

Performances of Peace

Utrecht 1713-2013

The Peace of Utrecht, which brought an end to the War of the Spanish Succession, was a milestone in European history. The Treaty concluded the extensive wars that had swept through both Europe as well as the overseas colonies, and heralded an exceptionally long period of peace for early modern times that lasted until the outbreak of the War of the Austrian Succession in 1740. The Peace of Utrecht confronts us with changing concepts of international relations as well as with new public practices of ‘performing’ diplomacy in eighteenth-century Europe. The significance of this event, however, has not always been recognised. This conference, organised by the Utrecht University Department of History and the Dutch Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, aims to redress that.

The Peace of Utrecht embodies several intriguing contradictions. While it brought about a prolonged period of peace in Europe, it also became the root cause of aggressive ‘balance of power’ politics. Likewise, the Peace of Utrecht restructured overseas commerce, yet also accelerated Anglo-French rivalry in the colonies. Although decision making about war and peace was almost exclusively the domain of princes and ministers, the people’s insatiable hunger for military news stimulated governments to publically justify their war policies. The booming media informed the general public about the peace negotiations and facilitated public reflection on the diplomatic process. The public performance of peace became more important even though, at the same time, many forms of diplomatic communication and rituals remained invisible to the people at large. While the people were generally averse to war, they did not neglect to celebrate their war heroes. At the same time, the long years of conflict paradoxically forged a growing sense of ‘Europe’ as an international society, and artistic depictions of the Treaty of Utrecht highlighted both the European character of the Peace as well as the proto-patriotic sentiments that it stirred.

This conference aims to rethink the significance of the Peace of Utrecht by exploring the nexus between culture and politics. For too long, cultural and political historians have studied early modern international relations in isolation. By studying the political as well as the cultural aspects of this peace (and its concomitant paradoxes) from a broader perspective, this conference aims to shed new light on the relation between diplomacy and performative culture in the public sphere.

Proposals

The conference will take place in Utrecht, 24-26 April 2013. Paper proposals (300 words) should reach the conference committee by 1 May 2012 by email: peaceofutrecht@uu.nl. The committee invites proposals on any relevant topic related to the central theme of this conference: the significance and the legacy of the Peace of Utrecht. Confirmed keynote speakers include Marsha Frey (Kansas State University), Linda Frey (The University of Montana), Willem Frijhoff (VU University, Amsterdam) and Jane Newman (University of California, Irvine). Suggestions for papers or panels are:

- Performances of peace
- Theatres of war
- Forging identities
- **The Treaty's legacy**

Performances of peace

At a time when international politics and diplomacy became semi-professionalised, the general public's engagement with political accountability was paradoxically growing. The most successful peace negotiations were conducted informally and behind closed doors, but at the same time the performance of peace remained a highly formalised and ritualised event. Diplomats themselves increasingly realised the potential uses of public performances, even though princes mostly organised private feasts and masquerade balls to celebrate peace. Both groups nevertheless recognised the representative potential of public attention and arranged large-scale (semi-)public theatrical events (like fireworks, masquerades, and theatre performances) to create a public framework for their negotiations. The Peace of Utrecht therefore offers us intriguing tensions between public manifestations of peace on the one hand, and performances that remained invisible to the people at large on the other.

Papers and panels are invited on the topics of political and diplomatic performances during negotiations; peace proclamations, rituals and celebrations; the public role of diplomats and public attention for international politics (fashion, language, urban space, buildings, parties); diplomatic journalism and public debates during negotiations; diplomatic communication; and artistic representations of peace (peace allegories, music, fireworks, coins).

Theatres of war

The Nine Years' War and the War of the Spanish Succession ushered in a new era in European warfare: the sheer scale of military engagements and the wars' geographical scope greatly surpassed those of earlier conflicts. European-wide coalitions necessitated the revision of nations' 'grand strategies', which now came to span the continent as well as overseas territories. New concepts of international politics emerged, most notably embodied by the 'balance of power' principle. War also became the object of increasing public reflection. Images of war and (auto)biographical texts about war experiences might be interpreted as tentative attempts at bridging the gap between soldiers and citizens. The general public craved news about foreign battlefields, devouring newspaper articles and public announcements about the wars, and participating in special days of prayer and fasting. Printmakers and painters

depicted glorious victories, and even if the public eventually grew weary of sustained warfare, it did not fail to honour its war heroes.

Papers and panels are invited on the theory and practice of 'balance of power' politics; colonial and international warfare; war journalism; the emergence of an international system of diplomacy; grand strategy; images of the War of the Spanish Succession 1701-1713, such as paintings of battles and staged war spectacles; war psychology; descriptions of first-hand war experiences; public debates on war.

Forging identities

The Peace of Utrecht concluded a process initiated at the Peace of Westphalia, which had created a new international order in Europe. Instead of a 'society of princes', Europe increasingly came to be regarded as a 'system' of sovereign states that operated in accordance with the 'balance of power' principle. Accordingly, national identities were forged in tandem with a progressive international awareness of Europe and Christendom. How did patriotism and proto-nationalist identities relate to the emergence of cosmopolitanism and (transnational) religious identities? How were states and nations represented, and what were the roles of national stereotypes and the depiction of foreign enemies in the formation of national identities and diplomatic encounters? If we understand patriotism more generally as an attempt by citizens to penetrate the political realm of decision making and to defend the interests of 'the fatherland', how does early patriotism then relate to the growing public attention for diplomacy and international politics in the early eighteenth century (see section 'Performances of Peace')?

Papers or panels are invited on the construction and limitations of sovereignty; religious and humanitarian interventions; European identity vs. national identities; early patriotism vs. cosmopolitanism; representations of states and nations 1648-1713 (cartography, travel books, anthropological studies); constructing the enemy, national stereotypes, and ethnographical misconceptions; religious identities.

The Treaty's legacy

The Treaty of Utrecht can be regarded as a milestone in international relations: it established a new ordering principle for international relations, offered new methods of political communication, ushered in a period of colonial awareness.

Papers and panels are invited on the significance of the Treaty for the development of international relations; Peace of Utrecht commemorations; the framing of the Peace of Utrecht as a historical event.

Conference

The conference will coincide with the opening of an exhibition on the Peace of Utrecht at the Centraal Museum in Utrecht. The conference will be held in Utrecht, 24-26 April 2013. More information will be provided (in due time) on our websites,

<http://peaceofutrecht.hum.uu.nl/>

and

www.18e-eeuw.nl/peaceofutrecht

Organising committee:

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