Cambridge immerse

History Syllabus Overview
History Overview

Late Medieval and Early Modern Princely Courts 1384-1793
With particular attention to European transnational engagements

Addressing activities in and between international aristocratic courts, this course will examine major cultural developments from the late fourteenth century through the early eighteenth century, or more specifically from the time of Philip the Bold of Burgundy and his establishment of a court in 1384, until the death of Louis XVI of France in 1793. Although anchored in European socio-historical events and ideas during this span of four hundred years, the course will also introduce historical methods for interpreting European courts with regard to their engagements with non-European centres of trade and culture. At this time, the spread of courts throughout Europe developed with innovative partnerships, trade negotiations, and the staging of power, spectacle, and intellectual culture. Many of these contributions identify popularly recognisable characteristics of Renaissance and early modern movements in Europe, which the course module will assess with regard to the origins of those engagements and their influences in and beyond the court.

The purpose of the course is to expand and develop your knowledge, observation, analysis, and vocabulary of the history, society and culture of the centres of political power in Europe and associated nations from the late medieval era to the French Revolution. During the course, you will read, observe, discuss and write about the associated theories, purposes, and methods of historical assessment of these four hundred years of engagement at court.

Project

Your comprehension of the course material will be assessed with tutorial discussions and one research essay of 1500 words.

Required Reading

- Selections, noted below, from: J. Adamson, ed., The Princely Courts of Europe, 1500-1750, London, 1999. The tutor will provide the book at the first day of class.

Please don’t be intimidated by the quantity of recommended reading, as many of these readings will be explored during the tutorials.

Programme

These topics and suggested readings may change, according to the progress during the course. With the exception of items highlighted as ‘required’, all other items below are only suggested resources, and potentially helpful for tutorial discussions and the research essay. The tutor will provide digital versions of some of these suggested resources.
(1) Noble Power, the European Court, and Historiography

Focusing on social, political, economic, literary, visual, and material culture at court, this session will consider modes of trade with respect to the staging of magnificent behaviour, performance, and ceremony at court. We will assess rhetorical and manipulative strategies for developing powerful and influential centres of political, social and cultural engagement.


(2) The European Royal Court and the World

This introductory session will address the history of Europe with regard to its relationship with the broader world in the late medieval and early modern periods. This will be a reassessment of traditional concepts of European history, as a means of identifying types historical methodology and its applications. We will address the activities of aristocratic families in Europe, their engagements with international trade, the rise of the princely court, forms of peasant and religious revolt and reformation, European expansion, the rise of urban centres, and discoveries and innovations in natural science.

- J. Adamson, Princely Courts of Europe, Introduction, pp. 7-27 (required reading)
- J. Sensbach, Rebecca’s Revival: Creating Black Christianity in the Atlantic World, 2006

(3) Civic and Social Functions of the Court, and its Regional and International Engagements

In this session the structure of the court will be introduced, with particular interest in assessing the traditional understanding of social activities of the European Renaissance court. Trajectories of social developments at courts will be considered, from the time of the initial role of the court in late fourteenth century Burgundy, through to the courts of the Medici, Sforza, the Papacy, Henry VIII, Charles I, Elizabeth I, and Louis XIV, XV, and XVI. The session will address the ways in which the early courts as regional powers developed at a dramatic pace into international centres of power and in some cases, empires.

- M. Vale, The Princely Court, 2001, pp. 15-33
- W. Mignolo, “The Movable Center,” in The Darker Side of the Renaissance, pp. 219-243
(4) Magnificence and The Mirror of Princes Literature

The early literature on the role of the prince at court will be the focus of this session. To start the course with primary sources on expectations at court, this session will engage with the contemporary writing for and about princes and how the activities of the prince were to mirror the magnificence of the court.

- J. Adamson, Princely Courts of Europe, Chapter 10, pp. 255-262 (required reading)
- Platina, On the Prince, in Kraye, Cambridge Translations, pp. 89-108
- Petrarck, “How a ruler ought to govern his state,” in B. Kohl ed., The Earthly Republic, pp. 25-78
- F. Benigno, Mirrors of Revolution: conflict and political identity in early modern Europe, 2010

(5) The Court Artist and Musician

Studying the integral nature of the visual and performing arts in so many of the activities at court, this session will form one of a two-part assessment, the second of which will address festivals. The court artists in this case will include painters, sculptors, architects, gardeners, landscape designers, weavers, metal smiths, and manuscript illuminators. Court musicians will be included in this group, as many of these artists and musicians were also talented poets and actors, and all of these people were largely responsible for the specific cultural character of a court.

- J. Adamson, Princely Courts of Europe, Chapter 1, pp. 43-51 (required reading)
- M. Warnke, from The Court Artist on the Ancestry of the Modern Artist, tr. D. McLintock, 1993, pp. 89-108, 197-224
- Giorgio Vasari, “Life of Mantegna,” The lives of the most excellent painters, sculptors, and architects, tr. Gaston du C. de Vere
- E. Welch, “Painting as Performance in Italian Renaissance Courts,” in Campbell, Artists at Court
- C. Getz, Music in the Collective Experience in Sixteenth-Century Milan, 2005
- A. Moyer, Musica Scientia: Musical Scholarship in the Italian Renaissance, 1992
- S. Saunders, Cross, Sword, and Lyre: Sacred Music at the Imperial Court of Ferdinand II of Habsburg (1619-1637), 1995
- R. Sherr, Music and musicians in Renaissance Rome and other courts, 1999
(6) Portraits and Dynasty

This session will assess the activities of the court as a cult and as part of a dynastic development. Although
the role of one's appearance at court will be the general topic, mainly at issue will be the role of the portrait
for internal and international relations, especially with regard to the building of dynasties.

- J. Adamson, Princely Courts of Europe, Chapter 3, pp. 95-105 (required reading)
- Michel de Montaigne, “Of Sumptuary Laws”
donne,” Italian Studies, 62, 2007, pp. 27-44
- M.F. Rosenthal and A.R. Jones, “Introduction,” The Clothing of the Renaissance world: Europe, Asia, Africa, the Americas:
- T. Storey, “Marking distinctions: Clothing courtesans.” Fabrics, signals and experiences, Clothiing Culture 1350-1650, C.
Richardson, ed., 2004

(7) The Courtier

Baldessare Castiglione’s Book of the Courtier will be the main topic of this session. Whereas other sessions
of the course deal with literary and visual evidence on the activities of the courtier, this session will discuss
the means by which these ideas about the courtier were codified by Castiglione, and how his book marks
a turning point in literature on courtly behaviour.

- J. Adamson, Princely Courts of Europe, Chapter 6, pp. 165-174
- V. Cox, The Renaissance dialogue: Literary dialogue in its social and political contexts, Castiglione to Galileo, 1992
- R. Wistreich, Warrior, courtier, singer: Giulio Cesare Brancaccio and the performance of identity in the late Renaissance., 2007
- J.R. Woodhouse, From Castiglione to Chesterfield; the Decline of the Courtier’s M anual, 1991
- P. Canguilhem, “Courtiers and musicians meet in the streets: the Florentine ‘mascherata’ under Cosimo I,” Urb an Histo ry 37, 2010,
pp. 464-473
Rome, J. Burke & M. Bury eds, 2008
- J. Renn, “Galileo in context: an engineer-scientist, artist and courtier at the origins of classical science,” Science in Context 13, 2000,
pp. 271-278

(8) Military Treatises and Court Patronage: De re m ilitari

The role of the court as a military power, along the patronage of military treatises and activities at court,
will be the subjects of this session. Treatises on the art of war were popular at court during the Renaissance,
both as intellectual gifts and as semi-practical manuals. This session will address military engineering and
literature, and more generally, the importance of expertise in mechanical engineering at court, especially
in times of war.

- J. Adamson, Princely Courts of Europe, Chapter 5, pp. 141-152 (required reading)
- P.O. Long: “Power, Patronage And The Authorship Of Ars: From Mechanical Know- How To Mechanical Knowledge In The Last Scribal
Age” Isis, 88(1), 1997, pp. 1-41
- M. Landrus, Le Armi e Le Machine da Guerra: Il De re Militari di Leonardo, Disegni di Leonardo dal Codice Atlantico; (Weapons and
Machines of War: Leonardo’s De re Militari, Drawings by Leonardo from the CodexAtlanticus), 2010, pp. 5-25
- P. Delbianco, ed., Roberto Valturio De re militari, Saggi critici, e riproduzione facsimilare dell’Editio princeps, 2006
- P. Brioist, “Familiar demonstrations in geometry’: French and Italian engineers and Euclid in the 16th century,” History of Science, 47,
2009, 1-26
- C. Wilkinson, “Renaissance treatises on military architecture and the science of mechanics,” Les Traites d'Architecture de la Renaissance,
Feasting and festive activities often served as the core rituals of courtly life, recent scholarship on which will be the subject of this session. At issue will be the ephemeral celebrations of courtly community dining and spectacle, of the rise of the evening parties and the elaborate festivals.

- J. Adamson, Princely Courts of Europe, Chapter 4, pp. 119-130 (required reading)
- M. Montanari, selections from The Culture of Food, tr. C. Ipsen, 1994
- A. Ryder, Alfonso the Magnanimous, King of Aragon, Naples and Sicily 1396-1458, 1990, (on triumphs and hunting)

(10) Collecting the World

Although much of the course will address the rhetoric and power of the early modern court, assessments of the philosophical and epistemological interests at court will also form large portions of each of the sessions. The present session will provide an overview of the culture of collecting and intellectual exchange at court, focusing on the role of material culture in the rise of systematic investigations of Nature and the human condition.

- J. Adamson, Princely Courts of Europe, Chapter 12, pp. 295-302
- C. Farago and D. Preziosi, Grasping the World: The Idea of the Museum, 2004
- M. Baxandall, “A Dialogue on Art from the Court of Leonello d’Este,” Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes 1963