

Rank, power and intervention in early modern Europe

Edward Keene

Discussions about the legitimacy of intervention typically begin from the assumption that there is a general rule that states should not intervene in one another's affairs, thus framing the issue in terms of whether a particular case is a warranted exception to the rule. In 1999, for example, with the humanitarian crisis in Kosovo in mind, Tony Blair contended that '[t]he most pressing foreign policy problem we face is to identify the circumstances in which we should get involved in other people's conflicts': he tackled the problem in the standard manner, first paying his respects to the fundamental significance of the principle of non-intervention, and then demanding that 'it must be qualified in important respects.'¹ Obviously, controversy still surrounds the grounds on which Blair himself sought to justify intervention, here and in other cases. From a practical point of view in contemporary international society, probably the most important question that arises here concerns how we define the exceptional circumstances in which intervention is justified, perhaps in order to balance respect for sovereignty against other goals, such as the need to preserve international peace and security, pursue vital national interests, or respond to humanitarian emergencies. Such issues naturally, and quite properly, occupy the lion's share of discussions about the practice of intervention today. In this essay, however, I will instead focus on the historical background to the emergence of the doctrine of non-intervention in the first place, looking most closely at international relations in the two or three centuries before it is usually said to have emerged, and asking why it emerged when it did, and how the practice of intervention was changing more generally at the same time.

My enquiry into the background to the non-intervention doctrine concentrates on ideas about the equality and inequality of the members of international society, and thus my argument is framed in terms of the existence and changing structure of international hierarchies. A standard account of the emergence of the doctrine of non-intervention ties it to the writings of Wolff and Vattel, and associates it with the idea of the equality of sovereigns. I will look beyond those authors to a wider literature on the nature of law and politics in early modern Europe, and I will describe the structure of the early modern European system in terms of a 'ranking of princes'. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries this hierarchy was undergoing two distinct changes. First, it was being 'flattened' out: sovereign princes were coming to be seen as belonging to classes or categories of membership in international society, with an increasing sense of the formal equality of the members of each class. Secondly, the period also witnessed an increasingly fluid and competitive struggle for prestige, within which material capability was becoming a more important determinant of rank.² Gradually, the 'ranking of princes' was being replaced by a

¹ Tony Blair, April 22, 1999 Chicago Speech on 'The Doctrine of the International Community', cited in Adam Roberts, 'NATO's Humanitarian War in Kosovo', *Survival* (Vol. 41, No. 3, 1999), p. 119.

² This builds on Cornel Zwierlein's suggestion of a shift from a system of 'Präzedenzrechts', grounded in a sense of ancient precedent and established authority, to a new kind of 'Präzedenzpolitik', accompanied by a more empirical and historical way of assessing competing claims: 'Normativität zur Empirie: Denkrahmen der Präzedenz zwischen Königen auf dem Basler Konzil, am päpstlichen Hof (1564) und in der entstehenden Politikwissenschaft (bis 1648)', *Historisches Jahrbuch* (Vol. 125, 2005), p. 129.. Increasingly, rank was

'grading of powers'.³ This had a double-edged implication for the theory and practice of intervention. On the one hand, a decreasing sense of the significance of differences in formal rank between princes made it possible for international lawyers to posit the existence of an international society within which all members had the same formal rights and duties, which allowed the doctrine of non-intervention to gain ground. On the other hand, the more fluid nature of the emerging power system and the struggle for prestige within it created an environment within which interventions by one power in the affairs of other, usually lesser ones, was more common. In the old ranking of princes, precedence had seldom translated easily into a right of intervention. The nature of the medieval *ius commune* ensured that the boundaries of a ruler's jurisdiction were not always so clear cut as they became in the modern world, which allowed for certain kinds of what we might (rather anachronistically perhaps) call extra-territorial jurisdiction to emerge. However, the ability of high-ranked actors -- such as the papacy or the empire -- to intervene in the affairs of sovereign princes were extremely limited. Their ability to regulate the hierarchy was important, but is hard to treat as a general right of intervention.

Sovereign equality and the doctrine of non-intervention

The doctrine that states should not intervene in one another's affairs is typically traced back to the eighteenth-century commentators on the law of nations, Christian von Wolff and Emerich de Vattel. They are credited with its introduction because they argued not only that the principle of sovereignty implied that international actors should have their independence respected, but also that the members of international society were all *equal* to one another. The standard reference here is to Vattel's famous assertion that, just as 'a dwarf is as much a man as a giant is, a small republic is no less of a sovereign state than the most powerful kingdom.'⁴ The doctrine is thus said to depend on the combination of a set of concepts: sovereignty, territorial integrity and equality.⁵ The last is often seen as the latest to have emerged, and is the reason why it is not until this relatively late date -- getting on for two hundred years after the Peace of Westphalia -- that the non-intervention doctrine is said to have finally become a principle of international order. As Hedley Bull, for example, put it: 'it was only in the mid-eighteenth century, at the hands of Wolff and Vattel, that the doctrines of the equal rights of states to sovereignty, and of their duty of non-intervention, were first clearly stated.'⁶

The idea of the equality of the members of international society is seen as important because it affects how we understand what it means for an actor to be sovereign. First of all, it implies that sovereigns are all fundamentally the same, which makes it possible to propose a connection

³ The latter term is borrowed from See Martin Wight, *Power Politics*, eds. Hedley Bull and Carsten Holbraad (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), Appendix A, and Carsten Holbraad, *Middle Powers in International Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1984), Appendix A.

⁴ Emerich de Vattel, *Le droit des gens ou principes de la loi naturelle* (Washington: Carnegie Institution, 1916), p. 11. At the risk of anticipating my argument, I would note in passing that the fact that Vattel chose to talk about dwarfs and giants, which may seem to be more or less random specimens of humanity, is not insignificant: it implies the growing importance of differences in *size* between states, rather than *rank*.

⁵ For example, Caroline Thomas, *New States, Sovereignty and Intervention* (Aldershot: Gower, 1985), pp. 1-4.

⁶ Hedley Bull, 'Introduction', in Bull (ed.), *Intervention in World Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 4. See also R.J. Vincent, *Nonintervention and International Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974).

between sovereignty and independence. As one classic (and critical) commentary on Vattel's doctrine observed, '[i]ndependence, like every negative, does not admit of degrees.'⁷ One cannot be partially independent; one either is independent or one is not. It follows that, if independence is to be seen as an attribute of sovereigns, then in the same way there cannot be degrees of sovereignty. The idea of sovereign equality is necessary for us to move from the proposition that international society is composed of sovereign states to the proposition that as sovereigns they are entitled to have their independence respected, and thus that non-intervention should be the basic rule governing their affairs. Moreover, the idea that sovereign states are equals makes non-intervention into a *general* rule for all the members of international society, on the grounds that the rights and duties of any one member must be the rights and duties of all. Hence there is a fundamental logical connection between the evolution of the idea of sovereign equality and the doctrine of a general duty of non-intervention.

If sovereigns were seen as unequal, with different rights and duties, then it is possible (although by no means inevitable) that some might have a right to intervene in the affairs of others, or at least to act as judges of the circumstances under which an intervention, possibly by the rest of international society, was justified. The idea of unequal sovereignty introduces a range of qualifications, such as the notion of 'semi-sovereigns' or 'demi-sovereigns', that make it possible to see sovereignty as not automatically conferring a right to an independent domestic jurisdiction, free from interference by external actors. It thus breaks the connection between sovereignty and independence that is crucial to the non-intervention doctrine, because sovereignty is held to be 'partible' in a way that independence is not.⁸ Moreover, if sovereigns are seen as unequal, and thus occupying different positions within international society, some might have special privileges that endow them with the capacity to decide when and under what circumstances another member the society of states should be intervened against, for example whether it has breached some other principle of international order that renders void its claim to an independent domestic jurisdiction.

It is worth noting that, even when we look at a period as apparently 'modern' as Vattel's, we find many of his contemporaries arguing that there were 'different kinds of sovereign', and even contending that one ruler may be a vassal of another, but that 'this dependency in no way diminishes his sovereignty'.⁹ Vattel's account of the law of nations provides us with a clear example of how the ideas of sovereignty, independence and equality can all fit together to produce a doctrine of non-intervention; but Vattel was not the only person writing on the law of nations in the eighteenth century, and others could and did produce very different versions of the meaning of sovereignty that were less supportive of the non-intervention doctrine. Vattel's egalitarian version of natural law and sovereignty certainly fits with some potent strands of

⁷ John Westlake, *Chapters on the Principles of International Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1894), p. 87.

⁸ *Ibid.* I have discussed the issue of what I call 'divisible sovereignty' at greater length elsewhere. This is, I think, a crucial addition to the much-discussed notion of the 'composite polity' in the early modern system: for an excellent recent discussion of the latter, see Daniel Nexon

⁹ The references are from one of the leading mid-eighteenth-century commentators on diplomatic procedure: Jean Rousset de Missy, *Mémoires sur le rang et la préséance entre les souverains de l'Europe* (Amsterdam, 1746), p. 5; and *Le cérémonial diplomatique des cours de l'Europe*, published as a supplement to Jean Dumont, *Corps universel diplomatique du droit des gens* (Amsterdam, 1739), vol. 4, p. 59. For the latter example, of a sovereign vassal, he is discussing the position of the Duke of Savoy.

eighteenth-century thought, but it is not a consensus view from the period, and I think one can reasonably question whether his was even a mainstream position. There were plenty of commentators who believed in the natural *inequality* of man, and who preferred to think about relations between states in terms of the naturalness of the hierarchical principle that divided societies into estates, leading them to frame questions about international personality in terms of an analogy with nobles, citizens and peasants, rather than giants and dwarfs.¹⁰ There were, of course, also international lawyers who circumvented such naturalist argument more or less entirely, instead basing their account of European public law on treaty and custom, and although certain more egalitarian customs were beginning to emerge, for instance in arranging seating at conferences, these still gave no *prima facie* reason why all sovereigns should necessarily be treated as equals.¹¹ As will be discussed in more detail later, an idea of equality within certain *classes* of sovereigns was becoming widespread, but that did not deny the existence of a larger hierarchy within international society as a whole.

As this suggests, to speak of the inequality of sovereigns is not a merely hypothetical speculation that lacks any grounding in the theory and practice of modern international society. Indeed, it has often been pointed out that, Vattel's doctrine notwithstanding, modern international law has as a matter of fact admitted the existence of actors that are either not fully sovereign or that are endowed with special capacities that place them at a level above other states. There are two obvious and much-discussed examples of the ways in which the principle of the equality of sovereigns has been compromised, both of which have provided the basis for frequent qualifications to the general rule of non-intervention since the early nineteenth century: the special status attributed to great powers, and the notion that non-European peoples were outside the boundaries of the family of civilized nations.¹² To be sure, in both cases there was still considerable debate about the precise grounds on which interventions might be justified, especially in regard to the right claimed by the great powers to intervene in the affairs of other European states (but to be free from intervention themselves). For instance, while some argued for a very permissive right to suppress revolutionary movements within other states, others held to what Carsten Holbraad calls a 'British theory of intervention', which maintained that 'only direct threats to national security or vital interests were valid grounds for interfering in the domestic affairs of other states.'¹³ I will not go into the details of that controversy now, but the

¹⁰ This is the basis for Rousset de Missy's alternative position, mentioned earlier.

¹¹ For another example from one of Vattel's (near) contemporaries, see Jean Dumont, *Corps universel diplomatique du droit des gens* (Amsterdam, 1726). In the context of international relations theory, Vattel often dominates discussions of eighteenth-century international legal doctrine, but that risks ignoring this very influential alternative approach, exemplified by collections of treaties such as Dumont's. For a good overview of the primary literature, see Mario Toscano, *The History of Treaties and International Politics: The Documentary and Memoir Sources* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966); and, for a seminal discussion of its significance, see Wilhelm Grewe, *The Epochs of International Law*, trans. Michael Byers (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2000). For another excellent contribution, see Randall Lesaffer (ed.), *Peace Treaties and International Law in European History: From the Late Middle Ages to World War One* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹² A good recent discussion is Gerry Simpson, *Great Powers and Outlaw States: Unequal Sovereigns in the International Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), who labels these instances of sovereign inequality as 'anti-pluralism' and 'legalised hegemony'. I have discussed the position of non-European peoples, and its implications for how sovereignty was understood, elsewhere and will not repeat those points, or my discussion of the secondary literature, here.

¹³ Carsten Holbraad, *The Concert of Europe: A Study in German and British International Theory, 1815-1914* (London: Longman, 1970), p. 125, and for alternative positions within the debate, see pp. 155-56 and 164-65. The debates at the Congress of Verona in 1822, and surrounding the French intervention in Spain in 1823, provide an interesting illustration of many of the competing positions here, and the motivations – self-interested as well as ideological – that shaped them.

point is that the conversation about the legitimacy of intervention was carried on within the context of a broader denial of the principle of the equality of all the members of international society. Lesser powers might have been sovereigns, but they did not occupy the same position within international society as the great powers, and this affected the way in which the general duty of non-intervention was understood and qualified.

Any account of how and why we have come to suppose that international society rests on a general rule of non-intervention therefore requires us to explore the history of ideas about the inequality and equality of sovereigns. In an effort to contribute to that line of enquiry, here I will look at a different, and earlier, form of sovereign inequality within the European political system than nineteenth-century attitudes towards the great powers and ‘barbarians’. Let us return for a moment to Bull’s discussion of the evolution of the doctrine. Immediately after identifying Wolff and Vattel as the authors of the first clearly stated version of these ideas about sovereign equality and non-intervention, he then noted that the impact of their ideas on the conduct of relations between European states was limited in two ways:

‘on the one hand by the ancient hierarchies of status and precedent among European monarchies and republics, curtailed but not eliminated by the Congress of Vienna in 1815, and on the other hand, by the new hierarchy of rights determined by power, that gave rise to the especially modern idea of the rights and duties peculiar to the status of a great power, still embodied in the privileges of the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council.’¹⁴

As I have just noted, the ‘hierarchy of rights determined by power’, leading to the privileged position of the great powers, was one of the dominant features of discussions about intervention in the nineteenth century, and one that has deservedly received a great deal of scholarly attention. Here, in order to explore the early modern background to Vattelian and other eighteenth-century ideas, I am going to concentrate instead on what Bull called the ‘ancient hierarchies of status and precedent’.

Early modern images of the international system: rank and power

In one of the best-known passages of one of the most influential treatises on seventeenth-century diplomacy, Abraham de Wicquefort advised the ambassador that one of his principal duties was to guard the ‘rights and dignity of his Prince, and especially the rank he holds among other Princes.’¹⁵ The basic proposition that early modern international society was both hierarchical and peculiarly concerned with questions of precedence, standing, prestige and so on, is by no means a novel one in international relations theory, still less in diplomatic and international history.¹⁶ It is

¹⁴ Bull, ‘Introduction’, p. 4.

¹⁵ Abraham de Wicquefort, *L’ambassadeur et ses fonctions* (Amsterdam, 1730), p. 343. (First published in 1681.)

¹⁶ For a couple of recent discussions along these lines in international relations theory, see Christian Reus-Smit, *The Moral Purpose of the State: Culture, Social Identity, and Institutional Rationality in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); and Richard Ned Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). The

a commonplace of diplomatic history that questions of position within this ranking of princes -- of precedence, in other words -- were of great significance to how states interacted with one another, and it would by no means be an exaggeration to describe it as one of the basic organising principles of the international system of that period.¹⁷ Indeed, it is such a commonplace that, despite a continuing tendency on the part of some international relations theorists to talk about the modern international system in terms of the idea of anarchy, I will take the basic fact of an early modern international hierarchy for granted here.

Despite the voluminous literature that deals with the general significance of the hierarchical principle to early modern diplomacy, it is not a straightforward matter to describe the membership of the system or the positions of individual actors within it. To be sure, there are valuable studies of some of the most dramatic clashes over precedence, such as the famous pitched battle in London between the entourages of the French and Spanish ambassadors in 1661,¹⁸ or of how particular diplomats sought to demonstrate and enhance their status through ceremonial and display at landmark events, such as the Peace of Westphalia.¹⁹ There are also some extremely useful studies of how individual rulers worked actively to bolster their prestige, ranging from the self-assertion of monarchs whose high status was virtually unquestioned, such as Louis XIV of France, to the (often equally revealing) struggles by princes of smaller states to improve or even simply to preserve their positions.²⁰ Building on this literature, my purpose now is to pose a very basic question: who were the princes who belonged to this ranking, and what rank did each of them hold? Answering this specific question will then shed light on larger questions about the structure of the system: what were the rules defining membership, how were ranks determined, and so on.

Obviously, we will run into an immediate problem here because of the intangibility of the qualities that we are trying to identify: status, prestige and precedence are less easy to measure than the material capabilities of states, and so it is more difficult to produce an objective and

theme is elaborated in numerous general works of diplomatic history and international history: one fairly recent example (among several), is T.C.W. Blanning, *The Pursuit of Glory: Europe, 1648-1815* (London: Allen Lane, 2007). I think it is worth noting that this line of argument is especially prominent in what is sometimes called the 'new court history', much of which grows out of a critique of Norbert Elias, *The Court Society*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983). For a major statement of historiographical revisionism here, see Jeroen Duindam, *Myths of Power: Norbert Elias and the Early Modern European Court* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1984).

¹⁷ For one diplomatic historian's fascinating attempt to develop the theoretical implications of this point, see William J. Roosen, 'Early Modern Diplomatic Ceremonial: A Systems Approach', *Journal of Modern History* (Vol. 52, No. 3, 1980), pp. 452-76.

¹⁸ For instance, Linda S. Frey and Marsha L. Frey, *The History of Diplomatic Immunity* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999), pp. 209-12.

¹⁹ Anja Stiglic, 'Hierarchy of Ceremony and Status on the European Diplomatic Stage: The Diplomats' Solemn Entries into the Conference City of Münster', in Klaus Bussmann and Heinz Schilling (eds.), *1648: War and Peace in Europe* (Münster and Osnabruck, 1998), pp. 391-96.

²⁰ For example, Toby Osborne, *Dynasty and Diplomacy in the Court of Savoy: Political Culture and the Thirty Years' War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). There are also numerous superb and highly relevant treatments -- but usually country by country, rather than comparative -- in collections such as Robert Oresko, G.C. Gibbs and H.M. Scott (eds.), *Royal and Republican Sovereignty in Early Modern Europe: Essays in Memory of Ragnhild Hatton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); John Adamson (ed.), *The Princely Courts of Europe, 1500-1750* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1999); and Daniela Frigo (ed.), *Politics and Diplomacy in Early Modern Italy: The Structure of Diplomatic Practice, 1450-1800*, trans. Adrian Belton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). While I have found these and other studies immensely valuable, I am unaware of an authoritative survey -- other than a couple of very brief outlines in Ernest Satow, *A Guide to Diplomatic Practice*, Fourth Edition, edited by Neville Bland (London, 1957), and useful general works by historians such as Lucien Bély, Heinz Duchhardt and Heinz Schilling -- of the system as a whole in terms of system membership and the location of actors.

precise description of these rankings.²¹ One way in which students of international relations have tried to pin down questions about system membership and status is to look at who sends diplomatic representatives to whom, and at what rank: the mere fact that one is sent diplomats can be seen as an indicator of membership in the system, while the number of diplomats sent and their own personal status (whether in terms of their ambassadorial or ministerial rank, or their social position more generally) can be used as a proxy for the status that the receiving state is perceived as having.²² This approach has much to recommend it, and it certainly provides at least a first cut at trying to measure the status of international actors. It is, however, one that is difficult to make work for the early modern period, which may be why its exponents have tended to focus on the post-1815 international system, by which time new procedures for regularising and organising diplomatic representation had been put in place; a proper comparative analysis along these lines is much harder in the context of the diplomatic culture that existed prior to the Congress of Vienna.²³

In the absence of an obvious objective measure of the status of princes, here I will try to map their positions by looking at the more subjective evidence of how they were described by contemporary commentators on the European international system. This requires us to move to some degree away from the literature that has typically occupied the attention of historians looking at the development of the concept of sovereignty, which has tended to focus, not unreasonably, on canon and civil lawyers as well as theologians and political theorists. For our specific question, more is to be learned from people writing about diplomacy, especially diplomatic precedence. Even there, it is necessary to move beyond some of those authors such as Wicquefort and François de Callières, who have featured with exceptional prominence in attempts to recover a general sense of the culture of early modern diplomacy. Perhaps rather surprisingly, these authors are not the best at surveying the overall shape of the ranking of princes. While they do give some important insights into numerous individual questions of precedence – Wicquefort, for example, on the Franco-Spanish controversy mentioned earlier – they do not provide overall maps of the system as a whole.

There was, by contrast, a literature that comes much closer to giving us something along these lines, concerned more specifically with the practical consideration of diplomatic ceremonial and partly produced by those responsible for diplomatic protocol within courts, who therefore had to resolve questions of precedence as a matter of course.²⁴ If anything, this literature is much closer

²¹ It is worth adding that the measurement of capability, and especially the move from measuring capability to measuring power, is not without its own challenges: for an interesting and thoughtful discussion, see Jack Levy, *War in the Modern Great Power System, 1495-1975* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983).

²² A classic study along these lines came out of early work in the Correlates of War project: J. David Singer and Melvin Small, 'The Composition and Status Ordering of the International System, 1815-1940', *World Politics* (Vol. 18, No. 2, 1966), pp. 236-82. For work by a diplomatic historian that offers similar insights, see Raymond A. Jones, *The British Diplomatic Service, 1815-1914* (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1983).

²³ William J Roosen, 'A New Way of Looking at Early Modern Diplomacy: Quantification', *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History* (Vol. 5, 1978), pp. 1-13, is an admirable attempt to do precisely this, but I would venture to suggest that it also illustrates the limitations inherent in such quantitative methods for this period. See also Roosen, *The Age of Louis XIV: The Rise of Modern Diplomacy* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman, 1976). A related study, for an earlier time frame, is Donald Quellar.

²⁴ Another possibility would be schemes for re-ordering Europe, many of which include lists of the members of these ideal systems, for example those of Sully, Cruce, William Penn and the Abbé St Pierre: see Geoffrey G. Butler and Simon Maccoby, *The Development of International Law* (Union Press, 2003) for a good overview. The somewhat idealistic nature of these lists make them,

to heraldry than to the more standard legal or political treatises, although that is a distinction that should not be overstated, since the line between heraldic and legal ‘sciences’ was not so great as one might think.²⁵ One of the most persistent images of the international system in this genre was the notion that it was a ‘theatre’.²⁶ Of course, in a general sense this conveys the dramatised nature of early modern diplomatic culture, and the importance of extraordinarily magnificent – indeed, theatrical – display to demonstrating a prince’s status. ‘Princes,’ Elizabeth I said, ‘are set on stages in the sight and view of the world.’²⁷ The metaphor might sometimes be applied to a particular court, especially the papal court which was quite often described as the ‘theatre of the world’.²⁸ The point here is that, because they were trying to describe the various actors in this great ‘theatre’, writers on heraldry and ceremonial were often involved in trying to sketch the whole world, or at least the world of Christian and European chivalry, sometimes with fantastic inventions of other arms and insignia from great figures from history and myth. By the mid-eighteenth century, these were gradually being replaced by rather more sober sketches of the ‘state of Europe’ that were beginning to develop a new ‘political arithmetic’ to depict the standing of powers;²⁹ but even then the influence of heraldic science on studies of genealogy remained strong, and could even be seen as persisting through the nineteenth century in texts that still furnished part of the working library of European diplomats, such as the *Almanach de Gotha*.

One of the earliest (and best known) documents in any account of the general order of precedence in early modern Europe is a scheme drawn up by Pope Julius II’s Master of Ceremonies, Paris de Grassis, in 1504. As perhaps the leading example of the ‘theatre of the world’, the papal court was a vital centre for diplomatic activity, at which (at least before the Reformation) representatives from practically every ruler converged; its way of managing the ranking of princes is probably as close as we can get to an overall picture of the early modern international system. What we have here is a list of rulers, laid out to define their relative positions in the ceremony of the papal *curia*, divided into two different orders, an order of kings and an order of dukes. This basic division is reinforced by the architecture of the papal court,

in my view, less useful as a way of mapping the existing ranking of princes, but they should not be neglected, and do also give some indications of ideas about precedence.

²⁵ One of the most important figures in the legal history of the concept of sovereignty, Bartolus of Sassoferrato, also produced what Maurice Keen describes as ‘the first truly learned discussion of heraldry’, the *Tractatus de insigniis et armis*: see Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 148. I believe I am correct that this aspect of Bartolus’s work does not feature even in excellent historical studies, such as Kenneth Pennington, *The Prince and the Law, 1200-1600: Sovereignty and Rights in the Western Legal Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). Writers such as Rousset de Missy also illustrate this crossing-over between genres: his work fits in with the emerging public law literature (particularly Dumont) and is steeped in heraldic learning. Rousset helpfully provides a list of key references which mentions Wicquefort, but alongside numerous other authors that are more obscure (and does not give Wicquefort exceptional prominence). His major influences appear to have been Agostino Paradisi and Johann Christian Lunig. I am still working to try to trace more of these sources.

²⁶ For a couple of examples, André Favyn, *The Theater of Honour and Knighthood, Or a Compendious Chronicle and Historie of the Whole Christian World* (London, 1623); and Abel Boyer, *The Great Theater of Honour and Nobility* (London, 1754). The genealogical dimension, at least, of such studies can also be seen in studies by prominent figures such as Samuel von Pufendorf, notably his *An Introduction to the History of the Principal Kingdoms and States of Europe* (London, 1697).

²⁷ Quoted in John Adamson, ‘The Kingdom of England and Great Britain: The Tudor and Stuart Courts, 1509-1714’, in Adamson (ed.), *The Princely Courts of Europe*, p. 101.

²⁸ For instance, Mario Rosa, ‘The “World’s Theatre”: The Court of Rome and Politics in the First Half of the Seventeenth Century’, in Gianvittorio Signorotto (ed.), *Court and Politics in Papal Rome, 1492-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 78-98.

²⁹ For instance, John Campbell, *The Present State of Europe: Explaining the Interests, Connections, Political and Commercial Views of its Several Powers* (London, 1750). As the work of Campbell’s contemporary Boyer shows, the new statistical approach did not entirely eclipse the earlier way of representing the international system.

which had separate rooms for audiences with diplomats, one for representatives of kings and one for those of dukes. The *Ordo Regum Christianorum* begins with the Emperor. He is followed by his heir, who was at this time customarily given the title of the King of the Romans. Below them are thirteen other kings, in the following order: France, Spain, Aragon, Portugal, England, Sicily, Scotland, Hungary, Navarre, Cyprus, Bohemia, Poland and Denmark. The *Ordo Ducum* lists Brittany, Burgundy, Bavaria (Counts Palatine), Saxony, Brandenburg (a Marquis rather than a Duke), Austria, Savoy, Milan, Venice (a Republic, but ruled by a *Doge*), Bavarian Dukes, French and Lotharingian Dukes, Bourbon, Aurelian, Genoa and Ferrara.³⁰

These two orders implies a relatively small international system comprised of around thirty distinct actors (many more, of course, if the various Bavarian, French and Lotharingian dukedoms are included, and if we bear in mind that the list was perhaps not intended to be comprehensive).³¹ It is a system that is roughly divided into three types of actors: the emperor (and pope) at the apex; kings in the second rank; and finally a lower category into which are bundled various kinds of princes, dukes and marquises. But it also gives every indication that it is a system where the ranks of individual princes, even within these broad classes, can be fairly precisely distinguished from one another: one king outranks another; one duke is higher than another, and so on. It is, in other words, an individually articulated hierarchy, something that was of course necessary for what may have been the principal purpose of the list in the first place: organising seating arrangements at major events.

One point that is worth noting before we move any further is that because this list was drawn up for the purpose of papal diplomatic ceremonial, all of the rulers listed here were entitled to some form of representation at the papal court. They were all, in other words, international personalities of one sort or another. It is difficult to know whether the list was meant to be definitive, and there is room for doubt about how generally accepted it was. Nevertheless, there is evidence that it was not only known elsewhere, but was treated as possessing a certain authority. Sir William Segar, an English Herald and Garter King of Arms (created in 1600), remarked that ‘The number of Christian Kings are fourteen, of whom only four were anciently crowned by the Pope, that is, the French King, the King of England, the King of Jerusalem, and the King of Sicily. All the other Kings were crowned by their own Prelates. Thus saith Paris.’³² The reader will probably note that the King of Jerusalem does not appear in Paris de Grassis’s list, but otherwise the picture of the international system appears basically similar. Segar’s comment also points towards an aspect of how the ranking within the bands of the kingly and ducal orders were worked out: the antiquity of the title, and the way in which it had been generated. Segar’s intention was perhaps to promote the King of England, and a papal origin of his title (albeit perhaps of dubious merit) may have been a way of doing so. Other authors on precedence from around this time used various other ways of trying to decide competing claims (with, of course, an eye on their immediate patrons’ positions), sometimes using heraldic argument about the honour attached to particular ‘blazons’

³⁰ Paris de Grassis’s order is reproduced in several places: for instance, Satow, *A Guide to Diplomatic Practice*, pp. 25-26.

³¹ I should note that this is an extremely low figure for the number of sovereigns in Europe at the time; some commentators would put the number of sovereign princes as high as 2,000: see Butler and Maccoby, *Development of International Law*, p. 8.

³² Sir William Segar, *The Book of Honor and Armes (1590) and Honor Military and Civil (1602)* (Delmar, 1975), p. 56.

and images, religious devotion or piety, and also appealing to material greatness as an index of rank, but not always in military terms. As one early seventeenth-century French heraldic commentator put it, ‘Spain shall never walk Peere-like, for abundance of people, fertilitie of all good things; excellence of ground; temperature and wholesomenesse of the Ayre; length and largeness of her whole extendure...with France.’³³

The example of Segar shows that Paris de Grassis’s list continued to be known and used as a kind of benchmark after a hundred years, but it was still being cited as an authority over two hundred years later by one of the leading early eighteenth-century commentators on diplomatic precedence, Jean Rousset de Missy.³⁴ Rousset de Missy argued that Julian II had been trying to claim for himself ‘the right and the authority to regulate rank and ceremony between the powers’, and that Paris de Grassis’s scheme constituted to all intents and purposes ‘une Loy positive pour le régleme[n]t de leurs rangs.’ He acknowledged that the papal orders were controversial and that there had been significant changes since the early sixteenth century. However, his own ranking scheme was not dissimilar: indeed, it is interesting to compare the two to see how there were certain structural parallels between them, but also what exactly had changed in the meantime. To begin with, Rousset treated the division of every society into different ranks (peasants, citizens and nobles) as a basic, and indeed natural, fact, and further contended that at the head of each society was a sovereign, who again fell into different categories with respect to one another. In other words, there were ‘diverse sortes de Souverains’: emperors, kings, princes, dukes, marquises, counts, barons, etc.³⁵ To be precise, at the head of the hierarchy, as Rousset envisaged it, were the pope (although occupying a controversial position, since his preeminence was not recognised by Protestant rulers), and three emperors: the Holy Roman Emperor, the Ottoman Emperor and the Russian Czar. They were followed by eleven kings: France, Spain, Britain, Portugal, Denmark, Sweden, Poland, Hungary, Bohemia, Prussia, and Sicily and Naples (now conjoined as the Two Sicilies). They in turn were followed, in order of precedence, by the Electoral Princes and the Duke of Savoy (who, Rousset notes, had pretensions to the Kingdom of Cyprus); the Republics of Venice and the United Provinces; and then a series of other dukedoms: Lorraine, Tuscany, Mantua, Parma, Modena. Precedence between these groups was, Rousset argued, relatively clear cut: an emperor had precedence over a king, a king over a duke, and so on. The problems arose when dealing with the relative positions of sovereigns within each group: whether one king took precedence over another, one duke over another, and so on. Rousset’s

³³ Favyn, *Theater of Honour*, p. 196.

³⁴ See, for example, the commentary on Paris de Grassis’s list in Jean Rousset de Missy, *Le cérémonial diplomatique des cours de l’Europe*, in Dumont, *Corps universel diplomatique du droit des gens*, vol. 5, pp. 201-202. Rousset also appears, in a very different guise as an exponent of reason of state, in Friedrich Meinecke’s *Machiavellism: The Doctrine of Reason of State and its Place in Modern History*, trans. Douglas Scott (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), chapter eleven, which concentrates on Rousset’s journalism for the *Mercure historique et politique* -- one of a series of what can only be described as current affairs journals that were taking off in the first half of the eighteenth century -- and his *Les intérêts présents et les prétentions des puissances de l’Europe* (1741). Meinecke cheerfully confesses to ignoring the bulk of the latter work since it was concerned with ‘the historical legal titles’ that formed the basis for states’ claims to territory: ‘a monstrous baroque compendium full of marvellous and antiquated things’ (p. 264). Yes, but this ‘baroque compendium’ was the main point of the book! To leave it out and locate Rousset within the tradition of reason of state is a curious piece of scholarship. As an aside, a very large number of authors on these issues (as well as Rousset, Barbeyrac and Abel Boyer) were Huguenot refugees: see John Christian Laursen (ed.), *New Essays on the Political Thought of the Huguenots of the Refuge* (Leiden: Brill, 1995). Taking into account Vattel’s connections to this group as well, it is quite remarkable, in my view, how much of early modern discussion about international law and politics was influenced by Huguenots, but that is a subject for another day.

³⁵ Rousset de Missy, *Mémoires sur le rang et la préséance*, p. 5.

basic position here was that within each band a principle of equality reigned: kings, for example, saw each other as equals in dignity and standing.

A slightly different group of actors, and a slightly different terminology, is found in a yet later work: George Friedrich von Martens influential *Precis du droit publique de l'Europe*. Martens took issue with what he saw as the emerging tendency to divide up states with reference to their relative size or strength, something that other public lawyers were beginning to do by at least the middle of the eighteenth century.³⁶ By contrast, he preferred to reserve the term 'great states' for 'those which are entitled to royal honours'.³⁷ This category included fifteen monarchies, and, in a distinct sub-category, three republics that were generally granted royal honours at the time: Venice, the United Provinces and the Helvetic Union. The list of monarchies is deliberately given in alphabetical order by Martens, presumably to avoid questions about their more precise ranking: Britain, Denmark & Norway, France, the Germanic Empire (considered as a whole), Hungary & Bohemia, the Papal territories, Poland, Portugal, Prussia, Russia, Sardinia, the Two Sicilies, Spain, Sweden & Gothland, and the Turkish Empire. Beneath these were a group of 'non-royal sovereign states', such as the Duchy of Silesia, Monaco, Lucca, San Marino, and the members of the United Provinces considered separately. Finally, there were 'demi-sovereigns', the most important of which were the German Princes of Electoral rank, followed by numerous others, reaching all the way down to free towns such as Danzig.³⁸

It must be noted that these are not the only kind of surveys of the European system, and the ranking of princes was not the only way of framing it. In the seventeenth century, often drawing on the Italian literature on 'reason of state', a number of studies in French, German and English had begun to talk about European politics using the language of 'powers', 'interests' and 'balance', but they seldom advanced to any attempt at actually measuring or quantifying the relative capabilities of different states, and hence it is hard to describe them as conceiving of a grading of powers in any precise way.³⁹ A fairly typical format for such a survey would be to combine potted histories of the various European countries with some general observations on their constitutional systems, alliances and treaty relationships, national character, geography and political interests, but with little if any concrete information on matters such as the size of their armies or economies, and hence they are virtually useless as a way of determining their relative strength.⁴⁰ Later eighteenth-century studies go much further in their effort to quantify the populations, territory, military forces and commercial activity of the various states.⁴¹

By the end of the sixteenth century, a significant (although by no means universal) body of informed opinion was beginning to describe and classify states as 'powers'; by the middle of the

³⁶ See Abbé de Mably, *The Principles of Negotiations: or, An Introduction to the Public Law of Europe, Founded on Treaties* (London, 1758).

³⁷ Georg Friedrich von Martens, *Summary of the Law of Nations, Founded on the Treaties and Customs of the Modern Nations of Europe*, trans. William Cobbett (Philadelphia, 1795), p. 29. This closely echoes language used by Rousset de Missy in *Le cérémonial diplomatique*, although Rousset adds discussion of the difference between those with 'closed' and those with 'open' crowns, which I do not find in Martens. Possibly this highly symbolic distinction had dropped out of the discussion somewhat.

³⁸ Martens, *Summary*, pp. 29-32.

³⁹ Classic examples are Henri de Rohan, *De l'intérêt des princes et des états de la chrétienté* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 1995) and SlingsbyBethel, *The Interest of Princes and States* (London, 1680).

⁴⁰ One of the most important examples is Pufendorf 1711.

⁴¹ For a relatively early English example, a short work with a narrowly military focus, see Anon 1730; one of the first English attempts at measuring relative power, not as statistically refined as Zimmerman's work, is Campbell 1750.

seventeenth century, mainstream commentaries were frequently depicting their relations with one another in terms of a 'balance of power', a formulation that presupposes an awareness of the significance of differences in states' relative strength; during the second half of the eighteenth century, the idea of distinct classes of 'great', 'middle' and 'lesser powers' was beginning to take hold, and we start to find statistical work that made it possible to rank individual states quite precisely in these terms. A further point about the changing vocabulary of international politics is that the idea of a 'balance of power' and the classification of states according to a grading of powers were associated with the emergence of the idea of a 'system'. In the 1760s, for example, William Robertson could say that during the reign of Charles V, 'the powers of Europe were formed into one great political system, in which each took a station'.⁴² Here, in other words, we have a conception of the international system as a system of powers, where the 'station' of each was determined by its standing within the international distribution of capabilities.

It is worth comparing a couple of these views of the European political system: works by the Abbe de Mably's and those of a contemporaneous commentator on European affairs, John Campbell.⁴³ As Martin Wight noted, Mably identifies three classes of powers: the first class, described as a 'ruling' and a 'rival' power, sometimes apparently limited to just two such states, and occasionally referred to as 'great powers'; a second class, 'who are powerful enough to dare meddle with their quarrels'; and a third class, 'who are too weak to have regular and followed projects of fortune and greatness'.⁴⁴ It is also important that he makes this distinction central to how he thinks international relations should be conducted: 'every power of Europe should...according to the difference of their strength, political laws and situation of their provinces, follow different methods of negotiating, or treating with strangers.'⁴⁵ Middle powers, for example, should try to play the first-class powers off against each other, changing alliances frequently, and should aim to take what territorial gains they can from the great powers rather than each other. It is extremely telling that his belief that inequalities in power are the driving force in international relations leads Mably to dismiss alternative possibilities, such as family relationships between sovereigns, as much less important: 'It signifies but little that princes have a common origin; they cease to be friends when their states have opposed interests.'⁴⁶ If we recall that major European wars had only recently been fought over securing the succession to Spanish throne for one dynasty or another, this was a radical proposal for the reorientation of policy.

Campbell, on the other hand, does not offer a clear grading of great, middle and small powers, and his idea of the 'interests' of states is still tied to the earlier approach of Rohan or Pufendorf: he identifies five 'political vowels' that are the key to understanding states' interests, in which the first place is given to religion (as Rohan had argued); followed by the 'natural grounds of friendship', such as similarities in government or family connections between

⁴² William, Robertson. *The History of the Reign of Charles V. With a View of the Progress of Society in Europe, from the Subversion of the Roman Empire to the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century* (Dublin, 1762-71), p. 6.

⁴³ While these are representative examples, they are not the only ones. One could equally point, beyond Mably, to the works of other legal scholars, such as Johann Jakob Moser; Scott 2006 describes how Jakob Friedrich von Bielfeld and Johann Heinrich Gottlieb von Justi were crucial to the development of the statistical approach in the 1750s. He also notes the importance of Montesquieu.

⁴⁴ Mably, *Principles*, p. 12 and chapters seven and eight.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p., 24.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

sovereigns (something that, as we have seen, Mably discounts); the situation of the state, where balance of power considerations come into play; the ‘relative state’ of a nation, which means whether it is doing better or worse than before, not how it stands relative to others; and the ‘claims or pretensions’ of rulers, meaning their view of their dynastic rights over other territories, principalities or kingdoms.⁴⁷ Campbell’s view of the interests of states is thus somewhat old-fashioned (although I would suggest it is still representative of a substantial body of opinion in the 1750s), and certainly does not give the central place to differences in strength that Mably does. On the other hand, unlike Mably, Campbell anticipates later developments in ‘statistics’ by offering an admittedly rather primitive mathematical analysis of the relative size, population, maritime strength, commerce, etc., of the various states. Mably’s ranking, for all its awareness of the differences between middle and small powers, is still rather impressionistic in how it applies these categories (what exactly, one might wonder, does it mean to follow ‘a project of fortune and greatness?’); Campbell is at least trying to give the reader a definite sense of how strong individual states actually are in relation to one another.⁴⁸

In short, Mably and Campbell are each capturing one aspect of how the idea of the ‘grading of powers’ was evolving during the first half of the eighteenth century, and both of their works can, I submit, be seen as transitional. The one is making differences in strength the decisive factor in shaping international relations (and that in a study of public law to boot!), but without any proper index of state strength; the other is beginning to move towards a more precise quantification of differences in material capability, albeit without having grasped the importance of these over and above other considerations such as religion or dynastic connection. By the later eighteenth century, as Mably’s view became more widely accepted and as statistical studies advanced, the two come together in what one could call recognisably modern ‘realist’ accounts of the European system. By 1760, for example, the German diplomat Jacob Bielfeld could support with statistical analysis his frank claim that ‘one must disabuse oneself of the speculative ideas held by ordinary men about justice, equity, moderation, candour, and the other virtues of nations and their rulers. In the end, everything depends on power.’⁴⁹

Rank, power and intervention

The schemes outlined above give us a preliminary sense of what the early modern ranking of princes looked like, who was in it and where they were located. The question for us now is how this international hierarchy affected the practice of intervention, and how we can explain the movement in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries towards both the new Vattelien ideas of sovereign equality and non-intervention, and the emergence of new ways of thinking about sovereign inequality and intervention contained in the idea of the special role of the ‘great powers’.

⁴⁷ Campbell, *Present State*, pp. 10-12. In the introduction to his book, Campbell mentions Rohan, Pufendorf and Bethel by name as his main predecessors and inspirations.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, chapter two.

⁴⁹ Quoted in William Doyle, *The Old European Order, 1660-1800*, Second Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 267.

A first point here is that we should not confuse precedence with authority: while, for example, the emperor might have been generally recognised as pre-eminent in early modern (and, for that matter, medieval) Europe, this did not automatically translate into a right to intervene in the affairs of lower ranking princes. There were, of course, occasions when emperors tried to convert their precedence into something more substantial, and moments when even kings appeared to submit to them. For example, Henry II of England famously wrote to the emperor Frederick Barbarossa, to offer that ‘we place our Kingdom and everything subject to our rule anywhere at your disposal... Let there be between us and between our peoples an indivisible way of peace and love and of safe commerce, yet in such a way that the authority to command shall go to you who holds the higher rank’. This has often been taken as an indication not only of the precedence of the emperor, but also of his greater authority, and was later used by some imperial publicists as part of the campaign to assert his ascendancy.⁵⁰ However, it has also been argued that this was mere posturing, polite words to cover up the fact that Henry was not returning an important relic to the emperor. Certainly, while it was to play a role in subsequent squabbles between pope and emperor, it seems to have translated into little practical imperial involvement in English domestic affairs, as a matter of right.⁵¹ Another classic moment of imperial assertion in the middle ages also demonstrates the limits of imperial authority: Henry VII’s encyclical letter announcing his election in 1312, in which he asserted that all things had been placed under his imperium. Not only did this attract a stinging response from Philip the Fair of France (who had earlier successfully resisted similar assertiveness by the Pope), in which France’s refusal to recognise any temporal superior was made crystal clear; but it also had its hollowness revealed in Henry’s own largely fruitless struggle with Robert of Naples.⁵²

This is not to suggest that high ranking rulers were entirely lacking in any kind of special role within the system. But perhaps the most significant aspects of their role lay in the normative and legal realms. Rather than directly intervening as such, one might say that these high authorities set the parameters of the system, relying on others to conform to their wishes. Sometimes they went further, for example in the papal sending of judges delegate to other countries.⁵³ But perhaps their most significant role was in the authoritative management of the order of precedence itself. Pope and emperor were both founts of ennoblement and entitlement. Rulers who wished to improve their positions often looked to the papal and imperial courts to try to substantiate their claims and gain new titles: the Medicis’ campaign for a grand-ducal title is an outstanding and highly successful example, which also illustrates, incidentally, the growing role that money and strength were beginning to play in the ranking of princes. Even this role, however, was losing much of its force in the eighteenth century. Campaigns by the Russian Czar to have his imperial title acknowledged, the Savoyard search for a royal title, and what Heinz Duchhardt has called a

⁵⁰ See, for example, Robert Folz, *The Concept of Empire in Western Europe: From the Fifth to the Fourteenth Century*, trans. Sheila Ann Ogilvie (London: Edward Arnold, 1969).

⁵¹ K. Leyser, ‘Frederick Barbarossa, Henry II and the Hand of St James’, *English Historical Review* (Vol. 90, 1975), pp. 481-506.

⁵² This is discussed in Osiander, ‘Before Sovereignty’, and see also Pennington, *The Prince and the Law*, and, especially for French responses to imperial and papal claims, see Chris Jones, *Eclipse of Empire? Perceptions of the Western Empire and its Rulers in Late Medieval France* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007).

⁵³ Jane Sayers, *Papal Judges Delegate in the Province of Canterbury, 1198-1254: A Study in Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction and Administration* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

'wave of regalization' among German rulers, were both examples of how this process was beginning to escape the traditional authoritative controls.⁵⁴ Increasingly, these claims were grounded in assertions of the strength of the ruler, and in magnificent display of appropriate symbols -- regal adoptions of the key imperial symbol of the 'closed crown' providing an earlier indication of this development -- which were, in effect, self-proclaimed elements of royal status.⁵⁵

This 'wave of regalization', and what we might call the earlier 'wave of imperialization' of kingly symbolism, point to the increasingly competitive and fluid nature of the ranking of princes in the early modern period. But they also illustrate the way in which that hierarchy was beginning to be expressed in terms of bands or classes of sovereign, rather than an individually-articulated ordering of princes. By the time we get to the mid-eighteenth century, with authors such as Rousset de Missy or Martens, we are beginning to see the precedence ranking described in terms of broad types: possessors of closed crowns, for instance, or, in Martens's formulation, royal sovereigns, non-royal sovereigns and demi-sovereigns. And, as we have seen Rousset de Missy argue, within each band there was a growing sense of the equality of sovereigns. Diplomats were worrying less about precise seating arrangements, often agreeing to seat themselves 'pele-mele'; kings would write to one another as 'brothers', without unduly worrying about questions of their exact precedence over one another. Within the ranks of the 'royal sovereigns' at least, one can begin to detect a certain egalitarianism creeping into international relations, also perhaps an increasing desire on the part of non-royal sovereigns to join their ranks, and a growing anxiety at the dangers of slipping into the realm of the 'demi-sovereign'.

This sense of a greater equality within each class of sovereign, but also a growing distance between the classes, is one of the most significant changes in the structure of the early modern international hierarchy. It is in this context that one can, I think, begin to understand the movement in Vattel's account of the law of nations towards the idea of the equality of sovereigns. By effectively ignoring the position of demi-sovereigns, Vattel is left with the assumption that the only difference that matters is one of size, making for his famous comparison between giants and dwarfs. The separation that Vattel sought to achieve between rank and size, however, was not one that could seriously affect the conduct of international relations. The growing importance of the grading of powers was, within a few decades, translated into a novel kind of inequality of sovereigns, following the logic of employing differences in power to distinguish the rights and duties of the members of international society. This change, which had been slowly percolating through the eighteenth century became manifest in the nineteenth.

Conclusion

Starting from the commonly argued premiss that an idea of sovereign equality was crucial to the articulation of a doctrine of non-intervention in the eighteenth century, I have examined forms of

⁵⁴ See Isabel de Madariaga, 'Tsar into Emperor: the Title of Peter the Great', and Robert Oresko, 'The House of Savoy in Search for a Royal Crown in the Seventeenth Century', in Oresko, Gibbs and Scott (eds.), *Royal and Republican Sovereignty*, pp. 351-81 and 272-350 respectively.

⁵⁵ On the meaning and adoption of the closed crown, see Dale Hoak, 'The Iconography of the Crown Imperial', in Hoak (ed.), *Tudor Political Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 54-103.

international hierarchy by looking at the ways in which various early modern commentators described the structure of their international system, and the positions of individual rulers within it. The core of my argument has been that changes in the ranking of princes created the conditions for Vattel's novel doctrines of equality and non-intervention, but at the same time opening the door to a new kind of 'grading of powers' that provided the basis for the principal qualification to the Vattelian doctrine in the nineteenth century, the special role of the 'great powers'.

Looking ahead, the account of the structure of the early modern international society that I have developed here also provides the basis for further research on changing patterns of intervention, and the conduct of international relations more generally. I have suggested that precedence did not in itself translate into a right of intervention in the affairs of lower-ranking actors, unlike the more overtly interventionist cast of the nineteenth-century system of powers. That tentative proposition, however, requires more work to be properly substantiated. It would be interesting to use this more precise description of the structure of early modern hierarchy to pose the question of 'who,whom' for early modern intervention. There was no comprehensive sense that a higher ranked sovereign had a right to intervene in the affairs of a lower-ranking sovereign prince, but did position in the ranking of princes nevertheless fundamentally affect the way in which different actors related to one another? It would also be interesting to use these images of the international system to frame questions about social mobility in international society. As I suggested towards the end of the paper, there was considerable movement within the ranking of princes, especially as the authoritative management of the order became less definitive or constraining over time. Traditional sources of status, such as antiquity of lineage or title, began to be replaced by what one seventeenth-century author described as the role of fortune, and the 'continual revolutions' in the 'order of powers.'⁵⁶ The sense of greater fluidity in this order, while potentially attractive to some states that stood to benefit from the cracking open of the old status-order implied a more turbulent, and to some extent a more violent world, and one in which old standards of respect for the rights of sovereign princes were, despite Vattelian theory, no longer so assured of their role in the practice of intervention.

⁵⁶ Samuel Guichenon, *Histoire généalogique de la Royale Maison de Savoye* (Lyons, 1660), p. 80. Cited in Oresko, Gibbs & Scott, *Royal and Republican Sovereignty*, p. 4.