

# Crossing Borders: Comparative and Transnational Approaches to Court and Civic Festivals in Early Modern Europe

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## Introduction

J. R. Mulryne well understood that in order to come to terms with the essentially international and interdisciplinary nature of early modern European festival culture researchers are by definition prompted to cross borders. Those borders are both literal, dividing cities, regions, states, or entire continents, and metaphorical, distinguishing between scholarly disciplines such as anthropology, history of the arts (literature, music, theatre, fine arts), performance, fashion, and material culture studies, and diplomatic and political history. As a co-editor of the book series “European Festival Studies, 1450-1700”, which is now published by Brepols, Mulryne successfully brought together festival scholars who analysed the multiple and converging contexts in which court and civic festivals operated – cultural, economic, political, religious, social, and so on – through the lens of their own expertise. One of the last conferences that Mulryne helped organising for the Society for European Festivals Research, together with Richard Morris and Margaret Shewring, was aptly titled “Crossing Boundaries: Confessional, Political and Cultural Interactions in Early Modern Festivals and Diplomatic Encounters” (30 April-1 May 2018, Trinity Hall, University of Cambridge). The focus of the conference on the transnational and transcultural dimensions of festival culture, such as transnational exchanges between rulers and ambassadors, who frequently travelled between territories to attend or participate in celebratory occasions, or transcultural exchanges between the international designers and participants of

those occasions, was much indebted to Mulryne’s own research as a festival historian.

As an individual researcher, Mulryne pioneered border-crossing approaches to early modern festival culture. His work often examined aesthetic exchanges between national traditions of staging festivals. Mulryne’s contributions on the Medici festivals of the late sixteenth century and the celebrations for the 1613 wedding of the Palatine couple in London, Oppenheim, and Heidelberg, among others, have revealed how festival culture in early modern Europe was the product of both similar and dissimilar national concerns and influences (1992; 2012; [2013] 2016). Mulryne was particularly interested in how political authorities in England and Florence, and occasionally France and the German Protestant States, adapted or borrowed from each other’s aesthetic traditions to develop an iconography that would make audiences in those countries, as well as in other states and regions taking an interest in the spectacle and its politics, receptive to the festivals’ expressions of court and civic hierarchy and community. Although European festivals, as Mulryne succinctly put it, boasted “a wide range of recognisably common elements across national boundaries”, their “ceremonial language [...] [was] nonetheless typically occasional and flexibly adapted to the political and social circumstances of the moment” (2015: 1). He argued that it was precisely the adaptability of this “ceremonial language” that festival designers hoped to exploit in producing messages specific to the national and related dynastic interests of their international spectators, including rulers, diplomats, nobles, magistrates, students, commoners, and a wide range of non-state intelligencers, such as merchants, missionaries, spies, and consuls (*ibidem*).

This article pays tribute to Mulryne's border-crossing scholarship on early modern European festival culture and seeks to identify and explore avenues for future research on the topic in which his pioneering scholarship can be implemented and further expanded. It concentrates on comparative approaches to court and civic festivals which include Mulryne's focus on aesthetic exchanges between states, though extend beyond the exclusively aesthetic and transnational insofar as they enable comparison between any of the contexts in which festival culture operated, including cultural, diplomatic, economic, religious, political, social, as well as local and regional contexts. By drawing on insights from cultural and postcolonial studies, especially Homi K. Bhabha's concept of "newness" ([1994] 2004: 10), it proposes an all-encompassing comparative approach to festival culture. This approach not only takes into account individual artifacts, pageants, artistic styles, or literary source material, but also the mediated nature and immaterial or even intangible aspects of festive occasions, such as beliefs, ideas, institutions, languages, practices, structures, diplomatic solutions and strategies, and spectatorial responses.

This article will first discuss the relevance of comparative history for early modern festival scholarship within the context of Marc Bloch's proposal for an "histoire comparée" of Europe and the recent comparative turn in cultural history (see, e.g., Cohen - O'Connor 2004; Duindam 2010; Duindam - Artan - Kunt 2011; Levine 2014). It will then review some of the most salient challenges of doing comparative research as a festival scholar. Finally, I will indicate further avenues for research to which an all-encompassing comparative approach to festival culture, both with respect to historical sources (printed, material, and visual) and to specific immaterial and intangible "comparables" or aspects of festive occasions, can be applied. It should be noted that most of my examples in this regard relate to my own expertise, that is, the diplomatic context of the court and civic festival cultures of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century France and the Low Countries.

## Why compare?

Comparative approaches to history are by no means new. Already in 1928 Marc Bloch called for an "histoire comparée" of Europe to avoid the essentialism and compartmentalisation of nationalist and monodisciplinary historiography (Bloch 1928; Hill - Hill, Jr. 1980; Dosse [1987] 1994: 60-61). He took his cue from Henri Pirenne who five years before had passionately argued for a "méthode comparative" to counter the nationalist racism that had begun to emerge in response to rising international tensions (Pirenne 1923; Verhulst 2001). Bloch hoped that his – by now famous – proposal for a comparative methodology could equal the rigour of the social sciences and thus offer historians "un langage scientifique commun" (1928: 49). Rather than limiting oneself to a single case study, he encouraged historians to test their hypotheses against a wide range of similar examples from various historical periods and geographical territories. Bloch believed that examining historical phenomena within such a comparative framework constituted a more holistic approach to cultural history that could genuinely acknowledge and tackle the irreducible influences and interpenetrations that existed among Europe's various societies, languages, and institutions. Whereas Bloch's "histoire comparée" was still a novel approach in late 1920s Europe, more than a century later comparative history is thriving and regularly taught at, or frequently referenced in the curricula of, history departments across the Western world. Cultural historians working in fields relevant to the study of early modern festival culture, such as court, diplomacy, religion, rulership, and travel studies, continue to call for, and often consciously advance, a comparative approach to their respective objects and practices of research (e.g., Thomson 2006; Duindam 2010; Duindam - Artan - Kunt 2011; Rubiés - Ollé 2015; Kosior 2019).

Similar to Bloch's vision of an "histoire comparée", such a comparative approach does not study those objects and practices in isolation (for example, a single court, monarch, embassy, journey, or travelogue), but alongside examples that involve similar or shared elements and practices, whether separated in space or time. Its goal is to pinpoint meaningful patterns and divergences that can then be used to nuance or expand well-worn

generalisations. Just like Bloch, modern historians believe that the relevance of a comparative approach consists in its ability to deepen common or trite conceptions of historical phenomena, as well as transcend both national and disciplinary borders. Recent publications on topics of cultural historical importance argue that comparison may challenge nation-centred histories of early modern court and diplomatic culture (Thomson 2006; Duindam 2010; Duindam - Artan - Kunt 2011; van Leuveren 2019), subvert common perceptions of Tudor and Valois rulers as “the European norm” (Kosior 2019: 173), break down conventional barriers between East and West (Rubiés - Ollé 2015; Riello - Gerritsen - Biedermann 2018; Wei 2020), or draw attention to historical phenomena previously overlooked due to disciplinary traditions or prejudices, such as travelling royal and noblewomen (Cremer, Baumann, and Bender 2018) or cultural-religious interactions between Christians, Jews, and Muslims in early modern Europe (Terpstra 2015; Terpstra 2020). Many of these contributions in the field of comparative history are also relevant to scholarship on early modern festival culture and will be discussed more closely below.

### The challenges of doing comparative history

Despite the recent popularity of comparative history, relatively few studies are truly comparative in scope, insofar as the approach may not always be systematically pursued, applied to a wider range of objects and practices, or subjected to rigorous analysis, which explains why Bloch’s call for an “*histoire comparée*” is still echoed by historians today. This lacuna is largely due to the inherent difficulty of doing comparative history. Analysing historical phenomena within a genuinely comparative framework often requires the researcher to enter unfamiliar territory. Mulryne was keenly aware that festival scholars faced particular challenges in this respect (see Mulryne 2013). They may have to read manuscript sources in different languages, linguistic varieties, and scribal hands, familiarise themselves with different fields of study that, as seen in the introduction, extend well beyond the history of the arts, and reconstruct an essentially ephemeral event on the basis of frequently contradictory

and sparse fragments of historical evidence in a wide range of early modern media, including commemorative books, financial records, diplomatic correspondence, legal documents, broadsheets, newspapers, pamphlets, and visual artefacts such as emblems, engravings, medals, paintings, painted scrolls, and so on (Watanabe-O’Kelly 2002: 19-23; McGowan 2008: xvi-xix; Nevile 2008: 7-10; van Leuveren forthcoming).

Confronted with similar disciplinary and linguistic challenges in his research on maritime business culture in twentieth-century Europe, Michael Miller has pointed to what he calls “the unresolved flaw in comparative history” (2004: 120). Miller argues that what comparative historians “[gain] in scope is most likely surrendered in depth”, because they can never be fully competent in all aspects and related areas of their research (*ibidem*). The solution, Miller suggests, can be found in limiting one’s research to a restricted number of comparables which he defines as “two, perhaps three countries” (*ibidem*: 123). But even after having narrowed down one’s comparative scope, Miller believes that historians may still be tempted to resort to well-worn observations from secondary literature rather than reveal new insights, because it is virtually impossible to maintain command over the vast literature, both primary and secondary, on more than one comparable (which Miller interprets here as more than one country; *ibidem*). Miller is right to point out that comparative history poses significant challenges to the disciplinary skills and knowledge of researchers, but the dilemma that he identifies is not shared by all comparative research. Whether comparative history is successful – that is, original, insightful, and rigorous – does not necessarily depend on *the number* but rather on *the nature* of one’s comparables and *the overall purpose* of one’s comparative research.

Systematically comparing festival traditions of three, or even two, early modern states over a longer period of time may indeed seem like a daunting task and run the risk of over-generalisation, considering the difficulty of conducting an exhaustive analysis of all the multifaceted and shifting contexts in which those traditions would have operated. Approaching festival culture from more than one national tradition has of course resulted into much valuable scholarship (e.g., Jacquot 1956-1975; Mamone 1987; Watanabe-

O'Kelly - Béhar 1999; the "European Festival Studies, 1450-1700" book series edited by J. R. Mulryne, Margaret Shewring, Margaret M. McGowan, and Marie-Claude Canova-Green, among others), but does not necessarily advance a systematic comparative approach. However, settling on a set of comparables that is more spatially and temporally defined than a *longue durée*-approach may facilitate genuine methodical comparison. Stijn Bussels (2012), for one, has compared different historical interpretations to the same festive occasion, namely the ceremonial entry of Prince Philip of Spain into Antwerp on 10 September 1549. More specifically, Bussels has analysed eyewitness records of Philip's entry, alongside the "official" accounts of the event, issued by the city fathers of Antwerp, in order to identify contesting views and interpretations of the festivities among participants who wrote in Dutch, French, Spanish, and Latin.

The linguistic variety and cultural-political complexity of the entry's reception proves challenging indeed, but does not tempt Bussels to generalise on the basis of secondary literature because his comparative framework is tight to a single, one-day event only (see Mulryne 2013). This spatiotemporal focus enables feasible and systematic comparison between a variety of reactions to the entry which nuance and expand, rather than confirm, existing academic literature on civic festivities in the early modern Low Countries. In other words, comparative history is most successful when researchers work with a manageable and clearly defined set of comparables, whether divided in space or time, and combine their close-readings of individual events, objects, and practices with informed knowledge of a wider corpus of secondary literature on the topic. Certainly, oscillating between the particular and the general, as well as between one's "home" discipline and (potentially) unfamiliar territory, requires hard work and effort, but ultimately enables scholars to study early modern court and civic festivals in all their messy and interlinking contexts and circumstances, from preparation and production to staging and reception.



## What and how to compare?

Now that I have discussed some of the general appeals and difficulties of doing comparative history, it is time to look more closely into *what* and *how* we can compare as festival scholars. Bloch (1928) proves instructive here once again. His view of what constitutes a comparison has been partly covered in previous sections, but begs further discussion here. Bloch's thoughts on the issue allow us to think more deeply about the specific nature of the comparables that we may select for our research on early modern festival culture, particularly with respect to the extent to which those comparables should be similar to, or differ from, each other:

Qu'est-ce, tout d'abord, dans notre domaine, que comparer? Incontestablement ceci: faire choix, dans un ou plusieurs milieux sociaux différents, de deux ou plusieurs phénomènes qui paraissent, au premier coup d'œil, présenter entre eux certaines analogies, décrire les courbes de leurs évolutions, constater les ressemblances et les différences et, dans la mesure du possible, expliquer les unes et les autres. Donc deux conditions sont nécessaires pour qu'il y ait, historiquement parlant, comparaison: une certaine similitude entre les faits observés—cela va de soi—et une certaine dissemblance entre les milieux où ils se sont produits (*ibidem*: 16-17).

In other words, a successful comparison should take on board at least two largely analogous historical phenomena that occur in one or more "milieux" displaying "une certaine dissemblance" (*ibidem*). Bloch did not explicitly comment on the degree to which those phenomena should be different from, or similar to, each other, given the almost unlimited variety of historical factors that can be compared, but believed that they should ultimately enable the historian to retrace "une origine commune" between them (*ibidem*: 19). He interpreted this common origin as a largely definite point in time and place from whence the historical phenomena under consideration had emerged and evolved (*ibidem*).

Whereas Bloch still perceived comparables as relatively stable and fixed categories whose mutual differences and similarities can be more or less neatly detected and separated from the "milieux" in which they operate, cultural and postcolonial studies have since drawn attention to the conflictive and transformative nature of transcultural and transnational processes (*ibidem*:

16). Homi K. Bhabha, for one, has argued that communication across cultures – what he calls “cultural translation” – never presupposes an undistorted and smooth transfer of one culture into the other, but instead creates a “newness” ([1994] 2004: 10). This “newness” refers to the new meanings and interpretative contexts that cultural translation by definition generates, as communication between cultures entails negotiations of, as well as clashes between, differences of language, religion, etiquette, and other cultural products (*ibidem*: 310-11, 324-26). According to Bhabha, this form of translation is key to any culture, and thus cultural products have no common or “pure” origin, as Bloch believed, but are continuously subject to the clashes and conflicts of meaning and interpretation involved in the translation process (Rössner - Italiano 2012a: 12). Bhabha’s concept of “newness” has often been applied to contemporary art and media and to literary fiction in particular (e.g., Bassnett 1993; Weninger 2006; Rössner - Italiano 2012b). Most helpful from the perspective of early modern festival studies is the argument of Sharon Marcus that a comparative approach to one of her fields of expertise, namely nineteenth-century theatre history, should acknowledge “how fluid and porous national borders can be and how easily genres, forms, and works move across them, often changing as they go” (2011: 150). Echoing Bhabha’s emphasis on the conflictive and especially transformative nature of cultural translation, Marcus recommends theatre historians to “not only track discrete cultural products but also map dynamic activities of production, circulation, and consumption” (*ibidem*).

In my view, are precisely those “dynamic activities” that can prove most fruitful for future comparative research on early modern civic and court festivals. Rather than “discrete cultural products” alone, such as individual pageants, artistic motifs or styles, and various adaptations of literary source material, festival scholars may study meaningful differences and similarities between historical interpretations and perceptions of those products, as well as the cultural, diplomatic, religious, and social interactions between participants of the festival which were narrated in, and filtered through, a variety of historical sources written or visualised by as many individuals in a first, second, or even third hand. Comparative research, in other

words, can reveal the often conflictual reception of early modern festival culture, given its dispersed audiences and organising committees made up of different nationalities, socio-economic classes, and politico-religious parties and individuals, while also theorising the mediated and constructed nature of its frequently contradictory, scattered, or genre-specific historical sources. The image of the court or civic festival that emerges from such a comparative approach is less that of a stable and fixed product which scholars can access more or less independently from its many layers of historical reception and more that of a moving “arrow” subjected to, and mediated through, shifting contexts of meaning and interpretation. My comparative approach to early modern festival culture thus agrees with one of the main premises of “histoire croisée”, developed by Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, that historical “entities, persons, practices, or objects” are by definition “in a state of interrelationship” – what Bhabha labels “cultural translation” – and “modify one another reciprocally as a result of their relationship” (Werner - Zimmermann 2006: 38, 35; Bhabha [1994] 2004: 10). Rather than focussing on the specific nature or circumstances of certain historical objects and practices, Werner and Zimmermann encourage historians to examine the continuous intercrossing between them and the extent to which they clash, meet, or form hybrids – a variation on Bhabha’s concept of “newness” (Werner - Zimmermann 2002; ead. 2003; ead. 2004; ead. 2006; Bhabha [1994] 2004: 10). The next section will explore what comparative approaches to court and civic festivals may look like in this regard and how they can reveal new insights into the diverging mental beliefs, ideas, and perceptions, wider contesting contexts of interpretation, and related social, religious, or cultural behaviours and practices that surrounded the events’ production, reception, as well as circulation in material, printed, and visual sources.

### **Towards a comparative history of festival culture in early modern Europe**

My proposal for a comparative approach to early modern festival culture in Europe will focus on two broad types of comparison. The first type

relates to comparisons between different historical sources on court and civic festivals, whether material, printed, or visual; the second type to comparisons between largely immaterial and intangible aspects of festival culture, including beliefs, ideas, institutions, languages, practices, structures, diplomatic strategies and solutions, and spectatorial reactions. Those two broad types of comparison will be discussed here in consecutive order. By having a separate discussion of historical sources on festival culture I seek to emphasise that the mostly immaterial and intangible aspects of the second type of comparison cannot be directly or unproblematically accessed or detected by researchers, but have instead been inevitably filtered through a wide range of media and genres, as well through the – often multilingual and recorded or edited – voices and perspectives of different individuals. Acknowledging and theorising the various degrees of mediation involved in one's corpus of historical sources is key to doing comparative research on early modern festival culture. As Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly reminds us, "we can never discuss the actual festival. We are always discussing the records of that festival, in whatever form they have come down to us" (2002: 20).

### Type I: Comparing historical sources

Scholars have perhaps most frequently turned to printed commemorative documents as sources of historical evidence for festival occasions, including *livrets* (pamphlets), *recueils* (anthologies of written accounts), *libretti* (texts or lyrics for a musical performance), and *Festivalbeschreibungen* (festival descriptions). Most researchers in the field have recognised the politically coloured nature of those documents and warned against taking them at face value, given their "expression of wishful thinking" (Prest 2008: 232), tendency "to narrate what the organizers hoped would happen rather than what did happen" (Watanabe-O'Kelly 2002: 22), or strategy to either please or blame certain stakeholders by featuring messages specific to their diplomatic needs, interests, or concerns (van Leuven 2019). In other words, printed commemorative documents communicated an intentionally one-sided, because "official", interpretation of the festival to ruling elites

across Europe. Comparing those documents with eyewitness or otherwise confidential accounts of the festival may help to reveal the more complicated, and frequently conflictual nature, of spectatorial responses to the event, as well as nuance its propagandistic impact and the purported authority of its organisers as primary interpreters.

Examples of festive occasions that lend themselves particularly well to such a comparative approach, besides the aforementioned entry of Prince Philip of Spain into Antwerp, include the civic festivals staged for the English and French monarchies in the Low Countries from the late-sixteenth to mid-seventeenth centuries (Strong - van Dorsten 1964; Snoep 1975: 25-31, 34-36, 39-76). The festivals coincided with the ceremonial entries of various prominent English and French rulers into major cities across the Low Countries, such as Amsterdam, Dordrecht, and Rotterdam in the north and Antwerp, Ghent, and Namur in the south. Those visiting rulers included Hercule-François, Duke of Anjou (1555-1584), heir presumptive to the French crown and Prince and Lord of the Low Countries from 1579 until his death, and Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester (1532-1588), favourite of Queen Elizabeth I of England and Governor-General of the northern Dutch provinces from 1586 until his demise (Strong - van Dorsten 1964; Snoep 1975: 25-31; Van Bruaene 2007; Peters 2008; Thøfner 2014). Printed commemorative books on the festivals were officially authorised by the Dutch, English, and French authorities and thus often provided a politically desirable interpretation of the proceedings as outwardly peaceful events that promoted diplomatic collaboration between those authorities against the aggressive expansionism of Habsburg Spain in Europe. Besides printed books, the authorities issued numerous material and visual sources, including coins, paintings, and engravings, to boost their idealised interpretation of the festivities to an even wider international audience, particularly to spectators who may not have been able to read or otherwise understand the Dutch, French, or Latin text of the commemorative accounts.

For example, metal coins that were likely distributed among bystanders during the ceremonial entry of the Duke of Anjou into Antwerp on 19 February 1582 depicted the

French overlord as protector of the Dutch people and victor over the Spanish enemy (Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum (hereafter RM), NG-VG-1-444 and NG-VG-3-572). Similarly, a commemorative painting (RM, SK-A-4867, Monogrammist MHVH) and a series of engravings on the entry, part of Frans Hogenberg's collection of historical prints (RM, RP-P-OB-78.785), testify to the aim of especially the Dutch city councils to create an internationally accessible iconography that sought to advertise and support their revolt against the Habsburg Spanish crown. Thus comparing various aspects of the festival in a wider constellation of printed, material, and visual sources, issued by different political authorities, helps scholars to understand how images of the festive occasions were selected, produced, and circulated in a wide range of media, and the extent to which those images corresponded to descriptions in commemorative books.

By contrast, confidential accounts of the civic festivals for the visiting rulers, handwritten by ambassadors, treasurers, and civil officers of Dutch, English, and French descent, complicated and regularly contradicted the one-sided interpretation of the events provided in commemorative sources<sup>1</sup>. As such, the confidential accounts unearth detailed information about the still largely unknown reception of the civic festivals and bring into focus the diplomatic conflicts, national rivalries, differences of opinion, and occasional misunderstandings that occurred in response to the theatrical entertainments staged for the festivities. Among those entertainments were *tableaux vivants*, largely mute and static theatrical scenes which dramatised the diplomatic collaboration between Dutch, English, and French authorities, triumphal processions of civic guards and magistrates, mock naval battles against Spanish troops, and after-dinner balls and ballets which aimed to produce conviviality among the international participants. Some of the competing reactions to those festivities related to Dutch dissatisfaction over English and French intervention into domestic politics or to disagreements over the symbolism and rhetorical expressions used in dramatic scenes and speeches of individual pageants. Rather than ignoring commemorative sources, however, scholars may compare "official" views of the events as discussed in those printed, material, or visual

sources with competing views of participants in diplomatic, municipal, and financial records. This comparative reading reveals the differences between the political agendas of the national authorities and the European audiences for the pageants, and the extent to which the idealised content of the various commemorative sources functioned as a tool for diplomacy itself in order to anticipate a mixed or negative reception of the events.

Just as festival organisers could use printed, material, and visual media to advertise and enhance the diplomatic content and impact of the festive occasion in question, be it a baptism, wedding, princely visit, or treatise-ratification ceremony, other stakeholders, too, could exploit the global impact of print for largely the same purposes. Helmer Helmers (2016) and William T. Rossiter (2020) have recently demonstrated that throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries diplomatic actors used printed media to influence public opinion and engage international audiences as forms of "public diplomacy". They have shown how ambassadors frequently published libellous pamphlets, written in various languages, to generate international smear campaigns against opponents or leak confidential information "to heap blame upon foreign countries or monarchs with whom their country was at war" (Helmers 2016: 410; cf. Rossiter 2020: 525). Although not mentioned by Helmers and Rossiter, court and civic festivals were popular targets of such libellous pamphlets and regularly served as occasions for other printed publications on topics and events related to the diplomatic content or occasion of the festivities, including diplomatic audiences, conferences, or negotiations over peace treaties. Many such occasions coincided with the festival or, indeed, were held in response to the event (van Leuveren 2019). Comparing printed sources on the festival's wider diplomatic, economic, religious, or social contexts with one another, as well as with officially authored books on the occasion, can reveal the diverging ideas, opinions, and views that existed on the festivities and their wider impact on early modern life, and the extent to which those various perspectives on the event competed for attention by targeting different audiences in a broad range of printed media.

The printed sources that appeared in the wake

of the court and civic festivals for the Habsburg-Bourbon double marriages of 1612-1615 – between Louis XIII of France and Anna of Austria, and between Louis's sister Élisabeth and the future Philip IV of Spain – serve as a case in point. Apart from many commemorative books on the events, published by the French and Spanish monarchies, the festivals witnessed an enormous output of pamphlets, broadsheets, chronicles, diaries, newspapers, harangues, and apologies written by a wide range of stakeholders, including ambassadors, city councils, religious societies, and members of rival noble families in France, Spain, and allied states<sup>2</sup>. In France, pamphlets written in support of the double union were often laudatory and even utopian in style. One author filled his text with references to ancient Roman history to suggest that the matches stood in a long and respected tradition of diplomatic celebration (Dublin, Marsh's Library (hereafter ML), anonymous 1614). Conversely, French pamphleteers who vehemently opposed the marriages were frequently apocalyptic in their assessment of the likely consequences for France of entering a lasting alliance with Habsburg Spain (e.g., ML, anonymous 1615).

A comparative approach may elucidate the extent to which pamphleteers allied to different aristocratic, monarchical, and politico-religious parties used similar or different rhetorical tactics to convince readers of their interpretation of the festival and its broader impact on diplomatic, economic, religious, or social life. By studying ideas, opinions, and perceptions of the festival in various printed, material, and visual media, one is reminded that festive occasions were not the chief “property” of their organisers but frequently became vehicles for the diplomatic agendas and campaigns of other stakeholders, or served as public arenas for fierce debate or conflict over broader diplomatic issues, such as the implications of the Habsburg-Bourbon alliance for international relations. Therefore, comparative research may demonstrate how various media, sources, and perspectives on the festival always circulated “in dialogue” with one another. This dialogue can be understood in both a literal sense, as in one source referring or reacting to the other, and in a figurative sense, insofar as publications on the event were not necessarily consumed hierarchically but communicated diverging views

of the festival to different target audiences.

## Type II: Comparing immaterial and intangible aspects

What are some of the immaterial and intangible aspects of early modern festival culture that can be identified in printed, material, and visual sources and which can be subsequently compared? I do not aim to provide an extensive list of comparables here, as this would extend well beyond the scope of my article, but I hope that the following overview will provide an indication of the many fruitful ways in which comparative history can assist and expand current scholarship on festive occasions. The overview may prove useful to both festival scholars and researchers working on related topics and themes, including diplomacy, etiquette, ritual, religion, hospitality, language, court and civic cultures, and the construction of difference between cultural, national, religious, and ethnic communities.

### Diplomatic solutions

Court and civic festivals in late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France have recently been analysed as quintessentially diplomatic events that attracted the attention of diplomatic stakeholders across the continent and beyond (Welch 2015; ead. 2017; van Leuveren 2019). Whereas theatrical entertainments of such events often sought to promote the diplomatic alliances or policies that constituted the *raison d'être* of the festival, official ceremonies formally implemented those alliances or policies in the presence of elite and urban audiences (Watanabe-O'Kelly 2002: 15-16). Eyewitness accounts of entertainments and ceremonies frequently point to conflicts over diplomatic precedence among participants or to difficulties of organising such events while not offending the cultural and religious sensibilities of the parties involved. For example, the official ceremony that wedded Marguerite de Valois, a Catholic Princess, to Henri de Navarre, a Protestant Prince, on 18 August 1572 in front of Notre Dame in Paris was carefully negotiated to satisfy the demands of especially the Huguenot stakeholders (van Leuveren 2019: 99-102). A tapestried



scaffold was erected in front of the cathedral to enable Navarre to partake in the nuptial blessing without having to enter the building himself. The Huguenot ministers of the Parlement de Paris had demanded that Navarre ostentatiously left the portal after the blessing to indicate that he had no desire to participate in the ensuing Mass at Notre Dame (*ibidem*: 100). The festival's diplomatic solution of erecting a walkway and allowing for performances of religious disapproval on the part of its Huguenot participants was copied for the wedding ceremony of the Catholic Henrietta Maria and the Protestant Charles I at Notre Dame on 11 May 1625 (anonymous 1625: 9). A comparative approach may reveal answers to questions such as: how did the organisers and diplomatic engineers of both (and other) festivals find similar or different diplomatic solutions to the problem of cultural and religious difference? How did participants react to the solutions found? How did participants in both (and other) festivals explain or "frame" those solutions to their followers? And, finally, towards what effect?

**Cultural disconnects and practices of "othering"**  
As J. R. Mulryne's research on English, German, and Florentine pageantry has demonstrated, court and civic festivals were important occasions for aesthetic exchanges between different cultures and nationalities. More than aesthetic exchanges alone, however, the presence of international participants frequently led to misunderstandings of other people's cultural beliefs, ideas, and customs – what I call here "cultural disconnects" – and to practices of "othering". I define the latter concept as the attempt to represent another culture, nationality, or ethnicity as markedly different or even inferior to one's own, often through ridicule and travesty. Practices of othering usually resulted from one or more cultural disconnects. An example of a festive occasion at which such practices occurred is the solemn entry of the Spanish extraordinary ambassador, Gómez Suárez de Figueroa (1587-1634), third Duke of Feria, on 8 September 1610 (van Leuveren 2019: 190-91). The entry marked Feria's official proposal of the Habsburg-Bourbon double marriages to the French crown. Contrary to French custom, the Spanish ambassador entered Paris on a mule rather than a horse. Mules were the preferred Spanish mode of transportation given the country's mountainous roads and the

animal's association with Jesus's triumphal entry into Jerusalem (*ibidem*). The Parisians were clearly not used to seeing elite visitors riding mules on such an important occasion because they reportedly could not stop laughing (*ibidem*). The "foreignness" of the Spaniards was apparently not only perceived by commoners, but also by the Florentine ambassador Andrea Cioli who described how members of Feria's embassy wore enormous, heavily starched ruffs, appearing "like dwarfs, almost like Negroes and very ugly" (cited in Carmona 1981: 229). Comparative research on festive occasions like Feria's entry may reveal how both "outsiders" and "insiders" of a certain culture perceived cultural customs within a festival context. How did festival participants try to make sense of cultural disconnects? To what extent did they resort to practices of othering? How did victims of those practices react or otherwise defend themselves? How was the reception of festive occasions controlled to avoid clashes between cultures and nationalities? Questions such as these demonstrate the potential of comparative history to unpack the multifaceted difference underlying the ostensibly celebratory appeal of the festival and enable analysis of the extent to which festival organisers sought to address that difference in the spectacle staged.

## Bibliography

Archival, manuscript, and rare sources

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## Notes

1 Confidential accounts of the civic festivals are held at London, British Library, Add MS 48127, Leiden, Erfgoed Leiden en Omstreken, 0501A, and Amsterdam, Stadsarchief Amsterdam, 5044, among other manuscript collections.

2 The bibliography in McGowan [2013] 2016 gives a good impression of the extensive output of printed sources on the Habsburg-Bourbon marriages (251-79). I have studied French-language sources on the union, not included in the aforementioned bibliography, during my Maddock Research Fellowship at Marsh's Library (Dublin) in October 2019.