



## Signatures, Subscriptions, and Marks as Sources for Early Modern History

a workshop to be held on 26–27 September 2019  
in the Russell Room at Balliol College, Oxford

supported by  
*Stories of Survival: Recovering the Connected History of Eastern Christianity in the Early Modern World<sup>1</sup>*

### ***Thursday, 26 Sept. 2019***

- 9.00–9.30 Arrival and morning coffee
- 9.30–10.15 *Welcome and introduction / Tobias Graf (Oxford)*
- 10.15–11.00 *Richard Calis (Princeton)*
- 11.00–11.15 break
- 11.15–12.00 *Hannah Murphy (King's College London)*
- 12.00–12.45 *Henning Sievert (Heidelberg)*
- 12.45–14.00 Lunch
- 14.00–14.30 Coffee and tea
- 14.30–15.15 *Gauri Parasher (Heidelberg)*
- 15.15–16.00 *Christina Brauner (Tübingen)*
- 16.00–16.15 break
- 16.15–17.00 *Tracey Sowerby (Oxford)*
- 19.00 Dinner

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***Friday, 27 Sept. 2019***

9.15–9.30 Morning coffee

9.30–10.15 *Feras Krimsti (Oxford)*

10.15–11.00 *Alicja Borys (Masaryk University, Brno)*

11.00–11.15 break

11.15–12.00 *Robyn Radway (Central European University, Budapest)*

12.00–13.00 General discussion and planning the article

13.00–14.00 Lunch

14.00–15.00 Additional time for general discussion, if needed

## Thematic Outline

By and large, we take signatures and signature-like marks inscribed in written documents for granted. When scholars think about their functions, they usually restrict themselves to discussing them in the context of identifying individuals, for instance the author of a letter, or authenticating documents as the sultan's *tuğra* lends force to an Ottoman *ferman* or the signature under a cheque authorizes a financial transaction. It is telling that one of the most fundamental scholarly explorations of signatures, Béatrice Fraenkel's *La signature* (1992), devotes considerable space to discussing them as legal devices and 'the vestiges of a veritable system of signs of identity' (p. 7: *le vestige d'un véritable système de signes d'identité*).

Yet even signatures fulfilling this primary purpose often encode more than just the name and title, for instance the writer's handwriting proficiency, preference for and practice in certain scripts, as well as degree of literacy, as demonstrated, for example, by John-Paul Ghobrial's (2017) discussion of the signatures of three Eastern Christians under documents from seventeenth-century Spain. Moreover, the signatures of rulers, in particular, were often carefully crafted graphical devices and as often as not subscriptions added by scribes rather than genuinely autograph signatures. The French king, for example, had a 'secretary of the hand' who was especially trained to imitate the monarch's handwriting and sign documents on his behalf. The sultanic calligraphic seal, affixed by the *nışancı* and his secretaries, is only a particularly elaborate example of this phenomenon whose underlying principles are no less evident in the distinctive signature of Queen Elizabeth I of England (r. 1558–1603) and the Greek Orthodox patriarch of Constantinople Jeremias II (in office 1572–9, 1580–4, and 1587–95). The principles, considerations, and rules underlying this crafting are presently hardly investigated, let alone understood.

In fact, signatures and comparable marks could and did serve a multitude of purposes in different contexts. They could express devotion when they were added by readers and book owners to religious manuscripts or when they were scribbled or engraved on church walls (as in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre). They could also represent certain skills or claims to knowledge, in the process sometimes visually confirming claims about a particular person's geographical origins, as in the case of eighteenth-century 'Arabian princes' wandering Europe in search of alms. Even today, signatures under petitions are first and foremost a symbol of support. It is precisely for this reason that news reports generally focus on the numbers of signatures collected rather than the identities of the signatories, unless certain individuals are particularly noteworthy and lend prominence to the issue concerned.

The workshop will bring together a small group of selected researchers who, in one way or other, have had to pay close attention to signatures, subscriptions, and related marks and their many different functions to explore the potential of using them as historical sources in their own right. The meeting deliberately departs from standard models of papers followed by question-and-answer sessions or pre-circulated papers, to integrate impulse presentations on particular aspects and particular documents with intensive examination and discussion of source material from a wide range of early modern contexts, including a variety of different scripts and languages. The organizers hope that bringing together individuals with different linguistic expertise who, as historians, are grounded in different cultures of literacy will shed new perspectives on familiar material. Since the workshop is very much interested in understanding how such signatures and marks might have been perceived and might have functioned outside the original context of their creators (if not necessarily their context of creation), exposing participants to unfamiliar conventions is in itself an integral heuristic part of the exercise.

To facilitate the free exchange of ideas, there will be no expectation to publish proceedings and participants are expressly invited to bring along material which they are struggling with at the moment. However, all those interested are warmly invited to co-author a joint article for submission to the *History Workshop Journal* on signatures, subscriptions, and comparable marks and their potential as sources for the study of social, cultural, diplomatic, and legal history.

### ***Literature***

Bahl, Christopher and Stefan Hanß, introduction to idem (eds), *Scribal Practice: Global Cultures of Colophons, 1400–1700* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, in preparation).

Fraenkel, Béatrice, *La signature: Genèse d'un signe* (Bibliothèque des Histoires; Paris: Gallimard, 1992).

Ghobrial, John-Paul A., 'Migration from within and without: In the Footsteps of Eastern Christians in the Early Modern World', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 27 (2017): 153–73.

Groeber, Valentin, *Der Schein der Person: Steckbrief, Ausweis und Kontrolle im Europa des Mittelalters* (Munich: Beck, 2004). English translation: *Who are you? Identification, Deception, and Surveillance in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Zone Books, 2007).

Regourd, Anne (ed.), *The Trade in Papers Marked with Non-Latin Characters / Le commerce des papiers à marques à caractères non-latins* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

## Presenters

**Alicja Borys** worked in the manuscript department at Wrocław University Library and is currently a doctoral candidate in history at Masaryk University in Brno. Her dissertation investigates Habsburg embassies to the Ottoman court in the sixteenth century with a particular interest in the participation of Silesians in these missions. Her research and publication activities focus on the contacts between Silesians and the Habsburg court as well as the Ottoman Empire in the early modern period, the history of diplomacy, friendship albums (*alba amicorum*), and perceptions of the Orient. She is also editing several accounts of Silesian travellers' journeys to Constantinople between c.1550 and 1650. In both her doctoral research and her work for Wrocław University Library, she has engaged intensively not only with entries in friendship albums, but also more generally with signatures, marginalia, and ownership statements in early printed books, manuscripts, and friendship albums, especially those left by sixteenth-century travellers from Silesia to the Ottoman Empire.

**Christina Brauner** is Junior Professor of Late Medieval and Early Modern Global History at the University of Tübingen. She has previously worked at the universities of Münster and Bielefeld, as well as Humboldt University Berlin and spent some time as a research fellow in Princeton and London. Her research interests span the history of West Africa, diplomacy, religious polemics, and practices of advertising. Christina's interest in the workshop stems from her work on Afro-European diplomacy in early modern West Africa. In the context of her monograph *Kompanien, Könige und caboceers: Interkulturelle Diplomatie an Gold- und Sklavenküste, 17.-18. Jahrhundert* (Companies, kings, and caboceers: Cross-cultural diplomacy on the Gold and Slave Coasts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; Cologne, 2015), she has studied treaties concluded between African rulers and different European trading companies which often bear signatures and/or marks interpreted as signatures by both the European and the African parties. This gives rise to different lines of inquiry: What significance was attributed to such marks by the actors involved? What role did writing play in cross-cultural treaty-making in general? Who was included in the group of signatories and who was not? What does this tell us about European knowledge about African political institutions and practices as well as local power relations? But also: Which practices were involved in the making of treaties beyond writing?

**Richard Calis** is a PhD candidate at Princeton University. His dissertation is a microhistory of Martin Crusius (1526-1607) and his ethnographic interests in the Ottoman Greek world. An article stemming from this research recently appeared in *Renaissance Quarterly*. He became interested in signatures, seals, and other material characteristics of books, manuscripts, and letters because Crusius was interested in them: for decades Crusius filled his notebooks with detailed copies of the elaborate Greek signatures that adorned the letters that he received from his contacts in Istanbul. Other interests include Pope Gregory XIII and the Eastern Churches, the 18th-century librarian and scholar Ludovico Antonio Muratori (1672-1750), and the history of proof in the broadest sense.

**Tobias Graf** is a Research Associate in the ERC-funded research group *Stories of Survival: Recovering the Connected Histories of Eastern Christianity in the Early Modern World* directed by John-Paul Ghobrial at the University of Oxford. In the past, he has worked on Christian-European converts to Islam as well as Austrian-Habsburg intelligence on the Ottoman Empire in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. His current book-length project

explores the presence of Levantine Christians in eighteenth-century Germany. In this context, he has recently focused particularly on the so-called ‘princes of Mount Lebanon’ and the narratives constructed by these migrants, their supporters, and their critics. His interest in signatures and subscriptions stems from the appearance of Arabic names and titles in the petitions submitted by these ‘princes’ to courts and city councils all over the Holy Roman Empire.

**Feras Krimsti** is a Research Associate in the ERC-funded project *Stories of Survival* at the University of Oxford. In his research, Feras focuses on the Arabic provinces of the Ottoman Empire in the early modern and modern era. He works at the intersection of cultural, intellectual, and social history. Analysing ego documents often only available in manuscript form, like travelogues, eyewitness reports, letters, chronicles, and other texts, he engages with questions of identity formation and the complex processes in which social, religious, and economic configurations shape representations of Ottoman rule and notions of self and society. As part of his research, he has paid close attention to colophons, marginalia, and annotations, especially ownership notes, in Christian-Arabic manuscripts. This has enabled him to reconstruct the library of the eighteenth-century physician Ḥannā al-Ṭabīb from Aleppo and to shed new light on Melkite efforts during the seventeenth century to reform the liturgical and theological literary canon.

**Hannah Murphy** is the Senior Research Fellow on Renaissance Skin, a five-year Wellcome Trust funded research project at King's College London. Her work addresses intersections between the history of science, the history of subjectivity, and material and visual culture. Her first book, *A New Order of Medicine: The Rise of Physicians in Reformation Nuremberg*, examines the material practices embedded within medical texts. She is currently working on a project on calligraphy and writing manuals and their owners, across manuscript and print. She is interested in the relationship between authors' signatures in writing manuals and owners' names upon them, and the interaction between style and subjectivity they suggest.

**Gauri Parasher** is a PhD candidate in History at Heidelberg University. Her research explores the transcultural dimension of colonial law and justice in Pondicherry, the capital of French India in the eighteenth century. She is especially interested in the entanglements between French and Indian legal traditions which emerged as a result of the initiatives of the rulers and the ruled and through diverse processes of conflict and cooperation. One among these many transcultural legal entanglements produced by the Indo-French encounter were the petitions submitted on behalf of Pondicherry's Indian inhabitants which, while written in French, sported Tamil signatures. Although signed by different persons and for different reasons, many petitions also contained the signatures of the translators involved since, at least in theory, these were required for the document to be officially accepted. The workshop provides Gauri with an opportunity to explore the impact of the presence and absence of the translator's signature on the administration of justice, in the process shedding light on what these signatures themselves can tell us about legal procedure, colonial governance, and the relationships between colonial authorities and their subjects.

**Robyn Dora Radway** is an Assistant Professor at Central European University in Budapest. With a background in Ottoman studies, art history, and the history of the Habsburg empire, she has worked extensively on Ottoman–Habsburg diplomacy as well as Ottoman Hungary. Robyn's interest in signatures is very much fuelled by her interest in material and book culture as well as scribal practices. With funding from the CEU's Institute for Advanced Study and the Gerda Henkel Foundation, she is currently directing a research project on friendship albums (*alba amicorum*) kept by Habsburg subjects travelling to the Ottoman Empire. Through this source, she investigates the interactions of a displaced group of men and their networks to study

larger questions of identification practices in zones of layered sovereignty and deterritorialization as well as imperial belonging.

**Henning Sievert** is Professor of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at Heidelberg University. His wide-ranging research interests focus on the Ottoman Empire and encompass such themes as education, the history of the book, elite network formation, and political culture. For several years, he has been engaged in a project which examines political communication in the Ottoman Empire through the practice of petitioning the Ottoman authorities in the capital as well as the provinces. While signatures like the royal cypher (*tughra*) or a vizierial monogram (*pence*) formed integral parts of *fermans* and other official documents, signatures of supplicants and petitioners have not yet been studied seriously. These people's subscriptions were no signatures in the modern sense, to be sure, but may have been significant nevertheless in the petitioning process. The case studies to be contributed contrast individual and collective petitions from the early modern period (early eighteenth century) with similar cases from the modern period (c. 1900).

**Tracey Sowerby** is Director of the Europaeum Scholars Programme, an international doctoral training programme. Tracey passionately identifies herself as a historian of diplomacy whose research focuses on Tudor England. In two books currently under contract with Oxford University Press (*The Tudor Diplomatic Corps: A Cultural History* and *Tudor Diplomatic Culture*) she examines how English diplomatic practice, personnel, and theory adapted to three major sixteenth-century developments: the introduction of resident ambassadors, the English Reformation, and female rule. She was also a PI on the interdisciplinary research network 'Textual Ambassadors: Cultures of Diplomacy and Literary Writing in the Early Modern World' which was funded by the AHRC from 2012 until 2015 and has recently co-edited the collection *Cultures of Diplomacy and Literary Writing in the Early Modern World* (OUP, 2019) with Joanna Craigwood. Tracey has a particular interest in diplomatic ceremonial and the material aspects of diplomacy, of which diplomatic letter writing plays a key part. The signatures contained in such epistolary documents represent an important element of symbolic communication whose meaning is vitally affected by their physical placement in relation to other elements.