

Megan K. Williams
Columbia University
mkw2001@columbia.edu

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"My Brother the Ambassador: Early Modern Diplomacy as a Family Affair"
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The concept of the Renaissance and the traditional narrative of diplomatic history were both developed and initially articulated in the second half of the nineteenth century, and both have been profoundly influenced by the period's distinctions between "public" and "private", "political" and "domestic", state, individual, and society. The study of diplomacy, in particular, has until recently been deeply invested in a state-centric view of politics which perceived politics as emerging from a nucleus of sovereign and hierarchically-defined power, exercised through formal, institutional structures, and characterized by ambitions towards rationality and progress. Moreover, influential Weberian and Marxist models posited the early modern period as the font of modernization, of self-conscious association, and of economic and administrative rationalization. In such interpretations, the family or faction lay outside of the purely political and administrative "public" world of diplomacy, which was best studied through formal and measurable diplomatic products, such as treaties, instructions, public audiences, diplomats' debriefings or *relazioni*, and prescriptive treatises on the "ideal" ambassador.

The heavy reliance of traditional diplomatic history on a handful of such classically-inflected treatises, my paper suggests, has tended to isolate and heroicize the

ambassador in order to better define his office, in ways which rarely reflect what I will demonstrate to be the familial context of early modern diplomatic recruitment or praxis. Even the celebrated and elaborately-governed elections of Venetian ambassadors, which early became the standard yardstick against which other polities' diplomatic services were measured, occurred in part to prevent the predominance of a single family or faction in the Republic's political life; and when examined closely, as my research in the Venetian archives has uncovered, often drew from a narrow circle of proven statesmen who involved their kin in their embassies in ways very similar to their foreign counterparts.

The recognition that princely government remained personal government for much of the early modern period has meant that the family or kin faction can no longer be seen as inimical to, or requiring to be segregated from, diplomacy. Focusing on the families that monopolized high political office and the ways in which they "balanced notions of duty and interest, public service, and private gain" offers valuable insight into how politics was understood, constructed, and practiced in the early modern era (Osborne, 2002; Frigo, 2000). In shifting attention from the formal structures of diplomacy to its constitutive personnel and their practices, a reexamination of early modern diplomacy through the lens of diplomats' familial networks reveals a much richer, more broadly-conceived notion of diplomacy and of "the political".

My paper will discuss the many advantages, as well as certain disadvantages which princes derived from the employment of diplomats embedded in familial networks. I will incorporate examples and cases drawn from my research into archivally-preserved and edited sixteenth-century diplomatic correspondence and related materials to demonstrate that far from being isolated agents, early modern diplomats across Europe

were embedded in and exploited complex, overlapping webs of family relationships.

With the changing role of the ambassador, the international legal ambiguity, challenging communications, frequently shifting alliances, and political turmoil of the early modern era, and particularly of the formative sixteenth century, I argue that these familial networks provided a versatile and effective method of prosecuting diplomacy and especially of maintaining political alliances over distance and time.