

This project explores how conspiratorial thinking, diplomacy, and espionage shaped politics and religion in early modern Europe. It focuses on two key historical figures: the Venetian statesman Fra Paolo Sarpi (1552–1623) and the English ambassador to Venice, Henry Wotton (1568–1639). At a time when Europe was torn by religious conflict and political rivalries, Sarpi and Wotton were alarmed by what they saw as a dangerous alliance between the Catholic Church, the Habsburg Empire, and the Jesuit order. In response, they launched intelligence-gathering efforts, diplomatic initiatives, and wide-ranging correspondence aimed at countering this influence.

To uncover how these efforts unfolded, the project will analyze thousands of historical documents—letters, diplomatic reports, and polemical texts written in English, Italian, and Latin. While rooted in traditional historical methods, the research will also use advanced digital tools to detect patterns in language and communication that might otherwise go unnoticed. For example, the project will look at how certain phrases or sentence structures hinted at hidden motives or implied threats. It will also trace how ideas—such as rumors or coded warnings—moved across Europe.

A major outcome of the project will be the creation of interactive visualizations, known as Knowledge Graphs, showing how information and misinformation spread through Sarpi's and Wotton's networks. These "maps" of influence will help bring to light the hidden connections, alliances, and rhetorical strategies that shaped political decisions in early modern Europe.

This research matters because it shows how conspiracy theories and misinformation have long been powerful forces in shaping history—not just through action, but through fear, persuasion, and words. By studying these hidden dynamics, the project offers new insight into how Europe's political landscape was formed and reminds us that battles of ideas have always been just as influential as battles fought with weapons.