XVI (1774–92) in 1791 deplored the National Assembly's eagerness to isolate financially and administratively the services rendered to him personally, 'comme si... les services rendus à la personne du roi, ne l'étaient pas aussi à l'état', his contention reflected a partisan perspective.² In the preceding five centuries rulers themselves had frequently attempted to disengage government and household. The administrative agents and institutions expanding from the later Middle Ages remained linked to the services catering for the ruler's personal needs, but in the course of the early modern age they increasingly operated as an autonomous segment connected only with the apex of the household: the ruler and his circle of advisers. In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the steady growth of government by paper secured a more conspicuous place at court for administrative specialists of various kinds – a challenge to those among the sword nobles who saw executive power, high court office, and military command as their birthright. Whether subservient to the court's dignitaries, or responsible only to the ruler himself; whether competing with the great nobles, or assimilating with them: high-placed robe administrators had come to stay. Everywhere specialised administrative services grew larger and developed 'bureaucratic' routines. Robe and sword had to come to terms with each other, establishing a new division both of responsibilities and of status.

From the later seventeenth century onwards several practices emerged that further qualified the pre-eminence of the noble household officers and their clans. Through the 'ordre du tableau' Louis XIV's (1643–1715) war minister François-Michel Le Tellier, marquis de Louvois (1641–1691) reorganised promotion in the army, stressing seniority and restricting the privileges of noble status. More importantly, the Sun King did not readily include princes and great nobles in his councils: only the most trusted among his noble companions were allowed to participate in the formal machinery of decision-making. The officers of the royal household were no longer responsible for the government of the realm, and they shared the responsibility for the household staffs with the *secrétaire d'Etat* for the *maison du roi*. In 1662–1665 and in 1685, the restored English court was much reduced, and it must have lost some of its allure. In the century following the institution of the 'civil list' in 1698, this parliamentary grant sustaining the royal household helped to secure a clearer separation of the budgets of household, warfare, and government.³ Moreover, it underlined the fact that the court could no longer unequivocally claim to be the centre of the realm.

² Louis' declaration is printed in the *Archives Parlementaires de 1787 à 1860*, ed. M. J. Mavidal and M. E. Laurent, première série, vol. XXVII (Paris 1887), pp. 378–383, at p. 379.

³ See John A. Lynch and E. A. Reitan, 'From Revenue to Civil List, 1689–1702: The Revolution Settlement and the "Mixed and Balanced" Constitution', *Historical Journal* 13 (1970), pp. 571–588; J. Adamson, 'The Tudor and Stuart Courts 1509–1714', in *The Princely Courts of Europe*, pp. 116–117.

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Elsewhere, different developments pointed in the same direction. In the years of Frederick III/I (1688–1701–1713), the Prussian court had attempted to emulate the greater European courts. The Soldier-King Frederick William I (1713–1740), however, almost totally abolished his father's household. Frederick the Great (1740–1786) restored a bare minimum, but concentrated on government and military exploits, leaving representative courtly responsibilities to the separate establishments of his spouse and siblings.⁴ After the debacle of the Silesian Wars, Maria Theresa (1740–1780) fundamentally reorganised the administration and the army, following enlightened precepts but carefully maintaining the compact of dynasty and magnates. She did put the household, and even noble rank in general, on a more equal footing with the administrative and military hierarchies – a development echoing a similar 1680 Danish ordinance, and Peter the Great's 1722 Table of Ranks.⁵ The share of the senior court officers in Maria Theresa's administrative machinery was hardly as comprehensive as had been that of their predecessors, though we can only guess the extent of their influence. Joseph II (1765–1790) further transformed and reduced the Austrian court; his recurring attempts at sweeping reform temporarily upset the balance between elites and dynasty.⁶ In France, where the initial bureaucratic impulse had been quite strong, and the administration undoubtedly became more professional in the course of the eighteenth century, the challenge of the robe administrators diminished. The most prominent among the ministerial dynasties were integrated into noble dynasties, several of whom had again secured a key position in the machinery of decision-making around court. In the last decades preceding the Revolution, military and financial debacles did cause fundamental reforms in two quintessentially noble domains: the army was reorganised by the comte de Saint-Germain in 1776, and the royal household was reformed and curtailed from 1780 onwards.

By the end of the eighteenth century, service and merit, traditionally connected with noble status, were no longer necessarily based on genealogy: noble birth and merit could indeed be perceived as opposing principles. Nobilities may or may not have served their rulers, but service itself, on the battlefield, in the bureaucracy, or in finance, became the ennobling principle *par excellence*. European court fashion reflected this evolution: military uniform replaced traditional court dress at the Swedish, Prussian, and Josephine courts – most other

⁴ Thomas Biskup, 'Queen Elisabeth Christine of Prussia as Consort', paper presented to the conference of the Society for Court Studies, September 1999; the author kindly gave me a copy of his text, to be published in Clarissa Campbell Orr, ed., *Queenship in Europe 1660–1815: The Role of the Consort* (Cambridge 2004). See also Markus Völkel, 'The Hohenzollern Court', in *Princely Courts of Europe*, pp. 211–229.

⁵ Robert Molesworth, *Etat du Royaume de Danemark, tel qu'il étoit en 1692* (Amsterdam 1695), pp. 205–211, the 'Ordonnance' of 31 December 1680.

⁶ P. G. M. Dickson, *Finance and Government under Maria Theresa 1740–1780*, 2 vols. (Oxford 1987); Dickson, 'Monarchy and Bureaucracy in Late Eighteenth-Century Austria', *English Historical Review* 110 (1995), pp. 323–367.

courts followed, or sported the simple *frac* instead of the rich French-inspired *habit habillé* and the traditional Habsburg *Mantelkleid*.⁷ The forms of social advancement the early modern state had provided for its servants had closely mirrored the traditions and social patterns of the noble elite, creating a multi-layered stratum of service elites that sought to legitimise their position by genealogy; the service elites emerging in the nineteenth century, however, were subject to more rigorous forms of training and selection, and genealogy became less important. This 'modernisation' of the state and its service elites was a long and confused process. We can point to late medieval 'new' monarchies, to the great phases of state building from the sixteenth into the eighteenth centuries; we may want to stress the watershed of 1770–1830, choose to focus on the remarkable mixture of innovation and inflated traditionalism characteristic of nineteenth-century monarchy, or emphasise structural affinities of 'modernising' states in all ages. In no country, however, did the professionalisation of bureaucracies and the insulation of the ruler's household reach a conclusive phase in the early modern age. At some courts the formal connections between household and government remained strong, while the separation achieved on paper in other realms inevitably proved highly permeable because of the accumulation of offices from both spheres in one person or dynasty, and the courtiers' easy access to the ruler's ear.

Emmanuel Siéyès forcefully made this point in his famous 1789 *Qu'est ce que le Tiers Etat* where he deplored the pervasive influence of court nobles.⁸ For Siéyès' contemporaries the argument may have been evident, but a further century of bureaucratic development and constitutional debate obscured it. Indeed, with the erosion of monarchy itself in the nineteenth century, the political relevance of court office dwindled as well. Access to the ruler through noble familiarity or domestic service lost its prime importance as other centres of power and patronage came to the fore. Without a doubt, the personal environment of heads of state, whether crowned or chosen, will always retain a certain influence, but the primacy of institutionalised processes of decision-making, and the public functions of representative agencies strictly limit such influences – or force them to domains less visible to public scrutiny, as informal contacts bypassing regular procedures threaten to bring scandal or crisis upon discovery. In the early modern age, household and government were equally 'public', and the household was by no means subservient. Thus, in a process of many centuries, the priorities were inverted: the subservient administrative compartment within

⁷ Philip Mansel, 'Monarchy, Uniform, and the Rise of the Frac', *Past & Present* 96 (1982), pp. 103–132, cites the fact that in eighteenth-century France, the fortunes of the silk industry determined the court's decision to maintain the *habit habillé*.

⁸ Emmanuel Siéyès, *Qu'est ce que le Tiers Etat*, ed. R. Zappéri (Geneva 1970), pp. 132–133. Siéyès presents robe, sword, and church as functional categories within the 'toute-puissante' aristocracy ruling the court. Compare Malesherbes' complaint to Louis XVI during his short incumbency as secretary of state for the household, AN O 1 749, no. 51, stating that the minister could not reform the court, or give orders to court dignitaries.

the ruler's household now reigns supreme, whereas the modern equivalents of the household are either relegated to a constitutionally defined compartment within the state, or have no formal significance.

Not without reason, nineteenth-century historians looked for the origins of this development in medieval and early modern Europe – one of the contentions of this book is that in doing so, they seriously antedated the isolation and marginalisation of the household. They judged dynastic Europe with the standards of the late nineteenth century, and saw ministers, councils, and bureaucracies in isolation from their courtly environment, treating the early modern household as the largely irrelevant environment of these modern-day institutions. An obsession with the antecedents of the modern state prevented them from granting the household its proper place, and from understanding the crucial unrecorded and informal component of collegial decision-making. In France, the court could be viewed with some indulgence, because it was thought to have consolidated 'national' state building by allowing the 'absolute' rulers to overcome 'feudal' opposition – and establish favourable boundaries. Nineteenth-century German historiography had more difficulties in reconciling the heritage of the Holy Roman Empire and its multi-dynastic mosaic with the ideal of the national state: the multiple courts came to symbolise German impotence, equally ineffectual Habsburg suzerainty, and French triumph. Versailles was equated with the blatant proclamation of victory, demonstrated again in 1871 and 1919. Everywhere, the ideals of national state building dictated the interpretation of dynastic Europe: this prolific generation of historians laid the foundations for our knowledge of the early modern court, and their copious source editions still mould it. Nor was their heritage soon to be corrected by twentieth-century historians. Royalty became ever more marginal, and from the early 1930s until the early 1970s, the court was seen as a quixotic topic, suited only for reactionaries or eccentrics.

REDRESSING THE BALANCE

After fifty years, the court was roused from its historiographical somnolence. Probably, Norbert Elias was the main actor: his epoch-making studies restored the relevance and legitimacy of the court as a theme for research among a generation of historians that had been inclined to ignore it. Indeed, he made it acceptable for those frowning upon the traditional forms of political history, for whom the court and its mannerisms had represented a historical non-entity carrying politically offensive associations. Elias combined the nineteenth-century thesis of state building with the equally classic notion of a *civilisation des mœurs* from the later Middle Ages into the eighteenth century; a connection that would hardly have surprised Voltaire or other *philosophes*. They would probably have been slightly more sceptical about the nature of this connection as proposed by

Elias: a change from *Fremdzwang* to *Selbstzwang*. 'External' force dictated more subdued forms of behaviour, but such forms were soon to be embraced as an 'internal' standard, an ideal. Elias chose the court as the focus of this process of 'internalisation', ruler and nobles acting as his main protagonists.⁹ Only by losing its power could the nobility set the standards for 'civilisation' in Europe. Elias' conceptual framework thus neatly fitted the perspective of the 'national' historians: again we learn that the court was important because it contributed to the rise of the modern state by annulling the power of that other atavism: nobility. The court was not a centre of noble power; it was a gilded cage for the 'domesticated' grandees. The ruler incited his courtiers to ruin themselves by conspicuous consumption, to engage in ceremonial squabbles with their rivals at court, and thus to gradually dissolve into insignificance under his wary eye. Elias sought and found support for his model mainly in the *mémoires* of the duke of Saint-Simon – a great writer but a *courtisan manqué* and a seriously misleading source for the history of the Sun King's court when used in isolation.

Elias elucidated many patterns of elite behaviour, and some of his conceptions undoubtedly still have great relevance for those studying court life. Rulers may frequently have been shrewd manipulators, nobles hapless victims: it will not do, however, to use such circumstances as logical necessities within a larger argument. Striving to substantiate his grand thesis, Elias excluded the multiple variants of court life that did not fit or that explicitly contradicted his model, in France and elsewhere. The overstatement of the ruler's personal impact, moreover, surprises in an account that incessantly underlines the risks of concentrating on individual actors. By compressing various phases in the interaction of monarch and nobles into one model, Elias strengthened and extended the dominance of the 'myth of Versailles' that arose in the wake of Saint-Simon's memoirs and had already swayed several generations of historians, novelists, as well as, more recently, film-makers. Yet the triumphant restoration of royal power in Louis XIV's early personal reign, starkly contrasting with the defiance of princes and parlements during the *Fronde*; the brilliant first decade of Versailles; the somnolent train of later years marked by financial duress, and the eighteenth-century *raffinements* of a court dominated by an assertive noble elite do not easily fit Elias' monistic view. While Elias mainly discussed France, the scope of his study remained unclear,

⁹ Norbert Elias, *Die höfische Gesellschaft. Untersuchungen zur Soziologie des Königtums und der höfischen Aristokratie. Mit einer Einleitung: Soziologie und Geschichtswissenschaft* (Darmstadt and 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). For the earlier historiography of the court and the reception of Elias' works, see Jeroen Duindam, *Myths of Power: Norbert Elias and the Early Modern European Court* (Amsterdam 1995); Duindam, 'Norbert Elias und der frühneuzeitliche Hof. Versuch einer Kritik und Weiterführung', *Historische Anthropologie* 6, 4 (1998), pp. 370–387; Wolfgang Jäger, '“Menschwissenschaft” und historische Sozialwissenschaft. Zur Rezeption von Norbert Elias', *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 77 (1995), pp. 85–116; Gerd Schwerhoff, 'Zivilisationsprozeß und Geschichtswissenschaft. Norbert Elias' Forschungsparadigma in historischer Sicht', *Historische Zeitschrift* 266 (1998), pp. 61–105.

and the allure of his statements encouraged others to explicitly generalise them. Thus, in a 'structuralised' form, the Little Duke's rhetoric, barely credible for Versailles itself, was once more accepted as shorthand for court life all over Europe.¹⁰

Elias' perplexing mélange of grand theory, lucidly formulated analysis, and rather limited research gave rise to a tradition of aulic history with a strong partiality for conceptual ornament and eclectic discourse. The 'role' of the court in 'absolutism' and the 'meaning' of ceremony were deemed more worthy of scholarly attention than the concrete forms of ceremony or the daily routines of the court. Anthropological perspectives, of great relevance for the reassessment of courts in the European past, added emphasis to the notion of 'ritual' and, in an unfortunate conjunction with the post-modern stress on 'de-construction' and rhetoric, strengthened the inclination to wrestle with concepts rather than with concrete data. Moreover, aulic history emerged as a specialised domain with a strong cultural bias, demonstrated by the presence of authors from related

¹⁰ Surprisingly, among French historians of the French court, Elias' views long held sway; notwithstanding the fundamental article by Jacqueline Boucher, 'L'évolution de la maison du Roi: des derniers Valois aux premiers Bourbons', *XVIIe Siècle* 137 (1982), pp. 359–379, putting the Sun King's *maison* into its proper perspective; the brilliant revision of the balance among state, high finance, and nobilities by Daniel Dessert, *Argent, pouvoir et société au grand siècle* (Paris 1984) and his earlier article with J.-L. Journer, 'Le lobby Colbert: un royaume ou une affaire de famille', *AESC* 30, 6 (1975), pp. 1303–1336; the generally well-balanced overview by Jean François Solnon, *La Cour de France* (Paris 1987) corrected many clichés, as did Hélène Himelfarb, 'Versailles: fonctions et légendes', in *Les lieux de mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora, vol. II: *La Nation* (Paris 1986), pp. 235–292, and to a lesser extent Edouard Pommier, 'Versailles, l'image du souverain', in the same volume on pp. 193–234. See many instructive contributions to the *Dictionnaire de l'Ancien Régime*, ed. Lucien Bély (Paris 1996) and the *Dictionnaire du Grand Siècle*, ed. François Bluche (Paris 1990). The traditional interpretation, reinforced by Elias, was explicitly challenged by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's *Saint-Simon ou le système de la cour* (Paris 1997) paradoxically on the basis mostly of Saint-Simon himself. Gérard Sabatier, *Versailles ou la Figure du Roi* (Paris 1999) a careful, but descriptive study of the great palace, and the dossier on the *logements* compiled by William Ritchey Newton, *La cour de France au château de Versailles 1682–1789* (Paris 2000) do not go beyond the traditional view. On aspects of the court see, for example, the lavishly illustrated Daniel Roche and Daniel Reyter, eds., *Les écuries royales du xvii^e au xviii^e siècle* (Paris 1998), particularly Reyter's 'Un service de la Maison du roi: les écuries de Versailles (1682–1789)', on pp. 61–95, a fine and well-researched overview, that nevertheless dutifully pays lip service to Elias' analysis; the collection 'Les Métiers de Versailles', edited by Béatrix Saule, recently opened with Patricia Bouchenot-Déchin, *Henry Dupuis, jardinier de Louis XIV* (Versailles 2001). Philippe Salvadori's *La Chasse sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris 1996) adds depth and detail, but does not explicitly attack older conventions; nor does the notably less scholarly work by Roland Jouselin, *Au couvert de roi XVII^e–XVIII^e siècles* (Paris n.d.) mixing original research with unverified assumptions. Two recent works go much further: Nicolas Le Roux, *La faveur du roi. Mignons et courtisans au temps des derniers Valois (vers 1547–vers 1589)* (Paris 2000) provides a detailed analysis of the world of faction and favouritism in the later sixteenth century; Katia Béguin, *Les princes de Condé. Rebelles, courtisans et mécènes dans la France du grand siècle* (Paris 1999) outlines the careers of the Condé princes in the seventeenth century, Henry II, Louis II, and Henry-Jules, carefully demonstrating the compromise of Henry II and Richelieu, the exceptional phase of the *Fronde*, and the lasting importance of the Condé 'nébuleuse' in the later seventeenth century, based on an ever-increasing family fortune. Béguin recently published an innovative analysis of the consequences of Louis XIV's decision to rule without first minister: 'Louis XIV et l'aristocratie: coup de majesté ou retour à la tradition', *Histoire, économie et société* 19, 4 (2000), pp. 497–512. For the Anglo-Saxon revision of absolutism, see below; among other works on the French court: David Potter, *A History of France 1460–1560: The Emergence of a Nation State* (Houndmills and Basingstoke 1995), pp. 57–89, offers a thorough discussion of the French court; Ruth Kleinman, 'Social Dynamics at the French Court: The Household of Anne of Austria', *FHS* 16, 3 (1990), pp. 517–535, is an analysis of the social composition of the household. Leonhard Horowski, 'Pouvez-vous trop donner pour une chose si essentielle? Eine prosopographische Studie der Obersten Chargen am Hof von Versailles', *MRK* 11, 1 (2001), pp. 32–53, offers a wide-ranging discussion of the careers and connections of the highest courtiers, confirming the 'revisionist' thesis.

disciplines such as the history of art, music, theatre, architecture, and language. While the impetus from these disciplines was and remains indispensable, the dominant cultural bias complicated the communication with the field of political history. Thus, the discussion of the 'rhetoric' or 'presentation' of power was not sufficiently connected to the processes of decision-making at court, nor were the rationale or the audiences of courtly splendour systematically analysed. The post-1970 aulic history in its first decades did not suffice to expose the biases of the nineteenth-century heritage; neither could it put into perspective the unwarranted hegemony of Versailles, nor did it effectively integrate the revision of absolutism that gained force in the same years.¹¹

Indeed, a fundamental reinterpretation of the early modern state emerged in these decades that should have had many repercussions for the history of the court. Among others, R. J. Knecht, R. Hatton, J. H. Elliott, and R. J. W. Evans, gave a more differentiated and nuanced image of state building, underlining the composite nature of monarchies, the lasting impact of various elites, the nature of political and cultural patronage, faction and favourites at court. Their works made quite clear the relevance of the ruler's personal entourage, and it is hardly a coincidence that the authors mentioned contributed the most distinguished chapters to A. G. Dickens' *The Courts of Europe*.¹² In the 1980s, a range of detailed studies explicitly attacked the notion of 'absolutism', stressing the financial limits of monarchical rule and the resilience of regional powers. The impressive written output of central administrative institutions, the principal source of earlier histories of state building, cannot in itself be seen as 'evidence' of the ruler's power. A proliferation of decrees and state servants does not necessarily coincide with the growing power of the administrative centre of a realm. Moreover, when we can indeed establish such a development, it is far from evident that this necessarily entailed a decline of noble power: elites could gain in the centre what they had lost in the periphery. Absolutism was a conscious

¹¹ See discussions and bibliography in Duindam, *Myths of Power*, and more recently 'Ceremony at Court: Reflections on an Elusive Subject', *Francia. Forschungen zur westeuropäischen Geschichte* 26, 2 (1999), pp. 131–140; Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, 'Zeremoniell, Ritual, Symbol. Neue Forschungen zur symbolischen Kommunikation in Spätmittelalter und früher Neuzeit', *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung* 27, 3 (2000), pp. 389–405. In his review of Adamson's *The Princely Courts of Europe*, J. H. Elliott, 'Tediums and Te Deums', *Times Literary Supplement*, 28 April 2000, p. 27, rightly points to the dangers inherent in 'mere antiquarianism'; it is difficult, however, to find a middle way between an 'archeology' of the court concentrating on staffs, numbers, details of ceremonies, etc. and the highly conceptualised and uninformative first phase of 'new aulic history' – a certain level of precision is imperative.

¹² In addition to the contributions to *The Courts of Europe: Politics, Patronage and Royalty 1400–1800*, ed. A. G. Dickens (London 1977), see R. J. Knecht's, 'The Court of Francis I', *European Studies Review* 8 (1982), pp. 1–22; Knecht, *Renaissance Warrior and Patron: The Reign of Francis I* (Cambridge 1994); with Jonathan Brown, J. H. Elliott published *A Palace for a King: The Buen Retiro and the Court of Philip IV* (New Haven and London 1980); his *Spain and Its World 1500–1700: Selected Essays* (New Haven and London 1989) includes a section on the world of the court, as does the volume of essays in honour of Elliott, *Spain, Europe and the Atlantic World*, ed. Richard L. Kagan and Geoffrey Parker (Cambridge 1995), pp. 27–99. R. J. W. Evans' *The Making of the Habsburg Monarchy 1550–1700: An Interpretation* (Oxford 1979), the basis of a new consensus on the Habsburg Lands, does not concentrate on the court; the same holds true for the various volumes edited by Ragnhild Hatton on Louis XIV's reign.

presentation of rulership – an ambition demonstrated on a grand scale, but only partly underpinned by concrete achievement. Nor can we simply take at face value the grandiose presentation of the Sun King's power.¹³ Indeed, French 'absolutism', always the prime example, was also the first casualty: William Beik, Daniel Dessert, Joseph Bergin, Roger Mettam, David Parrott, and many others carefully exposed the frailty of earlier historiography.¹⁴ In Germany, conversely, the revision of 'national' historiographies fostered a greater interest in and respect for the Holy Roman Empire, as is evident in the works of authors such as Karl Otmar von Aretin, Volker Press, and Helmut Neuhaus.¹⁵

Did the revision of absolutism and the new focus on the history of elites give rise to a more mature aulic history? The conference volume edited by Ronald Asch and Adolf Birke, *Princes, Patronage, and the Nobility*, offered a new starting point, combining a detailed down-to-earth discussion of the courts with questions arising from the more conceptualised forms of aulic history. Only towards the end of the 1990s, however, was it followed by various other equally important volumes.¹⁶ Even the most recent works suggest that we are far from a broadly based and well-founded reassessment of the European court. David Starkey, Robert Bucholz, and a range of other historians have established an exceptionally favourable position for the English court. Several studies have contributed to our knowledge of the Spanish court, always relatively strong because of John Elliott's leading example. Elsewhere, results have been less promising: there is no fully convincing study of either the French or the Austrian Habsburg court, and

¹³ See the discussion of Louis' presentation in Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* (New Haven and London 1992), contrasted with eighteenth-century developments in T. C. W. Blanning, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture* (Oxford 2002); compare Roger Mettam's more sceptical 'Power, Status and Precedence: Rivalries among the Provincial Elites of Louis XIV's France', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 38 (1988), pp. 43–62, and the judicious analysis of the king's image in popular media by Jens Ivo Engels, *Königsbilder. Sprechen, Singen und Schreiben über den französischen König in der ersten Hälfte des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*, *Pariser Historische Studien* 52 (Bonn 2000).

¹⁴ William Beik, *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth-Century France: State Power and Provincial Aristocracy in Languedoc* (Cambridge 1985); Roger C. Mettam, *Power and Faction in Louis XIV's France* (Oxford and New York 1988); Joseph Bergin, *The Rise of Richelieu* (New Haven 1991) and his *The Making of the French Episcopate (1589–1661)* (New Haven and London 1996); David Parrott, *Richelieu's Army: War, Government and Society in France, 1624–1642* (Cambridge 2001); Dessert, *Argent, pouvoir et société*; also see Sharon Kettering, *Patrons, Brokers and Clients in Seventeenth-Century France* (Oxford 1986); Peter R. Campbell, *Power and Politics in Old Regime France, 1720–1745* (London 1996).

¹⁵ See the judicious reassessments by Peter H. Wilson, *The Holy Roman Empire, 1495–1806* (Basingstoke 1999); Helmut Neuhaus, *Das Reich in der frühen Neuzeit* (Munich 1997), and further literature cited there. Georg Schmidt's challenging *Geschichte des alten Reiches. Staat und Nation in der Frühen Neuzeit 1495–1806* (Munich 1999) opened a new debate; see, for example, Heinz Schilling, 'Reichs-Staat im frühneuzeitliche Nation der deutschen oder teilmodernisiertes Reichssystem. Überlegungen zu Charakter und Aktualität des Alten Reiches', *Historische Zeitschrift* 272, 2 (2001), pp. 377–395.

¹⁶ R. G. Asch and A. Birke, eds., *Princes, Patronage and the Nobility: The Court at the Beginning of the Modern Age c. 1450–1650* (Oxford and London 1991); Adamson, *Princely Courts of Europe*; J. H. Elliott and L. W. B. Brockliss, eds., *The World of the Favourite* (New Haven and London 1999); Maurice Aymard and Marzio A. Romani, eds., *La cour comme institution économique* (Paris 1998); Holger Kruse and Werner Paravicini, eds., *Höfe und Hofordnungen 1200–1600. 5. Symposium der Residenzen-Kommission der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen* (Sigmaringen 1999), and other volumes in this valuable series, most recently Jan Hirschbiegel and Werner Paravicini, eds., *Das Frauenzimmer. Die Frau bei Hofe in Spätmittelalter und früher Neuzeit 6. Symposium der Residenzen-Kommission der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen* (Stuttgart 2000).