Power and its *Doppelgänger.*
James I and the Political Theology of Images
(The Peace Conference, Somerset House, 1604)

"Il ne suffit pas de mettre la peinture en rapport avec l'espace, il faut la mettre en rapport avec le temps, un temps propre à la peinture. Traiter un tableau comme s'il opérait déjà une synthèse du temps. Dire : un tableau implique une synthèse du temps. Dire : faites attention, le tableau ne concerne l'espace que parce que, d'abord, il incarne une synthèse du temps. Il y a une synthèse du temps proprement picturale et l'acte de peindre se définit par cette synthèse du temps",
Gilles Deleuze, *Sur la peinture. Cours Mars-Juin 1981*, (Paris, Éditions de Minuit, 2023), p. 36[1].

[Figure 1: Juan Pantoja de la Cruz (?), The Somerset House Conference,1604, oil on canvas, 205 cm x 268 cm, National Portrait Gallery, London, England, NPG 665]

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[1] 'It is not enough to put painting in relation with space, it must be put in relation with time, a time that is proper to painting. To treat a painting as if it were already effecting a synthesis of time. To say: a painting implies a synthesis of time. To say: pay attention, the painting concerns space only because, first, it embodies a synthesis of time. There is a properly pictorial synthesis of time, and the act of painting is defined by this synthesis of time.' Gilles Deleuze, *On Painting*, trans. by Daniel W. Smith (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2023), p. 24.

The large-scale painting, *The Somerset House Conference*, held at the National Portrait Gallery, London – of which a contemporary copy resides in the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich – offers crucial insight into the political and diplomatic work enacted by images amidst the confessional conflicts of the early modern period[2]. The work has long been the subject of scholarly debate, concerning both its attribution and the interpretation of its wider significance[3]. We propose a reading of the painting's "hors-champ" (that which lies beyond the frame) in order to disentangle its iconographic programme and thereby account for its visual discourse.

The work has long been the subject of scholarly debate, concerning both its attribution and the interpretation of its wider significance. It intervenes, more broadly, in a central question of Stuart historiography: was the accession of James I a moment of radical rupture, or one of profound continuity with the Elizabethan era? Whilst the king styled himself as *rex pacificus*, a peace-making monarch for a new age, the historian Pauline Croft has memorably argued that the 1604 Treaty of London is better understood as 'the last chapter of Elizabethan foreign policy'[4]. It is precisely to navigate this tension between historical event and its representation that our analysis will focus on the painting's 'hors-champ' (that which lies beyond the frame)[5]. This examination includes not only what is visible but also that which remains unseen, yet may be revealed through a network of ancillary texts – such as the treaty itself, its ornamentation, diplomatic papers, and the memoirs or political correspondence of the negotiators depicted. This approach will allow us to disentangle the work's iconographic programme and thereby account for its complex visual discourse[6].

The present inquiry will focus on three key aspects. First, we shall examine how the composition virtually reconstructs the negotiations by assembling figures who were never simultaneously present in the same space. Second, we will analyse how the political timeline is distended across the various temporalities embedded within the painting. Finally, we will decipher the work's complex allegory, particularly through the interplay of the subjects' gazes and the symbolism of the background tapestry.

Contemporary scholarship on diplomatic gestures and objects, alongside studies of magnificence as a form of political expression, has significantly enhanced our understanding of diplomatic practice in the early modern period. Situated at the intersection of cultural and political history, such studies highlight the importance of ceremony, material exchange, and

[2] See, for example: *Les guerres de Religion: Une histoire de l'Europe au XVIᵉ siècle*, ed. by Nicolas Le Roux (Paris: Passés/Composés, 2023); *The European Wars of Religion: An Interdisciplinary Reassessment of Sources, Interpretations, and Myths*, ed. by Wolfgang Palaver, Harald Rudolph, and Dietmar Regensburger (London: Routledge, 2015); Luise Schorn-Schütte, *Konfessionskriege und europäische Expansion: Europa 1500-1648* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2010); *Les affrontements religieux en Europe: Du début du XVIᵉ au milieu du XVIIᵉ siècle*, ed. by Valérie Castagnet, Olivier Christin, and Naïma Ghermani (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2008).

[3] Roy Strong, *Tudor and Jacobean Portraits*, 2 vols (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1969), I, pp. 351-53; Maria Kusche, *Juan Pantoja de la Cruz* (Madrid: Castalia, 1964); Maria Kusche, *Juan Pantoja de la Cruz y sus seguidores: Bartolomé González, Rodrigo de Villandrando y Antonio López Polanco* (Madrid: Fundación de Arte Hispánico, 2007); Gustav Ungerer, 'Juan Pantoja de la Cruz and the Circulation of Gifts between the English and Spanish Courts, 1604/5', *SEDERI: Yearbook of the Spanish and Portuguese Society for English Renaissance Studies*, 9 (1998), 59-78; and *The Sale of the Century: Artistic Relations between Spain and Great Britain, 1604-1655*, ed. by Jonathan Brown and John Elliott (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

[4] Pauline Croft, 'Rex Pacificus, Robert Cecil, and the 1604 Peace with Spain', in *The Accession of James I: Historical and Cultural Consequences*, ed. by Glenn Burgess, Rowland Wymer, and Jason Lawrence (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 140-54.

[5] William J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[6] Ralph Dekoninck, 'Image du désir et désir de l'image: Ou comment l'image parvient-elle à se nier', in *Paroles, textes et images: Formes et pouvoirs de l'imaginaire*, ed. by Jean-François Chassay and Bertrand Gervais, Collection Figura, 19 (Montréal: Université du Québec à Montréal, 2008), pp. 255-67.

bodily comportment in the forging of international relations. This historiographical renewal is particularly evident in three key areas, which provide a crucial framework for our analysis of *The Somerset House Conference*.

The first of these areas concerns the theatricality inherent in diplomatic interactions. Ambassadors, aptly described by Jean-Claude Waquet as 'human letters', employed their physical presence, gestures, and posture – as much as the objects they carried, such as credentials, sealed letters, and dispatches – to communicate subtle political messages. In the case of *The Somerset House Conference*, this theatricality is strikingly evident in the staging of both bodies and objects, particularly in the arrangement of the delegations around the negotiating table and the complex interplay of gazes between the participants.

A second axis of research focuses on diplomatic ceremonial. Recent studies have shown how gestures, postures, and the exchange of gifts were meticulously codified to reflect, and at times to challenge, political and social hierarchies. Ceremonial ought not to be understood as mere decorum; rather, it constitutes a political language in its own right, a means of expressing and negotiating power relations. The painting provides a particularly rich illustration of this, notably in its staging of the virtual meeting between the delegations and their relationship to sovereign authority, which is symbolised by an implied, out-of-frame throne.

A third line of research has emerged from a cultural approach to diplomacy, one that emphasises the significance of informal norms, social practices, and symbolic representations. This perspective allows for diplomacy to be understood as a holistic phenomenon, not limited to verbal or written exchanges but rather mobilising an entire repertoire of gestures, objects, and performances. The scholarship of Evelyn Welch on the material culture of diplomacy and of Timothy Hampton on its linguistic dimensions has underscored the importance of magnificence as an instrument of power and negotiation.

This recent historiography thus compels a focus on the performative and material dimensions of diplomatic representation in *The Somerset House Conference*. The objects depicted – the Anatolian carpet, the tapestry of David and Bathsheba, the credentials held by the negotiators – are not merely decorative elements but are, in their own right, actors in the diplomatic process. Likewise, the positioning of the bodies, the comportment of the figures, and the direction of their gazes all form part of a meticulously orchestrated choreography that reflects the power relations and negotiating strategies at play.

More broadly, these new approaches illuminate how the painting itself, as a diplomatic object presented by James I to Philip III, participates in the economy of gift and counter-gift characteristic of international relations in the early modern period. The very choice of subject matter – a scene of negotiation, rather than a more traditional depiction of a treaty's signing or ratification – testifies to an evolution in the representation of power, whereby the exposure of the *arcana imperii*, or secrets of the state, becomes an instrument of diplomacy.

The year 1604 marked a decisive juncture in the series of conflicts that had engulfed Western Europe since the collapse of religious unity between France, Spain (including the Spanish Netherlands), and the Kingdom of England[7]. This break corresponds to the peace treaty signed and sworn that year by King James I of England and King Philip III of Spain. The geopolitical confrontation between the two powers had been intense; by 1604, however, new sovereigns reigned in both England (since 1603) and Spain (since 1598), creating an opportunity for resolution[8]. *The Somerset House Conference* may be seen as representing the end of a cycle of violence and the dawn of new prosperity for the two maritime powers – a narrative the painting itself seeks to promote. The accession of James I to the English throne in 1603 initiated a turning

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[7] Charles Giry-Deloison, 'England and the Spanish Netherlands, 1600-1630', *Revue du Nord*, 90, nᵒ. 377 (2008), 671-86.

[8] Geoffrey Parker, *The Army of Flanders and the Spanish Road, 1567-1659: The Logistics of Spanish Victory and Defeat in the Low Countries' Wars*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

point in Anglo-Spanish relations. Unlike his predecessor, Queen Elizabeth I, who had pursued a staunchly anti-Spanish policy, James I styled himself as *rex pacificus*, a peacemaking king eager to restore stability to Europe[9]. Yet the success of this policy owed less to the new king than to the veteran politician Robert Cecil, who continued the delicate diplomatic work initiated long before Elizabeth's death[10]. Indeed, James I was conspicuous by his absence during the negotiations at Somerset House, preferring to spend most of the summer on a lengthy hunting tour of the midlands. He complained to Cecil that the Spanish Constable's delayed arrival was interrupting his sport, declaring with testy irony: 'the season of the year will no more stay upon a king than on a poor man, and I doubt if the Constable of Castile hath any power in his commission to stay the course of the sun'[11]. This royal detachment left Cecil in complete command, a fact acknowledged by the king himself. The day after the treaty was formally concluded, James immediately rewarded his Secretary of State with a new title, Viscount Cranborne, in recognition of his singular achievement[12]. Contemporaries were not mistaken; a pamphlet circulating in Calais in August 1604 attributed the peace not to the king, but to 'the reasons which the lord Cecil did use, to induce his Majesty'[13]. This desire for rapprochement with Spain, however, met with strong resistance within English society, where anti-Catholic and anti-Spanish sentiment, inherited from previous decades, persisted[14]. England's military involvement in the Netherlands had profound ramifications, and the ensuing Anglo-Spanish War (1585-1604) precipitated direct confrontation between the two states, culminating in the Spanish Armada of 1588. Although this attempted invasion failed, it initiated nearly continuous warfare that lasted until 1603 and fundamentally reshaped relations between England and the Spanish Netherlands[15]. Commercially, the conflict accentuated Antwerp's decline as the primary hub of Anglo-Flemish trade[16]. English merchants, who had already begun redirecting their activities to ports such as Hamburg, accelerated their withdrawal from the Spanish

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[9] Joe Doelman, *King James I and the Religious Culture of England* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2000), pp. 73-101; R. Malcom Smuts, *Political Culture, the State, and the Problem of Religious War in Britain and Ireland, 1578-1625* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), pp. 446-88; Diana Newton, *The Making of the Jacobean Regime: James VI and I and the Government of England, 1603-1605* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2005).

[10] Croft, 'Rex Pacificus', p. 140.

[11] King James I to Robert Cecil, quoted in Croft, 'Rex Pacificus', p. 150.

[12] Croft, 'Rex Pacificus', p. 151.

[13] Croft, 'Rex Pacificus', p. 151.

[14] Paul C. Allen, 'The Policy of Rapprochement', in *Philip III and the Pax Hispanica, 1598-1621: The Failure of Grand Strategy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 115-40; Jason C. White, 'Militant Protestants: British Identity in the Jacobean Period, 1603-1625', *History*, 94 (2009), 154-75; Thomas Cogswell, *The Blessed Revolution: English Politics and the Coming of War, 1621-1624* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); George R. Waggoner, 'An Elizabethan Attitude Toward War and Peace', *Philological Quarterly*, 33 (1954), 20-33; R. B. Manning, 'The Jacobean Peace: The Irenic Policy of James VI and I and its Legacy', *Quidditas*, 39 (2018), 147-89.

[15] Richard B. Wernham, *The Return of the Armadas: The Last Years of the Elizabethan War with Spain, 1595-1603* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Jérémie Ferrer-Bartomeu, 'Pour une histoire rapprochée de l'État: La représentation de l'écrit politique à la Renaissance (Castille-Angleterre, 1590-1604)', *Annales de l'Est*, 70 (2022), 141-60; Joseph Cuvelier, 'Les préliminaires du Traité de Londres (29 août 1604)', *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, 2 (1923), 485-508; *España y las 17 provincias de los Países Bajos: Una revisión historiográfica (XVI-XVIII)*, ed. by Ana Crespo Solana and Manuel Herrero Sánchez, 2 vols (Córdoba: Universidad de Córdoba, 2002); Catherine Thomas, 'Les "ambassades" flamandes dans les cours européennes (1598-1621): une reconnaissance de souveraineté? Le cas des négociations du traité de Londres de 1604', *Revue du Nord*, 90, no. 377 (2008), 687-700.

[16] Pauline Croft, 'Trading with the Enemy, 1585-1604', *The Historical Journal*, 32 (1989), 281-302; Monique Weis, 'Commercer avec les "hérétiques": Les relations économiques entre les Pays-Bas espagnols et l'Angleterre élisabéthaine', *Bulletin de la Société royale d'histoire du protestantisme belge*, 133 (2014), 1-16; Alexandra Gajda, 'War, Peace and Commerce and the Treaty of London (1604)', *Historical Research*, 96 (2023), 459-72; Edmond Smith, *Merchants: The Community That Shaped England's Trade and Empire, 1550-1650* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021); Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London's Overseas Traders, 1550-1653* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

Netherlands. Politically, English intervention prolonged and internationalised the conflict, strengthening the position of the rebellious provinces that would form the Dutch Republic. The Netherlands was consequently divided between an independent, predominantly Protestant north allied with England, and a southern territory that remained under Spanish rule and was largely Catholic. This division had lasting consequences, as England developed close ties with the Dutch Republic while its relations with the Spanish Netherlands remained tense.

The death of Elizabeth I and the accession of James I in 1603 marked a further turning point. As a peacemaker, James I prioritised improving his kingdom's relations with Spain. The resulting 1604 treaty established a precarious peace, yet it did not resolve all latent conflicts between the Spanish, Flemish, Dutch, and English. It was, however, decisive on one specific point: the restoration of maritime security for commerce on the seas and in ports[17]. This issue was debated over the eighteen negotiating conferences that preceded the treaty's ratification[18]. The hypothesis of this study is that the painting depicts this central achievement while simultaneously composing a complex relationship with political time (the conference, the context of trade, the long sixteenth century of warfare) and with geopolitical space (political centres, imperial peripheries, and the links between absent sovereigns and their present commissioners)[19]. Ultimately, the treaty reorganised the fronts of conflict in the Spanish Netherlands against the rising power of the Dutch Republic, which grew in strength until the Twelve Years' Truce of 1609. The early seventeenth century also witnessed a gradual decline in the Spanish monarchy's arbitral role in Europe, as its focus shifted towards a transatlantic imperial perspective[20].

This network of texts forms both the substrate and the dense discursive weave of the painting. The pictorial margins are accentuated by a powerful threshold effect[21]. Here, the negotiators direct their gaze towards an unseen dais located above them. The viewer is positioned on this platform alongside the two eminent spectators of this diplomatic gift from James I to Philip III (of which the English sovereign kept a copy). The confrontation between the two sets of negotiators is thus mirrored by the conceptual juxtaposition of the sovereigns and their commissioners. The Kings of England and Spain are implicitly positioned in the upper part of the room, on a dais beneath a canopy[22]. The painting's broader theme, therefore, gestures towards the *arcana imperii* – the secrets of state and the confidential nature of negotiation.

[17] Alexandra Gajda, 'War, Peace and Commerce and the Treaty of London (1604)', *Historical Research*, 96 (2023), 459-72; Guillaume Calafat, *Une mer jalousée: Contribution à l'histoire de la souveraineté (Méditerranée, XVIIᵉ siècle)* (Paris: Seuil, 2019).

[18] Bernardo José García García, *La Pax Hispánica: Política exterior del Duque de Lerma* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996), pp. 46-47.

[19] *Las distancias en el gobierno de los imperios ibéricos: Concepciones, experiencias y vínculos*, ed. by Guillaume Gaudin and Roberta Stumpf, Collection de la Casa de Velázquez, 190 (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2022); Jérémie Ferrer-Bartomeu, *L'État à la lettre: Écrit politique et société administrative en France durant les guerres de religion (vers 1560-vers 1620)* (Ceyzérieu: Champ Vallon, 2022); Jérémie Ferrer-Bartomeu, 'Quand le pouvoir vint à l'écrit: Les offices des secrétaires d'État de Villeroy à Richelieu', *Genèses*, 126 (2022), 11-33.

[20] José Javier Ruiz Ibáñez, 'Les acteurs de l'hégémonie hispanique, du monde à la péninsule Ibérique', *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 69 (2014), 927-54; *Polycentric Monarchies: How Did Early Modern Spain and Portugal Achieve and Maintain a Global Hegemony?*, ed. by Pedro Cardim and others (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2012); Jean-Paul Zúñiga, 'L'histoire impériale à l'heure de l'histoire globale: Une perspective atlantique', *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine*, 54 (2007), 54-68; Jean-Paul Zúñiga, *Constellations d'Empire* (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2023).

[21] To complete the present study, we plan to discuss in a future contribution the ornamentation of the two treaties sworn by James I in 1604 and Philip III in 1605. The references for these documents are cited in Brown and Elliott, *The Sale of the Century*, p. 154, and are as follows:
Ratification by James I of the Treaty of Peace, 1604 (parchment, 855 x 794 mm), Archivo General de Simancas, Patronato Real, 55-38; and *Ratification by Philip III of the Treaty of Peace*, 1604 (illuminated bound volume, 460 x 570 mm), The National Archives, Kew, E 30/1705.

[22] Strong, *Tudor and Jacobean portraits*, I, p. 353.

These secrets are made momentarily visible, as if in a frozen tableau, yet this legibility is immediately complicated. The image seems almost to deny its own transparency through the visual tension between its two dominant textiles: the central Anatolian carpet and the narrative tapestry hanging in the left margin.

We are therefore in the presence of a "hyperimage", a visual apparatus that stages the fundamental oxymoron of the "*arcana* spectacle"[23]. In this context, the concept refers to a pictorial device that accrues multiple levels of reading and meaning, thereby creating a dense network of references and symbols. This superimposition manifests itself both spatially – through the juxtaposition of delegations and decorative elements – and temporally, through the various historical moments the painting evokes.

Virtual recreation of potential worlds

The analysis of both the scene and the object is beset by significant problems, ranging from the misidentification of the artist and faulty inscriptions to questions surrounding the work's provenance and purpose, including that of its Greenwich copy . At first glance, the composition appears straightforward: a scene that would become a classic in the seventeenth-century representation of peace[24]. Two delegations face one another across a table, with several figures looking out towards the viewer. The English are positioned on the right, facing the Hispano-Flemish delegation on the left[25] . The table is draped with an Anatolian carpet (a *kilim*), upon which a writing desk placed before the English Secretary of State displays the outcome of the negotiations: the Treaty of London itself[26]. The room's decoration is sober; a window stands open on the Hispano-Flemish side, behind which hangs a large tapestry. Yet the apparent simplicity of the scene at Somerset House is deceptive. It is necessary, therefore, to 'unfold' the image, which concatenates multiple temporalities within the folds of the vast political spaces over which the two great powers of the early seventeenth-century extended their imperial ambitions.

The painting captures, as if in a single moment, the long months of negotiation conducted between the distant power centres of Madrid, Brussels, and London. The envoys depicted were, in reality, never assembled in this room at the same time[27]. Diplomatic processes of the period typically involved other elements, such as private consultations, bilateral talks, and a functional specialisation of councils between service aristocrats and jurists. The painting erases the vast administrative machinery – the secretaries, clerks, and scribes – that constituted the daily reality of government business[28]? Their conspicuous absence from this idealised scene demands explanation. Furthermore, the protracted nature of the negotiations was not due solely to the

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[23] Felix Thürlemann, *More than One Picture: An Art History of the Hyperimage*, trans. by Elizabeth Tucker (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2019).

[24] *Repräsentationen des Friedens im vormodernen Europa*, ed. by Henning P. Jürgens (Bonn: Bonn University Press, 2021).

[25] Catherine Thomas, *Le personnel du Conseil privé des Pays-Bas des archiducs Albert et Isabelle à la mort de Charles II (1598-1700): Dictionnaire prosopographique* (Brussels: Archives et bibliothèques de Belgique, 2005); Catherine Thomas, *Le visage humain de l'administration: Les grands commis du gouvernement central des Pays-Bas espagnols, 1598-1700* (Brussels: Académie royale de Belgique, 2014).

[26] Gerald MacLean, 'Ottoman Things in Early-Modern England', in *Geographies of Contact: The Foreign, the Familiar and the Question of the Other*, ed. by Caroline Lehni, Claire McKeown, and Cédric Ploix-Maes (Strasbourg: Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, 2017), pp. 92-107; Gerald MacLean, 'Performing East and Captive Agency', in *Looking East: English Writing and the Ottoman Empire before 1800* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 97-119.

[27] Ferrer-Bartomeu, 'Pour une histoire rapprochée de l'État', pp. 151-52.

[28] On the study of the secretariat, see: Ferrer-Bartomeu, *L'État à la lettre*, p. 44; Damien Fontvieille, 'Les commis des secrétaires d'État en France à la Renaissance: Entre domesticité et structuration d'une administration', *Revue d'histoire moderne & contemporaine*, 70 (2023), 5-28.

material difficulty of communicating between the principals (the sovereigns and the Archdukes) and their commissioners (the composite Hispano-Flemish and the English delegations). Rather, it is time itself – as a strategic, political, and diplomatic resource – that the painting manifests[29]. The internal interests of the Spanish-Flemish delegation, for instance, were not strictly aligned between Philip III's commissioners and those of the Archdukes[30]. Philip III sought to discover English aims in order to negotiate the most advantageous peace possible. To this end, he instructed his ambassador, Juan de Tassis, to make numerous stopovers and to wait in Brussels before embarking for London. The Venetian ambassador, Giovanni Scaramelli, reported on a meeting between James I and one of the Archdukes' chief negotiators, the Count of Arenberg, concerning Ambassador de Tassis's delay:

> Le retard de l'arrivée de Taxis est dû à des ordres formels du roi d'Espagne. Il doit attendre à Bruxelles jusqu'à ce que Sa Majesté puisse prendre une décision d'après les informations que fournira le comte d'Arenberg, de manière à ne manquer d'aucun des avantages résultant des délibérations et de l'attention employées par les Espagnols dans toutes leurs affaires. [31]

Tassis's delay aroused suspicion at the English court regarding the King of Spain's true intentions. This situation reveals a crucial aspect of the negotiations: the strategic use of forced delays. Such tactics served not only to temporise and discern an adversary's position but also to await formal orders and written authorization – an authority with which Arenberg had not yet been vested. The English Privy Council, for its part, refused to negotiate the full treaty solely with the Flemish envoys, whom they rightly considered subordinate to Spain, and awaited the arrival of a Spanish minister plenipotentiary: in this case, Juan de Tassis[32].

Furthermore, the diplomatic competence of the initial envoys, led by the Count of Arenberg, proved insufficient for conducting the dialogue. By his own admission, Arenberg was not adequately qualified to comprehend the terms of the debate, even at a linguistic level. He therefore expressly requested that Archduke Albert send President Richardot, the head of their Privy Council, to assist him:

> *Letter from the Prince-Count of Arenberg to Archduke Albert, written from Steyn on August 8, 1603 (original in French with translation).*
>
> Jusques à ici j'ay faict ce que j'ay peu, mais plus avant je confesse à Votre Altesse, encores que la volonté et zèle au service d'icelle ne peult estre plus grand, entrant plus avant en matière je ne me vouldrais fyer à moi mesmes seul, car je promectz à Votre Altesse qu'ils estoient cest après disner à trois discourant et me retournant, tantost d'une façon, tantost d'une aultre, leurs discours que j'y perdis quasy le Nord, car tantost l'ung parloit françois, l'aultre italien et le troisième latin, à quoy je rendis les aboy[33].

[29] Deleuze, *Sur la peinture*, p. 36.

[30] Thomas, 'Les "ambassades" flamandes', pp. 694-95.

[31] Charles, Prince-Count of Arenberg, to Archduke Albert, 8 August 1603, cited in Joseph Cuvelier, 'Les préliminaires du Traité de Londres (29 août 1604)', *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, 2 (1923), 279-304 (p. 294).

[32] Thomas, 'Les "ambassades" flamandes', p. 696; Jean-Claude Waquet, *Temps et diplomatie dans l'Europe moderne (XVIe- XVIIIe siècle)* (Geneva: Droz, 2024).

[33] Henri Lonchay and Joseph Cuvelier (eds.), "Pièce 359", *Correspondance de la cour d'Espagne sur les affaires des Pays-Bas au XVIIe siècle,* t. 1, Brussels, Kiessling, 1923, p. 169.

The Flemish members of the delegation were driven by interests stemming from the war with the rebellious Protestant provinces to their north. They sought a swift peace and the rapid restoration of security on the seas and in the harbours, which was essential for their trade-based economy[34] . These misaligned interests between the Spanish and the Flemish manifested primarily as a competing relationship with time[35] . It is precisely this disjunction of interests that the painting, commissioned by James I, illustrates. The consequence of this temporal competition is visually compressed within the composition: the successive arrival times of the various representatives are collapsed, showing them virtually assembled in the same room. More significantly, the artist conveys the potential of this meeting through the direct visual dialogue between two key delegates: on the left, Alessandro Robida, Senator of Milan, and on the right, Charles Blount, Master-General of the Ordnance[36]. This construction of a virtual meeting is one of the first analytical problems the painting poses.

The second problem is more complex, as it concerns the work's material composition: the signature of the painter Juan Pantoja de la Cruz (Court Painter to Philip III), and the inscribed date of 1594 . The fiercest scholarly controversy surrounding the painting has centred on its attribution, with arguments made for either Pantoja de la Cruz or an anonymous Flemish master. This debate appears to have subsided following the research of Brown and Elliott, whose conclusions are adhered to here. The painting is indeed inspired by Flemish styles and promotes the new European commercial and maritime order secured by the English in their negotiations. Beyond the art-historical arguments, several details support this reading: the greater space afforded to the English delegation, suggesting their dominant role; the writing tablet placed before the English Secretary of State, Robert Cecil; and the allegorical motif of duplicity expressed through the tapestry positioned behind the Hispano-Flemish delegation, a point to which we shall return.

The signature of Pantoja de la Cruz and the date 1594 – ten years prior to the treaty – raise fundamental questions about the image's overall economy[37]. The hypothesis of a simple *lapsus calami*, suggesting the Spanish painter falsely attributed the work to himself, is not, by itself, a convincing explanation[38]. The answer may lie elsewhere, specifically in a detail of the tapestry depicting the story of David and Bathsheba, positioned behind the Hispano-Flemish envoys[39]. The date 1560 appears in the tapestry's border and is referenced in the painting's own

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[34] Weis, 'Commercer avec les "hérétiques"'; Julien Régibeau, 'Aux marges du congrès, un congrès à la marge: Les pratiques de négociation franco-espagnoles en dehors de la Westphalie (1648-1650)', *XVIIe siècle*, 298 (2023), 127-55.

[35] Deleuze, *Sur la peinture*, p. 36; see also the introduction by Alexander Nagel and Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2010).

[36] Manuel Rivero Rodríguez, 'A Peace in Context: Spanish Change in Italian Affairs', in *Stuart Marriage Diplomacy: Dynastic Politics in Their European Context, 1604-1630*, ed. by Valentina Caldari and Sara J. Wolfson (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2018), pp. 243-58; Victor Brants, 'Un ministre belge au *XVIIe* siècle: Jean Richardot, chef-président du Conseil privé des Pays-Bas, 1597-1609', *Bulletin de la Commission royale d'Histoire*, 8 (1901), 831-914; *Secretaries and Statecraft in the Early Modern World*, ed. by Paul M. Dover (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

[37] Roy Strong, *Tudor and Jacobean Portraits*, 2 vols (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1969), I, pp. 352-53.

[38] Brown and Elliott, *The Sale of the Century*, p. 145.

[39] For the study of this tapestry, we would like to express our deep gratitude to Professors Guy Delmarcel (KU Leuven) and Didier Martens (Université Libre de Bruxelles), for taking the time to extensively search Henri VIII's collections for any mention of such a tapestry. At this stage, it appears that the tapestry does not exist in any inventory and that it is itself a virtual creation by the painter, or even a quotation from the tapestry commissioned by Margaret of Austria and acquired by the Tudor sovereign Henry VIII in 1528. The tapestry *L'Histoire de David et Bethsabée*, 5th piece, 1510-1515, Brussels, is conserved at the Musée national de la Renaissance, Écouen, France, inventory n^o E.Cl.1615.

marginalia. We hypothesise that this marginal inscription holds the primary key to the painting's interpretation.

The analysis of the 'hors-champ' must therefore proceed on several fronts. It requires studying not only the elements in the margins but also the conspicuous centrality of the carpet-draped table. Complementing this, the textual apparatus surrounding the negotiations – the treaties, dispatches, and memoirs – must also be considered, as this network of sources itself complicates any straightforward reading of the painting's visual boundaries[40].

The painting's final "hors-champ" consists of what is unseen yet strongly implied: the prominence given to the concept of delegation over that of direct representation. The emphasis on the delegates' written powers, held visibly in their hands, paradoxically draws attention back to the absent sovereigns whose authority they embody. This focus on mediated authority ultimately serves to exalt the majesty of the principals – primarily that of the patron, James I, but also that of Philip III [41].

Stretching political time

While *The Somerset House Conference* maintains a singular relationship to the time of the event it depicts – the months of negotiations ending decades of war – it also marks the advent of a radical novelty, even an exceptional strangeness, in the representation of a diplomatic conference[42]. From a reticular perspective, the enclosed room of the negotiation is inscribed within multiple spaces beyond its walls.

This network is first materialised by the state papers – or, more accurately, the written powers – held by two figures: Henry Howard, Earl of Northampton, and Jean Richardot, President of the Archdukes' Privy Council. This emphasis on written authority also establishes a complex relationship with political time. The instructions issued to the envoys are materialised through the pictorial device of the bond of subjection between them and their sovereigns. A third, and perhaps ultimate, form of political writing is also present: the writing box placed before the powerful English Secretary of State, Robert Cecil, who appears to be setting down the terms of the peace.

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[40] Numerous accounts of the negotiations, right through to the diplomacy of the treaty itself, can be found in Robert Cecil's papers. See : *Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Most Hon. the Marquis of Salisbury, &c. &c. &c. preserved at Hatfield House, Hertfordshire*, Part XVI, ed. by M. S. Giuseppi (London: HMSO, 1933); Thomas Edmondes, 'A Journal of the Conference betwixt his Majesties Comissioners and the Commissioners of the King of Spaine and the Arche Dukes of Austria', The National Archives of the UK, SP 103/64, fols 141r-193v; Katalin Eperjesi, *English-Transylvanian Contacts in the 17th Century: The Early Stuarts and Transylvania during the Thirty Years' War* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2008); Lisa Jardine and Jerry Brotton, *Global Interests: Renaissance Art Between East and West* (London: Reaktion Books, 2000); John C. Appleby, 'War, Politics, and Colonization, 1558-1625', in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. I: *The Origins of Empire*, ed. by Nicholas Canny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 55-78.

[41] Guillaume Gaudin and Manuel Rivero Rodríguez, *"Que aya virrey en aquel reyno": Vencer la distancia en el imperio español* (Madrid: Polifemo, 2020); *À la place du roi: Vice-rois, gouverneurs et ambassadeurs dans les monarchies française et espagnole (XVIe-XVIIe siècles)*, ed. by Daniel Aznar, Guillaume Hanotin, and Niels F. May (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2015); *L'invention de la diplomatie: Moyen Âge-Temps modernes*, ed. by Lucien Bély (Paris: PUF, 1998); *De l'ambassadeur: Les écrits relatifs à l'ambassadeur et à l'art de négocier du Moyen Âge au début du XIXe siècle*, ed. by Stefano Andretta, Stéphane Péquignot, and Jean-Claude Waquet (Rome: École française de Rome, 2015); Lucien Bély, *L'art de la paix en Europe: Naissance de la diplomatie moderne, XVIe-XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: PUF, 2007); Dante Fedele, *Naissance de la diplomatie moderne (XIIIe- XVIIe siècles): L'ambassadeur au croisement du droit, de l'éthique et de la politique* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2017); John Watkins, 'Toward a New Diplomatic History of Medieval and Early Modern Europe', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 38 (2008), 1-14.

[42] On the representation of the administration in 16th-17th century iconography, see: Ferrer-Bartomeu, 'La figure du ministre ou le troisième corps du roi: Contribution à l'histoire des représentations et des matérialités politiques (Europe, première modernité)', *La Part de l'Œil*, 39 (2025), pp. 235-49.

This depiction, however, is a fiction. It is inconceivable that Cecil himself transcribed the complex agreement. High-ranking administrators of this period, while prolific writers of drafts and secret correspondence, relied on dictation to an army of scribes, clerks, translators, and interpreters[43]. Yet here, in this space depicting the *arcana imperii*, not one of these essential functionaries disturbs the composition's impeccable symmetry. All that remains of the state are its secrets, as its administrative personnel are effaced in favour of its symbolic sovereignty. This erasure is insightfully commented upon in Bryan Organ's portrait of Sir Roy Strong, where the vast machinery of state power fades behind the serene faces of the peace commissioners[44].

The placement of the writing desk before Cecil offers further evidence for the painter's identity as a Fleming in English service rather than a Spanish court painter. A temporal threshold effect is added to the spatial one: the viewer arrives, as it were, after the negotiations have concluded. The sheet of paper on the desk is already filled with fine, dense script, suggesting the treaty's terms are firmly established. This configuration transforms our understanding of the scene. The secret of the negotiations is unveiled only for a moment, and only once it has been secured in writing.

Autopsy of an allegory

While the painting's central device appears simple – an irenic meeting of former enemies seated at a negotiating table – its function is profound. The image visually reorganises the tumult of reality, seeking to calm, pacify, and impose order upon the political sphere[45]. The apparent symmetry of the diplomatic delegations is, however, disrupted by several key details that could be read as harbingers of the difficulties in maintaining peace. The half-open window, for instance, should not be misconstrued as a break in this symmetry; on the contrary, it traditionally signifies good fortune and the opportunity (the opening) to seal a lasting peace and its expected commercial benefits[46].

In addition to the two envoys who face one another, the other figures scrutinise the intended viewers of the painting: the two sovereigns themselves. This conceptual confrontation between the diplomatic administration and sovereign power is a notable visual strategy, reminiscent of Horst Bredekamp's analysis of the political iconography of Thomas Hobbes[47]. Yet a final element singularly disturbs the composition's balance: the narrative scene unfolding in the tapestry is no less unsettling than this conceptual face-to-face encounter between the sovereigns and their envoys. The tapestry thus introduces another critical face-to-face encounter: that between King David and his loyal servant, Uriah the Hittite. By means of a sealed letter – a chilling echo of the written powers held by Richardot and Howard – David sends Uriah to certain death in battle in order to take his wife, Bathsheba[48]. This tapestry, much like the diplomatic gathering itself, is a fabrication; no such textile is recorded in English collections. However, one of James I's predecessors, Henry VIII, famously identified with King

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[43] Ferrer-Bartomeu, *L'État à la lettre*; Damien Fontvieille, *Le clan Bochetel: Au service de la couronne de France, XVᵉ-XVIIᵉ siècle* (Paris: École nationale des chartes, 2022).

[44] Bryan Organ, *Sir Roy Strong*, oil on canvas, 1971, National Portrait Gallery, London, NPG 5289.

[45] Jennifer Fletcher, 'Substitution and Diplomacy', in *Renaissance Faces: Van Eyck to Titian*, ed. by Lorne Campbell and Luke Syson (London: National Gallery Company, 2008), pp. 46-63; Lucien Bély, 'Souveraineté et souverains: La question du cérémonial dans les relations internationales à l'époque moderne', *Annuaire-bulletin de la Société de l'histoire de France* (1993), 27-43.

[46] Jane Hayward, 'Painted Windows', *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, 30 (1971), 98-101.

[47] Horst Bredekamp, *Thomas Hobbes, Visuelle Strategien: Der Leviathan, Urbild des modernen Staates, Werkillustrationen und Portraits* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1999).

[48] *Reformation Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament*, IV: *1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles*, ed. by Derek Cooper and Martin J. Lohrmann (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), p. 378

David and commissioned a cycle of tapestries depicting his life[49]. Here, the painting's engagement with time becomes crucial, promoting a continuity between the Tudor and Stuart dynasties. This theme is reinforced by the concept of the functional pair that structures the entire image: two delegations, two kings, two copies of the painting, and the two central figures in the tapestry. The painting thus becomes a reflection on power and its double, which lies in its representation, or even its figuration. Beyond this hypothesis, James I's conception of sovereignty and the perfect monarchy finds expression in the *naos* of the state's *arcana*.

The tapestry prompts several critical questions. What period does it commemorate? In what political context does it inscribe its gesture? Furthermore, to adopt the analysis of Giorgio Agamben, following Erich Auerbach, should one read the scene of David and Uriah the Hittite as an allegory of duplicity, or as its figure[50]? Is it, that is to say, a concrete anamnesis of the betrayal suffered by English merchants in Antwerp, or is it the prophetic fulfilment of the peace treaty's eventual failure? A return to the parable's strictest meaning is instructive: Uriah is a faithful servant, as evidenced by a posture typical of Renaissance iconography. Kneeling, his hands often clasped to his chest, he is about to receive the fatal order enclosed in the king's letter, which is intended for an absent agent, Joab. In the Book of Samuel, David is the antitype *par excellence*; in the Gospel of Luke, Christ is called the Son of David, a literal relation through Joseph. Power and its double thus find a new mode of expression here, in a complex and masterful reflection where time unites the antitype (the Tudor dynasty in the figure of Henry VIII) with its perfected fulfilment (the Stuart dynasty, with James I as its first monarch), thereby inaugurating a sacred millennium through this just peace.

A close examination of this image-within-an-image reveals that the tapestry is pointedly placed behind the Spanish-Flemish delegation, in a space seemingly not intended for it. The composition of the scene thus acquires a different meaning, one less irenic and more fraught with peril. Peace has not yet been sworn by the two kings; and while the treaty – or at least its "minute" – is fixed on the sheet before Robert Cecil, several stages remain before truce becomes peace. Moreover, the means by which David deceives his servant is significant: a secret missive, a sealed letter that instructs not Uriah but his commander, Joab, to place him on the front line of battle. This reading of the tapestry as an allegory of duplicity, positioned behind the Hispano-Flemish, strongly suggests that the painting is not a work by Philip III's court painter, but a commission by James I from a renowned Flemish artist at the English court, most probably John de Critz the Elder, whose portraits of Thomas Sackville and Robert Cecil are very similar[51]. The tapestry's precise position, however, provokes a fascinating outcome: the English envoys are thus positioned to see, overlooking the Spanish delegation, the fateful warning – this coded reflection on power and the perfect monarchy. In this way, the margin assigns a biblical type to the Spanish-Flemish while engaging in a cautionary dialogue primarily with the English deputies, for whom the message is undoubtedly intended.

The date of 1560, inscribed on the margin of the King David tapestry, requires explanation. More precisely, this date refers to the commercial treaty that formed the basis of

[49] Pamela Tudor-Craig, 'Henry VIII and King David', in *Early Tudor England: Proceedings of the 1987 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. by Daniel Williams (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1989), pp. 183-205; Ellen Vanderstichelen, 'King David as a Model for Kingship in the English Renaissance' (unpublished master's thesis, Ghent University, 2018).

[50] Erich Auerbach, 'Figura', in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 11-76; Giorgio Agamben, *Lo Spirito e la Lettera: Sull'interpretazione delle Scritture* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2024).

[51] Jonathan Brown and John Elliott, *The Sale of the Century: Artistic Relations between Spain and Great Britain, 1604-1655* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); John De Critz the Elder, *Robert Cecil, 1st Earl of Salisbury*, oil on panel, 1602, National Portrait Gallery, London, NPG 107; John de Critz the Elder (attrib.), *Thomas Sackville, 1st Earl of Dorset, being presented with Petitions by his Secretary*, oil on canvas, c. 1605-1610, Sissinghurst Castle Garden, Kent, NT 802395.

the London Merchant Adventurers' monopoly on the export of cloth to the Netherlands and northern Germany. The 1560 agreements were, in fact, a complex set of tripartite arrangements, as they also involved the Hanseatic League; the Hanseatic Guild in London had received extensive privileges for the export of English cloth, alongside those acquired by the Merchant Adventurers. According to Wolf-Rüdiger Baumann's analysis, this configuration could be understood as a model for the expansion of commerce. This, undoubtedly, provides the final explanation for what was truly at stake during the London Peace Conference. The alternative hypothesis, which posits a revival of peace treaties between Scotland and England, is unconvincing. Such an interpretation would necessitate involving the Kingdom of France in the negotiations, a move that appears inconsistent with the primary goals of the new Stuart king. Given that one of the thorniest points of the negotiations concerned maritime trade, the evidence suggests that the 1560 date refers instead to the Company of Merchant Adventurers' acquisition of a monopoly on the export of cloth from Flanders[52]. Following the resumption of privateering warfare (*guerre de course*) and violent repression after 1566, this monopoly was undermined. The explicit mention of this date, in a painting celebrating restored peace, is a clear manifestation of England's objectives. In a similar fashion, the kilim covering the negotiating table signifies the commercial and imperial ambitions of English power: the textures of the textiles are thus added to the weave of the painting, with a Flemish tapestry representing European trade and an Anatolian carpet revealing the ambitions of grand commerce with the Orient[53].

The English monopoly on the export of cloth from Flanders was part of a long tradition of trade between the two regions, yet it also heralded a new era of tension and change. The Company, founded in the fifteenth century, was a powerful association of London merchants holding a monopoly on the export of cloth to the continent. Its continental headquarters were in Antwerp, the hub of international trade in the seventeenth century. The Merchant Adventurers enjoyed considerable privileges in the Antwerp metropolis, particularly fiscal concessions[54]. The monopoly of 1560 further strengthened their dominant position in Anglo-Flemish trade, granting them close control over the flow of textiles, one of the principal commodities traded between the two regions. This privilege can thus be seen as a concession made by the authorities of the Spanish Netherlands to preserve good economic relations with England, despite growing political and religious tensions.

It was only in the context of the intensification of denominational conflicts from 1566 onwards that the Company began planning the relocation of its headquarters to other trading centres, such as Emden and Hamburg[55]. These plans, initially used as a means of pressure in negotiations, were to take shape as the situation worsened. The outbreak of the Dutch Revolt in 1566 marked a decisive turning point, and the crackdown on Protestant merchants following the arrival of the Duke of Alba convinced the Company to leave Antwerp. Admittedly, the definitive break did not occur until 1582, but the main activities had already departed several years earlier. Antwerp had lost its status as an international commercial hub, and this development was part of a wider transformation of European trade networks, as the centre of

[52] George D. Ramsay, *The City of London in International Politics at the Accession of Elizabeth Tudor* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975); G. D. Ramsay, *The Queen's Merchants and the Revolt of the Netherlands* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986); Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London's Overseas Traders, 1550-1653* (London: Verso, 2003).
[53] Weis, 'Commercer avec les "hérétiques"'.
[54] George Unwin, 'The Merchant Adventurers' Company in the Reign of Elizabeth', in *Studies in Economic History: The Collected Papers of George Unwin*, ed. by R. H. Tawney (London: Macmillan, 1927), pp. 133-220.
[55] Weis, 'La diplomatie au service du commerce: Les relations politiques entre les Pays-Bas espagnols et les villes hanséatiques de Hambourg, de Brême et de Lubeck pendant les années 1560', in *Les monarchies européennes à l'époque moderne: Mélanges offerts à Jean-François Labourdette*, ed. by Jean-Pierre Poussou (Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2004), pp. 203-18.

gravity of international trade gradually shifted northwards. The painting of the Somerset House Conference captures precisely this moment when these contradictory trends clashed.

Tensions over trade came to a head during discussions regarding the Spanish colonies. The Spanish proposed that trade be allowed "in all kingdoms where trade is permitted". Admiral Nottingham rejected this formulation and produced a map to support his position, questioning the Spanish king's right to deny English traders access to areas his own ships did not frequent, such as China or Java. This session, probably on 20 June 1604, plunged the negotiations into confusion. The Spanish delegates, already divided, were caught off guard, doubting whether the proposed wording would be acceptable to Madrid. In the end, as Cecil wrote to Parry, "considering our free trade to the East and West Indies, we have pressed this point much with them, but find no possibility of obtaining it from their hands, and therefore, rather than admit the least prejudice against it by treaty, His Majesty has resolved to pass over this point in silence, and leave it undetermined as it was by the Treaty of Vervins"[56]. A fortnight later, the English cited the Spanish jurist Hernando de Minchaza to challenge Spain's exclusive claims. If the kilim is the proverbial *éléphant dans la pièce*, it represents precisely this crucial issue, deliberately omitted from the treaty: it symbolises what the text covers up, or rather, what it conceals.

The Somerset House Conference is thus an exceptional testimony to the political, diplomatic, and commercial transformations that marked the early seventeenth century. Through its virtuoso composition, it synthesizes three fundamental dimensions: the virtual recreation of a complex negotiation, the articulation of multiple temporalities, and the allegorical staging of power. In so doing, it inaugurates a new way of representing the exercise of political power, in which the written word and bureaucracy begin to assert themselves as the true mainsprings of diplomatic action. The collective portrait of the negotiators thus becomes the mirror of a political modernity in the making, where the force of arms gradually gives way to the power of the written word.

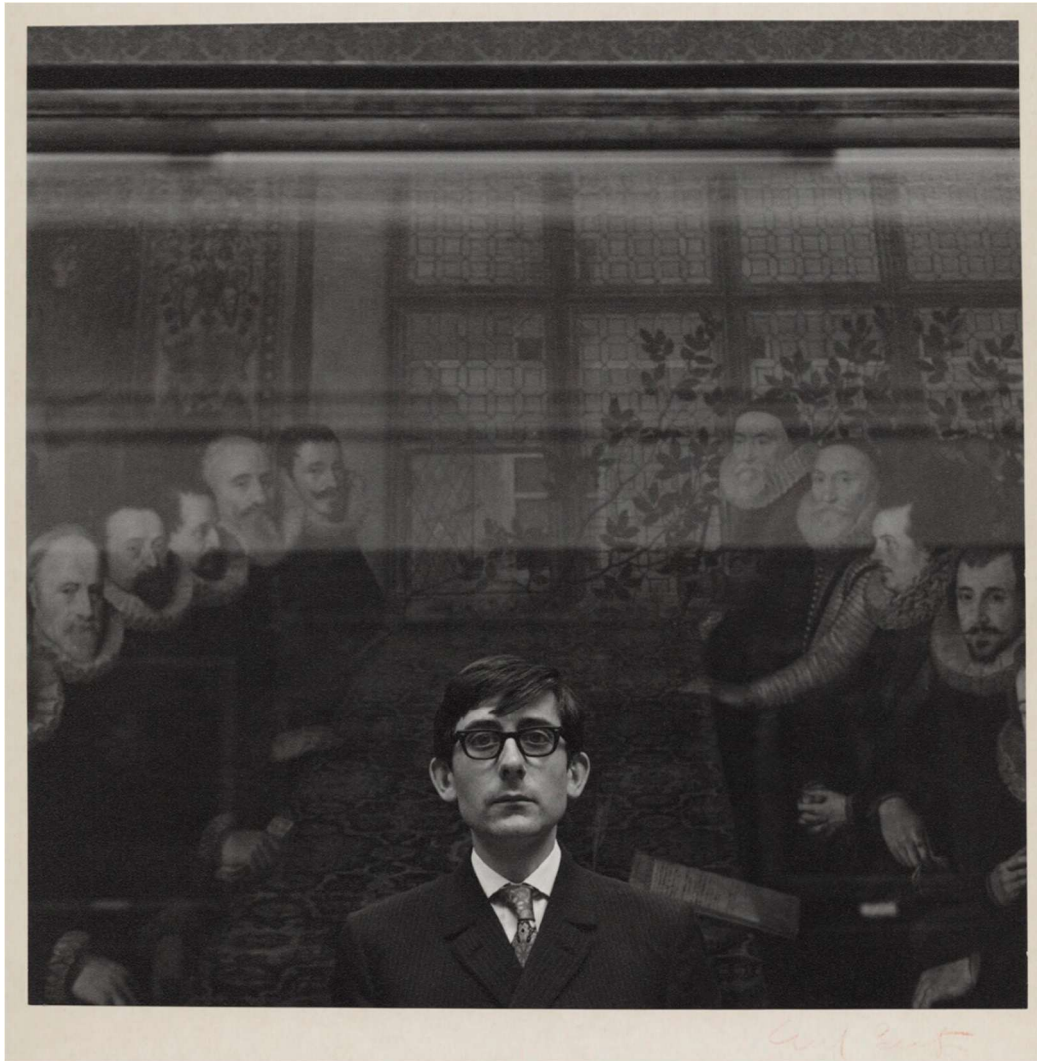[56] Gajda, 'War, Peace and Commerce', pp. 467-68.

Figure 2: Cecil Beaton, Sir Roy Strong, silver bromide print on white card, 1967, 20.8 cm x 21.1 cm, (Collection Condé Nast/Cecil Beaton Archive), National Portrait Gallery (London), inventory no. NPG x12533

Figure 3: Bryan Organ, Sir Roy Strong, oil on canvas, 1971 177.5 cm x 177.5 cm, National Portrait Gallery (London), inventory no. NPG 5289

Conclusion

One final element contributes to the debate surrounding the painter's identity: it is President Richardot, representing the Flemish contingent, who holds the dispatch, and not one of the Spanish agents. During the negotiations, the Count of Arenberg had complained of his difficult relations with the King of Spain's agents: "They proved to be our masters rather than our companions"[57]. Placing the document in Richardot's hands can therefore be understood as a manifestation of the prominent role of the Flemish administration within the negotiation cycle. If not an act of revenge, it at least permits a more advantageous re-reading of their contribution, set against the backdrop of dissensions between the Iberian and Netherlandish administrations, which are well-documented in the work of Catherine Thomas[58]. The dispatch as an instrument of information is thus discreet. It reveals how such tools were understood by contemporaries: as the sedimentation of power mechanisms, envisaged as the *arcana* of the state. Through these secrets, courts, councils, and diplomatic legations inscribed their political practices in the long temporality of deliberation, colloquy, and orality, all under the permanent control of sovereign power. The secretive, enclosed nature of the state paper contrasts with the glorious manifestation of royal success on the battlefield; nonetheless, these documents were formidably effective. This hidden dimension of the dispatch is notable in the painting, as it stands in stark contrast to the overt display of the writing table, where an ink-filled sheet is visible before Cecil.

This examination demonstrates how *The Somerset House Conference* transcends mere historical documentation. Through sophisticated visual strategies, it articulates the multiple temporal and spatial dimensions of early modern diplomacy. The work thus constitutes both a representation of, and a meditation upon, the nature of political power. Furthermore, it prefigures the emergence of bureaucratic statecraft as a defining feature of modern governance.

In 1967 and again in 1971, the director of the National Portrait Gallery, Roy Strong, was portrayed before the imposing painting[59]. In the first instance, a photograph by Cecil Beaton, the features of the envoys are perfectly rendered. In the second, a painting by Bryan Organ, Strong expressed his intimate attachment to the work through the medium of paint. Only a fragment is visible – the Hispano-Flemish delegation – and the treatment is starkly different. Organ reinterprets the scene, presenting only ovoid, featureless, unrecognisable faces. Power has become an abstract surface[60]. Only the hands holding the papers, and the *kilim*'s motif, remain; the tapestry has vanished into a dark cloud.

Roy Strong, who devoted much of his life to this painting, arguably understood its fragmentary nature, operating through functional pairs, threshold effects, and folds which trap the image in its own anfractuosities. The new Stuart sovereign promotes his dynastic filiation but more surely realises it in the true face-to-face encounter that the painting introduces beyond the envoys: James I, as a Christ-like king, contemplates Henry VIII, the new David, his antitype. And with him, we stand at the heart of the *arcana imperii*. James I delivers his theological-political message in one of the first representations of bureaucracy at work: the envoys no longer have faces; they have become the very *figura* of power.

A crucial visual element has not yet been emphasised: the striking contrast between the tapestry and the olive tree. While the English delegation faces the representation of royal duplicity, the Spanish delegation contemplates the classic biblical image of peace. In the play

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[57] Charles, Prince-Count of Arenberg, to the Archdukes, 20 July 1604, Vienna, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv (HHStA), Belgien, PC, 44.

[58] Thomas, 'Les "ambassades" flamandes'.

[59] Cecil Beaton, *Sir Roy Strong*, bromide print on white card mount, 1967, National Portrait Gallery, London, NPG x12533; Bryan Organ, *Sir Roy Strong*, oil on canvas, 1971, National Portrait Gallery, London, NPG 5289.

[60] For this beautiful formula, we depend on Marie Lezowski's reflections in *L'abrégé du monde: Une histoire sociale de la bibliothèque Ambrosienne (v. 1590-v. 1660)* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2015).

of contrasts and doubles that structures the image, this opposition is immediate. The treaty, still to be finalised, is adjacent to the olive tree but not quite beneath it, as if to suggest that peace has not yet been fully realised; its promise is yet to be fulfilled.