

Jan Hennings, Junior Research Fellow in Modern History, St John's College, Oxford

*Reading Between the Gestures: European Court Culture and Russian Diplomacy in the Early Modern Period*

This paper traces Russia's place in early modern international relations by examining diplomatic practice and the role of ritual in old regime diplomacy from c. 1645 to 1725. It moves beyond diplomatic history's focus on high politics and the nation-state as a political actor and puts the dynastic court and its distinct culture at the centre stage of all things political. *Reading Between the Gestures* focuses on the symbolic representations of social hierarchy, monarchical honour, and sovereign status, but related issues of diplomatic customs, negotiation practice and international law likewise figure prominently. It also discusses the ambiguity of contemporary sources which promoted Russia's outsider image as a 'rude and barbarous kingdom' but at the same time underscored the tsars' status as a member of the European ceremonial order. Finally, it debates the notion that a country's diplomatic culture emerged from exclusively national traditions and political ideologies, considering the effects and limits of continuous cultural exchange in diplomatic encounters.