

« *Cur si Circulus est non nominetur?* » The Habsburg Netherlands and the Holy Roman Empire after the Peace of Westphalia (1648-1664)

Aurélien DESTAIN (Université du Luxembourg, Université de Haute-Alsace)

The aim of this paper is to examine the links between the Habsburg Netherlands and the Holy Roman Empire (HRE), focusing on the diplomatic practices employed by representatives of the Burgundian Circle between the Peace of Westphalia and the rise of Louis XIV's wars of expansion.

As a member of the Burgundian Circle, created in 1512 and reinforced in 1548, the Habsburg Netherlands occupied a special position between the two branches of the Habsburgs and within the HRE. This complex relationship was further complicated by the Peace of Westphalia, which left the place of the Burgundian Circle within the Empire uncertain, particularly in the face of French expansionist policies. This precarious position forced diplomats to navigate between competing allegiances while ensuring their continued integration into imperial structures.

By analysing their participation in imperial diets, diplomatic correspondence, and juridical treatises, this study explores the diplomatic and legal strategies used to strengthen the presence of the Burgundian Circle within the HRE. In addition to high-level negotiations, state agents at both central and local levels played a crucial role. While the governor and his council in Brussels mediated between Madrid, Vienna, and the Empire, provincial actors and diplomats stationed in imperial cities worked to maintain the influence of the Burgundian Circle. Furthermore, the production of juridical treatises and pamphlets sought to legitimize the Circle's position within the Empire, invoking legal precedents to counter external threats and reinforce their claims.

By examining these negotiations and legal discourses, this paper contributes to a broader discussion on the fluid nature of imperial governance and the contested boundaries of sovereignty in late 17th-century Europe.