'True and Historical Descriptions'? European Festivals and the Printed Record

Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly

European festivals, whether staged by cities, courts, nobles, or the church, are often primarily known to posterity through the official printed accounts that have come down to us. Such printed festival books begin to appear already in the late fifteenth century, but the festival book really becomes a recognisable genre around 1520 during the reign of the emperor Charles V. He published official accounts of his coronation in Aachen in 1519 as Roman King, the peace celebrations in Madrid in 1526 after the Treaty with Francis I, King of France, his entry into Seville in the same year after his wedding to Isabella of Portugal, his entry into Bologna in 1529 and double coronation there in 1530 as King of Lombardy and Holy Roman Emperor, his entries into Messina and Naples in 1535, into Florence, Lucca, Rome, and Siena in 1536, into Nice in 1538, into Mallorca and Utrecht in 1540, as well as his progress through France in 1539. Indeed, he published multiple accounts, each in a different language, of the same event. The coronation in 1519 was the subject of at least five festival books in German and Latin, the entry into Rome in 1536 was published in Italian, German, and French, and the progress through France in 1539 appeared in Italian, French, and Spanish. The double coronation was so important that it was the subject of festival books in German, Latin, and Italian.

Though festival books do not become numerous until around 1550, from then on for the next 200 years they are an essential element of most princely, civic and religious festivals and are preserved today in their thousands in such libraries as the Herzog August Bibliothek, the British Library, the New York Public Library, and the Library of the Getty Research Institute.¹ One of the

1 See Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly, 'Festival Books in Europe from Renaissance to Rococo', *The Seventeenth Century* 3 (1988), 181–201 and idem, 'The Early Modern Festival Book—Function and Form' in J.R. Mulryne, Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly, and Margaret Shewring, eds., *Europa Triumphans. Festivals and Festival Books of the Renaissance and Baroque*, 2 vols. (London, 2004), vol. 1, 3–17; also Thomas Rahn, 'Fortsetzung des Festes mit anderen Mitteln. Gattungsbeobachtungen zu hessischen Hochzeitsberichten', in Jörg Jochen Berns and Detlef Ignasiak, eds., *Frühneuzeitliche Hofkultur in Hessen und Thüringen*, Jenaer Studien Bd.1 (Erlangen and Jena, 1993), 233–48 and idem, *Festbeschreibung. Funktion und Topik einer Textsorte am Beispiel der Beschreibung höfischer Hochzeiten (1568–1794)* (Tübingen, 2007). An idea of the number, variety, and geographical spread of festival

first questions the historian asks is whether festival books give, as they claim, a faithful and accurate account of the festivals they purport to describe.

Most festival books consist of plain unadorned text which narrates the events of the festival in sequence and, by means of such typical titles as 'Recit veritable de tout de qui s'est fait et passé', 'Warhaffte und historische Beschreibung', 'Diario esatto e veridico' or 'Klare und eigentliche Beschreibung' lay claim to complete and truthful narration. Many festival books in all European languages appear to make good this claim to historical accuracy, for they are chronicles that, in an often simple and brief narrative, give the precise date, list the principal participants with their names and titles, describe their costumes, and narrate the events of the festival and the manner in which they took place, all without much comment. This holds good whether the accounts are in prose—the commonest type—or in rhymed doggerel couplets according to the older German tradition.

It is very important that the reader should be convinced of the factual accuracy of what he is reading. In the account of a ceremony as significant as a coronation, for instance, the festival book should confirm for the reader that the coronation was carried out according to the pre-ordained ceremonial, for this is what makes the coronation valid and gives it its binding power. Equally important in a festival book is to describe who stood and who sat, who walked towards whom, who was bare-headed in whose presence. Such matters were vital indicators of rank and power and therefore essential pieces of political information which needed to be recorded. This need for particular details explains the pages of lists to be found in many festival books: of who followed whom in a procession, of how many there were in each group, of what they were wearing, and of what floats accompanied them. In accounts of tournaments we are often told who scored what and who won the prizes. It is therefore easy for the modern reader to imagine that festival books intend, like modern war or sports reporting, to tell us exactly what happened blow by blow.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Early modern courtly historiography is meant to be biased, and so are festival books.² Just as official histories were commissioned by a dynasty to demonstrate how the great deeds of that

---

books can be gained from Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly and Anne Simon, *Festivals and Ceremonies. A Bibliography of Printed Works relating to Court, Civic and Religious Festivals in Europe 1500–1800* (London, 2000), which describes 3000 works in twelve languages. A corrected and augmented version of this bibliography is now available online as a searchable database: festivals.mml.ox.ac.uk.

2 See, for instance, Birgit Studt, *Fürstenhof und Geschichte. Legitimation durch Überlieferung* (Cologne, Weimar, Vienna, 1992), and Horst Wenzel, *Höfische Geschichte. Literarische*

dynasty led up to the present moment and the present ruler, and then how his actions amply fulfilled the traditions of his house and the promise of his own early years, so festival books fit alongside the other kinds of text commonly produced by early modern courts—histories and chronicles, genealogies, books of heraldry, mirrors for princes, and panegyric poetry, aspects of all of which they sometimes contain. Festival books often present the event they are describing—the solemn entry, the wedding celebration, the tournament—as one of the great deeds, the *res gestae*, of the prince who is the central figure. The whole purpose of these works is to present events from the standpoint of whoever has commissioned the festival book and give them the desired official interpretation. The first questions to ask of a festival book, therefore, are who commissioned it and whose interests does it serve, for the authors of such works see their task as presenting the festival with a certain slant and see no problem in amending or altering events in their narration to suit the political purpose of the moment. Mark Greengrass discusses the way in which Blaise de Vigenère's account of Henri III's entry into Mantua in 1574, published two years later in 1576, alters the historical record in order to take account of the changed political situation.³ Vigenère does this not just by omitting elements that are no longer politically convenient but by substituting, in his description of the triumphal arch, a painting that was not there for a statue that was! It is possible to uncover Vigenère's textual manoeuvres because, exceptionally, we have not only other printed accounts of the same event but Vigenère's own marked-up manuscript copy for the printer. As Richard Cooper has shown, Maurice Scève, the author of the description of the entry of Henri II into Lyons in 1548, changed some of the inscriptions and suppressed other material when writing his account.⁴ Here it is comparisons with ambassadors' dispatches that enable us to spot Scève's departures from the historical fact. We must constantly remind ourselves, therefore, that the early modern chronicler's task was qualitatively different from that of the modern historian and that his description cannot therefore be regarded as factual truth in the way in which we understand it today.

Tradition und Gegenwartsdeutung in den volkssprachigen Chroniken des hohen und späten Mittelalters (Bern, Frankfurt am Main, and Las Vegas, 1980).

- 3 Mark Greengrass, 'Henri III, Festival Culture and the Rhetoric of Royalty', in J.R. Mulryne, Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly, and Margaret Shewring, ed., *Europa Triumphans. Festivals and Festival Books of the Renaissance and Baroque*, 2 vols. (London, 2004), vol. 1, 105–115.
- 4 Maurice Scève, *The Entry of Henri II into Lyon, September 1548*, Richard Cooper ed. (Tempe, AZ, 1997), Introduction, 128–9.

We also need to ask where the authors of festival books got their information. In many cases, they were surely not reporting what they saw because they cannot have got close enough to see much at all. They were not important enough to sit in the front of the stands at a tournament, and they were certainly not looking over the shoulder of the king at a banquet. Indeed, festival books were often printed beforehand in order to be distributed at the festival itself, so, no matter what their titles claim, such works cannot be a description of what happened on the day. The account of the carousel held at Versailles in 1685, for instance, states that it was printed in advance, so that it could be read while waiting.⁵ In addition, it is clear, if we compare a number of works describing the same event, that festival books often plagiarise each other, transcribe a common source, or translate each other's texts, without some of the writers ever having witnessed the event or even visited the city where the festival took place. Two accounts of the coronation in 1697 of Friedrich August I, Elector of Saxony, as King of Poland are so similar that they must either be copying each other or else both be based on a common source.⁶

Who the writer was—his education and interests and his function within the court—also affects the whole tenor of his account. A classical scholar will dwell on the learned aspects of the event he is describing, such as the Latin inscriptions or the allegorical emblems. The singer Massimo Troiano, who was a member of the Munich court chapel under the baton of Orlandus Lassus, devotes considerable space, in his account of the wedding of Wilhelm V, Duke of Bavaria, and Renée of Lorraine in Munich in 1568 to the music performed for the occasion.⁷ Troiano could also see the food being served, perhaps from the minstrels' gallery, so he describes that too. Other accounts of the same festival scarcely mention music but devote a great deal of space to the tournaments, which were of no interest to Troiano, probably because he never got to see

5 *La brillante journée ou le Carrousel des Galans Maures, entrepris par Monseigneur le Dauphin avec la comparse, les courses, Et des Madrigaux sur les Devises* (Paris, 1685).

6 *Bericht von dem Königlichen Bolnischen Einzug in Crackau/ Nebst andern Particularien aus selbigem Königreich. Anno 1697* (n.p., n.d.) and *Beschreibung/ was zu Crakau vor und nach der Krönung Sr. Königl. Majst. In Pohlen Friderici Augusti Churfürstlichens zu Sachsen vorgegangen* (n.p., n.d.).

7 M. Troiano, *Discorsi delli trionfi, giostre, apparati e delle cose più notabili fatte nelle sontuose nozze dell'illustrissimo & eccellentissimo Signor Duca Guglielmo. Primo genito del generosissimo Alberto Quinto, Conte palatino Del Reno, e Duca della Bauiera alta e Baſa, nell'Anno 1568, à 22. Di Febrar[i]o . . .*, (Munich, 1568). There is a modern edition edited by Horst Leuchtman: *Die Münchner Fürstenhochzeit von 1568: Massimo Troiano: Dialoge italienisch/deutsch* (Munich, 1980).

them.⁸ An account of a tournament by a horseman or of a firework display by an artillery specialist is equally detailed on technical matters that are usually scarcely mentioned, perhaps because of lack of understanding of these matters on the part of learned authors.⁹

Another important function of the festival book was to praise the prince who was God's representative on earth and therefore a central figure in the divinely ordained system of the universe. Praise of the prince is only one notch below praise of God and just as much of a duty. If the prince is admirable, this demonstrates that God's plan for his people is working as it should, so festival books (and festivals) often present the ruler as the perfect Christian prince. The festival book can then put him forward as a model for others, on the lines of the 'mirrors for princes' so prevalent in Europe in the early modern period. If a prince was not so perfect in reality, then the organisers of the festival and the authors of the festival book could at least present him as having those virtues they hoped he would acquire. The prince must also be placed within the long line of his heroic ancestors and shown to be heir to the heroes and rulers of antiquity.

Festival books can also be couched in many different forms. They can be plain narrative or chronicle, whether in prose or in verse; they can be phrased as fictitious letters or dispatches; they can be in the form of urbane dialogue; they

8 The two other accounts of the same wedding are: Heinrich Wirre, *Ordenliche Beschreybung der Fürstlichen Hochzeyt/ die da gehalten ist worden/ durch den Durchleüchtigen Hochgebornen Fursten und Herrn/ Herrn Wilhelm Pfalzgraf beim Reyn ... Mit dem Hochgebornen Fräwlein Renata/ geborne Hertzogin auß Lothringen/ den 21. Tag Februarij/ des 1568. Jars/ in der Fürstlichen Statt München ...* (Augsburg, 1568); and Hans Wagner, *Kurtze doch gegründte beschreibung des Durchleuchtigen Hochgebornnen Fürsten vnnd Herren/ Herren Wilhalmen Pfaltzgrauen bey Rhein ... Und derselben geliebsten Gemahel/ der Durchleuchtigsten Hochgebornnen Fürstin/ Frewlein Renata gebornne Hertzogin zu Lottringen vnd Pari/ &c. gehalten Hochzeitlichen Ehren Fests ...* (Munich, 1568).

9 The equestrian expert Alessandro Massari Malatesta, *Compendio dell' Heroica Arte di Cavalleria* (Venice, 1600), includes a very precise account of the movements of the riders in a tournament and horse ballet which he staged in 1599 in Tivoli. The account by the artillery specialist, August Adolf von Drandorff, of a firework display he put on in Leipzig in honour of Johann Georg II, Elector of Saxony, in 1667 is equally exact in detailing the kind of ordnance fired and the numbers of rockets and other explosives let off: August Adolf von Drandorff, *Augenschein und Positur Derer Feuer-Wercks Stücken/ Welche Der ... Churfürst zu Sachsen Hertzog Johann George der Andere in Gegenwart ... Hertzogen Augusti zu Sachßen ... Hertzogen Mauritii zu Sachßen ... Hertzogen Johann Adolphen/ zu Holstein ... jenseit der Pleiße bey der Vestung Pleißenburgk den 8. Julii Anno 1667 gnädigst angeordnet An statt Einer Feuerwercks-Probe ... abgelegt und gehorsamst verrichtet worden durch Augustum Adolphum von Drandorff/ der Zeit bestalten Fendrich bey der Vestung Pleißenburgk vor Leipzigk* (n.p., 1667).

can include poetry; they can consist of an extensive allegory. Festival books can embed the account of the festival in a fictional framework or themselves be an actual courtly romance.¹⁰ They can take the form of an illustrated libretto¹¹ or can be used by the author as the occasion for a series of lengthy moral and philosophical reflections, as we can see from two hefty German examples. One is Johann-Augustin Assum's *Warhaffte Relation und Historischer/ Politischer/ Höfflicher Discours* relating to the christening in Stuttgart in 1616.¹² A much more extreme example is Gabriel Tzschimmer's account of the meeting of Johann Georg II, Elector of Saxony, and his three younger brothers and their families in Dresden in 1678, the so-called *Durchlauchtigste Zusammenkunft*. The actual account is already huge, consisting of 316 folio pages with thirty huge fold-out plates depicting tournaments, hunts, processions, ballets, and theatrical scenes.¹³ There is, however, a discursive second part which is roughly

- 10 For example, *Le romant des chevaliers de la gloire contenant plvsieurs havtes & fameuses aduentures des Princes, & des Cheualiers qui parurent aux courses faictes à la Place royale pour la feste des alliances de France et d'Espagne...* (Paris, 1612), which is François de Rosset's account of the festivals held in Paris in 1612 for the wedding of Louis XIII with the Spanish Infanta, Anna of Austria, and of Louis's sister Elisabeth with Anna's brother, the future Felipe IV, King of Spain.
- 11 For instance, the libretti by Pietro Paulo Bissari for a tournament opera (*Antiopa Giustificata*), an opera (*Fedra Incoronata*) and a firework drama (*Medea Vendicativa*) staged in Munich in 1662 to mark the christening of Maximilian II Emanuel, the son of Ferdinand Maria, Elector of Bavaria and published collectively as: *Attione... De gli Applausi fatti nell' Elett[ora]le Città di Monaco per la Nascita Dell' Altezza... Di Massimiliano Emanuele, Primo Genito Elettorale Delle... Alt[ez]ze di Ferdinando Maria & Henrieta Maria Adelaide, Duchi dell' vna e l' altra Bauiera* (Munich, 1662). . . . The libretti are illustrated with seventeen, twelve and eight engravings, respectively.
- 12 Johann-Augustin Assum, *Warhaffte Relation und Historischer/ Politischer/ Höfflicher Discours Vber Deß... Herren Johann Friderichen/ Hertzogen zu Würtemberg vnd Teck... I.F.Gn. Jungen Sohns Printz Friderichen... KindTauf: Sampt darbey begangnem... Ritterlichem FrewdenFest zu Stuttgardten: Den 8.9.10.11.12.13.14. [et]c. Martij/ Anno 1616. / Auff I.F.Gn. gnädigen Bevelh/ verfertiget Durch Philopatrida Charitinum* (Stuttgart, 1616).
- 13 Gabriel Tzschimmer, *Die Durchlauchtigste Zusammenkunft/ Oder: Historische Erzehlung/ was der Durchlauchtigste Fürst und Herr/ Herr Johann George der Ander/... Bey Anwesenheit Seiner... Herren Gebrüdere/ dero Gemahlinnen/ Prinzen/ und Princessinnen/ zu sonderbahren Ehren/ und Belustigung/ in Dero Residenz und Haupt=Vestung Dresden im Monat Februario, des M.DC.LXXVIIIsten Jahres An allerhand Aufzügen/ Ritterlichen Exercitien, Schau=Spielen/ Schiessen/Jagten/ Operen, Comoedien, Balleten, Masqueraden, Königreiche/ Feuerwercke/ und andern/ Denkwürdiges aufführen und vorstellen lassen...*, Nürnberg/ In Verlegung Johann Hoffmanns/ Buch: und Kunsthändler/ Gedruckt daselbst bey Christian Sigismund Froberger. Anno MDCLXXX.

twice as long and which consists wholly of moral and philosophical reflections on a whole range of topics loosely related to the events of the festival.¹⁴

Another important type of festival book, again very characteristic of the German tradition, consists wholly or largely of plates, and this genre owes much to the influence of the Emperor Maximilian I. Maximilian I (1459, r. 1493–1519) came to power just when the office of Emperor and the Habsburg claim to the Imperial throne needed to be affirmed. With the help of a team of historians, genealogists, writers, and artists Maximilian set about weaving round himself a myth of power, virtue, and culture.¹⁵ A vital element in his self-mythologisation was a series of ideal paper blueprints for festival architecture and floats: Dürer's 192 woodcuts for the *Triumphal Arch* (1515), the 136 woodcuts by Burgkmair, Altdorfer, Dürer, and others which constitute the *Triumphal Procession* (1517) and Dürer's *Great Triumphal Car* (1522). These ideal (or, in modern parlance, 'virtual') festivals and their representation functioned as models down the centuries both for actual festivals and for their depiction in festival books.

This influence is one of the reasons why books emanating from the German-speaking courts far outstrip those produced by the north Italian courts in the quality and number of their illustrations. The other reason, of course, is the quality and sophistication of German woodcuts and copper engravings. No matter that Italian festival culture led Europe in its sophistication; the history of printing and the development of book illustration in a particular territory determine whether a festival book is illustrated or not and the quality and number of the illustrations, not the level of its festival culture. So the Germans, who developed the art of the woodcut and of the copper engraving at the same time as they discovered the art of printing with moveable type, who had a number of excellent artists such as Dürer and Cranach the Elder to develop the form, and who had the prestigious works produced by Maximilian as models, were producing beautifully illustrated festival books at a time when this was not at all common elsewhere. The most magnificent examples of this type of festival book are the festival books produced in Stuttgart in 1609 (214 plates), 1616 (77 plates) and 1617 (92 plates) respectively.¹⁶ (Fig. 1) It is not

14 For an analysis of this text see Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly, 'Gabriel Tzschimmer's *Durchlauchtigste Zusammenkunft* (1680) and the German Festival Book Tradition', *Daphnis* 22 (1993), 1–12.

15 The classic study is still Jan-Dirk Müller, *Gedechtnus. Literatur und Hofgesellschaft um Maximilian I.* Forschungen zur Geschichte der älteren deutschen Literatur 2 (Munich, 1982).

16 Balthasar Küchler, *Repraesentatio Der Fürstlichen Aufzug und Ritterspil* (Schwäbisch-Gmünd, 1611); Esaias von Hulsen and Matthaeus Merian, *Repraesentatio Der Fürstlichen Aufzug und Ritterspil* (Stuttgart, 1616) and Esaias von Hulsen, *Aigentliche Wahrhafft Delineatio unnd Abbildung aller Fürstlichen Aufzug und Ritterspilen* (Stuttgart, 1617) resp.

until Louis XIV's Royal Press in Paris produces illustrated accounts of some of Louis's festivals in the 1660s and 1670s that illustrated festival books of comparable magnificence are to be found.

Who constituted the readership for these early modern European festival books? This depends on who commissioned the festival and who it was designed to honour. When a city such as Paris puts on a firework display in honour of Louis XIII's victory at La Rochelle in 1628, then the festival book, like the festival, is directed at the King, and its aim is to remind him of the city's homage after the fireworks themselves have vanished. Sometimes the language of a festival book is the clue. One account of the entry of the Cardinal Infante of Spain into Genoa in 1633, written in Spanish rather than Italian, is meant to be read in Spain in order to demonstrate to the Spanish king the goodwill and desire for peace of the Republic of Genoa. When Friedrich August I, the Lutheran Elector of Saxony, converted to Catholicism in order to be crowned King of Poland in 1697, he had to convince both his German subjects back in Saxony and his new subjects in Poland that his disputed election as King had now been made good by his coronation. He also had to convince the rest of Europe. So there are three accounts in German, one in Italian, and one in Polish.

FIGURE 1 *Felicitas and Concordia, from: Esaias van Hulslen, Aigentliche Wahrhafftē Delineatio vnnd Abbildung [...] Bey Deß Durchleüchtigen Hochgebornen Fürsten vnnd Herren, Herren Johann Friderichen Hertzogen [...] Kindtauff [...] gehalten, In der Fürstlichen Hauptstatt Stuetgartt Den 13. 14. 15. 16 vnnd 17. Iulij Anno 1617 . . . (Stuttgart, 1617).*

But while the necessity of putting important events in the life of a court or the history of a dynasty on record may be a sufficient justification for the many plain, factual accounts, it does not explain the sizeable minority of festival books that are published in a much more lavish way. The point of these works is that a lavishly illustrated festival book quite literally provides a fuller picture of the festival for posterity. But this could be achieved just as well by means of a manuscript that no one outside the court itself and its guests would ever see, and many courts do produce such manuscripts. Large folios, sometimes with huge foldout plates, cannot be directed at the prince's ordinary subjects, since they would not have been able to afford them. Instead, it is clear that they are meant to impress other courts, whether allies or rivals. (Fig. 2) Princes saw to it that their ambassadors disseminated copies of the festival book at the courts to which they were accredited, and it is clear from the inventories of princely libraries that princes collected accounts from other courts.¹⁷ Again, the language in which the festival book is written gives an indication of the addressees. In 1670, Louis XIV had an account of the running at the ring and at the head, staged in Paris in 1662 to mark the birth of his son, published by the Royal Press in a magnificent volume illustrated with ninety-seven engravings designed by Israel Silvestre and François Chauveau. One version of the text is in French by Charles Perrault,¹⁸ but since French was not yet an international court language, the book was also produced in Latin, with Perrault's text in a Latin translation by Bishop Fléchier.¹⁹ This volume broadcast to all the other important European princes the splendour and magnificence of Louis's celebration of the fact that for the first time in many decades there was a young and vigorous king on the throne of France who now had a male heir.

Conclusion

Early modern European festival books can tell us much about the complex festive culture of early modern courts and cities, their historical context, and their

-
- 17 For instance, the manuscript inventory of the library of Elector August of Saxony compiled in 1575: 'Registratur der bücher in des Churfürsten zu Saxon Liberey zu Annaburg'. Sächsische Landesbibliothek, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek, Dresden, Bibl.Arch.I B vol. 20.
  - 18 Charles Perrault, *Courses de Testes et de Bague Faittes par Le Roy et par Les Princes et Seigneurs de sa Cour En l'Année 1662* (Paris, 1670).
  - 19 Valentin Esprit Fléchier, *Festiva ad capita annulumque Decursio, a Rege Ludovico XIV. Principibus, Summisque aulae proceribus edita anno 1662* (Paris, 1670).

FIGURE 2 *The arrival of Neptune. From: Francesco Maria Piccioli, L'Orologio dell Piacere: che mostra lore del diletteuole soggiorno hauto dall'altezza serenissima d. Ernesto Augusto, vescouo d'Osnabrug, duca di Bransuich, Luneburgo, &c. Nel luoco di Piazzola di S.E. il signor Marco Contarini, procurator di S. Marco, consacrato all' A.S. dalla medemna eccellenza / del dottor Piccioli. (Piazzola, 1685).*

artistic achievements, but what they tell us is very often not what we expect them to tell us. Instead of the festival book narrating what actually happened on the day and providing a reliable, factually accurate source, it tells us rather about the political aims, the allegiances, and rivalries as well as the fears and anxieties of a particular court or city as they are expressed in that festival. It tells us how the body that commissioned the festival and the festival book wished the festival to be interpreted and how that body wanted to be seen in present and future times. The concept of *fama*, of reputation in the eyes of posterity, is one of the main aims of much courtly writing. It is precisely this that festival books seek to influence.