International Conference

Court Ceremonies and Rituals of Power in the Medieval Mediterranean

Archaeological Research Unit
Gladstonos 12, Nicosia

26-28 November 2010
This conference aims at discussing and developing comparative approaches to the investigation of ceremonies and rituals as symbolic languages of royalty and rulership in Byzantium, Islam and Latin Europe with a special focus on the Medieval Mediterranean from the seventh century to the age of the Crusades. While the main interest lies on historical methods, the conference will also include aspects of art and literature, which in many respects form an indispensable mode of expression for ceremonial realities in the Middle Ages.

Over the past decades, medievalists, influenced by results and methods of adjacent disciplines, such as linguistics and anthropology, have made much progress in analyzing and explaining patterns of non-verbal and symbolic communication within a broader conceptual framework of interpreting political cultures in pre-modern societies. This shift of scholarly interest, which sometimes is even referred to as “performative turn,” is mainly due to a new understanding of the role and significance of these phenomena. Ceremonies in the sense of publicly performed acts of self-representation projecting authority, hierarchical order and ideological claims, on the one hand, and forms of ritual behavior in various political contexts such as warfare, negotiations and conflict resolution, on the other, are no longer seen as mere decorative elements of processes determined by governmental traditions and customary law. Instead, many scholars consider them as key features for an adequate decipherment of the rules and principles on which medieval public order and the stability of ruling elites are based. Thus, the analysis of gestures and symbols became an essential part of what traditional scholarship used to call “Verfassungsgeschichte.”

Heinrich Fichtenau’s seminal study of tenth-century concepts of order included a systematic analysis of medieval hierarchical thinking (“Rangordnungen”) expressed in commonly understood symbols and ritual acts pertaining to medieval feudal society. Jean-Claude Schmitt’s _La raison des gestes dans l’Occident médiéval_ moved the discussion an important step forward by examining the intrinsic logic of the medieval arsenal of gestures and by describing their function and effectiveness as an expression of mental conditions and emotions and as a means of communication. The highly influential school of thought initiated by the scholarly work of Gerd Althoff combined the medieval culture of signs and symbols with a new interpretation of public authority and state in the Middle Ages by emphasizing the crucial significance of ceremonial and ritual acts for post-Carolingian forms of lordship “in the absence of a state” or a political order based on a consensual exercise of power respectively. Philipp Buc eventually brought in a new perspective by focussing on the “Dangers of Rituals” caused, on the one hand, by modern scholars’ proclivity to over-emphasize or even misinterpret these phenomena and, on the other, by the description and intrinsic meaning of rituals in medieval narratives.

In comparison to western medieval studies, much less work has been done for the other politico-cultural entities of the Mediterranean World, namely Byzantium and Islam. Michael McCormick’s _Eternal Victory_ follows the evolution of the late Roman imperial triumph up to the tenth century and discusses the adoption of this concept by the western barbarian kingdoms in the early Middle Ages. Gilbert Dagron’s _Empereur et prêtre_ investigates the religious dimensions on which Byzantine imperial rule and legitimacy are based. Thus we know quite a lot about Byzantine court ceremonies in connection with imperial ideology, whereas the functional aspects of rituals in the framework of Byzantine political life are widely unexplored. As for the Islamic world, the great number and variety of dynasties and concepts of lordship extending from the Umayyad state in the seventh to the Ottoman Empire in the fifteenth century offers an incredibly vast field of inquiry, but also poses many hitherto unanswered questions concerning the nature and origin of Islamic court cultures and ritual forms of expression. Andrew Marsham’s recent book on “Rituals of Islamic Monarchy” for the Umayyad and early Abbasid period is an excellent point of departure.

Alexander Beihammer
Stavroula Constantinou
Maria Parani
FRIDAY, 26 NOVEMBER 2010

10.00 Opening Ceremony
11.00-11.30 Coffee Break
11.30-13.00 1st Session
Chairperson: JONATHAN SHEPARD
MARIA KANTIREA (NICOSIA): A celebration in decline during Late Antiquity: the dies natalis of the Roman emperors.
ANDREW MARSHAM (EDINBURGH): The architecture of allegiance in Islamic Late Antiquity.
13:00 – 15:00 Lunch break
15.00-16.30 2nd Session
Chairperson: GILLES GRIVAUD
BJÖRN WEILER (ABERYSTWYTH): Ceremonies of succession, c. 1050 – c. 1200.
ALEXANDER BEIAMMER (NICOSIA): Comnenian imperial succession and the ritual world of Niketas Choniates’ Chronike Diegesis.
RUTH MACRIDES (BIRMINGHAM): Byzantine coronation protocols.
16.30-17.00 Coffee Break
17.00-18.30 3rd Session
Chairperson: RUTH MACRIDES
HENRY MAGUIRE (BALTIMORE): Parodies of imperial ceremonial and their reflections in Byzantine art.
ANTONY EASTMOND (LONDON): Saints at court in the tenth century.
MARIA PARANI (NICOSIA): Look like an angel: the attire of eunuchs and its significative ramifications within the context of Middle Byzantine court ceremonial.
20:00 Dinner

SATURDAY, 27 NOVEMBER 2010

09.30-11.00 4th Session
Chairperson: HUGH KENNEDY
JENNY RAHEL OESTERLE (BOCHUM): The power of invisibility and the invisibility of power: some remarks on the political function of concealment and epiphany in Fatimid court ceremonial.
JOVAN STEENBERGEN (GHENT): Ritual, politics and the city in Mamluk Cairo: the Bayna l-Qasrayn as a Mamluk ‘lieu de mémoire’.
NIKOLAS JASPERT (BOCHUM): Court regulations, administration and ceremonies in the medieval Crown of Aragon.

II.00-II.30 Coffee Break
II.30-13.00 5th Session
Chairperson: NIKOLAS JASPERT
IOANNA RAPTI (PARIS): Court and religious ceremonies in the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia: evidence from documents and arts.
STEVEN BURKHAERT (HEIDELBERG): Court ceremonies and rituals of power in the Latin Empire of Constantinople.
GILLES GRIVAUD (ROUEN): En quête d’un style: les rituels royaux des Lusignan.
13:00 – 15:00 Lunch break
15.00-16.30 6th Session
Chairperson: MARGARET MULLETT
CHRISTINA ANGELIDI (ATHENS): Designing a reception area at the imperial palace (De Cerimoniis II.15).
ANTONIA GIANNOLI (NICOSIA): Coronation speeches in the Palaeologan period.
MARTIN HINTERBERGER (NICOSIA): Phthonos - a pagan relic in Byzantine imperial acclamations?
16.30-17.00 Coffee Break
17.00-18.30 7th Session
Chairperson: HENRY MAGUIRE
STAVROULA CONSTANTINOU (NICOSIA): Violence in the palace: rituals of imperial punishment in Procopius’s Secret History.
PANAGIOTIS AGAPITOS (NICOSIA): The ‘court of amorous dominion’ and the ‘gate of love’: rituals of empire in a Byzantine romance of the thirteenth century.
MARGARET MULLETT (WASHINGTON D.C.): Tented ceremony.
20:00 Dinner

SUNDAY, 28 NOVEMBER 2010

09.30-11.00 8th Session
Chairperson: WALTER POHL
JONATHAN SHEPARD (OXFORD): Adventus, arrivistes and rites of rulership in Byzantium and France in the tenth and eleventh century.
HUGH KENNEDY (LONDON): Itinerant and transhuman monarchy in the medieval Islamic world.
II.00-II.30 Coffee Break
II.30-12.00 Concluding Ceremony and Acclamations
20:30 Farewell Dinner
List of Participants

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ILLUSTRATIONS

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Par. gr. 139 (Paris Psalter), fol. 6v:
The coronation of David.

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Par. lat. 1 (Vivian Bible), fol. 423:
The presentation of the Bible to Charles the Bald.

Istanbul, Topkap Saray Müzesi Kütüphanesi 3593, fol. 47b, Vehbi’s Sûrnâme:
Sultan Ahmad III (1703-1730) and his entourage are watching games.

Dige dag comic-book series, vol. 4, Abenteuer am Bosporus:
The knight Runkel von Rübenstein in front of the Byzantine emperor in the Magnaura.