

Spectacles and diplomacy (Paris/Versailles, 25–27 Sep 24)

Paris and Versailles, Sep 25–27, 2024

Deadline: Oct 30, 2023

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Call for papers: "Spectacles and diplomacy. Peace conferences and congresses from the 15th to the beginning of the 20th century", September 25-27, 2024, Paris and Versailles.

International conference organised by the Research Team Saprat (EPHE-PSL).

From the Hundred Years' War to the end of the First World War, from Arras in 1435 to Paris and Versailles in 1919, the diplomatic meetings organized in Europe with a focus on peace are very numerous. Medieval sources only mention the generic term "conferences" to refer to meetings where emissaries discuss paths of peace. The word diplomatic "congress", and the form associated with it itself, only really appeared from the middle of the 17th century. In the 19th century, conferences and congresses were then marked, among other things, by the rise in power of Nation-States, the emergence of concert diplomacy and the growing role of English. The places, actors, organization, modes of sociability and duration of these meetings therefore vary considerably from the 15th to the beginning of the 20th century. They are nevertheless characterized by the common concern, if not real at least proclaimed, to avoid or end conflicts. The most important meetings - gathered for information purposes in the list below - confront crucial issues, aim for stabilization or a decisive change in relations between powers and have left a lasting mark in the collective memory.

Peace congresses and conferences are also extraordinary, multifaceted events. Like princely meetings in modern times, for which Jean-Marie Le Gall has discerned a vast range of entertainment (including mystery plays, triumphal entries, jousts, tournaments, carousels, equestrian ballets, balls, ballets, theatrical performances, concerts, operas and other lyrical forms, animal games and races, fireworks and illuminations. See: Jean-Marie Le Gall, «Fêtes accueil: rencontres princières et système de divertissements à l'époque moderne», *Revue historique*, 2022, n°704, pp. 851-914, mainly pp. 857-858), peace congresses and conferences are thus the occasion for numerous and varied forms of spectacles.

This conference intends to study such forms of spectacle from a comparative, typological and diachronic perspective, while highlighting the unique character of the different spectacular performances.

The subject has already aroused the interest of historians of diplomacy. Several important studies devoted to meetings between princes, in medieval and modern times, as well as congresses, have highlighted the number, diversity and importance of public festivals, celebrations and religious rituals on these occasions. We refer here to the foundational work of Lucien Bély on congresses, in particular that of Utrecht (*Espions et ambassadeurs au temps de Louis XIV*, 1990), to a recent con-

ference systematically exploring the interactions between congresses and the cities of welcome (Christian Windler [ed.], *Kongresorte der frühen Neuzeit im europäischen Vergleich: der Frieden von Baden (1714)*, 2016), or even analyses of the sound dimension, particularly musical, of diplomacy (see for example Damien Mahiet, Rebekah Ahrendt and Frédéric Ramel (eds.), *Diplomacy, audible and resonant*, dossier in *Diplomatica*, vol. 3/2, 2021).

In general, the history of diplomacy, by integrating many more actors into its fields of inquiry, now takes more into consideration the artists, jugglers, dancers, actors, painters and musicians speaking at conferences and congresses. The organization of certain shows, concerts and plays in particular, has been analysed in depth. However, specialists in diplomacy have generally considered these practices as a form of sideline, from the angle of entertainment, possibly with a symbolic significance. An overall approach to the typology, roles and evolution of spectacular practices in a diplomatic context is still lacking.

As for the history of spectacles, which has, at the same time, also become a real discipline, congresses and peace conferences have not been the subject of specific work. It is mainly musicologists who are interested in it, within the broader framework of the study of the relationships between music and politics, which is illustrated for example by the conference “Musique et sorties de guerres (XIXe-XXIe siècles)” held in Montreal in 2018.

By situating itself at the crossroads of studies on entertainment, diplomacy, the history of music, theatre, pictorial arts and dance, this conference therefore intends to promote dialogue between several historiographies which have, for several decades now, been very vigorously renewed. Several complementary lines of research will be favoured to consider all the spectacular practices in conferences and congresses.

The first step will be to determine who the actors in these shows are. If the separation between professionals and amateurs is delicate and does not necessarily make sense at all times, taking into consideration the individuals involved is fundamental. Participants and public – these two categories can mix – will be considered together.

Equally important is the question of where the spectacles take place. Are the places where diplomatic negotiation take place transformed to host these shows or are the diplomatic envoys requested to travel elsewhere, to places of performance? Are both natural and urban sites used? This reflection on the actors and the places leads us to question the negotiations prior to the performing of the shows. Who decides? According to what schedule? Who pays? An economic approach to shows is essential.

The study of these various points leads to exploring how “spectacular” and diplomatic culture interpenetrate, how the practices linked to these two types of activities coexist and influence each other.

The study of the répertoire (a word to be taken here in the broad sense) is essential in this respect. If one speaks or sings, what language is chosen?

Is the aim to innovate, to propose creations or to resort to more traditional forms of spectacle?

The reflection will also focus on the symbolic significance of the spectacles.

What discourse do they convey?

How do they harmonize with those which form the very material of diplomatic work?

The way in which this is realized during the shows is a central question for the conference. Rais-

ing such question leads to an assessment of the political benefit expected and brought by the spectacles – and such question is also linked to that about the reception (or forgetting) of these shows, both among contemporaries and in the longer term.

Numerous and varied sources could be mobilized to deal with this subject: ceremonial books, diplomatic correspondence, embassy journals, accounting documents, iconography, diaries, press, material sources (costumes, decorative elements, places where the events take place), etc.

Indicative list of congresses:

1435 : Congress of Arras

1459 : Council of Mantua

1643-1648 : Congress of Westphalia

1678-1679 : congrès de Nimègue

1697 : Congress of Ryswick

1712-1713 : Congress of Utrecht

1714 : Congress of Baden

1814-1815 : Congress of Vienna

1818 : Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle

1820 : Congress of Troppau

1821 : Congress of Laybach

1822 : Congress of Vérone

1856 : Congress of Paris

1878 : Congress of Berlin

1885 : Conference of Berlin

1906 : Conference Algésiras

1919 : Paris Peace Conference

Submission:

Proposals with a maximum length of 2000 characters and accompanied by a half-page biographical presentation, must be sent before October 30, 2023 to maddalena.bellavitis@ephe.psl.eu; jean-claude.yon@ephe.psl.eu ; stephane.pequignot@ephe.psl.eu.

The final programme will be notified by December 20, 2023, once the scientific committee will have concluded the selection.

Scientific Committee :

Lucien Bély (Sorbonne Université),

Marie Bouhaïk-Gironès (CNRS),

Yves Bruley (EPHE-PSL),

Astrid Castres (EPHE-PSL),

Véronique Dominguez (Université de Nantes),

Laurent Hablot (EPHE-PSL),

Beate Angelika Kraus (Beethoven-Haus, Vienna),

Guy-Michel Leproux (EPHE-PSL),

Jean-Marie Moeglin (Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres),

Cécile Reynaud (EPHE-PSL)

Reference:

CFP: Spectacles and diplomacy (Paris/Versailles, 25-27 Sep 24). In: ArtHist.net, Oct 10, 2023 (accessed Aug 29, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/40312>>.