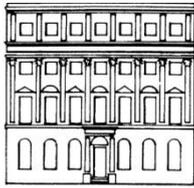


German Historical Institute
London



BULLETIN

ISSN 0269-8552

Heidi Mehrkens:

*The Influence of Personal Relationships between Statesmen
on the History of Politics (1815–1945)*

German Historical Institute London Bulletin, Vol 33, No. 1
(May 2011), pp 154-158

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CONFERENCE REPORT

The Influence of Personal Relationships between Statesmen on the History of Politics (1815–1914), workshop held at the German Historical Institute London, 11–12 Oct. 2010.

Why the great interest in the history of emotions these days? And what place, to take up a crucial question of Ute Frevert's, do emotions have in history? The workshop 'Persönliche Beziehungen zwischen Staatsmännern als Kategorie der Geschichte des Politischen (1815–1914)' discussed the usefulness and challenges of the history of emotions for accessing international relations between Britain and the Continent in the nineteenth century.

Within its Post-Doc programme focussing on 'History of the Political' the GHIL gives a scholarship-holder the opportunity to invite international scholars to a workshop. Andreas Gestrich (Director), Benedikt Stuchtey (Deputy Director), and the organizer, Heidi Mehrkens (Brunswick) welcomed both younger and more established scholars from Germany, Russia, Italy, Britain, and France to Bloomsbury Square.

The aim of the workshop was to concretize, by using specific examples, thoughts on how to deal methodologically with personal relationships as a category in writing the history of the political. In two sections the participants discussed papers on 'Personal Relations' und 'Political Networks', in each case from the perspective of the actors. Personal relations between statesmen were of a private nature. However, long-standing friendships, personal dislikes, and mentor or patronage relations also had the potential to affect political relations. Feelings thus became the motive or catalyst for specific decision-making. All the participants asked about the place of social interaction in the specific political setting of the nineteenth century, that is, how the 'private' became intertwined with the 'public'.

Birgit Aschmann (Kiel) introduced the first section with a paper on emotions as hidden factors in political history and presented the inclusion of emotions as a suitable means of analysing, amongst other things, power relations in history. She said that looking at the

relationship between emotions and politics was a trend in historical science, and was currently being applied on a large scale to the twentieth century. What is more, Aschmann said, cultural history offered a new perspective on the nineteenth century. Seen through the glasses of emotional history, the room for manoeuvre in the relationships between monarchs could be analysed and the social acceptability of demonstrated emotions and emotional political styles discerned. In any case, a careful contextualization of the political events, the people involved, and the social norms was needed in order to determine how important emotion was in relation to the political event.

Andrea Stahl (Wolfenbüttel) looked at the significance of common political values, experiences, and objectives in the 'Metternich generation'. Using the negotiations about Austria joining the Quadruple Alliance against Napoleon Bonaparte as an example, Stahl could show how sympathy and personal impressions in a face-to-face encounter between Metternich and Castlereagh influenced the political constellation at the Congress of Vienna. Mistrust and prejudice, previously dominant on both sides, gave way to growing trust. This initiated co-operation that was crucial for European politics and was based on common values, even though the two men had different political aims.

Volker Barth (Cologne) presented rulers and statesmen travelling incognito as something that peaked in the nineteenth century. This carefully worked out ceremonial, which was supposed to reduce the burden of state visits, clearly had a political function. According to Barth, the 'private' journey was staged for the public and opened up new opportunities for political action. The journey of the French Empress Eugénie to Queen Victoria in 1867 was an example of how the personal relationship between the dignitaries based on grief and empathy after Emperor Maximilian was hanged in Mexico became the object of public demonstration.

In the context of the Balkan Crisis, Edward Henry Stanley, 15th Earl Derby, had to resign as Disraeli's Foreign Secretary in spring 1878. Jennifer Helen Davey (Norwich) explained the background to the crisis, which was linked to Lady Derby's relationship with the Russian Ambassador Shuvalov. The accusation that in the course of an affair Lady Derby had divulged cabinet secrets to the Russian served as an instrument for Derby's political exclusion. In a broader sense, according to Davey, the incident demonstrated the unchal-

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lenged male dominance of international High Politics and the strong position of the press as an instrument for politicizing supposedly 'private' matters.

A triumvirate from the field of the social sciences and international law was the focus of Christian Müller's (Münster) paper. Using the long friendship of the 'fathers' of the Institut de Droit International, John Westlake, Gustave Rolin-Jaequemyns, and Tobias Michael Asser, as an example, Müller showed how the business of international congresses became more professional. Personal networks accompanied the establishment of these and other leading academics as political experts, but the objectives changed over time. According to Müller, the avant-garde with the oppositional agenda and international perspective had transformed, around 1900, into government experts, whose main interest was in the well-being of their own nation.

As moderator of the first section, Hans Henning Hahn (Oldenburg) drew some of the threads together. His commentary took up the gender aspect, often mentioned in the papers, since depending on the actors' gender contemporaries clearly attributed different functions to personal relationships. So the great challenge to historians, he said, was how to deal with constructions from the private and public spheres that had the potential to scandalize or instrumentalize emotionality.

The second section was introduced by Constance Bantman (Guildford, Surrey) with a keynote lecture that provided a new look at the elites dealt with so far. A specialist in the history of nineteenth-century international anarchist networks, she used the 'class change' to open the discussion on the politically organized Left. The concepts of political friendship dealt with so far were not, she said, confined to the Conservative side. She posed the question to what extent in the late nineteenth century modes of behaviour and interpretations of personal relations 'seeped through' to the politically organized Left from the elites.

Federigo Niglia (Rome) gave an example of the ability of political relations to adapt and change in a paper on the Italian diplomatic elite between 1870 and the First World War. Rooted in the political milieu of the *Risorgimento*, Niglia demonstrated the development of various alliances of the young national state with Austria, France, the German Reich, and Britain based on the personal connections of lead-

ing diplomats. He was able to show the enduring influence of German and French diplomatic models on Italian foreign policy after 1870 and, in addition, how the traditions of an originally Neapolitan or Piedmontese social milieu marked Italian diplomacy up to the First World War.

Vera Dubina (Moscow) talked about comradeship and the reorganization of patronage relationships amongst the Russian bureaucratic elite of the nineteenth century. She explained the great significance of patronage networks by the fact that they represented protection for personal status, value system, and, not least, career. Using the Imperial School of Justice in St Petersburg, one of the most renowned aristocratic boarding schools, as an example, Dubina demonstrated the self-perception of an elite bureaucratic society bound together by comradeship and patronage. After completing their studies, the students were assured of taking up important positions. Increasing professionalization of education thus did not, as Dubina stressed, lead to greater distancing from the infamous 'old system' of corruption.

Heidi Mehrkens (Brunswick) looked at the relevance of relations between politicians in unequal power relationships. During the Franco-Prussian conflict of 1870-1 the disempowered French Minister François Guizot had activated an old network of friendly politicians, amongst them British Prime Minister Gladstone. Ultimately, the attempt to persuade the island nation to intervene in the conflict failed. However, Guizot's activities in the wider space of what could be said, in which the politician out of office could still make his opinions known abroad, were actively used by Gladstone to direct British foreign policy away from the principle of non-intervention in Europe.

Moderator Sabine Freitag (Frankfurt) summed up the main points of the second section. In her commentary she stressed the motives of the historian who decides to look at events from the perspective of the history of emotions and asked, as did Birgit Aschmann in her introductory remarks, what the reasons were for the current peak in research on the history of emotions. She also pointed out the rediscovery of emotions by academics in the second half of the nineteenth century, which led to a similar boom.

The concluding discussion was moderated by Heidi Mehrkens. Various points had been raised regarding personal relations as a cat-

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egory for writing the history of the political: the request was discussed that (self)statements about the perception of emotions should be more precisely located in their historical contexts and that spheres of study such as the public sphere and diplomacy should be separated. The meaning of the expressions used also needed to be precisely defined in the historical context. What did trust mean to an early nineteenth-century person in the context of treaty negotiations? On the conceptual level differentiation was suggested of terms such as comradeship, friendship, network, and beyond that a historical analysis of 'emotional' concepts in the diplomatic context (*friendship of nations, entente cordiale*).

One key feature of the papers and discussions was the question as to how the change in political style in the nineteenth century may have influenced personal relations between politicians. It is possible that the expansion of the political space to include new actors also presented new opportunities for forging personal relations and making use of them. It would be interesting for further research to take account in particular of the function of the Courts and Court societies. The speakers and experts attached great importance to common social values and codes of conduct, membership of a class or social stratum, and common religious affiliation in forging relationships within a changing political constellation which, despite all national perspectives, on the level of relations remained a genuinely European one.

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