

«Secret Renaissance» - 54th Basler Renaissancekolloquium

Outline

In the Renaissance some forms of knowledge were best kept secret. From the artisanal workshop, through trade networks, to the dense social fabric of cities and the politically charged ambience of courts, the sharing of knowledge was always shadowed by practices of concealment, obfuscation, and silence. Within the artist's workshop and the craft community, as in other family businesses and trading networks, the keeping and sharing of secrets could be both a point of social-familial cohesion and a jealously guarded competitive advantage in the marketplace. In religious life, secrecy also had its place: the seal of confession, the "secret" prayer of the priest at the altar, the secret interior forum of the conscience. Among political elites, regimes of magnificence went hand in glove with forms and practices of secrecy; privy councils, secret negotiations, clandestine diplomacy and espionage. Throughout Renaissance polities, secrets — or the imputation of secrets — also spurred rumor, antagonism, and accusation.

The 54th Basel Renaissance Colloquium aims to inquire into the nature and scope of Renaissance clandestinities with particular respect to their potential dynamics of (re)presentation: was there a specific "Renaissance secrecy" and how does it relate to (at least equally widespread) contemporary penchants for ostentation and display? We propose to conceive of secrecy as a social strategy that manifests itself within performative processes while channelling the emergence and/or development of social and institutional hierarchies.

We thus seek to discuss not only the kinds of knowledge deemed worthy of secrecy, but also the cultural techniques developed to preserve secrets, the values — both positive and negative — assigned to secret knowledge, and the challenges that Renaissance secrecy poses to historical study.

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



Abstracts

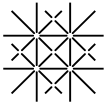
Ioanna Iordanou (Oxford Brookes): Republic of Secrets: The Bureaucratization of State Secrecy in Late Renaissance Venice

In the sixteenth century, the Republic of Venice governed a territorial and maritime state comprising a substantial part of Northern Italy, the Balkans coast, and several islands of the Levant. In support of this complex political economy that resembled an imperial state and allowed the Republic to maintain a stronghold over Mediterranean trade, Venice created one of the world's earliest centrally-organised state intelligence organisations. This organisation, part of Venice's constantly evolving state bureaucracy, was responsible for the political and economic conduct of the Venetian Republic. As a result, it was steeped in secrecy.

The paper will start by introducing the socio-political context in which Venetian state secrecy was institutionalised through a string of governmental regulations that were centred on three principal concerns: firstly, the encounters of patricians with foreign princes and their emissaries; secondly, the treatment of secret matters of the state by governmental bodies; and thirdly, the safeguarding of the formal correspondence and other relevant documentation of Venetian envoys serving within and beyond the City of Venice. Examining early sociological theorizations of secrecy, the paper will demonstrate how, due to such regulations, state secrecy acted as an enabler of, rather than an obstacle to, the transfer of secret knowledge. Finally, as secrecy added a distinct layer to the working relationships and communications between leaders and subordinates within the Venetian intelligence organisation, the paper will also explore the role that emotions and, by extension, emotional labour played in sustaining the ongoing practice of official secrecy within an emergent state bureaucracy of the early modern period.

Nancy K. Turner (J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles): Joris Hoefnagel Occultus: Technical Secrets, Between the Hidden and the Manifest

The Flemish illuminator, Joris Hoefnagel (1542–1600), demonstrated an unwavering technical mastery in his paintings of *naturalia* on parchment, from his first major manuscript commission to his last. Claiming nature as his only teacher (*Natura Sola Magistra*), Hoefnagel's technical secrets for his paintings have yet to be fully revealed. An educated humanist working at the behest of the Duke of Bavaria and Rudolf II, Hoefnagel can be appreciated for his artistic responses to the natural historical and alchemical interests pursued by his contemporaries and the objects collected in the *Kunstammern* of his patrons. Hoefnagel was an artist whose work straddled the *occultus*, as in his use of long-unrecognized techniques in his illuminations, and the public, as in the printed circulation of his designs made by his son after his illuminations. This paper will consider Joris Hoefnagel's techniques used to create his painted illuminations of *naturalia* in the context of late sixteenth-century practices of secrecy and concealment. Through discoveries made under the microscope and new investigations into possible inspirations for the artist's visual "jokes", sources for Hoefnagel's extraordinary art will be uncovered and made manifest.



*Jasmine Kilburn-Toppin (Cardiff): **Secrecy, Experiment, and Workshop Practices at the Early Modern Tower Mint***

In early modern culture, secrecy and the motivations for keeping knowledge secret could mean different things to varied professional and social groups. This paper explores the nature and practice of secrecy at the Tower Mint, early modern England's foremost site of coin production and metallurgical testing. At this series of workshops – within which artisans, workmen, guild representatives, institutional officials, and gentlemen interacted – the drive for secrecy operated at varied cultural, political, institutional, and epistemological levels. For royal representatives, coinage was fundamentally a state secret. And designers of mechanised coinage equipment desired to protect their intellectual rights to novel technologies. For specialised artisans like coiners, secrecy was associated with craft mysteries and concealed workshops. Gentlemen natural philosophers – who were highly curious about the experimental metallurgical activities at the Tower Mint and sought entry to its artisanal workshops – saw themselves as hunters and collectors of secrets of nature.

Moreover, while secrecy might have been an institutional ideal, the space of the Mint, situated within the multifunctional Tower of London, proved hard to manage and police. The site had seemingly porous boundaries, movement was hard to control, and those with the right social connections might gain access to view operational practices and personnel. The physical built environment of the Tower site impacted upon its cultures of secrecy. By exploring the various material practices and operations of the Mint, and the engagement of its practitioners with the thorny issue of secrecy, this paper aims to expand our understandings of early modern cultures of secrecy.