

Call for Papers

International Workshop on "Secret Councils: Comparative Perspectives on Monarchies and Republics, c. 1550–1800"

Location: University of Bern

Date: 20-21 June 2024

Organisers: Debora Heim, M.A., and Prof. Dr. Nadir Weber, SNSF Eccellenza Project "Republican Secrets: Silence, Memory, and Collective Rule in the Early Modern Period", Universities of Lucerne and Bern

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, so-called secret councils emerged in centres of political decision-making across Europe. Known as "privy council", "conseil secret", "geheime Kammer" or "consiglio segreto", they advised rulers, established networks of secret information and communication, and sent orders or received foreign ambassadors. Despite their omnipresence on the political scene of Baroque Europe, these political bodies have rarely been compared. Did they have more in common than their names, which reflect the political language of the "Age of Secrecy" (Daniel Jütte)? Do they represent a specific mode of government and political representation that shaped the political cultures of both monarchies and republics?

In this international workshop we will explore the history of secret councils in a European comparative perspective. We will use the topic of secret councils as a lens through which to analyse different modes of political communication, diverse cultures of decision-making, and the functions of governmental secrecy in the early modern period. We will be particularly interested in the similarities and differences between monarchical and non-monarchical political systems. Finally, we will critically assess the role of such institutions in broader historiographical narratives about the rise of absolute monarchies or the political public sphere. In particular, the workshop aims to provide a platform for PhD students and postdoctoral researchers to present and discuss preliminary findings and open questions from their ongoing research projects.

Both historical case studies and comparative or methodological contributions are welcome. Themes of interest for the workshop include, but are not limited to:

1. The evolution and role of secret councils
2. Concepts and practices of secrecy in secret councils
3. Their information and communication networks
4. Secret councillors and their families as political actors
5. Secret councils and political public sphere(s)
6. Secret councils in early modern political thought

We invite interested scholars of history and related disciplines (art history, literary history, history of political thought) to submit an abstract of approximately 500 words in English, German, or French outlining their proposed contribution, together with a short CV (1 page), to debora.heim@unilu.ch and nadir.weber@unibe.ch by 29 September 2023. Invited participants will be expected to submit a paper of 6-10 pages by the end of May 2024, which

will be read by all participants and discussed at the workshop. For the invited participants, travel, accommodation and meals during the workshop will be reimbursed thanks to funds from the Swiss National Science Foundation.

For further information and updates, please visit the project website: www.republican-secrets.ch. Should you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact us at debora.heim@unilu.ch.