

Dissertation project of Andreas Affolter, M.A. (University of Berne):

State-Building and Foreign Relations: Networks, Perceptions, and Communicative Practices. France and the Thirteen Swiss Cantons in the Early 18th Century

The project focuses on the foreign relations between France and the Cantons of the Swiss Confederacy during the embassy of Claude-Théophile de Béziade, Marquis d'Avaray, 1716-1726. An exceptionally comprehensive source material allows analysing the different levels of these relations. The manifold relations are traceable on the one hand by the ambassador's correspondence with both his superiors at the French court and the Swiss authorities, on the other hand by his correspondence with several Swiss magistrates and officers serving in the French king's armies. Thus, the analysis focuses not only on the official "inter-governmental" relations but also on the personal network of the ambassador in the Swiss Confederacy. However, considering all thirteen cantons would go beyond the scope of a dissertation project, and therefore emphasis is put on the relations between France and the cantons of Berne, Solothurn, Lucerne and Zug. This selection is most suitable because of the good source material and the possibility of conducting a comparison between protestant and catholic city-states as well a rural community.

Brokering the French kings' patronage resources, the ambassadors assured the transfer of highly important material and symbolic resources like pensions, career opportunities in the French army and honorary titles. In doing so, however, the ambassadors had to cope with competing networks as well as multiple loyalties. Depending on the political culture of the different cantons, the brokering of patronage resources varied considerably. In the protestant cantons, patronage relations with foreign princes were discredited since accepting foreign pensions had been prohibited during the Reformation. Based on the comprehensive correspondence of the Marquis d'Avaray with magistrates in all cantons, the question will be raised to which extent the establishment of personal networks in protestant cantons remained possible and whether or not these networks differed from networks in catholic cantons. Were, for instance, foreign relations in Berne increasingly considered to belong to a public sphere? Did Bernese authorities succeed in monopolising foreign relations to the disadvantage of non-governmental players? Or can we observe an increase of unofficial personal networks precisely in the protestant cantons, considering that their governments did not renew the alliance with the French crown formed in 1663 and expiring in 1723? As regards the question of the formation of state structures in foreign relations, the Swiss authorities' as well as the French Court's endeavours to control the distribution of pensions will also be analysed.

In addition to French networks in the Swiss Confederacy, Swiss networks in France will also be looked at. Under which circumstances and how successfully did the Swiss authorities try to pursue their interests not only via the ambassador but via Swiss officers in French service or Swiss bankers in France? How did the French side judge the legitimacy of such procedures?

Furthermore, the project will ask how the players involved perceived their relations and with which self-conception they interacted. In the decades following the Peace of Westphalia, Swiss authorities developed a new understanding of the states they governed and began to conceive themselves as the rulers of sovereign republics. However, at the beginning of the 18th century, the

degree to which this new republican self-conception was embraced varied from canton to canton. It will therefore be analysed in what way different concepts of the state influenced the symbolic, discursive and communicative practices of the Cantons' relations to France. Did the cantons address the ambassador as sovereign states and did they claim an appropriate ceremonial? Did the foreign relations between France and the Swiss Confederacy increasingly follow the logic of an intergovernmental model in principle based on equality or did they continue to follow hierarchical models of interaction?

It will also be analysed whether or not the non-use of symbols and rhetoric of their own sovereignty inevitably points to ignorance or lacking reception of the conceptions in question. Did the Swiss authorities in certain situations deliberately avoid referring to the new concepts? Did they instead point to alternative relationship models such as the model of patronage? In that case, patronage could not only be applied to relations between individuals but also to relations between ruling groups.

Regarding the republican constitution of the Swiss cantons, it will furthermore be asked on which occasions d'Avaray highlighted the "otherness" of the political procedures in the Swiss Confederacy as well as discrepancies between his own practical experiences in situ and the "knowledge" of his superiors. Under which circumstances, for instance, did the ambassador denounce gratifications and pensions as symbols of Swiss venality, when they usually played a constitutive role for social relations in the aristocratic court societies?

Andreas Affolter, December 2009 (contact: andreas.affolter@hist.unibe.ch)