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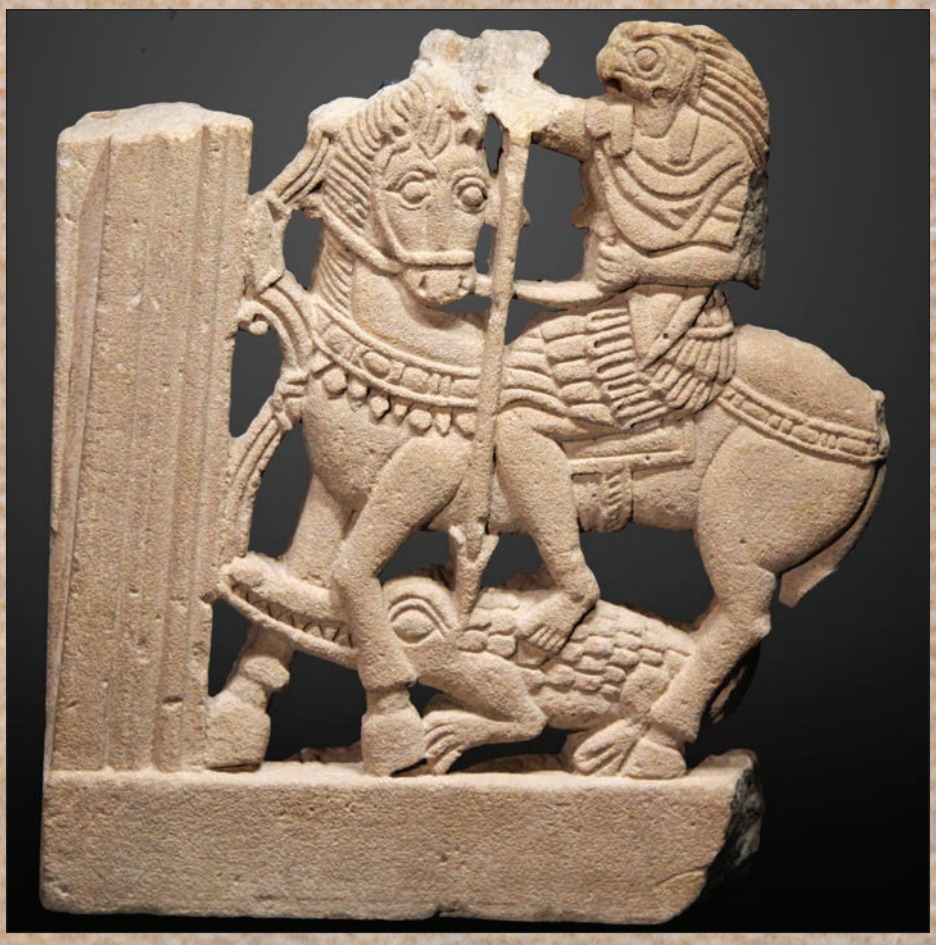

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Conference Report on International Symposium: *Justifying Interpersonal Violence in Early Modern Europe* (Online, 23 April 2025)

On 23 April 2025, the Institute IRRIS for Research, Development and Strategies of Society, Culture and the Environment (Slovenia) in collaboration with the University of York (UK) organised the international symposium *Justifying Interpersonal Violence in Early Modern Europe*. The event took place online and formed part of the bilateral research project *Justifying Interpersonal Violence in Early Modern Europe* (BI-VB/23-25-001), co-funded by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (ARIS), as well as the research programme *Practices of Conflict Resolution Between Customary and Statutory Law in the Area of Today's Slovenia and Its Neighbouring Lands* (P6-0435).

The aims and context of the symposium were focused on European early modernity that is often characterised as a period in which feuding practices disappeared and levels of interpersonal violence gradually declined, ushering in the values of civility and discipline. Yet, as recent scholarship demonstrates, this narrative masks a far more complex reality. Far from disappearing, violent practices remained widespread between 1500 and 1800, often retaining a degree of social legitimacy despite formal prohibitions. Pardons, letters of safe conduct, and local judicial leniency attest to a continuing acceptance of violence as a legitimate means of conflict resolution.

The symposium was conceived precisely to investigate these contradictions: how was interpersonal violence narrated, justified, or condemned across Europe, and how were such discourses shaped by law, gender, social status, and political transformations? The event sought to bring together scholars working on different regions of Western, Central, and Mediterranean Europe, in order to build comparative perspectives and open new avenues for future research.

Welcoming addresses by Žiga Oman (Institute IRRIS) and Darko Darovec (Institute IRRIS) highlighted the need to revisit long-standing assumptions about the "civilising process" in Europe. They stressed that the interdisciplinary and international collaboration underpinning the bilateral project allows for a more nuanced understanding of how violence functioned in practice and how it was framed in legal and cultural discourse.

The first panel titled *European Comparisons* underscored the value of comparative analysis in questioning entrenched historiographical models. It was opened with a joint presentation by Žiga Oman (IRRIS) and Stuart Carroll (University of York) titled *Narrating Elite Violence in the Early Modern Habsburg Erblande: Inner Austrian*. The core of the presentation was focused on how the Duchies in the Imperial Context examined elite violence in the Habsburg Hereditary Lands. Contrary to the prevailing view

that noble feuding had disappeared after the Imperial ban of 1495, they showed that feuding practices persisted well into the seventeenth century. The crucial shift lay not in the abandonment of violence but in the semantic and judicial strategies used to frame it. Their findings suggest that the supposed "pacification" of elites was in fact the product of changes in legal rhetoric and court practices, rather than a substantive decline in violent behaviour.

The second paper in the panel was also a joint paper, further connecting the bilateral cooperation between the United Kingdom and Slovenia. Sian Hibbert (University of York) and Veronika Kos (Institute IRRIS) offered a comparative study of women's involvement in violent conflicts in Languedoc and Ljubljana between 1680 and 1720, which is clearly reflected in the title of their paper *Women and Interpersonal Violence in Early Modern Europe: A Comparative*

Study of Languedoc and Ljubljana (1680–1720). Drawing on criminal records from the parliament of Toulouse and town council archives in Ljubljana, they challenged the conventional perception of women as marginal or passive actors in disputes. Instead, their case studies revealed women as active participants—both verbally and physically—in conflicts, suggesting that gendered agency in violence must be reassessed within patriarchal structures that simultaneously constrained and enabled their participation. Together, these two papers highlighted how comparative research can unsettle dominant narratives of decline and passivity, replacing them with more dynamic accounts of adaptation and negotiation.

The second panel, titled *The Italian Perspective* shifted focus to the Italian states, offering three papers that examined the interplay between institutional innovation, cultural practices, and gendered notions of honour. Opening paper *Justifying the New Protagonists of Civic Peace: Signori alla Pace and Pacifici in 16th-Century Italy* by Andrew Vidali (Trinity College Dublin) explored the emergence of civic peacekeeping bodies (*signori alla pace* and *pacifici*) in the Venetian mainland and Papal States during the mid-sixteenth century. He argued that their establishment reflected broader European concerns about order in the wake of the Reformation. The Italian ruling classes presented these institutions as necessary guarantors of public peace, and Vidali convincingly situated them within the wider European "crisis of peacemaking."

The second paper, titled The *Nexus of Gender, Honor, and Interpersonal Violence in the Venetian Republic 1550–1700* by Amanda Madden (George Mason University), investigated the nexus of gender, honour, and interpersonal violence in the Venetian Republic between 1550 and 1700. Through case studies such as the 1578 murder of Madonna Anzola Nogara, she illustrated how honour was mobilised as both a personal and collective rationale for violence. Honour could legitimise acts of aggression tied to

adultery, insults, or political affronts, while also shaping the responses of state authorities. Madden's paper underscored the complex intersections of gender, social status, and legal discourse in constructing the legitimacy of violent acts.

The last paper of the panel and the closing paper of the symposium, *Justifying Violence Through Dance in the Renaissance Republic of Venice* by Umberto Cecchinato (University of Trento) provided an innovative cultural perspective by examining the role of Renaissance dance. Often seen as a practice fostering civility and self-control, dance could paradoxically serve as a framework through which violence was initiated and justified. By analysing court records from the Veneto, Cecchinato demonstrated how the rules of dance allowed adversaries to transform latent enmities into socially intelligible violent encounters, thereby complicating the notion of dance as a purely "civilising" force. This panel collectively highlighted Italy as a laboratory for studying both institutional responses to violence and the cultural forms through which violent acts were justified or concealed.

In his closing remarks, Stuart Carroll (University of York) emphasised the symposium's success in revealing both commonalities and divergences across European contexts. What emerged clearly was that the legitimacy of violence did not simply vanish with legal reforms or the rise of absolutist states. Rather, it remained embedded in cultural, gendered, and symbolic frameworks that continued to shape early modern societies. He also stressed that the Reformation, often invoked as a causal factor, may not in fact provide a sufficient explanation for the surge of violence in the seventeenth century. The outbreak of the French Wars of Religion in 1562 demonstrates that factional crime and factional violence played a decisive role, complicating any simple correlation between religious reform and rising levels of conflict. Furthermore, the discussion highlighted the uneven availability of evidence across Europe: while in France and Inner Austria the scarcity of sources constrains our ability to reconstruct female participation in violence, in Italy (particularly in Venice) there is an abundance of legal and normative material on the regulation of violence, which opens different interpretive possibilities. The symposium thus underscored the necessity of moving beyond linear narratives of decline in violence. By focusing on justification, whether in courts, in honour disputes, or even in dance, the event highlighted how violence was negotiated within changing political, legal, and cultural landscapes. The symposium fostered a productive exchange between scholars from Slovenia, the UK, Ireland, the US, and Italy, paving the way for further comparative research. The bilateral projects will continue to investigate the ways in which interpersonal violence was framed and legitimised, with the aim of situating the Slovenian and Central European experience within broader European developments. The event confirmed the

value of cross-regional dialogue and interdisciplinary approaches in reassessing the role of violence in early modern Europe. Far from being merely the residue of a pre-modern past, interpersonal violence was a dynamic practice, constantly redefined by law, custom, and cultural creativity.

Angelika Ergaver