



Entangled Objects and Hybrid Practices? The Material Culture of Transcultural Diplomacy (1500-1900)

Leitung: Harriet Rudolph (Regensburg)

The history of diplomacy and foreign policy has come into the focus of historical research again. Mainly two issues might be considered responsible for this development. Firstly, a cultural turn in historical sciences since the 1990s led to the application of new approaches to this once notoriously traditional field of study. Secondly, a number of recent political crises resulted not only in intensifying diplomatic interaction between states but also in increasingly critical reflections on their capability to actually settle international conflicts, above all those of a cross-cultural nature. To be sure, a methodologically renewed history of diplomacy has turned to socio- and cultural-historical perspectives of diplomacy which had been largely neglected in the past. However, not taking into account a few studies on diplomatic gifts or rather marginal examinations of selected objects in specific historical situations, the material culture of diplomacy has hitherto played a limited role in historical research. This is even more surprising, if we look at early modern times as an era in which modern diplomacy evolved. At that period in time, ostentatiously exhibiting or hiding objects as well as exchanging gifts between negotiators and principals was of major significance for diplomatic negotiations all over the world.

The panel aims at exploring theoretical approaches of material culture studies as an interdisciplinary field of study to the investigation of diplomatic cultures across the globe in the early modern period and in the nineteenth century. The papers of this panel focus on diplomatic procedures in the context of transcultural diplomacy in different regions of interest and thus in very diverse political and cultural contexts. They examine the gain in knowledge which a perspective on material cultures might offer to historians who are interested in culturally specific means of diplomatic interaction as well as in such forms of political communication which left an imprint on diverse civilizations. They scrutinize the efficacy of artifacts in their meaning as entangled objects (Nicholas Thomas) and their role as objects of translation (Finbarr B. Flood) in the context of the diplomatic ceremonial as well as informal contacts between negotiators of both sides. They are also interested in tracing the diverse ways in which contemporaries tried to translate and make sense of material aspects of diplomatic interaction. Finally, they look for processes of cultural transfer and cultural blending as a result of transcultural contact in early modern times. All these issues cannot satisfyingly be understood by exclusively using the approach of symbolic communication because an object does not consist of mere symbolic

dimensions. Thus reflections on the materiality of artifacts and on the ways they were handled by political actors is what the presentations focus on. Thereby, pervasive Eurocentric narratives, such as the claim that modern diplomacy and international law are solely European inventions, might be scrutinized in the longer term, even though quite a number of additional studies on the material culture of diplomacy will be necessary to successfully do so in the end.

Vorträge

- ✚ **Lost in Translation? Material Culture Studies and the History of Diplomacy**
Harriet Rudolph (Regensburg)

- ✚ **In the Kingdom of the Leopard. Commodities in Transcultural Interactions between Edo and Portuguese in Benin**
Gregor Metzig (Berlin)

- ✚ **When is Gift? Circulation of Objects in Political Negotiations between the English East India Company and Indian Rulers in the Late Eighteenth Century**
Sonal Singh (Delhi)

- ✚ **Gift-Giving in British-Ottoman Diplomacy in the Long 18th Century**
Michael Talbot (Paris)

- ✚ **The Use of Artifacts in Indian-White Diplomacy in Nineteenth-Century North America**
Volker Depkat (Regensburg)