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978-0-521-03791-4 - *Dynasty and Diplomacy in the Court of Savoy: Political Culture and the Thirty Years' War*

Toby Osborne

Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

In September 1999 the National Gallery in London proudly announced the acquisition of the magnificent full-length portrait of Abate Alessandro Cesare Scaglia (1592–1641), ‘without question one of Van Dyck’s greatest achievements’.¹ Felicitously, the ‘Camrose’ portrait came into the National Gallery’s permanent collection in the same year that marked the four-hundredth anniversary of Anthony van Dyck’s (1599–1641) birth, adding to the gallery’s other portrait of Abate Scaglia by Van Dyck in devotion to the Virgin and Child, and establishing the abate not only as a major patron of Van Dyck but also as a figure of exceptional importance in the history of collecting. Scaglia was indeed positioned at the heart of an international network of courtiers, collectors, artists and writers who gave seventeenth-century Europe a distinctive character, among them the artists Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) and Jacob Jordaens (1593–1678), the collector Cassiano dal Pozzo (1588–1657), the duke of Buckingham (1592–1628), Balthasar Gerbier (1592–1663) and Endymion Porter (1587–1649), and the writers Emanuele Tesauro (1592–1675), Virgilio Malvezzi (1595–1654), Fulvio Testi (1593–1646) and Alessandro Tassoni (1565–1635).

This was a remarkably wide-ranging cultural network. However, it would be wrong simply to view the abate in the reflected glory of such undeniably renowned names as Van Dyck or Rubens alone, divorcing artistic patronage from its early modern social and political context. Alessandro Scaglia was also of major importance in seventeenth-century international relations. For Scaglia, like many of his cultural contacts, the acquisition of pieces of art and patronage more generally were integral to early modern diplomacy rather than separate phenomena as academic categorisations

¹ National Gallery, press release, September 1999. It had been given to the gallery in lieu of death duties from the estate of the second Viscount Camrose, following his death in 1995, and his wife, who herself died in 1997 and who had formerly been married to Prince Aly Khan.

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

of 'history' and 'art history' possibly imply. Collecting and patronage created a cultivated and agreeable environment in which courtiers and diplomats shared in what approached a common language across both national and even confessional boundaries. While it would be too crude to suggest that this had direct or compelling political significance, shared interests created international networks of friends and contacts that could influence negotiations or facilitate policy-making, a factor of crucial importance to Alessandro Scaglia's role on the stage of European power politics. A synthesis of the history of collecting with diplomatic history would indeed move beyond traditional conceptions of narrative studies where the pursuit of foreign policies often meant little more than the signing of treaties or the writing of despatches, borrowing instead from studies in what might be described as 'new' diplomatic history, the very titles of which reflect a discernible change of historiographical emphasis.²

International relations in seventeenth-century Europe operated in various, often complex, ways. Early modern diplomacy should be seen as a multi-layered process rather than a linear series of events as purely narrative accounts might suggest. True enough, there were formal points of diplomacy that might for instance have included the public entrance of ambassadors to courts, with different levels of ceremony according to the status of the representative, public audiences, the signing of formal agreements and the exchange of gifts. It was during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that these ceremonial elements began to be formalised into coherent systems in a variety of European courts, including Turin, not least with the introduction of the office of Master of Ceremonies who was concerned with the regulation of court protocol.³ However this did not constitute the sum total of diplomacy and diplomatic culture. The less tangible elements of early modern diplomacy, encompassing both the individual personality and personal interests of diplomatic representatives, also had their parts to play. In respect of personality, more attention should be given to studies of what might be described as 'creativity' in public affairs, that is to say what role an individual might have played in contrast to or perhaps in conjunction with

² In particular, Lucien Bély, *Espions et ambassadeurs au temps de Louis XIV* (Paris, 1990); Daniela Frigo, *Principe, ambasciatori e 'jus gentium': l'amministrazione della politica estera nel Piemonte del Settecento* (Rome, 1991); Miguel Angel Echevarría Bacigalupe, *La diplomacia secreta en Flandes, 1598–1643* (Leioia, 1984); Jocelyne G. Russell, *Peacemaking in the Renaissance* (London, 1986). Two 'classic' studies in a similar vein are Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy* (London, 1955) and Charles Howard Carter, *The Secret Diplomacy of the Habsburgs, 1585–1625* (New York and London, 1964).

³ Albert Loomie, 'The *Conducteur des Ambassadeurs* of seventeenth century France and Spain', *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire*, 43 (1975); Albert Loomie (ed.), *Ceremonies of Charles I: The Notebooks of John Finet, 1628–1641* (Fordham, 1987).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-03791-4 - Dynasty and Diplomacy in the Court of Savoy: Political Culture and the Thirty Years' War

Toby Osborne

Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

3

the influence of impersonal or structural forces in diplomacy such as economic imperatives or a state's 'quest for security'. By drawing on Linda Levy Peck's work on the Jacobean court and by taking account of the mental world of a diplomat like Alessandro Scaglia – through a synthesis of his cultural and political sensibilities recorded by the Van Dyck commissions – a more subtle picture of early seventeenth-century diplomatic culture emerges where the agency of the individual assumes a greater role in the formulation and execution of state policies.⁴

But what of 'state' policy-making? Alessandro Scaglia was a subject of the duke of Savoy, the ruler of a complex composite sovereignty that straddled the Alps. More correctly known in the period as *les états du Duc de Savoie*, Savoy had taken shape over a span of centuries and encompassed most importantly the francophone duchy of Savoie and, across the Alpine mountains, its social and political rival, the Italian principality of Piemonte, where the abate's family was based.⁵ Through Alessandro Scaglia's career this book presents the first major account in English of Savoy's role in the diplomacy of the Thirty Years' War, redressing a balance that too often has weighed in favour of larger states. Of course Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was undeniably dominated by France and Spain and the rivalries of their sovereign dynasties for territory and prestige across the continent, while the Austrian Habsburgs through the Holy Roman Empire maintained and possibly increased their power in central Europe. Other states also waxed and waned in greatness during this turbulent period. Sweden increasingly dominated the Baltic, Britain gradually emerged as a global trading power, while the Dutch Republic enjoyed its relatively brief but spectacular Golden Age of economic might and cultural brilliance in the seventeenth century. But narrowly focused

⁴ Linda Levy Peck (ed.), *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court* (Cambridge and New York, 1991), especially the introduction.

⁵ See Robert Oresko's introduction to Arabella Cifani and Franco Monetti, *I piaceri e le grazie: collezionismo, pittura di genere e di paesaggio fra Sei e Settecento in Piemonte* (Turin, 1993). See also Lino Marini, *Libertà e tramonti di libertà nello stato sabaudo del Cinquecento* (Bologna, 1968), chapter 1, and Lino Marini, *Libertà e privilegio dalla Savoia al Monferrato da Amedeo VIII a Carlo Emanuele I* (Bologna, 1972), pp. 9–10; Stuart Woolf, *Studi sulla nobiltà Piemontese nell'epoca dell'assolutismo* (Turin, 1963), p. 7. For a clear introduction in English to Savoy's territorial portfolio that also included the county of Nice to the south of Savoie, the alpine duchy of Aosta, and the small principality of Oneglia which was surrounded on all sides by the republic of Genoa and which Emanuele Filiberto bought from Giovanni Girolamo Doria in 1576, see Geoffrey Symcox, *Victor Amadeus II: Absolutism in the Savoyard State 1675–1730* (London, 1983), chapter 2. On the rivalry between Savoie and Piemonte see Lino Marini, *Savoardi e Piemontesi nello stato sabaudo, 1418–1601* (Rome, 1962), and more recently, Alessandro Barbero, 'Savoardi e Piemontesi nel ducato sabaudo all'inizio del Cinquecento: un problema storiografico risolto?', *Bollettino Storico-Bibliografico Subalpino*, 87 (1989).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-03791-4 - Dynasty and Diplomacy in the Court of Savoy: Political Culture and the Thirty Years' War

Toby Osborne

Excerpt

[More information](#)

4 DYNASTY AND DIPLOMACY IN THE COURT OF SAVOY

views of European history from this great-power perspective alone have distorted the ways in which historians have considered relations between them and other, seemingly 'smaller', states and dynasties. The effects have been almost entirely deleterious as some 'second-rank' states (for want of a better term), not least Savoy, have become the victims of neglect and misunderstanding.

Much of the difficulty in assessing Savoy's importance lies with its particular and burdensome historiography, a theme addressed in the first chapter of this book. While historians from Italy have often viewed Savoy in the light of its role in the *Risorgimento* (with contradictory results), many non-Italian historians have until recently neglected to lend any significant weight at all to the Italian peninsula in their accounts of seventeenth-century political history. Both groups have often failed to appreciate that the states of the peninsula, not least Savoy, were distinct and discrete identities with their own regional interests and internal politics in an age when there was no one unified Italian sovereignty. Indeed, archival research into Italian political history for the period after 1530 has hitherto remained woefully inadequate apart from the admirable tradition of north Italian local erudition, and the special case of the Venetian Republic which has long attracted the attention of economic and social historians. Only in recent years, with the research of a number of Anglo-American historians such as Robert Oresko, David Parrott, Christopher Storrs and Geoffrey Symcox, is the enormous but untapped potential of the north Italian archives for political history in the post-Renaissance period at last being exploited and placed in context for Anglophone scholarship.⁶ It has, moreover, been accepted too often that Savoy only began to emerge from the long shadow of Franco-Spanish rivalry under the guidance of Vittorio Amedeo II (1666–1732), the sovereign who successfully exchanged his ducal title for that of a king following the War for the Spanish Succession (1701–13). A study of the duchy of Savoy during the early part of the seventeenth century presents a markedly different picture, showing that it was more than capable of holding its own in a Europe of leading and secondary powers; even 'small states', as Daniela Frigo has written, could 'play a political role of much greater weight than their military and territorial size might warrant'.⁷

⁶ See for instance Robert Oresko, 'Bastards as clients: the House of Savoy and its illegitimate children', in Charles Giry-Deloison and Roger Mettam (eds.), *Patronages et clientélismes 1550–1750 (France, Angleterre, Espagne, Italie)* (London, 1995); D. A. Parrott, 'The Mantuan Succession, 1627–31: a sovereignty dispute in early modern Europe', *English Historical Review*, 112 (1997), 20–65; Christopher Storrs, *War, Diplomacy and the Rise of Savoy, 1690–1720* (Cambridge, 2000); Symcox, *Victor Amadeus II*.

⁷ Daniela Frigo, 'Introduction', in Daniela Frigo (ed.), *Politics and Diplomacy in Early Modern Italy: The Structure of Diplomatic Practice, 1450–1800* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 4.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-03791-4 - Dynasty and Diplomacy in the Court of Savoy: Political Culture and the Thirty Years' War

Toby Osborne

Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

5

There were indeed a number of similar states in Europe, all of which can be described as being of the second rank through their geo-strategic, military, economic or political assets. The duchy of Lorraine was situated on the politically sensitive cross-roads between the Low Countries and southern and central Europe and had a complex dynastic relationship with France; the Saxon Electorate had valuable resources in silver mines, as well as its juridical position in the Empire; both the duchy of Bavaria and the Brandenburg Electorate had troops that could be of critical importance in central Europe; the duchy of Mantua controlled crucial fortresses that could influence movements through north Italy; the grand-duchy of Tuscany, on the other hand, had the wealth of the Medici family and a galley fleet that, although of decreasing importance, could be used in the Mediterranean.

What defined Savoy as a 'second rank' or 'small' state? The provinces under the duke of Savoy as a whole were not especially rich in terms of natural or economic resources. Of all the provinces, Piemonte had the greatest concentration of economic activity and wealth with its textile industries in towns such as Biella, a centre of wool production, and the silk-producing Racconigi. The principality was also the location from 1563 of the ducal capital, Turin, which was itself a significant silk producer, while beyond the city were the fertile plains around the River Po that gave way to wine-producing vineyards in the surrounding hills. But aside from Piemonte, much of the Savoyard patrimony was mountainous and undeveloped.⁸ The Savoyard state also lacked a viable Mediterranean port that could rival Genoa or Leghorn, despite its control of Nice-Villafranca and, from the late sixteenth century, of Oneglia, which was never really developed. More promising was the fact that Savoy's population seems to have been one of the largest of the independent states of north Italy, though precise comparisons are difficult. In 1700 there were an estimated 1,396,000 inhabitants in the ducal states of Savoy. This can be compared with the Venetian Republic (with its Greek and Croatian populations beyond the peninsula) that had an estimated 2 million inhabitants by 1700, though it has also been suggested that Spain ruled over 5 million of the Italian peninsula's entire 13 million inhabitants in 1600.⁹ Revenue systems, gradually developed from the mid-1550s and after Duke Emanuele Filiberto's restoration of 1559, combined direct and indirect taxes. These included a *taille* (from which the nobility and church were exempt) and various *gabelles*, though the collection and 'efficiency' of the most important *gabelle*, the salt *gabelle*, was not straightforward in what Mathew

⁸ Symcox, *Victor Amadeus II*, chapter 2.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 245; Gregory Hanlon, *Early Modern Italy, 1550–1800* (Basingstoke and London, 2000), chapter 4, and p. 74.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-03791-4 - *Dynasty and Diplomacy in the Court of Savoy: Political Culture and the Thirty Years' War*

Toby Osborne

Excerpt

[More information](#)

6 DYNASTY AND DIPLOMACY IN THE COURT OF SAVOY

Vester has characterised as a 'polycentric' state where ducal power was mediated through local and non-state interest groups.¹⁰ Whatever the limitations of the *taille*, it nevertheless enabled dukes of Savoy from the second half of the sixteenth century to raise troops with greater surety. During the Thirty Years' War Savoy was indeed a significant regional military power, even if, again, it lacked the kinds of European-wide resources available to the French and to the Spanish and Austrian Habsburgs – the armed forces, including mercenaries, available to the dukes during the early decades of the seventeenth century could total as many as 25,381 infantry and 1,213 cavalry (excluding militia), raised in 1625. To place this in context, Venice raised 11,000 troops in 1621 when it considered joining the German Protestant Union and Dutch Republic, and could raise up to 30,000 troops, though this mainly consisted of militia. With Spanish aid, Genoa managed to raise 15,000 to oppose Savoy and France in 1625; a year before, the papacy mobilised its own army of 12,000 in the vicinity of Ferrara, augmented by an additional 6,000 around Rome.¹¹ Perhaps more significantly, the Savoyard state also enjoyed a crucial geo-strategic position as the 'gatekeeper to the Alps', which made it such an important ally for the leading powers to court both politically and dynastically. Through a series of fortresses that included Pinerolo and the capital city of Turin itself, Piemonte controlled the main passes across the western Alps, over the Mont-Cénis and its subsidiary, the Mont-Genèvre, and through the Val di Susa, which lay to the west of the capital. To the south of Turin, between the county of Nice and the principality of Piemonte, lay the pass of Tenda, and the Great and Little Saint Bernards were to the north, through the duchy of Aosta.¹²

Savoy's geographical position in northern Italy meant that both France and Spain went to great lengths to gain the favour of the duchy, and this allowed successive dukes to play the rival ambitions of the leading powers for their own recurrent dynastic and political interests. Even the rhetoric of Franco-Spanish rivalry afforded opportunities for Savoy to improve its standing in the Italian peninsula and further afield. French foreign policy under Richelieu was faced with curious ideological tensions, at

¹⁰ Mathew Vester, 'Territorial politics in the Savoyard domains, 1536–1580', (PhD thesis, UCLA, 1997), especially section 1.

¹¹ For some estimates of the numbers of troops Savoy could muster see Gregory Hanlon, *The Twilight of a Military Tradition: Italian Aristocrats and European Conflicts, 1560–1800* (London, 1998), pp. 106–9, 280–1; Hanlon, *Early Modern Italy*, p. 256. The impressive numbers mustered by Savoy in 1625 can be put into further perspective – the duchy only attained comparable numbers again at the end of the seventeenth century, during a period of sustained military expansion. Storrs, *War, Diplomacy and the Rise of Savoy*, p. 24.

¹² Symcox, *Victor Amadeus II*, p. 14.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-03791-4 - Dynasty and Diplomacy in the Court of Savoy: Political Culture and the Thirty Years' War

Toby Osborne

Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

7

once claiming to be founded on Catholic ideals yet also recognising the legitimate existence of Protestant states and allying with them and other states to oppose the Habsburgs. The Spanish argued in similarly defensive political language that the stability of 'Christendom', with its pre-Reformation resonances, essentially needed to be based on limiting French power while regaining the rebellious Dutch provinces. These different conceptions of how European power should be balanced played an important role in Savoyard diplomatic strategies, revealing how a seemingly regional power like Savoy was never isolated from wider issues of power politics. To France, the duchy was crucial because it potentially controlled access to the peninsula while the Spanish were equally aware of Savoy's significance to their logistics and the Spanish Road.¹³ What is more, the very rhetoric of this Franco-Spanish rivalry, where both powers sought the moral highground for domestic and international audiences, clearly implied that it was necessary to work with independent states like Savoy to avoid charges of 'betraying' Catholicism or, particularly in Spain's case, of pursuing 'universal monarchy'. Neither France nor Spain therefore felt able or indeed willing to sideline Savoy. This in turn enabled the duchy to manipulate them by alternating alliances and dynastic affiliations, preferably keeping the two leading powers as rivals for Savoy's loyalty.

Military and geo-strategic resources undoubtedly proved important to Savoy's identity as a regional power in north Italy. Yet where this book discusses Savoy's role in Europe, most particularly in the first chapter, it is not primarily in terms of men or material, important though they were, but more from a dynastic viewpoint. Dynasticism might not have been the sole consideration in foreign policy-making but, in an age when ruling dynasties around Europe were acutely aware of responsibilities to family and posterity, Savoyard relations with other powers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were formulated in the first instance around issues of family interest. They lay at the heart of its most important international disputes that often dated back centuries. The marriage alliances of different members of the ruling House moreover locked the duchy into a system of European courts and sovereign families. There were two practical implications of this dynastic system that directed the ruling family of Savoy to pursue particular foreign policies and a distinctive style of diplomacy. First, the Savoyard House could claim rights of inheritance to various territories within the Italian peninsula and also further afield at a time when there were often no codified laws of succession governing

¹³ A subject elucidated by Geoffrey Parker's *The Army of Flanders and the Spanish Road, 1567–1659* (Cambridge, 1972).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-03791-4 - *Dynasty and Diplomacy in the Court of Savoy: Political Culture and the Thirty Years' War*

Toby Osborne

Excerpt

[More information](#)

them, while Europe more generally still did not have totally fixed state borders. These claims, among them to Monferrato, the shadow kingdom of Cyprus, the Spanish Netherlands, and even the Spanish composite monarchy itself, were in the early seventeenth century dangled before successive dukes by the leading powers as incentives for alliances. That is not to say that north Italy and the independent states of the region were under the sway of the leading powers. Unresolved territorial claims had the inherent energy to mobilise Savoyard rulers to action, something neither France nor Spain could necessarily prevent even with their superior material assets. But while Savoy's unfulfilled territorial ambitions meant that the duchy was neither a neutral nor a passive power in certain diplomatic disputes, dukes of Savoy could none the less mediate between other sovereigns precisely because of the criss-crossing family connections between the ruling House and dynasties that principally included the Habsburgs, Bourbons and Stuarts. These family webs were in this sense more extensive, and possibly of greater importance, than Savoy's formal diplomatic network in Europe; effectively, the dynasty's only permanent diplomatic missions in the seventeenth century were to the papal court, France, the Wittelsbach cousins in Bavaria and the Imperial court, with frequent (if not permanent) missions to Spain.¹⁴ Playing the role of mediator became in itself a key element in Savoy's international strategies during the Thirty Years' War as the duchy pursued support for its territorial claims, and mediation was one of the characteristic signatures of Alessandro Scaglia's diplomacy as he moved around different European courts.

Relations with other powers in north Italy and further afield therefore were shaped by Savoy's geographical position and its military resources, though equally by family interest. There were other factors affecting the formulation of foreign policies in the early modern period. 'State' policies, closely connected as they were to the strategies of the ruling dynasty and at least formally by the seventeenth century seen as the expression of the sovereign's will, were to a significant degree also shaped by ministers and representatives in the service of the state or sovereign. In discussing the complexities of diplomacy in early modern Italy, Daniela Frigo has gone so far as to suggest not only that retrospective distinctions between 'interior' and 'exterior' spheres of politics are artificial, but also that diplomacy itself was much more than the expression of state power invested in the sovereign prince alone. Diplomacy, she argues, was subject to various complex influences that reflected the interests of court factions, families,

¹⁴ This diplomatic system was not significantly expanded until after 1690. Storrs, *War, Diplomacy and the Rise of Savoy*, chapter 3.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-03791-4 - Dynasty and Diplomacy in the Court of Savoy: Political Culture and the Thirty Years' War

Toby Osborne

Excerpt

[More information](#)

INTRODUCTION

9

individuals, local feudatories, cities and even peasantries.¹⁵ While this might be stretching the case a little far, Frigo makes the important point that state and foreign policies often reflected the outcome of a process of interaction between the prince and at least some subjects within his patrimonial state. This study correspondingly argues that the conduct of Savoyard international relations needs to be understood in terms of personal and structural forces, and of the relationship between domestic and external forces, and as cultural and social history in addition to a narrowly defined conception of politics. By considering Alessandro Scaglia's career through his various interconnected identities, as a collector and diplomat and as a member of the Scaglia di Verrua, an elite noble family, and by examining the public and political roles of his family in conjunction with the dynastic interests of the sovereign House of Savoy, further insights can be gleaned into the processes that were involved in the pursuit of foreign policies. In this book 'dynasty and diplomacy' is examined as the interaction between two families, the sovereign dynasty and the Scaglia di Verrua.

The book argues that Alessandro Scaglia, as an experienced, wealthy and articulate member of an elite noble family on the social level immediately below that of his sovereign House, had a conception of what he should do as an ambassadorial representative of the duke of Savoy while advancing his own interests and those of his family. State service and personal interest constantly overlapped. Of course as with so many of the categories in this book, a distinction between public and private spheres of politics in early modern history needs to be considered with caution. For an individual like Scaglia, from a leading court clan, his entire public career was an expression of the intimately related ideas of service to the prince and service to his own family. Like sovereign dynasties, the elite noble families of early modern Europe directed their own strategies in the court context and also in the international arena to further their particular concerns. The pursuit and preservation of aristocratic power within the court was certainly influenced by the politics of the ruling family and by the changing patterns of alliances with other sovereign dynasties. One effect of Savoyard marriage alliances was the presence at different points in the Turinese court of members of the Spanish and French royal families which, coupled with the policy of playing Spain and France constantly against one another, encouraged the formation of different (and flexible) court loyalties that could be sympathetic to one state or the other. As families and individuals sought to establish their positions at court, they were also keenly aware of each other's fortunes. Not only did competition

¹⁵ Frigo, 'Introduction', in Frigo (ed.), *Politics and Diplomacy*, pp. 7–8.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-03791-4 - *Dynasty and Diplomacy in the Court of Savoy: Political Culture and the Thirty Years' War*

Toby Osborne

Excerpt

[More information](#)

10 DYNASTY AND DIPLOMACY IN THE COURT OF SAVOY

for power exist between different factional groups and groups associated with particular members of the ruling House; it also came from within them where individual and family affiliations proved powerful.

The importance of the individual as a political actor can be appreciated further by drawing on other lines of historical investigation. In the first place the structural characteristics of international relations enhanced the importance of a personalised style of diplomacy. This was a period in which the existence of semi-permanent embassies in European courts became a more normal element of international affairs, but where regimes still had problems in exerting immediate control over their diplomats resident in embassies. As Fernand Braudel has argued, time and space had a profound influence on early modern power politics, which in turn affected basic diplomatic practicalities such as the transmission of information from an embassy to the home state.¹⁶ It took, for instance, roughly a week for a letter to pass between Turin and Paris during the early seventeenth century, though this was obviously subject to weather conditions across the Alps. More particularly, the relative slowness of communications meant that representatives had to know who and what they were serving while they were in the field, given the relative autonomy of action they might have while serving on missions. These practical problems coincided not by chance with a general interest in the conduct of state policies, especially diplomacy, which became a category for discussion in its own right because it was becoming a normal element of sovereign power, and because of the particular dilemmas faced by Catholic sovereigns in negotiating with other powers, including heretical Protestants. Political theorists in a discernible Catholic Europe, many of whom were themselves experienced diplomats or public figures, were in agreement in emphasising the moral content of state service, including diplomatic service. There was a general consensus that the role of the diplomat was in essence to serve the interests of his Christian prince for the pursuit of peace in a context where there was no definite division between what was useful and what was good.¹⁷

There is of course a perceived difficulty in connecting this commonplace rhetoric of seventeenth-century political conduct with what public

¹⁶ Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, 2 vols. (London, 1986), I, part 2, chapter 1.

¹⁷ There were a number of treatises written on the conduct of state affairs in this period. Three of direct interest to this book are Giovanni Botero, *Della ragion di stato*, ed. Luigi Firpo (Turin, 1947); Juan Antonio de Vera y Figueroa, count of la Roca, *El embaxador* (Seville, 1620); Gasparo Bragaccio, *L'Ambasciatore in sei libri* (Padua, 1627). For a brief discussion of early modern diplomatic treatises more generally, consult François de Callières, *The Art of Diplomacy*, ed. H. M. A. Keens-Soper and Karl W. Schweizer (Leicester, 1983), pp. 19–41.