For our parents

THE PRACTICE OF DIPLOMACY

Its Evolution, Theory and Administration

Keith Hamilton
and
Richard Langhorne

ROUTLEDGE
London and New York

THE PRACTICE OF DIPLOMACY

In the post-cold-war world the role of diplomacy has visibly expanded in the face of far more unstable international conditions. This is partly because of the emergence of complex relationships between a larger number of power centres, including non-governmental organizations as well as states. These developments are adding to the machinery of diplomacy, expanding the number of topics of negotiation and modifying the established character of diplomacy in significant ways. This book explores the historical development of diplomatic practice from the earliest times and shows how it has grown and adapted to the needs of changing international environments. It follows these developments into the late twentieth century and concludes that while diplomatic techniques have altered in response to new needs and have taken in technological advances in communications, the activity itself is inevitable and has never been more important.

The authors have brought together their wealth of research experience to provide a broad approach to diplomacy that is both coherent and accessible. *The Practice of Diplomacy* will be essential reading for undergraduates and graduates in international relations and international history as well as for those training as diplomats.

Keith Hamilton is Editor of *Documents on British Policy Overseas* in the Historical Branch of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Formerly he taught international politics at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth. **Richard Langhorne** is Director and Chief Executive of Wilton Park, FCO, and was formerly Director of the Centre of International Studies, University of Cambridge. He has also taught at the universities of Exeter and Kent.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book was conceived in the late 1980s as a brief history of diplomacy for students of international politics. Since then the enterprise has expanded in scope and content, and recent political developments in eastern and east-central Europe and the apparent end of the cold war have led us to revise the later chapters to take account of changed perspectives and newly emerging practices. Our purpose has, nevertheless, remained much the same, and we hope the resulting volume will provide a useful introduction to those seeking to understand the ways in which diplomacy has evolved and the work of its practitioners.

We should like to thank for their advice and assistance Professor Derek Beales, Mr Richard Bone, Dr Eleanor Breuning, Mrs Glyn Daniel, Miss Jane Davis, Dr Erik Goldstein, Dr Ann Lane, Dr Frederick Parsons and Dr Moorhead Wright. The finished product remains, however, wholly our own responsibility and it should not be taken as an expression of official government policy.

Keith Hamilton
Richard Langhorne
St David's Day, 1994

First published 1995
by Routledge
11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

Typeset in Baskerville by
Ponting–Green Publishing Services, Chesham, Bucks
Printed and bound in Great Britain by
T.J. Press (Padstow) Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book has been requested

ISBN 0–415–10474–2 (hbk)
ISBN 0–415–10475–0 (pbk)

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Diplomacy, the peaceful conduct of relations amongst political entities, their principals and accredited agents, has rarely been without its critics or detractors. Sometimes regarded as necessary but regrettable, at other times with deep respect, it has seldom, if ever, had a more significant role to play in human affairs than it has at present. The necessity for organized dialogue in an era when the relative certainties of a bipolar states system have so recently given way to a disorderly, confused multipolarity is witnessed by the frenetic pace of contemporary diplomatic activity. The collapse of long-established hegemonies and the re-emergence of long-neglected enmities have placed a high premium on the work of those skilled in mediation, negotiation and representation. In the meantime efforts to restructure and revive existing international institutions have tended to focus public attention as much upon the execution as the administration of foreign policy. More than thirty years ago, Lord Strang, a former British diplomat, remarked: 'In a world where war is everybody's tragedy and everybody's nightmare, diplomacy is everybody's business'. The end of the cold war has deprived the aphorism of neither its pertinence nor its validity.

If diplomacy is important, it is also very old. Even the most ancient and comparatively most primitive societies required reliable means of communicating and dealing with their neighbours. The process was generally considered worthy to warrant a general agreement that the safety of diplomatic messengers be assured by divine sanction. And while our knowledge of the earliest diplomacy may be limited, we know enough to see that it existed widely, that its results were sometimes recorded in highly public ways – on stone monuments, for example – and that rules of the game had been devised and developed.

The diplomatic process, its machinery and conventions, has grown steadily more complex, usually in fits and starts. Its growth has been a response to the interconnected developments of more complicated governing structures in human societies and the consequentially more complicated things they have wanted to negotiate with each other, or represent to one another. As states began to evolve in Europe at the end of the Middle

Ages, and by the mid-twentieth century became, in only mildly differing forms, universally accepted structures, much greater clarity emerged about what sources of authority might legitimately send and receive diplomatic agents. Their precise relationship to these authorities then became so significant that establishing it could lead to disputes which could prolong wars for years at a time, until during the eighteenth century such stultifying disputes were abandoned as inherently impractical.

It had always been clear that diplomats enjoyed special privileges and immunities while actually engaged in diplomacy, though it was often a matter of dispute as to when a person was genuinely a diplomat, and sometimes as to what their privileges and immunities were. These arguments tended to disappear during the eighteenth century and a more or less general agreement about their extent and nature emerged. With the emergence of continuous diplomacy in the seventeenth century, diplomats themselves increasingly became a recognizably professional body. This led to a series of disputes about exactly which persons in a diplomatic household were entitled to privileges and immunities and about what status embassy buildings and compounds should be given. In practice most of these questions were resolved by 1815, certainly most matters of precedence were regulated then and additionally in 1818. It was not until 1961, however, that a general agreement about the legal bases of diplomatic relations was arrived at and codified into a treaty. This agreement was principally fuelled by the arrival of large numbers of new, post-colonial, states who had no experience of the essentially *de facto* rules operated by the older states system. It was also partly the consequence of deliberate breaches of those rules which had occurred during the early cold war.

This kind of pressure was a modern example of what has always been an important factor in the development of diplomacy. As the machinery of diplomacy has responded to changes in the entities it represents, most obviously with the evolution of states and most recently with the emergence of power centres not located in states, so it has also responded to the needs of successive international environments. Development has occurred most significantly during periods when war, for one reason or another, has been regarded as a particularly ineffective means of pursuing interests, and diplomacy has become its principal substitute. The institution of the resident ambassador was partly a response to this situation in Renaissance Italy, and the completion of the web of foreign ministries linked by permanent embassies was the consequence of the intense diplomacy of the late eighteenth century. Later on, when the prevention of warfare became a principal objective of diplomacy after 1815, the consequences included the development of the peacetime conference in the early nineteenth century and the subsequent construction of both the League of Nations and the United Nations in the twentieth century.

In the contemporary world both kinds of pressure are plainly and

simultaneously visible. There are changes occurring in the global distribution of power which follow from changes both in the nature of power itself and from consequential changes in its location. Such changes bring the risk of conflict in multifarious forms and raise the profile of diplomacy. There are changes, too, to be seen in the character of the state. The state has been, since the seventeenth century, the principal and sometimes the only, effective international actor. Now there are more states than ever before, differing more widely in type, size and relative power, and this factor alone has greatly increased the quantity of diplomatic activity and the range of topics that are discussed. Some of these topics are now derived from economic, financial and technological issues which transcend the traditional role of the state and operate on a global, horizontal basis disconnected from the essentially vertical state structure. Dialogue between old and new sources of power and old and new centres of authority are blurring the distinctions between what is diplomatic activity and what is not, and who, therefore, are diplomats and who are not. Such dialogue is also creating an additional layer of diplomacy in which non-state actors communicate both with states and associations of states and other non-state actors and vice versa. The effect has certainly been an explosion of diplomatic and quasidiplomatic activity. This book gives an account of the way in which diplomacy acquired its characteristic structure and discusses the forces which are quite sharply modifying that structure for the purposes of the contemporary world. Nevertheless, it also shows that the history of diplomacy demonstrates continuity. The exigencies of dialogue between communities, rulers, states and international organizations over time has brought the development of perceptibly similar structures.

In writing this book the authors have borne in mind particularly the needs of international relations and international history students and the work is also intended to provide valuable background material for the foreign service trainees of any state or organization engaged in learning the art and practice of diplomacy.

PART I

FROM THE BEGINNINGS UNTIL 1815

1

THE OLD WORLD

> And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon King of the Amorites, saying, Let me pass through thy land: we will not turn into the fields or into the vineyards; we will not drink of the waters of the well: but we will go along by the King's highway, until we be past thy borders.
>
> (Book of Numbers 22, vv. 21–2)

Despite the fact that Sihon did not accept this request for a *laissez-passer* and suffered dreadfully for not doing so, it is often and correctly observed that the beginnings of diplomacy occurred when the first human societies decided that it was better to hear a message than to eat the messenger. If that has been agreed then there have to be rules which assure the safety of the messenger, and if there are rules, there has to be some sanction for them. This must have been true from times before we have any record at all, and from early recorded history, when the evidence is derived almost entirely from epigraphic sources – often frustratingly broken just at the crucial point – it is clear that diplomatic exchanges were quite frequent, that they led to what were evidently treaties, that good faith and enforcement were even then perennial problems and that the sanction for the safety and general good treatment of ambassadors was divine. It was no doubt the more effective in a world where the local pantheon would be expected to intervene regularly in daily life and to be the source of sudden and nastily effective retribution in the case of wrongdoing, either directly or by human agency.[1]

What is also clear is that there is not enough evidence for us to form other than a shadowy view of what truly ancient diplomacy was really like. Certainly it was intermittent and generated no permanent institutions; and how far rulers recorded transactions or negotiations and to what degree they differed in their practices, we can know only patchily. With rare exceptions, it is likely that the lack of evidence does not hide sophisticated diplomatic structures which have been lost. For most of the state structures took the form of large, loosely formed empires, with porous boundaries, slow communications and little need to deal on any continuous basis with

any other entity which had to be treated as an equal. Such conditions did not give rise to the development of complicated diplomacy nor to the devices required to pursue it. We have an idea of the kind of attitude that must once have been general. It arises out of the survival of the Chinese Empire from ancient times into the modern world. When Lord Macartney attempted to open diplomatic relations with the Chinese Emperor in 1793 on behalf of King George III, he encountered the response of a diplomatic dinosaur. The Chinese reply was as follows:

> As to the request made in your memorial, O King, to send one of your nationals to stay at the Celestial Court to take care of your country's trade with China, this is not in harmony with the state system of our dynasty and will definitely not be permitted. Traditionally people of the European nations who wished to render some service at the Celestial Court have been permitted to come to the capital. But after their arrival they are obliged to wear Chinese court costumes, are placed in a certain residence and are never allowed to return to their own countries.[2]

Of course this reply was as much evidence of a particular world view as of diplomatic practice, but it did illustrate one aspect of the oldest kind of diplomacy, as did another Chinese example of its administration, this time from the nineteenth century. One of the reasons why the Chinese had such difficulty coping with European inroads was the absence of a central office or officer for co-ordinating diplomatic responses. For some purposes, provincial governors at the edges of the Middle Kingdom held responsibility for reacting to the outside world; for other needs different holders of influence at Peking might intervene capriciously, and yet other matters would be dealt with by the Barbarian Tribute Office. Even after foreign missions in China had been forced on Peking, there was little urgency about sending reciprocal Chinese missions abroad.[3] Some of these characteristics were to be found in the Roman Empire, with similarly insignificant consequences – but only for so long as it was not necessary to deal with another party as an equal. Faced with that, such systems collapsed.

ANCIENT GREECE

The first diplomatic system of which there is not only reliable but copious evidence was also one whose evident complexity was derived from the need to communicate among equals, the reverse of the submission or revolt situation which normally obtained on the peripheries of loosely controlled empires. In ancient Greece, a collectivity of small city-states emerged, separated by a sufficiently rugged topography to ensure their independence, but connected by sea routes and relatively short, if difficult, land journeys, thus compelling regular intercity communication. This diplomatic

traffic was made more necessary by the fact that, for a substantial period, no single city was powerful enough to establish an empire over the others, nor were they overwhelmed from outside. This ensured that they must deal with each other as equals. And, of course, it was easier to do so, since they shared a language and a largely common inheritance of culture and religion.[4] The practice of frequent diplomatic exchange was probably increased by the marked Greek tendency to be intensely quarrelsome internally and bellicose externally. Greek diplomacy was propelled by these characteristics and did little, if anything, to relieve them. What developed out of this situation was not a clear-cut and fixed system of behaviour, nor did any kind of administrative structure appear, but there is no doubt that a pattern emerged, some of it extremely surprising to the modern eye.

The Greeks knew three kinds of representative: the *angelos* or *presbys*, the *keryx* and the *proxenos*.[5] The first two, meaning messenger and elder respectively, were envoys used for brief and highly specific missions; the second was a herald, having special rights of personal safety; and the third was resident and informal, perhaps akin to a consul, though so different as to make any detailed comparison impossible. Before about 700 BC, what we know is confined to Homeric descriptions, and they certainly include one fine example of an embassy – that of Menelaus and Odysseus to Troy, revealing also a certain level of accepted immunities, to be flouted only with serious risk of retribution. In this case, Antimachus had proposed that the two ambassadors should be murdered, a fact later learnt by the Greeks, who took eventual revenge for the suggestion: Agamemnon had the two sons of Antimachus beheaded after they fell from their chariot in battle.[6]

Thucydides is the outstanding source of information about the later period.[7] Greek ambassadors were chosen with care, usually by the assembly of the city, and sometimes, in order to get the right men, in contradiction of existing regulations, for example, that men might only have one state job at a time. Their qualities were not necessarily those of suave or confidential negotiators, for one of the more surprising elements in Greek diplomacy was its open and public nature. Policy in the sending state was frequently debated at length in public, and the arguments to be used by ambassadors openly determined. They were often issued with extremely restrictive instructions and very rarely were plenipotentiary powers given. Such openness also had the effect of excluding the collection, recording and subsequent use of military or diplomatic intelligence. This exclusion was not complete, but to the modern eye, the diplomatic exchanges of the Greeks were marked by an astonishing ignorance.

On arrival in the host state, where the treatment was expected to be reasonably hospitable in a physical sense, though unaccompanied by any grandeur or ceremony, the ambassadors were conducted to the assembly, where their oratorical abilities were foremost, as was their nimble-footedness in answer to questions or subsequent debate. It was rather as if the principal

skill expected of a British ambassador to the United States was to produce a fine forensic performance before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. This aspect of the work may account for the tendency of Greek cities to criticize returning ambassadors, often sharply, sometimes even to prosecute them.[8] Taken together with the lack of payment, a marked tendency to question expense accounts and the lack of any *douceur* in the way of life, it is quite remarkable that ambassadors could be found to serve. These disadvantages were no doubt mitigated by the relative brevity of the missions undertaken. Greek embassies were strictly *ad hoc*. Their credentials were valid for one negotiation only and appointment as an envoy was always a brief tenure.

A second aspect of Greek diplomacy which would have surprised even a high-Renaissance embassy was the number of ambassadors involved in a mission, which could be as many as ten. This was mainly intended to increase the weight of the case being put in another state's assembly, but large numbers were also used to represent different strands of opinion in the sending state, and as such could cripple an embassy's effectiveness. The outstanding example of this was the vitriolic abuse exchanged between Demosthenes and Aeschines when serving on an Athenian mission to Macedon in 346 BC. Demosthenes would not sit at the same table or sleep in the same house as his colleague.

This lack of consistency, lack of continuity and lack of confidentiality rendered the pace of Greek diplomacy extremely slow, as it staggered between shifting domestic public opinion and the ignorance which the absence of any kind of administrative process and record keeping imposed. Yet the constant flow of missions, the understood immunities which kept them relatively safe, the treaties and alliances which resulted and the often high standard of public debate give a picture of highly sophisticated, if not always effective, diplomatic activity. It is to be remembered for example that the Athenians succeeded in creating a league of over 200 members drawn from states over a wide area and in maintaining it for most of the fifth century BC.

In this kind of achievement, the *proxenos*, that other Greek diplomatic figure, played little part. A *proxenos* acted for another state while remaining resident in his own state. The office could be hereditary, but was more generally derived from a sympathy developed by the *proxenos* for the political method or culture of his adoptive state. It would be notable Athenian sympathizers with Sparta who might be appointed as the Spartan *proxenoi* in Athens, for example, Cimon and Alcibiades. The logical consequence of this appeared from the fourth century BC onwards when *proxenoi* were often granted citizenship of the state they were representing. The principal duties of the *proxenos* were to offer hospitality and assistance to visitors from the state that they represented, and this usually included the accommodation of their ambassadors. It also included giving advice on the current domestic

political situation, and *proxenoi* were often the leaders of the political faction which was best disposed towards the state they represented; but it did not include the handling of negotiations, nor did it carry any other contractual duties. Moreover, there was no suggestion that the *proxenos* was expected to carry his external sympathies to the point of damaging the interests of his own state. In bad times there was probably little a *proxenos* could do; in good times, however, in commerce, culture and politics, his influence could be substantial. Athens came to regard the office as important enough to justify the grant not only of citizenship, but also of protection and political asylum, if need be. The post was generally regarded as one of distinction, commonly to be found among senior statesmen in a Greek city-state. Martin Wight said of it:

> The modern system is weak in giving expression to the sympathy of individuals for foreign peoples, exemplified by the concern of many Victorian Englishmen for United Italy, of R. W. Seton-Watson for the central European and Balkan nations, of C. A. Macartney for Hungary, of T. E. Lawrence for the Arabs, of Denis Brogan (honorary citizen of La Roche Blanche, Puy de Dôme) for France as well as the United States. Such sympathies in the modern world are eccentric, slightly suspect, and mainly confined to scholars. It was precisely these sympathies that the Hellenic system of proxeny institutionalized.[9]

Claims have sometimes been made that the Greeks developed the first forms of international organizations. The bases of these claims are that the Olympic Games, and other similar festivals, during which a generally agreed truce occurred, represented a period of deliberately controlled international relations during which co-operative arrangements could be made; that the wide respect for and use made of oracles, perhaps particularly that of Delphi, amounted to a kind of international mechanism; and that the Amphictyonic leagues had similar characteristics.[10] These leagues were made up of a number of communities living in the area of a famous shrine. The league was responsible for the maintenance of the temple and for the care of the worship within it, and thus had to agree upon shared arrangements and responsibilities. Such leagues came sometimes to exercise political as well as religious influence and they were used for negotiating oaths of non-aggression and mutual defence or offence. Such oaths were regularly violated and any grand claims for their interstate significance seem too large. They represented the recognition, as did Greek shared legal principles, that the Greek city-states were part of the same religious and cultural environment and in that sense were prepared to share some institutions and practices. If they were sometimes the agency for making peace, they did not alter the truth of Plato's remark: '*Peace* as the term is commonly employed is nothing more than a name, the truth being that every state is by law of nature engaged perpetually in an informal

with every other state'.[11] These were not international organizations as they would be understood in the late twentieth century, and as far as the Olympic Games were concerned, there was an entirely familiar tendency to use them for immediate political ends to an extent which makes twentieth-century moralizing on the subject of the non-political nature of sport look weakly naive.

THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Remarkable as was its extent and its longevity, the Roman Empire contributed little to the development of diplomacy; and what did emerge was primarily legal in importance, and has none of the intrinsic interest which Greek dealings generated. It may be that this impression is unduly strong because of uncertainties about how the administration of the Roman Empire worked at the centre, and still more, the lack of archive materials – either because they did not exist or because they failed to survive. It is, however, of at least as much and probably more significance that the Roman Empire exhibited marked ambiguities about what was internal and what was external, as it also possessed dual functions in the conduct of affairs derived from the emergence of the Empire from the Republic and the continued existence of parallel institutions.[12] In the early days of the Roman Republic it is clear that procedures similar to those developed in Greece operated, and were used to keep the original federation together. As Rome came to dominate, the Senate took over – and never formally thereafter surrendered – the right of choosing and instructing ambassadors, and of receiving incoming embassies. After the establishment of the Empire, some of the formalities continued to be arranged through the surviving institutions of the Republic, but it is clear that even from Augustus' time, those from within or without the Empire who wished to influence decisions did so by sending embassies to the Emperor, wherever he might be – sometimes finding him was a difficult problem for visiting embassies. This fact illustrates an administrative difficulty about dealing with Rome on which no advance was made during the life of the Empire. Despite the continued ceremonial importance of the Senate, there were no central institutions at Rome for the conduct of foreign policy or the maintenance of records. Policy was where the Emperor was, and while he undoubtedly had staff whose duty was to write letters in both Latin and Greek, it seems likely that he composed most, perhaps all of them, himself. During the third century AD, the Emperor's involvement in the defence of the Empire against the Sassanid Persians, frequently led him to negotiate in person, and the question of how ambassadors were selected and what they actually did, still to some degree unresolved, became less relevant.

All these uncertainties of management were paralleled in uncertainties about the internal organization and limits of the Roman Empire. Like

preceding great empires, the Romans allowed highly porous borders. It would have been very difficult for a traveller in the second or third centuries to be entirely clear when he was entering or leaving the Roman Empire. And even when he was certain that he must be within it, he would have found a wide variety of local relationships with Rome which were determined by the circumstances in which the area in question had been joined to the Roman Empire. There could be areas of unsubdued tribes, there could be varieties of client kingdoms, there could be provinces which were under senatorial rather than imperial jurisdiction; and on the peripheries, there were kingdoms and tribes which owed a greater or lesser degree of allegiance to Rome, in which there could even be grants of Roman citizenship. In a speech to the Senate in 48, the Emperor Claudius attributed some Greek problems to failure to assimilate those they conquered. 'Was there any cause for the ruin of the Lacedaemonians and the Athenians, though they were flourishing in arms, but the fact that they rejected the vanquished as aliens?'[13]

From the correspondence which was preserved by cities anxious to have their rights publicly remembered and who therefore inscribed the relevant letters on walls, it seems that there was probably little distinction drawn between the method of communicating with entities of some independence within the Empire and authorities beyond it. Rome was prepared to write in both Latin and Greek, and its neighbours in the East evidently reckoned to use Greek. Letter writers for both languages were maintained by the Emperor, and there are references to translators when face-to-face negotiations took place, increasingly with the Emperor in person from the second century, or when visiting embassies met the Senate, as they had in earlier times.

For all the evidence of a complex correspondence and long-travelled embassies, Rome did not yield the procedures and complications of diplomacy conducted between equals. Most of what was transacted was in response to requests of one sort or another from within, from the peripheries or from beyond. Immediate problems with neighbours were usually dealt with on the spot, often by military authorities, and this became more common when the great crisis developed in the East with the expanding Sassanid Empire in Persia. No records appear to have been kept, and thus no notion at all developed of a continuing diplomatic relationship with any other entity. Rome did not use diplomacy, as Byzantium was to do, as a means of maintaining its supremacy, but as a means of transacting often very humdrum business, and this may be why it was the methods of managing long-distance legal or commercial business principally within the Empire which were to constitute its more important legacy. The notion that the exchanges of ordinary life should occur in a stable and regulated environment was a consequence of the Roman system. It was this system that gave rise to the legal principles written into the Code of Justinian which

became the first basis of a simple diplomatic law. Similarly, the Romans wanted to be very clear about the legality of warfare, and maintained an antiquated but symbolically significant set of procedures for marking war and peace. Observing these rituals was regarded as safeguarding good faith between nations – the *prisca fides* on which the Romans particularly prided themselves – by providing a legal distinction between just and pious war and brigandage. The only permanent body that Rome evolved with some role in international relations, the college of *Fetiales*, was responsible for making the correct responses. If war was to be declared, the *Fetiales* informed the enemy of the grievances of Rome, and if nothing happened after a fixed period to prevent war from being declared, certain formulas had to be recited on the border of the enemy's territory and a cornel wood spear cast into his land. If, as must almost always have been the case, distance prevented this, the ceremony was performed by the column of war in Rome. Peace was marked by the sacrifice of a pig as confirming the oath sworn at the time, and a curse was laid upon Rome should she be the first to break it. None of this conferred upon the twenty members of the college of *Fetiales* any rights or duties in the formulation or management of policy.

BYZANTIUM

In the later Roman Empire, as in the early days of the Republic, it was not possible to maintain a monolithic, non-international, attitude because of the force of external pressures; and the steady sharpening of this development brought about a revolution in the diplomatic stance and methods of the Eastern Empire at Byzantium (*c.* 330–1453). The Byzantine response to its circumstances came to give great importance, sometimes primary importance, to diplomatic activity. The expansion of its techniques, its immensely long range and its persistence made it a forerunner of the modern system to a degree which its predecessors could not have been, and the close relationship between Byzantium and Venice provided a channel of transmission to the Western world.

The external problems faced by the rulers of Byzantium arose out of the threat of invasion from virtually all quarters. The least of them was the rise of new authorities in the West in succession to Rome, owing allegiance to the Western Church. More serious were the series of nomadic incursions from central Asia into the northern and Black Sea areas. At intervals from the sixth century, the Germanic peoples, the Slavs, the Hungarians, the even more feared Pechenegs, the Russians, the Abasgians and the Khazars emerged from the Steppes in waves. To the east appeared the Persians, the Turks, Seljuk and then Ottoman; to the south, the Arabs, driven by the new religion of Islam, swept out of the Arabian peninsula. For the Byzantines, faced with this array of enemies, there was another problem: the internal resources of the Empire could not sustain a permanently successful military

response, indeed, it often found any military victory elusive. The longevity of the Eastern Empire, against all the odds, suggested that whatever alternative means of survival lay to hand, other than indigenous weaknesses in the enemy, were of unusual effectiveness. Those means had to be diplomatic.

The background against which the Byzantine diplomatic hand was played was of great importance. The conversion of the Empire to Christianity gave to the Emperor a conjunction of powers, divine and secular. The traditional universal authority of Rome was joined by a new and sacred role as representative of God; and gave to both Empire and Emperor a limitless scope. The Byzantine Empire was co-extensive with the *oikoumene*, the whole civilized world. All other rulers were held to stand in a natural relationship of inferiority to the ruler at the centre of the world, located in the city of Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire, which was itself a symbol of overwhelming influence as the junction point of both Christianity and the idea of Rome. Constantine VII put this into theoretical form when 'he compared the Emperor's power, in its rhythm and order, to the harmonious movement given to the Universe by its Creator'.[14] Many expressions of this view, and the consequent invincibility of the Empire exist. A good example was the response which the Emperor Romanus I Lecapenus gave to the Tsar Symeon of Bulgaria when he dared to assume the ultimate title, *basileus* of the Romans: he told him that a title assumed by force is not permanent. 'This is not possible, it is not possible even though you long and strive to beautify yourself like a jackdaw with borrowed plumes, which will fall away from you and reveal the name which your race fits you for.' Symeon was also warned by the Patriarch Nicholas Mysticus, who was otherwise highly accommodating, that those who attack the empire must expect the wrath of God because it was 'superior to every authority on earth, the only one on earth which the Emperor of All has established'.[15]

In addition to seizing every opportunity of emphasizing both the longevity of the Empire – a serious point, given the ephemeral nature of the 'barbarian' political organizations – and the contrasting fates of their enemies, the Byzantines were happy to hint at their possession of what might now be called 'non-conventional' weapons. They were also careful to keep all the physical signs of their unique superiority in evidence. These included the evidently outstanding beauty of the ceremonial singing of the Offices in St Sophia, itself an architectural wonder. In the late tenth century, during the visit of envoys of Prince Vladimir of Russia, they 'seemed to behold amid wreaths of incense and the radiance of candles young men, wonderfully arrayed, floating in the air above the heads of the priests and singing in triumph, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Eternal".' And on asking the meaning of this marvellous apparition they were answered, "If you were not ignorant of the Christian mysteries, you would know that the angels themselves descend from heaven to celebrate the Office with our priests."[16] It is

comparatively easy to understand what an irresistible effect this would be likely to have, and did have, on visiting dignitaries, and how it was achieved. It is less easy to see quite how other, seemingly more childish, manifestations also had a profound effect. The throne room in the palace was equipped with numerous mechanical devices designed to emphasize the all commanding nature of the imperial office. Audience might be delayed for some time in any case, and when it came, the envoy or ruler was conducted through crowds of officials and dignitaries to a room, panelled in purple, which was stated to be of unimaginable age, and contained apparently intensely venerable regalia. It also contained mechanical lions which roared and thrashed their tails, golden birds which sang in trees, and a mobile throne, which while the visitors were making a compulsory, deep and lengthy bow of obeisance, ascended rapidly, so that the Emperor was revealed in a superior position when they arose. No conversation was permitted with the Emperor, who was dressed in incredible finery and remained in a personally immobile dignity during the whole occasion.[17]

The treatment of ambassadors throughout a visit was designed to impress, without allowing them to associate in any way with other than official persons or to see anything which it was not decided that they should see. Their physical circumstances were usually well arranged, but could be dramatically downgraded if things went unsatisfactorily, or if, as happened with an envoy from the Pope, when he presented letters of credence which referred only to the Emperor of the Greeks, there was any suggestion that the Byzantine world picture was not being acknowledged. In this case, the envoy was thrown into prison.

The position of the Empire at the centre of the universe was elaborated into a carefully worked out plan, which gave many opportunities for giving honorary cousinage to neighbouring or distant rulers, or offices of grand title to others. These were usually meaningless but gratifying, but might carry some obligation of service to Constantinople for the luckless recipient. The terminology of treaties makes the position clear. Impositions upon the other party were gifts from the Emperor, services to be rendered and disadvantages accepted were privileges awarded. It is quite surprising to the modern eye to see how widely the Byzantine view of its own superior position was accepted and to what degree medieval rulers, both Christian and non-Christian, for both practical and sentimental reasons wished to be incorporated within the Byzantine hierarchy of states.

Byzantine diplomatic methods in one respect at least made use of the religious basis of the Empire. It was much easier to make good the claim to general hegemony with Christian neighbours than with Muslim rulers. It is noticeable that warfare, particularly the rarely seen Byzantine-induced warfare, occurred more frequently in the East than in the West, because the Muslim world was less liable to be manoeuvred into ideological submission; though it should be remembered that when Constantinople finally fell,

Mehmet II obviously felt himself the heir to some of the city's mythical status. From and beyond its other borders, however, the Empire conducted a major missionary operation. Byzantine priests, like Byzantine merchants, could be found spreading the faith, sometimes in the wake of conquest, but more often in front of military authority, and as they did so, they consciously spread not just religious doctrine, but a whole world picture of ideas, sentiments and customs, all of which started from the assumption that the Empire was the source of all religious and political authority. Conversion was a formidable weapon indeed.

The consequences of these characteristics of the Byzantine Empire were that its diplomacy could be patient, because it thought in the longest possible terms and it could use flattery by granting of offices and positions related to the Empire to people who had been generally persuaded to accept the central and special position it had awarded itself. It was also unmoved by accusations – frequently and justly made – of duplicity in foreign relations, since its special role meant that the end always justified the means. The Emperor Anastasios wrote in 515: 'There is a law that orders the Emperor to lie and to violate his oath if it is necessary for the well being of the empire'.[18]

Most of what the Byzantines did, however, and how they did it, was based on the desire to avoid war, for which, over the centuries, the Empire became increasingly poorly equipped. There was no doubt what the principal weapon was: bribery. Every ruler and tribe was held to have its price in either money or flattery, and for so long as the treasury at Constantinople remained full, chiefly as the result of being at the centre of the financial world, huge sums were expended in the knowledge that however huge, they would almost certainly be less than the cost of mounting and then quite likely losing a war. As Steven Runciman put it, the Calif or the Tsar might call it tribute if they wished, but to the Emperor, it was merely a wise investment.[19] These payments might be made in a way which the recipient thought of as tribute from Byzantium, or carried as part of the stock in trade of an embassy. These were immensely carefully prepared, grandly and richly equipped. The show was undoubtedly on the road and it was certainly intended to overawe, to bribe and sometimes to pay its own way in part by the sale of goods.

If bribery and flattery failed to work, other methods lay to hand. One of them, the marriages of Byzantine princesses to foreign potentates, which was a weapon sparingly but effectively used during the period of the Porphyrogenitoi (tenth and eleventh centuries), came later on, when funds sank low, to be a diminishing return as the device was overused by the Comneni. Rulers in Russia, in Abasgia (Georgia), in Bulgaria, Doges of Venice, Lombard princes, western Emperors married relatives of the ruling house at Constantinople, and their connections were further solidified by generous dowries and wedding presents of relics – Theophano went to

become western Empress accompanied by the entire body of St Pantaleon of Nicomedia. In addition Constantinople liked to have a resident store of disappointed claimants, defeated rebels and dispossessed rulers, ever ready to be used as negotiating material or inserted physically as circumstances suggested. They were comfortably accommodated in the city and often married off to well-connected ladies.

The other principal method employed by Byzantine diplomacy was to divide enemies and embroil them with each other, and thus induce them to undertake the fighting which the Empire wished to avoid. Treaty obligations might be scrupulously observed, but, as Sir Steven Runciman has written:

> the Byzantines saw nothing wrong in inciting some foreign tribe against a neighbour with whom they were at peace. Leo VI, who was too pious to fight himself against his fellow-Christians, the Bulgarians did not hesitate to subsidise the heathen Hungarians to attack them in the rear; and similarly Nicephorus Phocas incited the Russians against the Bulgarians, though he was at peace with the latter. It was a basic rule in Byzantine foreign politics to induce some other nation to oppose the enemy, and so to cut down the expenses and risks of a war. Thus it was the Frankish troops of the Western Emperor Louis II rather than Byzantine troops that drove the Saracens from Southern Italy and recaptured Bari in 871. The Byzantines managed to be there in time to take the fruits of victory and to manoeuvre the Franks out of the reconquered province.[20]

These tactics were also to the fore out on the Steppes, whence so many invasions had come. But after the seventh century none settled south of the Danube, having been either stopped on the edge of the Steppe or diverted, like the Hungarians, northward into central Europe. The design for achieving these results was set out in a famous treatise of Constantine VII (913–59), the *De Administrando Imperio*: against the Kazars, for example, the Pechenegs, or Black Bulgarians could be incited; against the Pechenegs, the Hungarians or Russians should be employed.

For this purpose, the gathering of information about the internal politics and external relationships of neighbouring societies was crucial and it was always the chief purpose of embassies and any other exchanges that the Empire might have. So much was this so, and so deeply engrained an expectation that it must be any visitor's intention, that it explains the care with which foreigners were watched, confined and guarded in Constantinople itself. The duty of obtaining and sending back intelligence was not confined to embassies and their staffs. Merchants, missionaries and the military were no less involved. Nor was it only an activity undertaken by Byzantines who were abroad. Much intelligence gathering was achieved by imperial officers, particularly the *strategoi* commanding frontier fortresses

at the edges of the Empire. Intelligence was carefully collected at Constantinople, and then supplied to embassies, so that they should know where best to place their bribes, and to the Emperor, so that he should embroil his enemies to the maximum degree. It was such information that led Justinian to write to a Hun prince:

> I directed my presents to the most powerful of your chieftains, intending them for you. Another has seized them, declaring himself the foremost among you all. Show him that you excel the rest; take back what has been filched from you, and be revenged. If you do not, it will be clear that he is the true leader; we shall then bestow our favour on him and you will lose those benefits formerly received by you at our hands.[21]

Part of the purpose of Byzantine diplomacy was to gain time. It was not a mere claim that the Empire was eternal; its staying power by contemporary standards made it seem relatively endless. The internal political arrangements and the consequences of the generally nomadic lifestyle of the Empire's northern neighbours led to inherent instability and short-lived political authorities. This in itself could give formidable advantages to the ever present Constantinople and its accumulated memory. More purely practically, delays could devastate an attacker, whether by the onset of plague, or by the nomadic necessity to move from pasture to pasture and to find water: to stay too long produced hunger and fatal depletion of horses and stock. Well-placed expenditure to achieve this effect by essentially diplomatic means was cheap at the price.[22]

Although the Byzantine Empire used diplomacy more continuously, employed more of its devices and generally used it to play a more central role in imperial policies than had occurred in any preceding society, there was no parallel for these developments in institutional terms. No forerunner of the resident ambassador appeared, perhaps because the Empire relied so much on information-gathering and diplomatic initiatives undertaken by its frontier officers. This practice evidently led to the emergence of a kind of foreign bureau for co-ordinating policy in the Steppes which was handled by the Strategos of Cherson in the Crimea – always the Empire's listening post for central Asia. At some periods the evidence suggests that the same people were used for embassies in particular directions – e.g. to the Arabs – on several occasions, suggesting that linguistic competence had become a factor in the choice of ambassadors.[23] Certainly a large staff of interpreters and translators existed at the court at Constantinople and was available to be sent on embassies. This staff was attached to the only part of the chancellery which had some of the characteristics of a foreign ministry, the *drome* (post office), one part of which was called the *Scrinium Barbarorum*, the Office of the Barbarians. The official in charge was the *logothete* of the *drome*, who was a bureaucrat, neither a minister nor an ambassador, who

arranged that the Emperor's policy should be carried out after frequent, often daily, interviews with him. As defined during the ninth and tenth centuries, the *logothete* was responsible for the imperial post, the supervision of imperial diplomatic officers within the Empire, the reception of foreign envoys and their formal introduction to the Emperor and his court, and the internal security of the Empire. This aspect meant also maintaining a constant surveillance of visiting envoys, most easily accomplished by confining them to the special residence – the *Xenodochium Romanorum* – maintained for them and accompanying them on highly structured excursions. The responsibility for escorting visitors outside the city lay with the *drome* and not with the *Scrinium Barbarorum*. Probably the most important activities of the *logothete's* offices concerned the collection and organization of information. They knew the weaknesses and strengths of the imperial neighbours, their internal political landscapes, the likes and dislikes of influential families, what and whose interests might most effectively be cultivated in the process of making the subtle combinations which might save the Empire from the expenses of war. From time to time, they issued general statements on the conduct of foreign policy, like that set out in Constantine VII's *De Administrando Imperio*.

Byzantine developments were certainly striking, and they seem the more so when seen against the far less sophisticated diplomatic system which emerged in post-Roman northern and western Europe. Not until the fourteenth century did anything comparable develop, and when it did, it was a response, as will be seen in the next chapter, to more complicated international conditions. Later developments were the consequence of the diffusion of much more advanced methods from Italy, which were themselves partly derived from the way the Venetian Republic systematized what it had learnt from the Byzantine Empire. The other source of power which had developed the need for a response to the outside world simultaneously with both Byzantium and medieval Europe was Arab, Islamic and deeply different.

THE ARAB WORLD

In theory, diplomacy for the Islamic world, rather as the Bolsheviks were later to expect, was a temporary necessity. It was required because progress towards global peace and order conferred by Islam – the Abode of Islam or *dar al-Islam* – was slower than expected and eventually indefinitely postponed. The world was thus divided into the area which was Islamic or acknowledged Islamic sovereignty and that which did not – the Abode of War or *dar al-Harb*. Between the two there was always a state of war of some kind. It might be latent, temporarily postponed, it might be in full flood in the form of Holy War or *jihad*, or it might be suspended for long periods. During periods of suspension, there was no equivalent of the more modern

notion of recognition. The situation was not stable; it was merely that war was, for reasons of convenience, called off for the time being. In all these possible conditions, however, some form of communication was required, particularly if actual warfare was in view or reaching its end; and means had to be found for allowing safe passage through Islamic lands at unofficial levels.

For accredited diplomats, provided that they turned out to be what they said they were, and they were not caught spying or buying up war materials, no special passes were issued. Islam had acknowledged the immunity of emissaries from the beginning and had done so on the same ground as other rulers: its reciprocal usefulness, even necessity. In the earliest days, this kind of diplomacy was at the most basic level, and approximated more to the functions of a herald. The announcement of battle, the exchange of prisoners and the arrangement of truces were all part of diplomacy's contribution to what was incessant warfare. Only after the establishment of the Abbasid dynasty at Baghdad (AD 750–1258) was sufficient equilibrium achieved to require the exchange of missions for more complex purposes. Even when this occurred, Islamic diplomacy did not develop in the direction of establishing any semi-permanent relationships in the hands of resident representatives. Special missions were sent and received with the object of achieving short-term objectives. Visiting envoys were treated with great grandeur in Baghdad, but as in Byzantium, they were isolated from ordinary civilians and carefully watched, it being understood that gathering information was likely to be as much their concern as giving it. Emissaries leaving *dar al-Islam* were chosen for their skills, so broad a range of qualities being required that missions were usually made up of at least three envoys, often a soldier, a scholar and a scribe, who acted as secretary. Written accreditation was provided, but the important messages were delivered verbally by the senior representative. If a mission to Baghdad had succeeded, the ceremonies at departure might be as lavish as those on arrival, and rich gifts would be exchanged. If unsuccessful, a cool dismissal followed; and if war broke out before the ambassadors had left, they might be held captive or even executed.

The important device in Islamic diplomacy at levels lower than missions from or to foreign rulers was the *aman*, or safe-conduct. This entitled the holder to enter Islamic lands and to obtain the protection of the authorities for his person, his household and his property. It could be obtained both officially and unofficially. The official *aman* could be granted by the imam to a group of persons, to the population of a territory or to the inhabitants of a city whose ruler had signed a peace treaty with Islamic authorities. Such an *aman* would always be granted on a reciprocal basis. Unofficially, an *aman* could be obtained from any adult, verbally or by any other sign, and it was possible for the giver to be punished if the receiver behaved badly in some way while within the Islamic world. The same vagueness affected the

discussion about what should happen to a non-Muslim who entered *dar al-Islam* without an *aman*: his fate might range from execution to being conducted in safety to the frontiers after a four-month stay. Like all other contacts between the Islamic and the non-Islamic world, the working of the *aman* was affected by the permanent, if largely suppressed, state of war between *dar al-Islam* and *dar al-Harb* and by the contrasting but evident need for goods, merchants and diplomats to pass between the two with reasonable ease. Certainly significant exchanges took place in the areas of science, medicine and literature and these could be quite deliberate. Islamic ambassadors were often asked to bring back examples of the skills and culture of the societies they had visited.[24]

THE MEDIEVAL WORLD

> A *nuncius* is he who takes the place of a letter: and he is just like a magpie, and an organ, and the voice of the principal sending him, and he recites the words of the principal.
>
> (Azo, *Summa*, Venice, 1594, 4: 50)

The diplomatic relations of the West for several centuries after the fall of Rome were, except for the communications of the Church, relatively infrequent, inevitably slow and subject to little, if any, organic development. In this quantitative sense it is possible to make a comparative remark about medieval diplomacy, but it is very difficult to do so in most other ways. The chief difficulty arises from the undeveloped nature of sovereignty in the period, and the consequentially vague notion that contemporaries had of the difference between private and public activity and and therefore of the representation of its source. Confusion arising from this is liable to be compounded by the wish of contemporary legal commentators to make clear distinctions where none existed and by the efforts of subsequent historians, particularly perhaps Maulde la Clavière who wrote in the late nineteenth century,[25] to create order out of what was naturally chaotic, but in the image of their own time. It is therefore wise to remember that it is not until the sixteenth century, and not completely even then, that a clearly defined sovereign state can be discerned, having an accepted diplomatic practice and nomenclature more or less confined to its like. This partly arose from a primitive state of administration, the limited powers of rulers, very poor communications and the likelihood that the most advanced entities would not abut directly upon each other, but be cushioned by areas of as yet unresolved geographical and political space.

It also arose, however, from the fact that as late as 1400, the Western world still thought of itself as one society. There were wars, doctrinal disputes, the Great Schism, the division between Pope and Emperor, eruptions of class war, but through it all, there continued to be 'a belief in the actual unity of

Christendom, however variously felt and expressed' which 'was a fundamental condition of all medieval political thought and activity'.[26] This concept came to have a name – the *respublica christiana* – but it never acquired any political expression. There did arise, nonetheless, a body of generally accepted law formed by the intermingling of Roman law, feudal law and canon law: two of them had universalist traditions or applications, which gave them a role in regulating diplomatic relations, and the third, feudal law, through its concern with rules for the chivalrous treatment of heralds, prisoners and noncombatants as well as the proper arrangements for observing truces and treaties had a clear element of 'international' law about it.

Roman law – civil law – was increasingly used from the beginning of the fifteenth century, and it offered both a general framework derived from its Imperial past and practical responses to a political world more and more filled with secular authorities and relatively large-scale pecuniary interests. It was, however, the first aspect which filled the need to provide for a common body of law for the *respublica christiana*, and gave to the civil law the character of a kind of international law until the seventeenth century. All contemporary advice to diplomats from the fourteenth to the late seventeenth centuries stressed the importance of knowing civil law. Canon law, even if it was inevitably to become less significant with the decline in the authority of the Church, and ultimately to be overwhelmed by the Reformation, was most obviously important in diplomatic relations. The Church was coextensive with the *respublica christiana* and canon law was administered by its own system of courts throughout Christendom. These courts claimed jurisdiction, not without opposition, over a very wide range of matters involving laity as well as clergy, and to regulate therefore on a broad basis many legal relationships. More than this, canonists had come to consider questions which today would fall to international lawyers: the definition of sovereignty, the sanctity of treaties, the preservation of peace, the rights of neutrals and noncombatants and the rules of war. The determination of just and unjust wars and the identification of unjust breakers of the peace also came under review by the canonists. In a more purely practical way, canon law had come to frame rules about diplomatic agents as the Church became a major user of diplomacy during the struggle with the Holy Roman Emperors in the thirteenth century. The diplomatic system of the Church was always recognized to be different, evident sometimes in nomenclature,[27] and these rules were not simply transferred to secular use as appropriate, but they were, nonetheless, adapted.[28]

One of the effects of such an unfamiliar international environment, at least to the late-twentieth-century eye, was that the act of representation was not and could not be confined to individual states, because they did not yet exist. Despite retrospective attempts to bring a descriptive order to diplomacy, it is apparent that there was no clear *droit d'ambassade* until the end

of the sixteenth century. In addition to rulers, all sorts of authorities – commercial, ecclesiastical, provincial and personal – sent and received representatives. The right to do so was made effective by those who wielded sufficient power. What was also very different until the fifteenth century was the infrequency of diplomatic exchanges. Another difference was that the ceremonial aspect of a mission could be at least as important as the message it was carrying, for claims and counter claims about the relative significance of the parties were indirectly expressed via the apparently endless and infinitely tedious ceremonial procedures.[29] There has always been an element of this in diplomacy but it became of much less significance during the early eighteenth century and played its greatest role during the later Middle Ages.

Until the rise of the resident ambassador during the fifteenth century began a major revolution, two phases can be seen in the development of medieval diplomacy. The earliest was dominated by the use of the *nuncius*[30] – *nuntius* in classical Latin – and coincided with the least complex international society of the period and thus the least frequency of diplomatic exchange. It was most often principals – whoever or whatever they might be – who needed to prepare the ground before arranging a personal meeting. They wished to communicate with each other by message, but in a way that was as near a personal exchange as possible. It was this which led the *nuncius* to be described as a 'living letter' and strictly limited his powers unless they were quite expressly increased or altered in some way for a particular purpose. It was, for example, possible for a *nuncius* to agree to a clearly stated and previously defined variation to his message: Venetian *nuncii* to the Emperor Andronicus in 1283 were allowed to make a truce for between seven to ten years depending upon what they could obtain, though only if agreement was reached within two months.[31] This was not very common, however, and the letter of credence carried by a *nuncius* often made the tightly closed relationship with the principal quite clear: 'certain other things concerning our business touching the King of France we place in the mouth of our aforesaid *nuncii* for the purpose of explaining to you', wrote Henry III of England to the Emperor Frederick II in 1236.[32] Dealing with a *nuncius* was, for legal and practical purposes, the same as dealing with the principal. The *nuncius* had no power to negotiate or to conclude an agreement unless such an agreement, for example, a marriage, had already been drafted, in which case a *nuncius* might be sent with agreement to the final terms.[33] How complete the identification was between *nuncius* and principal can be further gauged from the fact that a *nuncius* could receive and make oaths that ought to be performed in the presence of the principal.[34] It was also clear that the status of the *nuncius* was reflected in the immunity from harm which he was expected to be given. All diplomatic messengers from the earliest times had been accorded some kind of security

for their persons, usually on religious grounds, and the special status of ambassadors was clearly understood. In the case of *nuncii*, there was a special sense that harming a *nuncius* was the same as harming his principal, as there was that a *nuncius* should be received with the ceremony that would be due to his principal.

The extreme difficulty, slowness and danger of medieval journeying combined with the limited powers of the *nuncius* sometimes made him useful to more than one employer. Since there was no particular sense of nationality or of pursuing strictly national interests about the office of *nuncius*, he could and did pick up extra messages along his route. There was a greater possibility of such extra messages becoming garbled on the way, and they tended to be preparatory rather than definitive, or to be non-political. The fact that Stephen Voivode of Moldavia used a Venetian *nuncius* both to send an extra message to the Pope, and to request that a doctor be sent to treat an ulcer on his leg, gives an instructive glimpse of this kind of role.

If it was so clear that the *nuncius* was no more than a living letter, why was the office used at all? Part of the answer lies in the essentially blurred nature of most medieval arrangements. As has already been seen, it was possible by slightly varying the duties of a *nuncius* to use him more flexibly than the stern definitions offered by the authorities – from Durandus to Bernard du Rosier – would suggest,[35] and there was an argument for using a human messenger arising from the insecurities of medieval travel. There was also, however, the perhaps small but nonetheless significant flexibility which the use of a human being offered. The extra courtesies that the ceremonial rules injected were part of this, but the main considerations were set out by the Venetians when appointing an envoy to Genoa in 1306 when it was said that a person could convey meanings beyond the written word by the intonation of his words, his attitude, his actual wording – if that was left to him – and his response to questions.[36]

The *nuncius* was certainly the most widely used diplomatic agent of the first phase of the Middle Ages, his limited role being matched accurately with the limited requirements of the age. The relative simplicity of the office also rendered it useful over a very wide range of functions: arranging alliances, keeping allies up to the mark, arriving at truces, declaring war, making protests, settling details of military support, settling financial transactions (usually loans), and the recovery of debts, involving the physical transport of, actual money and the multifarious dealings which *nuncii* undertook for private persons or commercial bodies. This list is not exhaustive, nor would it be profitable to consider every minor variant in the messages sent or the manner of their delivery. The main lines are quite clear:

> [the *nuncius*] conveyed the will of his principal and could not act upon his own will so as to commit his principal. He could negotiate