

Call for Papers

"The Politics of Paper in the Early Modern World"

Groningen, The Netherlands, 9-10 June 2016

Paper is today so ubiquitous that we often overlook it. Yet paper was once a brand-new communications technology and political tool that fundamentally influenced early modern political life in myriad ways. Paper arrived in Europe via China and the Muslim Mediterranean by the twelfth century. By the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, as papermaking spread across Europe, the revolutionary effects of paper on European politics and political communications were becoming strikingly visible.

This two-day conference seeks to bring together scholars and paper experts working across a range of disciplines and geographic areas who are interested in the ways in which paper supported, shaped, or otherwise influenced practices of politics and political communications in the period ca.1350-ca.1800. It aims to sketch a more integral picture of paper as a material artifact and political communications technology around which coherent historical practices developed. To do so, it traces the 'life-cycle' of early modern 'political' paper across four themes:

- I. Paper as politically-desired manufacture, trade commodity and circulating material artifact. Early modern political actors were voracious consumers of paper. While a rich technical literature exists on paper's manufacture, the early modern rag- and paper trades remain largely unexamined, despite their economic and political importance. What material possibilities, constraints, and constellations emerge in early modern political practices when we focus on paper as commodity and circulating material artifact?
- II. Paper in the emergence of epistolary cultures, postal services, and the news. With the spread of affordable paper across Europe by about 1460, new opportunities and methods opened for acquiring, accessing, and transmitting political information. How did paper affect emerging early modern cultures and practices of political letter-writing? What role did paper play in the early modern development of postal services and postal infrastructures? How did paper influence forms, functions, and practices of transmitting the news, or of news-cultures?
- III. Paper as a tool of governance, diplomacy, and political information management. The often daily paper-borne correspondence between European rulers and their officials inundated chancelleries and swamped rulers, most famously in the case of 'el rey papelero' Philip II of Spain. How did the coming of paper (re-)shape practices of political representation, diplomacy, politics and governance? In what ways did paper alter routines of political decisionmaking, record-keeping and information management?
- IV. Paper as impulse for new forms of archiving and new archival practices. The early modern era saw heavy investment in archives and archival spaces across Europe, as well as wide-ranging innovation in archiving practices -- in part to manage the burgeoning spate of paper. How did the rise of paper as medium for political record-keeping and governance affect early modern archives and archival practices? What practices and discourses developed around the archiving of political paper(s), and with what consequences for their use?

Each theme will be explored through a set of parallel panels and a plenary lecture. Confirmed keynote speakers include:

§ Lothar Müller (Humboldt-Universität/Süddeutsche Zeitung); § Jonathan Bloom (Boston College/Virginia Commonwealth University); § Andrew Pettegree (University of St Andrews); and § Jacob Soll (University of Southern California).

The language of the conference is English. A peer-reviewed publication is planned.

Submissions Guidelines

We welcome proposals for 20-minute, English-language papers related to one or more of the conference's four themes. Submissions with a comparative or theoretical-historical bent are also welcomed, as are submissions from scholars working on paper in political life outside of Europe. Such topics might include paper in societies where it was present in political life for far longer (e.g., China and South Asia; the (Islamic) Middle East) or the role of paper in colonial politics and societies. Proposals should include § a preliminary title for your paper, § an abstract of 250-300 words, § a CV of no more than 1 page, § and contact information, including any institutional affiliation.

Submit your proposals to politicsofpaper@gmail.com by Friday, 29 January 2016.

Successful applicants will be notified by email in mid-February.

Participants are expected to organize and cover the costs for their own travel and accommodations, and are advised of a registration fee of €120 (€75 for students). The fee covers lunches and coffees during the conference, as well as the conference dinner on 10 June and an excursion to a paper mill (est. 1692) on 11 June. The conference organizers have applied for additional funding with which they hope to be able to reduce the fees.

For questions please contact the conference organizers at politicsofpaper@gmail.com, or visit the conference website, <http://politicsofpaper.wix.com/politicsofpaper> or the conference Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/Politics-of-Paper-1682012498751210/>.

Conference Organizers

This conference is organized by Dr. Megan K. Williams (University of Groningen) in conjunction with her research project 'Paper Princes: Paper in Early Modern Diplomacy and Statecraft', which is funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO). Read more about the project at paperprinces.org. The organizational team also includes Frank Birkenholz, MA (University of Groningen); Jeroen Claassens, MA-student (University of Groningen); Johanna Feenstra, MA-student (University of Groningen); and Quinten Somsen, MA-student (University of Leiden). The conference organizers are grateful for financial and material support from the NWO and the University of Groningen.