



*The Key to Power? The Culture of
Access in Princely Courts, 1400-
1750*

**Dries Raeymaecker and
Sebastian Derks (eds.)**

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As Fabian Persson identifies in his contribution to this volume, access to princes was discussed using the same terminology in the pre-modern period as it is by modern scholars (205). This makes it a historic concept unlike many others; yet, it is still one about which we have much to learn. An increasing engagement with the role of the court in pre-modern European polities has led to bold assertions about access and its importance to political power, but debate has arisen as to the extent to which access was actually always an indication of power. Tapping into these ongoing debates, Raeymaeker and Derks's volume provides a more systematic analysis of "how access worked ... and how it evolved" (5), with a particular focus on the ritual, cultural, and spatial aspects of access. While this is a Herculean task in many ways, and one that their introduction readily admits could not realistically be achieved in one volume, the editors do pull together a fascinating range of chapters here that offer a variety of methods and approaches to extend the scholarly understanding of access. The chapters are presented in four sections: articulating access, regulating access, monopolizing access, and visualizing access. These divisions present some minor challenges, as there are those that might have sat more comfortably elsewhere, but this equally reflects a fluidity between the sections.

Berland's chapter uses the palatial spaces of medieval Paris to delve into the way that political context could shape the use of space and rules around accessibility. Though regulations denoting levels of access are identified in lockable entrances and the arrangements of rooms, Berland demonstrates the relative openness of these urban palaces, with an ease of access to princes made necessary by the competition for support from the urban communities of Paris. Using urban records, Murphy explores royal visits to provincial towns in the chronological period following from Berland. From 1440 to 1570, these occasions are identified as important opportunities for the provincial urban communities to gain access to the king (either through those close to him or directly), but the openness of access was being notably restricted across this period. The format of extramural entry is offered as a prime example; shifting from a reciprocal oath-giving with opportunity for close contact, to a performed procession before a static king viewing the people from a platform. Considering the articulation of access through textual records of visiting Europeans to the Mughal court from the late sixteenth to early eighteenth centuries, Truschke takes a rather different approach to conclude this section. Three exemplars—religious missionary, economic

ambassador, and independent traveller—offer interesting comparisons of how these Europeans articulated their understanding (and often misunderstanding) of the access they gained to different European audiences.

The challenges posed by western interactions in eastern parts of the world continues into section two with Talbot's chapter, where a combination of spatial analysis and documentary evidence are used to track the progress of British (and other) ambassadors through the Topkapı Palace in Istanbul in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Arguably, with the different ritual spaces used to form the structure, and the manner in which this piece so consciously engages with the 'spatial turn,' this chapter did seem more suited to the description of section one. Nonetheless, throughout there is a dual emphasis on the processes, spaces, and rituals both reflecting the Ottoman worldview and on the polysemy of ritual action. The second chapter in this section takes us from the Ottoman Empire to the Holy Roman Emperors, with Hengerer offering insights into regulating access to the Austrian Habsburgs. Unfortunately, there were some minor issues with clarity in this chapter and, for a volume of such broad coverage, it lacked some contextual basics (for example, there were no dates offered for reigns of emperors) for a non-expert of the dynasty. These issues aside, this piece emphasises the critical importance of understanding the types and levels of access.

Spangler's analysis of the monopoly of access in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France opened the third section, which coherently drew together three pieces on monopolizing access. An exploration of the development of household roles in France offered a helpful introduction to place the Grand Chamberlain and Grand Equerry, whose roles form the core of this chapter. While the Chamberlain's role was defrayed over time, the extensive hold of the Grand Equerry grew through the training of young nobles in the royal stable. This offered opportunities to surround the king with choice provincial nobility but, as Spangler posits in closing, this was potentially to the detriment of the monarchy that was kept increasingly aloof from political reality. Asche offers a broader look at this topic by selecting a range of examples across Europe in the early modern period—primarily from France, Spain, and the British Isles—to discuss the manner in which the role of the favourite shifted and developed over period and geographic settings. Interesting discussions regarding friendship and trust offer further layers to this assessment, and emphasise further how these issues were linked to personalities of monarchs and the individual political makeup of each kingdom/polity. The final chapter in the section is a case study of the minority of Charles XI (1660–1772) in Sweden. Persson's chapter looks at the attempts to control the household and access to a young king by the Guardians of the Realm [Riksförnyndare] and the Council of the Realm

[Riksråd], with a particular focus on the years prior to his nominal majority being announced. This chapter aptly demonstrates the frictions arising from dealing with a young king coming of age with others maintaining the control (nominally) of access, and often pushing him towards those friends deemed most unsuitable (in perhaps a remarkably recognisable way for many a parent of teenage children!).

The final section on visualizing access considers how the Gonzagas of Mantua re-shaped spaces to reflect their changing status, using the case study of the *Castello San Giorgio* and some of its notable visual features, such as the frescoes in the *Camera Picta*, to decipher what they can reveal about the prince's ideals regarding representation and access through the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In doing so, Antenhofer demonstrates how art, space, and architectural features, combined with diplomacy and administration, all functioned as a crucial part of court culture, and moreover, how the re-fashioning and re-purposing of spaces can act as a mirror for the complexities of power over the centuries. Thirty's chapter offers insights into issues of access, dynastic affinity and stability through an assessment of birthing and baptismal rituals in Burgundian-Habsburg Low Countries across six decades. Looking at the use of spaces, objects, ritual actions, and roles, the chapter offers a new angle on Burgundian-Habsburg baptisms, enriching the study of this often overlooked ritual type, and emphasising the "multiform nature of the phenomenon" of access just as the editors desired (15).

As is often the case with edited collections, there are challenges with pulling the chapters together, even when there is a strong connecting theme running through them all. These are, for the most part, overcome here. The French examples are a little dominant, but it was great to see two non-European contributions here to avoid the western dominance, and striking a balance with just ten contributions is tricky. Considering the editors' clearly outlined objectives, an afterword to draw the key threads from these pieces together might have been a valuable addition. Overall, however, this volume successfully achieves its aims to offer an innovative range of approaches to exploring access and, through the wide variety of new insights, underscores the continuing importance of developing a far more nuanced understanding of access in pre-modern Europe.

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