



## «Renaissance of Diplomacy» - 55th Basler Renaissance colloquium

### Outline

The European Renaissance is often thought of as a crucial stepping stone in the long genesis of diplomatic practices, but (how) can we understand their complex comprisal of formal and informal elements in terms of a general historical framework? Is it possible to combine various established perspectives – e.g. on institutions, actors and networks, or underlying socio-cultural currents – in an explanatorily meaningful way, and, if so, to what purpose and effect? And, most crucially, can Renaissance diplomacy be thought of as a transregional phenomenon, spurred by outside influences and connectivities as much as by domestic struggles and upheavals?

Looking beyond old and new diplomatic histories, the 55<sup>th</sup> Basler Renaissance Colloquium aims to explore how a multi-layered kaleidoscope of interests, objects, channels, flows, and contexts enabled diplomatic exchange to transpire and flourish. Thus seeking to complement and extend prior conceptualizations, we propose to examine diplomacy – broadly understood as the intent of projecting power by non-violent means in pursuit of political goals – as an arena of encounters: a spectacle of discourses and intentions, successes and failures, (mis-)understandings and contingencies that gradually (and discontinuously) carved new inter-relational avenues for (self-)assertion, negotiation, and compromise. The broad array of Renaissance historiography may thus also serve as a conceptual starting point from which to venture beyond its traditional chronological and spatial boundaries.

*Renaissance of Diplomacy* thus invites to revisit the social, material, and intellectual conditions for emerging powers and hierarchies to develop into customized forms of interaction. The meeting is intended as an interdisciplinary forum open to (and seeking to combine) methods from e.g. social, political, intellectual, and art history, and/or perspectives that engage with non-European/global contexts. We are particularly interested in comparative, connected and/or gendered approaches as well as in thematic contributions relating to narratives and imaginaries of belonging, the politization of ideas and artistic practices, and the construction, representation, and differentiation of collective identities, among others.

The colloquium will allow for individual presentations of about 30 minutes in length, followed by questions and a final roundtable discussion.



## Abstracts

*Verena Krebs (Bochum): **Faraway Lands, Local Imperatives: Medieval Ethiopian Diplomacy Reconsidered***

This talk reconsiders the motivations behind a dozen diplomatic missions sent by the Christian kings of Solomonic Ethiopia to Renaissance Europe in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Recent research has highlighted the rulers' pursuit of religious relics and skilled artisans, but how crucial were these efforts in securing and legitimising local political authority within the Ethiopian-Eritrean highlands? By viewing these missions as part of a broader attempt by the ruling house to align itself with the ideological framework of the Kebra Negast, a foreign text adopted as the Solomonic dynasty's foundational myth, this talk examines the relationship between long-distance diplomacy, local power dynamics, royal legitimacy, and cultural production in the fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Horn of Africa.

*Bram van Leuveren (Utrecht University, Department of Art History): **Ephemeral Diplomacy in Renaissance France and The Netherlands: Public Engagement with International Relations at Celebratory Festivals***

This paper examines how in the late sixteenth- to seventeenth centuries French and Netherlandish authorities made conscious use of pageantry to advance their diplomatic interests in a war-torn Europe. Of particular concern are the diplomatic stakeholders from across the continent, including ambassadors and spies, but also university students and ordinary citizens, who participated and responded to the theatrical and ceremonial events that featured at French and Netherlandish festivals celebrating events of diplomatic importance, such as weddings, betrothals, and visits of befriended rulers. Analyzing a large body of multilingual eyewitness and commemorative accounts, as well as visual and material objects, the paper argues that French and Netherlandish pageantry operated as contested sites where diplomatic concerns of stakeholders from various regional, national, religious, and social backgrounds competed for recognition.

*Harriet Rudolph (Regensburg): **Renaissance Diplomacy? Evaluating a Research Concept from the Perspective of Current Trends in the History of Diplomacy***

The first part of the lecture is dedicated to the case study of a diplomatic actor around 1600, for whom there is an exceptionally dense tradition regarding Ego-documents. As a result we can approach the individual behind the diplomatic function and shed light on the relationship between emerging diplomatic offices and office-holders in a phase in which European diplomacy was considerably intensified and institutionalised. By analysing different genres of sources - including those that have not been the focus of diplomatic history studies for a long time - it is possible to establish variable practices of generating knowledge, networking and the self-staging of diplomatic actors, which are documented in the present example, for example, in linguistic, ethnographic and historical studies, the creation of art chambers or the keeping of *alba amicorum*. Based on the results of this case study, the second part evaluates virulent concepts of Renaissance diplomacy and relates them to current approaches in the history of diplomacy in early modern times.