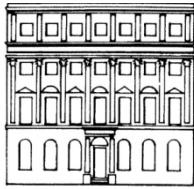


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The War of the Spanish Succession: New Perspectives
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The War of the Spanish Succession: New Perspectives. Conference organized by the German Historical Institute London and the University of Münster, and held at the GHIL, 22–4 Mar. 2012.

For a long time, the War of the Spanish Succession (1701/2–1714) was the forgotten conflict of early modern Europe. Although this war involved most of the countries of western, central, and southern Europe and spilled over into the colonial empires of the belligerent powers, it has received surprisingly little attention in recent years, at least in German and British historiography. Only with the approaching tercentenary of the various peace treaties that ended the conflict has interest picked up again in one of the most costly wars (in terms of finance and manpower) of the period before universal warfare. What is more, the research that was done in the past tended to concentrate on military campaigns and battles, and on an old-style history of international relations conceived of as the interplay between states, monarchs, and their ministers. Few of the modern approaches to the history of war and diplomacy that have been pioneered in other areas seem to have been applied to the War of the Spanish Succession.

This was the starting point for an international scholarly gathering convened by Matthias Pohlig (University of Münster) and Michael Schaich (GHIL) and held at the premises of the GHIL. As the organizers explained in their introductory remarks, the aim of the conference was to redirect interest to the conflict as a whole (and not just to the peace treaties and negotiations that brought it to a conclusion) and to open up new ways of analysing the war. For this reason the conference was organized around three major themes: 1) Diplomacy, Infrastructure, and the Logistics of the War; 2) War, Information, and the Public Sphere; and 3) The Colonial Dimension of the War.

Hamish Scott (Glasgow/St Andrews) started proceedings with a keynote lecture entitled 'The War of the Spanish Succession: Old Perspectives and New'. In a wide-ranging overview he made clear that most of the older (primarily English) historiography was heavily influenced by the Whig and Huguenot perspective of the early eighteenth century that saw the Allied war effort as a heroic attempt to

The full conference programme can be found under Events and Conferences on the GHIL's website <www.ghil.ac.uk>.

prevent a French universal monarchy and to save Europe and the Protestant religion. This perspective continued to prevail until well into the twentieth century and was reinvigorated in the political context of the 1930s by writers such as Trevelyan and Churchill who, in his biography of his ancestor Marlborough, likened Louis XIV to Hitler. Scott also stressed that there were several overlapping theatres of war. To be sure, the War of the Spanish Succession was the last act in the Anglo-Dutch struggle against France, but it was also a conflict between the Habsburgs and not only the Bourbons, but also the Hungarian rebels, and a conflict over Habsburg possessions in Italy; in addition, it included a struggle over the Spanish crown on the Iberian peninsula and an attempt by minor states such as Savoy to secure a place within the European state system. Finally, it was also a war waged in the colonies, if not about colonies.

The first session began with two papers on how wars were financed and what part tax regimes, financial bureaucracies, and military entrepreneurs played in the conduct of warfare. Peter Wilson (Hull) dealt with the problem of financing the war in the Holy Roman Empire. Whereas the older historiography overemphasized the importance of subsidies, especially those paid by the maritime powers to German territories, Wilson stressed their symbolic function, but concentrated on the effort that the Empire, its circles, and the German territories made to finance the war. Wilson pointed out that, on the whole, this was a surprisingly efficient and successful system that has gone largely unnoticed because of the difficulties of researching the complex financial and administrative processes in the multi-layered empire. In a similarly revisionist paper, Aaron Graham (Oxford) questioned the importance attached to the treasury as the key institution for financing the war in recent historical writing. Against historians such as Michael Braddick and John Brewer, he stressed the role of private financiers and other intermediaries for the success of the fiscal-military state. Acting largely behind the scenes, they lent their expertise and influence, and often their own personal credit, to the state. The War of the Spanish Succession was not so much a step towards administrative reform as an institutionalization of older, informal practices.

Shifting attention to the history of diplomacy, which has been reinvented recently, the next papers looked at the importance of perceptions and preconceived notions of ideology in international rela-

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tions and the role played by actors outside the traditional categories of diplomats and foreign ministers during the fighting. Guillaume Hanotin (Paris) presented the interaction between trade and diplomacy by demonstrating that Louis XIV's interest in economic issues was greater than is often assumed and that France used men of trade as important negotiators. Michel-Jean-Amelot de Gournay, former *commissaire* in the French Council of Commerce, was Louis XIV's ambassador to the court of Madrid during the war. Relations between France and Spain were thus commercial as well as diplomatic, which could also lead to tension, for instance, on the question of the Asiento. In his paper, Hillard von Thiessen (Cologne) applied the approaches pioneered by the cultural history of politics and diplomacy to the conflict. Contesting a traditional state-centred view of international relations and replacing notions of early modern politics as an arcane sphere by a view that regards politics not as autonomous, but entangled with social relations, he presented diplomats as both political and social actors at the same time. Courtiers with a personal adherence to the ruler and patronage interests were diplomatic actors in their own right. Diplomacy in the early modern period must therefore be understood as an activity within not a stabilized state system, but a *société des princes*. David Onnekink (Utrecht), too, criticized a diplomatic history centred on the state. Examining the series of succession crises that shook Europe in the 1690s and early 1700s, and in particular the Dutch responses to these issues, he highlighted that questions of the legitimacy of the succession that were at the core of these controversies have the advantage of pushing the dynastic aspect to the fore more than a state-centred paradigm permits.

The world of the smaller players during the War of the Spanish Succession was the topic of papers by Christopher Storrs (Dundee) and Leonhard Horowski (Wolfenbüttel). Storrs gave a broad overview of Italian princes and republics in the 'Long' War of the Spanish Succession (c.1688–1725). Mostly neglected in accounts of the war, they nevertheless played a crucial part and some of their territories (as well as neighbouring Savoy) held key strategic positions, as Storrs demonstrated with regard to the republic of Genoa. An important development of the period was the growing extent to which parts of Italy – and not just Imperial Italy – were made to feel Austrian and Imperial power more sharply. This led to a rise of Italian national

feeling that was, however, more anti-German than pro-Italian. Horowski, on the other hand, explored the degree to which the system of sovereign states was closed to newcomers at the beginning of the eighteenth century by looking at French courtiers (subjects of the French crown) and their attempts to use the war to re-invent their families as sovereign dynasties. Although they were ultimately unsuccessful, these attempts underline the social importance attached to the claim of sovereignty. This begs the question of whether diplomacy around 1700 should be discussed in terms of an already stabilized state system.

The main theme of the second session, the relationship between war and the public sphere in its various guises, from public and arcane information and war reporting to symbolic communication, is largely neglected in the historiography. Andrew Thompson (Cambridge) analysed printed sermons to demonstrate the importance of religion and, in particular, providentialist thinking, in contemporary interpretations of the war. The thorny issues of legitimacy and succession, but also the question of support for Continental Protestants, exerted considerable influence on public debates about Britain's participation in the fighting. Whether or to what extent the war was (still) a war of religion, however, remains open to discussion. On a slightly different note, the following two papers described important aspects of the role of information in conducting an early modern war. First Susanne Friedrich (Munich) looked at the Imperial Diet, a minor political protagonist during the war, but a crucial hub of information for all powers. From Regensburg, political news, opinions, and propaganda were distributed throughout the Empire and beyond. The sphere of the diplomats and their masters on the one hand and that of the media on the other were closely intertwined, but had only partly overlapping interests. The latter were assistants of governments as well as revealers of political secrets. As a consequence, the Diet was in danger of losing many of its political functions, as can be seen from the circumstances of the Imperial declaration of war. Matthias Pohlig (Münster) then discussed the ramifications of seeing the War of the Spanish Succession as waged with or for information. How did influential politicians, diplomats, and generals acquire information? What were the formal and informal channels of information? What functions did information have? To illuminate these aspects he presented a case study of John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, which showed

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that while a focus on espionage is too narrow, the precise uses to which information were put remain difficult to assess. Information had a number of functions: it provided the basis for decisions, although a simple causal relationship between information and decision-making cannot be established, worked as a symbol of efficiency, created a sense of security, and served as a unit of exchange in patronage relationships.

The symbolic representation of the war has also received scant attention from historians, a deficit which Mark Hengerer (Constance) and Michael Schaich (London) tried to remedy. Hengerer presented the Habsburg court in Vienna as a theatre where various ritual acts were played out, such as thanksgiving services, demonstrations of anti-French sentiment, and farewell and welcome back ceremonies for members of the imperial dynasty who had gone into battle. In addition, funeral monuments and material objects such as coins were drawn into the service of the war effort. As he also stressed, however, there was no coherent strategy behind the Viennese image policy. The same holds true for Britain where, as Schaich outlined, a variety of ritualistic actions were staged, from religious services to state funerals for military heroes and victory parades. A case study of the presentation of war trophies in various media such as newspapers and ritualistic performances allowed him to analyse the mechanisms and meanings of these acts in greater depth. The last paper in the session, by Antonio Alvarez-Ossorio (Madrid), dealt with the impact of the conflict on the government of Spain. He spoke in particular about Philip V's dual strategy of revoking the more unpopular political acts issued by Charles II while presenting himself as the natural successor to the Habsburgs. Charles III stressed this dynastic link even more, although many of his decisions were made in Vienna by his Imperial brother.

The third perspective on the war was also the most tentative. Was the War of the Spanish Succession not just a European, but also a colonial war? John Hattendorf's (Newport) paper provided a comprehensive overview of the North American theatre of conflict. Although not a major factor in the overall picture, the fundamental rivalry between Britain, France, and Spain that had started the conflict and the necessity for each power to develop relationships with the local Native Americans gave the fighting a special flavour. In the end Britain won the war not on the battlefield – its only major mili-

tary operation failed—but in the peace negotiations, with the acquisition of Hudson Bay. Marian Füssel (Göttingen) cast his net even wider and placed the conflict in a series of ‘global’ wars from the late seventeenth to the late eighteenth century. Examining them under the headings of entanglements, cultures of violence, and perceptions he stressed among other things the impact of colonial warfare on living conditions on the home front, the increasing entanglements between the various theatres of war, and the fact that along with other, slightly earlier conflicts, the War of the Spanish Succession was at the beginning of this development towards more globalized wars.

The economics of the war in the Atlantic formed the centre of discussion in the last three papers. José Manuel Santos Pérez (Salamanca) presented Spanish trade as a vital ingredient of the fighting. The issue of who should and should not participate in the trade between Cádiz and Spanish America was one of the main causes of the war. In addition, disputes between institutions and merchants, and even global circuits of trade and silver were at stake during the conflict. Finally, the fighting triggered an unprecedented increase in the sale of public offices in the Indies, with profound and lasting effects throughout the Spanish empire. Aaron Alejandro Olivas (Los Angeles) added another layer to this picture by dealing with French attempts to assert economic hegemony over Spanish America. By the end of the seventeenth century, the viceroyalties of New Spain and Peru had become the world’s most important markets for European textiles and African slaves. The succession of Louis XIV’s grandson to the Spanish throne presented French ministers and their merchant associates with the opportunity to remove English and Dutch competitors from these two highly lucrative trades. The French crown used the slave and cloth trades in New Spain and Peru not only to finance military campaigns in Europe but also, perhaps more importantly, to form strategic alliances with Spanish colonial elites whose loyalty to Philip V was necessary to win a global war. The slave trade also resurfaced in William A. Pettigrew’s (Kent) paper. Pettigrew suggested that the war was, to some extent, a catalyst in the development of African slavery. The fighting disrupted English trade with Europe and thus compelled merchants to switch to slave trading. The war also instilled a sense of legislative urgency in London and a greater concern with the security of British interests overseas that served the interests of monopoly companies like the Royal African

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Company. This polarization and the ensuing debates about the management of the slave trade ultimately pushed the prospect of economic gain from slave trading to the Spanish Americas up the agenda of domestic policy and on to the negotiating table at Utrecht. Taking a more general view, Pettigrew argued that the war created modes for how England would deal with the rest of the world in the following century, but also that the overall function of the peripheries in the war was to test the European coalitions and alliances.

In the first of two final commentaries Christoph Kampmann (Marburg) discussed the place of the War of the Spanish Succession in early modern history. Was the war a pre-modern or a modern war, a war of states or of dynasties, something *sui generis* or a classical *ancien régime* conflict? Kampmann agreed with other participants that the deficient state of research has to do with its in-between position. The war does not seem to be a beginning, an ending (if we do not want to emphasize the end of French hegemony), or a turning point in European history and thus does not lend itself easily to conventional historical narratives. It must also be said that there were different actors and interests at play (dynastic and religious on the one hand, political and commercial on the other) that stood for different states of development on the path to modernity. In addition, Kampmann stressed two particular perspectives of interpretation: the war as a process of professionalization, and the war as a catastrophe. As far as the first is concerned, he pointed to the successful mobilization of financial and information resources, alliance warfare, and the fact that, in contrast to previous wars, military leaders remained loyal throughout: Marlborough was not Wallenstein. The war, moreover, displayed new methods of far-reaching strategic planning and a new role for public opinion. Kampmann stressed that the war was also European (while the Thirty Years War had been a regional German one) and displayed the horrors of controlled warfare. Thus the experience of war led to a relatively stable peace afterwards.

Andreas Gestrich (London), who as director of the GHIL had welcomed all participants at the beginning, used his commentary to point to the importance of micro-historical perspectives and expressed doubts about abstract process terms so common in social and economic history. He further questioned the pre-modernity of the Habsburgs by comparison with the maritime powers, an aspect that deserves further research. Gestrich also opened up a number of

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avenues for future research, from the connection and interaction of dynastic power politics with new forms of trade policy (What influence did trade companies have on the formulation of peace treaties? Did the military and diplomatic actors have commercial or trade interests of their own?) to the role of interest groups in the formation of foreign policy. Finally, he also encouraged more research into the interconnectedness of colonial and European warfare, for instance, in the iconography of the war, and asked how thoroughly colonial fighting was part of the war for contemporary actors.

The points raised by Kampmann and Gestrich started off a broad final discussion. Participants remarked that the role of battles and violence seems to have been rather understated during the conference, that the importance of the colonial dimension needs further elaboration, and that issues such as the modernity and professionalization of diplomacy and warfare (compared with earlier and later conflicts) should be discussed in more detail. All this shows that the study of the war without the limitations of traditional military and diplomatic history is worthwhile. The publication of the contributions to the conference is planned and should provide an important stimulus for future research.

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