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Water, Fire, and the Mutability of Nature to the Power of the Ruler in late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth century German Court Festivals

Court festivals with their lavish fireworks displays held against watery backdrops, elaborate fountains, mock naval battles (*naumachia*), and use of innovative technology, as well as the tournaments and feasting, provided the perfect setting for early modern rulers to demonstrate their power and identity. This was necessary as the religious, economic, social, and intellectual challenges of the early modern period sparked a crisis of nobility which required the development of a new basis for legitimacy, identity, and power. Drawing on my own research, I argue that the ability seemingly to bend nature to the ruler's whim, to force fire and water into competition with each other and to fashion natural objects by artificial means, and the learning which lay behind such endeavours, were central to a humanist concept of virtue and a style of charismatic rule which underpinned ideas of legitimacy and of noble identity within the German-speaking lands of the Holy Roman Empire and which can be seen throughout court culture. As well as being present in festivals, the rhetoric of mastery over nature extended into the *Kunstkammern*, the collections of exotic natural objects from across the globe displayed alongside scientific and man-made devices, as well as the decorations of princely residences. Nature, the elements, fire and water, and their interplay and distortion thus lay at the heart of the symbolic language of power which was performed at court festivals.

Richard MORRIS was elected a Senior Scholar of Trinity College, University of Cambridge, in 2011 and is now completing his PhD research there on 'German Identity in the Court Festivals of the German-speaking lands of the Holy Roman Empire, c.1560-1650'. He is active in the Society for European Festivals Research and is co-editor of two forthcoming volumes: *Architectures of Festival: Fashioning and Re-Fashioning Urban and Courty Space in Early Modern Europe* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017) and *Occasions of State: Early Modern European Festivals and the Negotiation of Power* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017). He is contributing a chapter to the second of these, titled 'Identity: A Fresh Approach to Festivals in the Early Modern Holy Roman Empire', as well as to a volume arising from an international conference held in Mons in 2015, titled 'Fashioning identities in Habsburg-ruled lands: the 1568 wedding of Wilhelm V, Duke of Bavaria, and Renée, Duchess of Lorraine'.

