CHAPTER 1

The Subject and the Sources

Modern diplomacy differs from its medieval predecessor on three important levels: theoretical, institutional, and—for lack of a better word—technological. The political theory that justified, and thus to a degree shaped, diplomatic activity had earlier defined its legitimate end as the peace of Christendom, but defined it now as whatever was in the interest of the individual state. To the structure of the old occasional diplomacy was now added the permanent resident ambassador, and with him continuous diplomatic relations. And where before diplomacy had been an adjunct of medieval monarchy it now belonged to the rapidly-developing administrative state.

The former, the shift in attitude of political theorists (of whom Machiavelli is only the best known—the most influential but also, in his adjectival form, a 'mere' symbol for a widespread new wave of political theorists who successfully gained the field), analogous to developments in the 'real' world—whether cause or effect or both—is too well known to require going into here.[1] But one cannot seriously discuss the diplomatic documents of the 'early modern' period—certainly not as historical evidence—without giving some attention to the latter two aspects of the context in which they were produced and served their historical function and of which they themselves are evidence.

[1] The classic analysis of this shift in rationale is Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy* (London and Boston, 1955). The numerous writers who, drawing upon traditional Christian morality, mounted a substantial but unsuccessful opposition to the 'Machiavellian' rationale, have of course been granted no place in the historical canon: intellectual history, like political and military, is not kind to losers.

THE DIPLOMATIC SYSTEM

During the fifteenth century, what were to be the three major European powers in the succeeding period (Spain, France, and, on a lesser scale, England) were, when not preoccupied with fighting each other, scenes of internal power struggles, and of territorial consolidation. The eventual outcome in each case was a stronger and more effective monarchical government, increasingly well organised for both domestic rule and foreign adventure, with an expanded and improved territorial base, and—no small matter—with internal disruption at least temporarily under control (though all three were to experience domestic risings in both of the following centuries). Analogous processes were going on elsewhere in transalpine Europe, the most important, in the role it was subsequently to play, being the Netherlandish 'state' being pieced together by successive dukes of Burgundy.

Meanwhile, while the cats were busy at this, the mice were playing in Italy—playing (the old historical clichés are quite right about this) at being independent sovereign states, playing at small-scale power politics in a miniature international 'world', and in the process developing (inventing or adapting from the past) a new set of instrumentalities and procedures—those of permanent diplomatic representation—for dealing with relationships between and among independent states in that sort of world, in effect (though of course not by intent) working out the rules in advance for the great powers who would soon take over the game.[1]

[1] The question of whether the Western powers *owe* the institution of permanent diplomacy to Italian invention is as specious as the analogous one regarding the 'Renaissance State'. There seems no reason and no need to suppose that fifteenth-century Venetians or Florentines were more responsive to the institutional needs of the state than, say, Ferdinand of Aragon: that if they had not adopted permanent diplomacy no one else would have. But the point is irrelevant here: what is relevant, extremely so as regards the state of development of the European diplomatic system (and the sources it would produce) at some given later date, is that by the time the transalpine powers took up its use others had already had considerable experience with it and so had had time to work the initial bugs out of it.

The historical conditions which allowed this, however, were not limited to the abnormal hiatus that thus occurred in the usual (past and future) domination of Italian affairs by outsiders.[1] For reasons still perhaps not fully understood, while a process of territorial consolidation on a large-state basis was going on in most parts of the West, with small units being absorbed (as in France) or combined (as in Spain and the Netherlands) into larger ones, in Italy most of the small existing 'states' were able to maintain their separate identity[2] and to sustain their claims as independent sovereign powers.

One result, as noted, was to create an 'international' society within the confines of Italy, coincidental with (and no doubt partly the result of) a period of freedom from outside interference from greater powers. An indispensable aspect of this was that this world was made up of states sufficiently small to be operable as such at a comparatively early level of administration development, and to be prepared for such operation fairly quickly. Centralisation of government power was here a comparatively simple matter: the Medici, for example, had a considerably smaller landed aristocracy to deal with than, say, the Valois. Territorial consolidation was a similarly limited problem: the outlying region of a city state was relatively small—anything beyond that was a matter of 'foreign affairs'. And perhaps most importantly, administration of so small a state (and its foreign affairs) sufficiently effectively for it to function *viably* in diplomacy and war was sufficiently simple for such a condition of operability to be reached at a much earlier stage of administrative development than would be the case in meeting the larger and more complex administrative demands of a France or a Spain. This difference affected both sides of the equation: those greater

[1] There was, of course, still some occasional dabbling. Myron P. Gilmore, *The World of Humanism, 1453–1517* (New York; Harper Torchbook edition, 1962, pp. 293–5), provides a convenient brief bibliography.

[2] To the degree that the effectiveness of the imperial superstructure may be credited with the failure of states to achieve full sovereignty in the similar situation of non-consolidation in Germany, its converse ineffectiveness perhaps should be credited in Italy.

powers stayed out of Italy (a distant adventure far different from their usual disputes over contiguous territory) until they were ready, which included being sufficiently well organised, and meanwhile the Italian states were sufficiently ready to function as 'modern bureaucratic states', including the ability to maintain the sophisticated machinery of permanent diplomacy, and proceeded to do so.

This 'international' Italy saw several decades of inter-state warfare which apparently led to the conclusion that the state's natural instinct for competition with other states was not always best served on the battlefield, and that security, aggrandisement and the state's lesser goals might, at least a worthwhile part of the time, be gained through continuous peaceful liaison between governments. The institution of ambassador was of course an old one, well known to the ancient world, as old as kingdoms, as old as history. In the Middle Ages they were frequently employed,[1] but only for specific occasions. One medieval ruler might send another a herald, who was essentially a messenger, to deliver congratulations or condolences, a declaration of friendship or (more likely) war, or some message, and to receive (but not respond to) an answer. Or he might send a *legatus*, an envoy authorised to *discuss* certain specific matters in his name, such as negotiating an alliance or the settlement of a dispute; although

[1] The frequency is reflected in, for example: L. Mirot and E. Deprez, *Les ambassades anglaises pendant la guerre de cent ans* (Paris, 1900), which covers 687 English embassies; see also, e.g., J. Calmette, *La diplomatie Carolingienne* [843–77] (Paris, 1901). For the substantial recent European background in diplomacy see e.g., P. Champion and P. de Thoisy, *Bourgogne, France, Angleterre au traité de Troyes* [1420] (Paris, 1943); J. Toussaint, *Les relations diplomatiques de Philippe le Bon avec le Concile de Bâle, 1431–1449* (Louvain, 1942); J. M. Madurell Marimón, *Mensajeros Barceloneses en la corte de Nápoles de Alfonso V de Aragón 1435–1458* (Barcelona, 1963); P. M. Perret, *Histoire des relations de la France avec Venise du XIII^e siècle à l'avènement de Charles VIII* (2 vols. Paris, 1896); Baron F. de Gingins la Sarra, *Dépêches des ambassadeurs Milanais sur les campagnes de Charles-le-Hardi, duc de Bourgogne, de 1474 à 1477* (2 vols. Paris, 1858); R. Rey, *Louis XI et les Etats Pontificaux de France au XV^e siècle d'après des documents inédits* (Grenoble, 1899); J. Calmette and G. Périnelle, *Louis XI et l'Angleterre 1461–1483* (Paris, 1930); E. Toutey, *Charles le Téméraire et la Ligue de Constance* [1474] (Paris, 1902).

such a legate might have to stay for a considerable length of time, the duration of his embassy was still normally limited to that of the negotiations or the special set of circumstances that had occasioned his being sent. Ambassadors might also be sent to a neutral site to negotiate peace. The innovation which the Italians were first to experiment with, among themselves (first Venice, then the Papacy, then others) was not merely to send an ambassador *to* another court but to *keep* one there on a permanent basis, which soon also became one of mutual exchange. What institutionally differentiates 'medieval' diplomacy from 'modern' is the employment of the resident ambassador.

There were already some useful antecedents for this. Most states, as circumstances required and their resources allowed, kept spies at other courts on a continuing basis: in effect, permanent agents maintained there to pursue their employers' interests, though not such as could be formally acknowledged—though they were in practice covertly 'exchanged'. Commercial and banking firms maintained agents abroad—openly, of course—who served as eyes and ears for the home government, sending along not only whatever state secrets they could learn but general information as well, the value of which as a basis for making policy decisions governments were increasingly appreciative of, and were occasionally authorised to act as mouthpiece as well. In states such as Florence or Venice there was little enough distinction between the leading merchants and the government anyway, while the Papacy had the special advantage of the apparatus that already necessarily existed for liaison with the Church hierarchies in the various states. It was thus no very great jump from the old to the 'new', from a customary practice that included both the fairly common maintenance of 'regular' but non-ambassadorial agents abroad and the fairly frequent sending of official but temporary ones, to the maintenance of fully-accredited ambassadors at foreign courts on a permanent basis.

The crucial time for this phase was the forty years after the Peace of Lodi in 1554, during which the permanent, regular

diplomatic network thus created became the principal channel of interstate relations, increasingly used for the settlement of territorial disputes, the negotiation of ever-shifting alliances, etc. By the time Charles VIII invaded Italy in 1494—the start of the Great Italian Wars and the end of Italy's unwonted freedom from outside domination—it was a well-established and well-proven institution, with the rules, rituals and techniques of its use already quite fully developed.[1] The transalpine powers fairly quickly adopted its use, though the quickness and pattern of their doing so was naturally much affected by the long period of warfare among them then commencing.

Before the sixteenth century was many years old, however, most of the important powers had residents in several capitals of particular importance to them, and received residents from them in return since it was a bilateral exchange, a matter of establishing permanent (increasingly understood to be 'regular', normal) diplomatic relations *between* states. Each of these capitals thus was simultaneously the centre of its own network of permanent embassies abroad and the locus of a corollary community of foreign ambassadors to it. Since this permanent network was the mechanism used for handling most of the affairs between the more important states (when not at war with one another) it can properly be called the principal element in the diplomatic system from the time of its Europe-wide adoption. But—an important point—that is not to say universal adoption in Europe: employment of the permanent embassy did not extend quite so far or so fast as one might suppose.

For example, when Ferdinand of Aragon, one of the readiest exploiters of this new instrument of state, sent Rodrigo González de la Puebla to London in 1495 he was both the first resident

[1] That the basic *institution* of modern diplomacy—the permanent residency—was first developed in Italy there is no question, but one is on shakier ground in saying the same for some of the basic diplomatic *concepts* traditionally associated with the same period: see, e.g., E. W. Nelson, 'Origins of modern balance of power politics', *Medievalia and Humanistica*, I (1943), pp. 124–42. By the late fifteenth century some of the Italian states, especially Venice, already had resident ambassadors beyond the Alps.

ambassador in England and the first Spanish resident anywhere except Rome.[1] But by contrast, although Ferdinand sent at least ten major embassies to France (usually two or three persons) in the period 1498–1514 and Charles V at least three thereafter, there seems to have been no Spanish *resident* there until Juan de Hannart in 1531. They had of course been at war during much of that time, but even during the peaceful period between the sixteenth-century wars of religion and the Thirty Years' War, Spain, the predominant power in Europe (and at the same time a weakening one, increasingly dependent upon diplomacy) usually had only eight or ten residents abroad: at Paris and London, Brussels and the Empire, and in Italy Rome, Venice, Savoy and two or three varying lesser states. In a comparable period of French preponderance (but significantly without the same wide spread of territorial domains abroad) Louis XIV maintained twenty-one permanent embassies, but this was exceptional. England, far more typically, kept only five in the period 1660–88—while sending diplomatic missions to a total of thirty separate rulers.[2]

The reasons are not hard to find. Not many states could afford to maintain many (or any) permanent embassies abroad, or needed to; a state such as Genoa, for example, with middling resources and not much involved in Europe-wide affairs, was apt to compromise, maintaining residents with some of its neighbours (where it counted most) but only one or two at any distance from home. Conversely, most principal powers did not consider very many states important enough, or important enough to their

[1] On this much abused figure (a large part of whose papers are at Simancas, *Est.* 52–4, 806) see Garrett Mattingly, 'The reputation of Dr. de Puebla', *English Historical Review*, 55 (1940), pp. 27–46; see also 'The first resident embassies: medieval Italian origins of modern diplomacy', *Speculum*, 12 (1937), pp. 423–29.

[2] Phyllis S. Lachs, *The diplomatic corps under Charles II and James II* (New Brunswick, N.J. [1965]), pp. 4–5. I have used Professor Lachs's representative French figure (the actual number at any given moment would fluctuate slightly), for which she cites Louis Batiffol, 'Charge d'ambassadeurs du 17e siècle', *Revue d'Histoire Diplomatique*, XXV (1911), pp. 339–55—a very fundamental contribution to diplomatic history.

own interests, to warrant maintaining a permanent embassy there. Numerous others were, but continued so for only a brief time, then subsided into comparative unimportance again, to be replaced on the scene by some other transitory 'power': there were a good many such during the period 1500–1700, but, in the affairs of a given state, seldom more than a couple at any one time. A state of war, religious incompatibility, and other inhibitions reduced the number of available, eligible, and acceptable states still further.

In sum, the web of permanent embassies that stretched across Europe in this period was basic to the diplomatic system because it handled much of the basic business among the 'basic' states. It also gave the system its altered character, in two important ways. The existence and customary use of this network of permanent diplomacy, even though only partial in coverage, established and maintained a custom and context of permanent diplomacy for the system as a whole: the normal peaceful relationship between states of any consequence was that of permanent diplomatic liaison through the exchange of permanent diplomatic representatives; anything else was irregular, and the handling of relations through any other channel, whether from motives of friendship or the reverse, was considered and treated accordingly. And secondly, it was the permanent embassies (because they had a larger apparatus, and operated it on a continuing basis) that performed what in the broad view (and definitely that of the researcher) may be considered any ambassador's most significant function in the period: the production of diplomatic reports. But this same overwhelming influence on the entire system makes it necessary to remind oneself that the network of permanent representation and the diplomatic system were not the same thing. There was, in fact, a good deal else to diplomatic activity in the period: it was not only not confined to resident ambassadors—it was not even confined to states.

The participants in the broader system of diplomatic activity were both multifarious and subject to fairly frequent change. In pre-1494 Italy it included almost everyone: the Kingdom of Naples, Rome, Florence, Venice and Milan (the peninsular 'Big

Five'), a few middle-size powers (on the Italian scale) such as Genoa, and a shifting congeries of smaller states, some only tiny fragments, many of which were gobbled up by the others (or remained to be fought over later). After the incursion of the great powers most of these were eliminated from the diplomatic scene. By 1503 Naples was a Spanish viceroyalty, by 1535 Milan a reclaimed imperial fief, by 1540 a Spanish governorship. Though they continued to be active in diplomacy, Florence, Genoa, and the like became increasingly minor actors and even satellites; the Papacy, like the others unable to match armies with the great powers, was soon reduced to being merely a moral force in the world—an unaccustomed role, but not necessarily a bad thing. By the Peace of Cateau Cambrésis in 1559, of the old Italian powers only Venice, her naval strength a diplomatic asset, remained of real consideration, though by then Savoy, who had earlier functioned mainly in the French orbit, must be added to the Italian one, and, along with Venice, to the European one, where both can be rated as middle-sized powers which in pragmatic terms might be defined as neither fearsome nor negligible.[1]

Outside Italy the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries witnessed a dramatic reduction in the number of independent entities even available for participation in international affairs. In France, territorial consolidation removed Provence, Brittany, Béarne, etc., while in Spain two important powers, Aragon and Castile, became one far greater one. The Netherlandish state (which, with its dense population and highly developed economy, was potentially the third or fourth greatest power in Europe) was not yet quite rounded out in 1516 when the Duke of Burgundy became also King of Spain (already consolidated), and three years later Holy Roman Emperor as well. By the time the Spanish and Imperial crowns were again separated in 1556 the new emperor had already added Bohemia and Hungary to *his* holdings, and

[1] It is a truistic paradox that a state's importance in diplomacy, the peaceful alternative to war, is normally measured in military terms, the source of its diplomatic effectiveness consisting in unequal parts of the rightness of its policy, the quality of its ambassadors, and the size of its armies.