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Edited by Daniela Frigo

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INTRODUCTION

DANIELA FRIGO

After Italian historiography's long disaffection with themes concerning foreign policy and diplomacy, a number of important studies have recently directed historians' attention to the problem of the origins of diplomacy and to the ties between diplomatic forms and the political and institutional development of the Italian states in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Thus a manifest gap has been filled in studies on the Italian peninsula in the modern age, where the history of diplomacy displays a curious pattern. On the one hand stands a long tradition of inquiry into the 'Italian origins' of modern diplomacy, identified in the closely knit web of political and diplomatic relations that prepared, accompanied and guaranteed the Peace of Lodi of 1454. Also identified with that Peace is the creation of the first 'balance of power'¹ system used by historians as their model to explain and interpret subsequent critical episodes in the history of international relations, from the Treaty of Westphalia to the Treaty of Utrecht.² On the other hand, this focus on

¹ On the theme of 'balance of power' in European thought see M. Bazzoli, *L'equilibrio di potenza nell'età moderna. Dal Cinquecento al Congresso di Vienna*, Milan, 1998. See also L. Dehio, *Equilibrio o egemonia. Considerazioni sopra un problema fondamentale della storia politica moderna*, Brescia, 1964; G. N. Clark, 'European Equilibrium in the Seventeenth Century', in L. W. Martin (ed.), *Diplomacy in Modern European History*, New York, 1966, pp. 23–30; G. Pillinini, *Storia del principio di equilibrio*, Venice, 1973; G. Livet, *L'équilibre européen de la fin du xve à la fin du xviiiè siècle*, Paris, 1976; F. Chabod, *Idea di Europa e politica dell'equilibrio*, edited by L. Azzolini, Bologna, 1995, pp. 3–31. On the situation in Italy after the Peace of Lodi see G. Pillinini, *Il sistema degli stati italiani 1454–1494*, Venice, 1970.

² This is a view shared by the classic studies on the topic: D. J. Hill, *A History of Diplomacy in the International Development of Europe*, 3 vols., London, 1921–5 (1st edn 1905–14); L. van Der Essen, *La Diplomatie. Ses origines et son organisation jusqu'à la fin de l'Ancien Régime*, Brussels, 1953; H. Nicholson, *The Evolution of Diplomatic Method*, London, 1954; G. Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy*, London, 1955; E. Luard, *The Balance of Power. The System of International Relations 1648–1815*, London, 1992. A recent synthesis which adopts the same approach and proposes the 'long duration' of

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the theme of the ‘origins’ has given rise to a historiographical bias which has induced research to concentrate on the medieval antecedents of the diplomatic institutions and functions, and to neglect subsequent forms and events. Consequently, we have numerous good-quality studies on fourteenth- and fifteenth-century diplomacy³ in relation to the evolution of the communal and seigneurial institutions,⁴ and on the transition from medieval figures of diplomatic representation (*nuntii*, *procuratores*, *legati*)⁵ to that of the ambassador. And we also have the numerous digressions on diplomacy in histories of international relations and manuals on the history of international law.⁶

And yet, as regards the institutions, forms and ‘practices’ of diplomacy between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, the attention of historians has long focused on the Venetian ambassadors and on the figure of the papal nuncio, while little or nothing has been written on the diplomatic representations of the other Italian states. Neglected as a consequence have been numerous aspects of the foreign relations and diplomatic apparatuses of the Italian principalities and republics: the use of diplomacy by the small states to pursue their political designs and aspirations; the creation of offices to manage and control foreign policy; the emergence of rules, norms and privileges for ambassadors; the substantial nobiliary or patrician monopoly of the diplomatic service; the development of the functions and forms of diplomatic representation; the introduction of new ‘techniques’ of negotiation; the forms assumed by correspondence and the circulation of information among courts; the reception of the first formulation of *jus gentium* and of international law; the role of the Italian principalities in European international affairs in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In addition the fact that such a classic study of these themes as Mattingly’s *Renaissance Diplomacy* (1955) has never been translated into Italian is indicative of the reluctance of Italian historiography to address the history of diplomacy. Nevertheless, there has been no lack of recommendations for a revival of a study of these matters. Almost thirty years ago, Marino Berengo called for a revision of Italy’s political history in the light of new ideas

the forms of modern diplomacy is N. S. Anderson, *The Rise of Modern Diplomacy, 1450–1919*, London, 1993.

³ Besides the studies cited in the following notes see Dupré Theseider, *Niccolò Machiavelli diplomatico*, vol. 1: *L’arte della diplomazia nel Quattrocento*, Como, 1945.

⁴ A. K. Isaacs, ‘Sui rapporti interstatali in Italia dal medioevo all’età moderna’, in G. Chittolini, A. Molho and P. Schiera (eds.), *Origini dello Stato. Processi di formazione statale in Italia fra medioevo ed età moderna*, Bologna, 1994, pp. 113–32.

⁵ D. E. Queller, *The Office of Ambassador in the Middle Ages*, Princeton, 1967. But see also the essay by Fubini in this book.

⁶ See e.g. E. Serra, *Istituzioni di storia dei trattati e politica internazionale*, Bologna, 1970.

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and new historiographical methods,⁷ citing developments in the rest of Europe, where the history of diplomacy had constantly been a major area of historical investigation able to update its research issues and tools of inquiry.⁸ One reason for the scant interest of Italian historians in the matter is perhaps an enduring interpretation of Italian history between the later fifteenth and early eighteenth centuries which has only recently been superseded. I refer to the interpretation of these two centuries as largely, if not exclusively, characterized by an economic and political ‘decadence’ which affected – albeit in different forms and at different times – all the states of the peninsula.⁹ Distant from the institutional dynamics that distinguished the formation of the great European monarchies, marginal with respect to the pattern of international arrangements decided by the great powers, tied to the Spanish imperial system, and forced into antiquated forms of feudal dependence on the Empire, throughout the modern age the Italian states – according to this interpretation – were characterized by institutional models, political forms and economic developments entirely ‘peripheral’ to European history.

In recent years, however, this conventional view has been challenged by a more careful examination of events in the peninsula during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the concept of ‘decadence’ itself has apparently lost much of its explanatory capacity. The revision began in economic historiography, where discussion of proto-industrialization showed that the productive and commercial trends of the period were not entirely of negative sign, but were instead part of a broader and

⁷ ‘If by now this constant clash of armies and intrigue by ambassadors and sovereigns has little to say to our historical culture, the refusal to examine the reasons for the rise and decline of a state, for its orientation towards one or other alliance, within this or that sphere of influence, may render all other research meaningless, distorting it into the reconstruction of inert fragments’: M. Berengo, ‘Il Cinquecento’, in *La storiografia italiana negli ultimi vent’anni*, proceedings of the I Congresso degli storici italiani, Milan, 1970, p. 512.

⁸ A. O. Sarkissian (ed.), *Studies in Diplomatic History and Historiography*, London, 1961; C. H. Carter, ‘The Ambassadors of Early Modern Europe: Patterns of Diplomatic Representation in the Early Seventeenth Century’, in Carter (ed.), *From Renaissance to the Counter-Reformation. Essays in Honor of Garrett Mattingly*, New York, 1965, pp. 269–95; W. Roosen, *The Age of Louis XIV: the Rise of Modern Diplomacy*, Cambridge, Mass., 1976; W. Roosen, ‘A New Way of Looking at Early Modern Diplomacy – Quantification’, *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History*, 5 (1978), pp. 1–13; M. Keens-Soper and K. Schweizer, *François de Callières: The Art of Diplomacy*, Leicester University Press, 1983; *Armées et diplomatie dans l’Europe du XVII^e siècle: actes du colloque*, Paris, 1992; L. Bély, *Les Relations internationales en Europe (17–18 siècles)*, Paris, 1992; J. G. Russel, *Diplomats at Work: Three Renaissance Studies*, Sutton, 1992.

⁹ An example of this interpretation is provided by the essays collected in G. Quazza, *La decadenza italiana nella storia europea. Saggi sul Sei-Settecento*, Turin, 1971.

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more profound structural change in economic processes which affected the whole of Europe.¹⁰

Apart from economic history, a different historiographical approach is now emerging also towards political and institutional events in the peninsula during the Spanish period; and the dependence on Madrid of many formally independent Italian states has been analysed not only as political subordination but also in the light of such categories as convenience, convergence of interests, and the trade-off between service and privileges.¹¹ Although confined within much tighter margins of autonomy after 1559, and obliged constantly to calculate the convenience of their political choices, states like the Duchy of Savoy, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany or the Duchies of Modena and Mantua sought tenaciously to preserve their role as actors, albeit minor ones, on the European political stage. As has been rightly pointed out, the interest and preoccupations repeatedly aroused by their initiatives in Madrid demonstrated Spain's constant fear of any change in the political arena that might threaten her supremacy in the peninsula.¹² These were fears, as again has been recently observed, wholly consistent with the nature of the Spanish power system as a primarily 'dynastic', and in which all government measures 'were tied to the military and diplomatic interests of the monarchy and therefore to its international political action'.¹³ Within the ramified and mutable system of seventeenth-century European alliances, even political realities which in the international hierarchy ranked merely as 'small states'¹⁴ could – in particular circumstances – play a political role of much greater weight than their military and territorial size might warrant. This was the case of Genoa, a

¹⁰ For a synthesis of the discussion which preserves the concept of 'crisis' in the peninsula's economy between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but alters its meaning, see P. Malanima, 'L'economia', in G. Greco and M. Rosa (eds.), *Storia degli antichi stati italiani*, Bari, 1996, pp. 249–95.

¹¹ E. Stumpo, 'Il sistema degli stati italiani: crollo e consolidamento (1492–1559)', in *La storia. I grandi problemi dal Medioevo all'Età contemporanea*, vol. III: *L'età moderna*, 3: *Stati e società*, Turin, 1986, pp. 35–53; A. Spagnoletti, *Principi italiani e Spagna nell'età barocca*, Milan, 1996. The revision has obviously also concerned the Spanish dominions: of great interest is the study by G. Signorotto, *Milano spagnola. Guerra, istituzioni, uomini di governo (1635–1660)*, Florence, 1996. For a critical reappraisal of the concept itself of 'dependence' see G. Galasso, *Alla periferia dell'impero. Il Regno di Napoli nel periodo spagnolo (secoli XVI–XVIII)*, Turin, 1994; Galasso, *Dalla 'libertà d'Italia' alle 'preponderanze straniere'*, Naples, 1997.

¹² F. Angiolini, 'Osservazioni su diplomazia e politica dell'Italia non spagnola nell'età di Filippo II', *Rivista Storica Italiana*, 92 (1980), pp. 432–69.

¹³ Galasso, *Alla periferia dell'impero*, p. 31.

¹⁴ M. Bazzoli, *Il piccolo stato nell'età moderna. Studi su un concetto della politica internazionale tra XVI e XVIII secolo*, Milan, 1990.

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financial market of prime importance and a strategic node of communications among the Spanish dominions.¹⁵ By virtue of Genoa's crucial role in the Spanish power system, during the seventeenth century its ruling class undertook long and complex diplomatic negotiations to increase its prestige and ranking at the ceremonials of the European courts.

However, there are further reasons for the lack of interest in diplomacy shown by Italian historians in recent decades. The first is their suspicion of political history, even though at the beginning of this century this was the main focus of inquiry by such masters as Sestan, Quazza and Chabod.¹⁶ The identification of diplomacy with 'political history' has stunted the interest of an entire generation of historians, which in emulation of the *Annales* has turned its interest to economic-social history or, under the influence of German authors like Hintze and Brunner, concentrated on social-institutional history. The influence of French historiography has induced many Italian historians to believe that political and diplomatic history has now run its course and is incapable of revising its interpretative categories.

As said, the critical phase of this break with the past is now over. Within these new currents of historical research demands are being voiced for a renewal of political historiography. The areas of inquiry have been defined, as well as the interpretative tools best suited to a re-reading of the diplomatic history and foreign policy of the Italian states in the modern age, with the intention of freeing such research from its too close, sometimes suffocating, embrace with diplomatic history in the strict sense. As one of the most outstanding contributors to the reinterpretation of the fifteenth-century origins of diplomacy has recently pointed out,¹⁷ the scant interest in the subject since the Second World War has been also due to the excessively sharp demarcation line drawn between the interior and the exterior of the state by early twentieth-century historiography. This artificial division bred historians specialized in international relations, and others specialized in domestic politics, thereby preventing understanding of the close connections between foreign policy and government of the state, between military and diplomatic choices and internal arrangements, and between negotiations,

¹⁵ C. Bitossi, *'La Repubblica è vecchia'. Patriziato e governo a Genova nel secondo Settecento*, Rome, 1995, pp. 421–3.

¹⁶ B. Vigezzi, 'La "nuova storiografia" e la storia delle relazioni internazionali', in B. Vigezzi (ed.), *Federico Chabod e la 'nuova storiografia' italiana 1919–1950*, Milan, 1983, pp. 415–77.

¹⁷ P. Margaroli, *Diplomazia e stati rinascimentali. Le ambascierie sforzesche fino alla conclusione della Lega italica (1450–1455)*, Florence, 1992, pp. 3–4.

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alliances and alignments on the one hand, and the dynastic and patrimonial concerns of the princes, or the political concerns of the republican patriciates, on the other. Now, enriched with new insight, freed from the disciplinary divisions and conflicts that impeded any comprehensive approach to problems, armed with the results of a long tradition of social inquiry, and bolstered by prosopographical research, political historiography is undergoing a period of revival and renewal. And a contributory factor to its resurgence is that the boundaries marking out the 'political' in the *ancien régime* have been extended, while the distinctions between public and private have faded.¹⁸ However, as Angiolini has recently pointed out, this is not a matter of replacing the expression 'political and diplomatic history' with the more up-to-date and attractive one of 'history of international relations'. What is required instead, as Livet wrote some years ago, is a re-thinking of politico-diplomatic history which takes account of the most recent methodological advances and conclusions of social and economic history, as well as those of social psychology and research into the history of ideas and mentality.¹⁹ In short, in order to overcome the disciplinary dogmatisms of the past, a re-reading of diplomacy is required which not only reconstructs the aims, negotiations, grand alliances and diplomatic alliances of the European states, but examines, for each individual state, the mentality and culture of its leaders, the continuities and cleavages in its foreign policy choices, its disputes with other sovereigns, its wrangling over ceremonial, and the conceptions of state and sovereignty embraced by its ambassadors.²⁰ In this manner the history of diplomacy will offer fresh insights and open new directions for research on the themes of the state, the government, and of the ruling classes of seventeenth-century Italy, furnishing different materials and sources for those who set out to

¹⁸ For an interesting discussion see C. Mozzarelli, 'Introduzione' to G. F. Comendone, *Discorso sopra la corte di Roma*, Rome, 1996, pp. 9–42. However, all the recent historiography on the court of Rome, and on the interweaving within it of political with religious interest, of clientelism with ecclesiastical ties, of court practices with pastoral motives, makes a stimulating contribution to redefinition of the political realities of the *ancien régime*. See for example M. Pellegrini, 'Per una lettura storico-sociale della Curia romana. Corte di Roma e aristocrazie italiane in età moderna', *Rivista di Storia e Letteratura Religiosa*, 30 (1994), pp. 453–602; M. A. Visceglia, 'Burocrazia, mobilità sociale e patronage alla corte di Roma tra Cinque e Seicento. Alcuni aspetti del recente dibattito storiografico e prospettive di ricerca', *Roma Moderna e Contemporanea*, 3 (1995), pp. 7–55.

¹⁹ Angiolini, 'Osservazioni su diplomazia', p. 443.

²⁰ For a recent and brilliant reconstruction of politics and diplomacy in the Italian states of the modern age see G. Galasso, *L'Italia una e diversa nel sistema degli stati europei (1450–1750)*, in Galasso (ed.), *Storia d'Italia*, vol. XIX: *L'Italia moderna e l'unità nazionale*, Turin, 1998, pp. 3–492.

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analyse the political categories (honour, grace, service, reputation, etc.) of the Europe of the *ancien régime*.

At the same time, careful reappraisal of the politics and diplomatic practices of the Italian states in the age of the Counter-Reformation can shed clearer light on the connection between politics and religion, and between secular power and ecclesiastical power (further issues that recent historiography has addressed with updated tools of inquiry). In their policy choices, regarding foreign policy as well, the Italian states were constantly conditioned by their relations with Rome and by their need to obtain or keep the support of the Roman Curia, which throughout the modern age dispensed offices and benefits to sovereigns and nobles as well as to the members of local ruling groups, and acted as a springboard to the cardinalate for European aristocrats embarking on ecclesiastical careers.

Besides these little explored areas of inquiry, recent studies have also taken a different approach to the theme of the origins of ‘resident’ diplomacy, going well beyond the customary interpretation of diplomacy as signalling the advent of the modern state, of which the Renaissance state was some sort of precursor.²¹ In the wake of Burckhardt’s pioneering work,²² the growth of diplomatic representation and control over foreign policy were viewed as indicative of the political maturity and institutional robustness of the seigneurial and princely states that, between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, supplanted medieval political forms (fiefs, communes, republics) in much of the peninsula. Although many of the findings of traditional historiography are still valid today, doubts have been raised over the ‘stability’ of inter-state relations from the fifteenth century onwards. More specifically, the idea has been challenged that this was the century in which sovereigns acquired that monopoly over foreign policy which has long been taken to be one of the distinctive features of sovereignty. The concept itself of ‘state’ has been recently revised as a concept too restrictive to contain the dynamics and practices that wove personal, familial and dynastic interests tightly together,²³ as the study of modern diplomacy confirms.

²¹ S. Bertelli, ‘Il problema del Rinascimento’, in Vigezzi (ed.), *Federico Chabod*, pp. 103–28.

²² J. Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, Oxford, 1945 (first published in 1860).

²³ The term ‘state’, notes Prosperi in his fine study, is hazardous when applied to sixteenth-century Italy. It conveys an image of a power strong in territorial terms, jealous of its prerogatives, and able to counteract another entity sharply distinct from it, the Church. ‘This was not the state of affairs in sixteenth-century Italy. The Pope’s interlocutors in Rome were men whom he kept around his person to conduct multiple and complicated personal negotiations, who depended on him as

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To be sure, in the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, in almost all the states of the peninsula, the reorganization and strengthening of the organs and offices responsible for foreign policy got under way, while stable relations between Italian and European potentates were intensified. But what seems to emerge from most recent studies, altering the picture for so long propounded by historiography, is the plurality of the centres of power involved in the web of diplomatic relations, and the variety and flexibility of legations: in short, the impossibility of fixing categories (the ambassador extraordinary, the resident, the legation, etc.) valid for every situation. Studies have emphasized the large number – and diversity in terms of legitimacy, power and representativeness – of the actors who conducted international (or better ‘supra-state’) relations in the early modern age. These actors were so numerous because of the numerous and diverse networks of contact and exchange in operation, not only among the great and small potentates of Europe at that time but also among factions, court parties, aristocratic groups, large mercantile companies, and so on.²⁴ Hence, the expressions ‘international relations’ or ‘foreign relations’ are of little use for description of the phenomenon and its features. The term ‘international’, in fact, presupposes the existence of nations, or at least of ‘homogeneous’ political organizations, which establish relationships with each other, and this was certainly not the case of Renaissance and sixteenth-century Italy. The expression ‘foreign relations’, for its part, is predicated on the idea that precise boundaries can be drawn between ‘internal’ and ‘external’, between ‘domestic’ affairs and military and diplomatic interests: an assumption that is not always valid for the culture and political praxis of the Europe of the Renaissance and the *ancien régime*. Bonds of fealty, constraints of protection, interweaving interests, and clientelistic networks took no account of still uncertain and insecure territorial borders.²⁵ Rather, they acted as autonomous criteria of recognition,

on a high feudal lord, who needed graces, favours and benefits. More than by princes and lay governments, ecclesiastical matters were handled by churchmen from their own states resident in Rome. The system achieved perfection when there was a cardinal member of the ruling family: a Gonzaga for Mantua, a Medici for Florence, an Este for Ferrara. It was his task to guarantee the mediation of ecclesiastical matters’: A. Prosperi, *Tribunali della coscienza. Inquisitori, confessori, missionari*, Turin, 1996, pp. 63–4.

²⁴ On this see the excellent study by Margaroli, *Diplomazia e stati rinascimentali*. Margaroli analyses the Sforzas’ network of diplomatic contacts in relation to their diverse interests with regard to other states, which gave rise to distinct forms of legation and to differing relations between the ambassadors and their duke.

²⁵ Cf. C. Ossola, C. Raffestin and M. Ricciardi (eds.), *La frontiera da stato a nazione. Il caso Piemonte*, Rome, 1987.

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membership and alliance which were broader and more blurred than political, dynastic or territorial ones. If, therefore, and only for the sake of convenience, the expression ‘foreign relations’ can be used to denote the multiple political, diplomatic and military contacts among distinct centres of power, it must always be borne in mind that these exchanges took place not only among sovereigns, princes and republics, but also among local lords, feudatories, city magistracies, and peasants: the many and diverse subjects, that is to say, of Italian and European society of the *ancien régime*.

Riccardo Fubini has been the first to take an innovative approach to the theme of diplomacy. In numerous studies,²⁶ he has analysed the evolution of diplomatic practice in fifteenth-century Florence, at the same time raising issues for fruitful further inquiry: first and foremost, the institutionalization of a function – that of representation – which arose in Florence above all as *political praxis*. Equally interesting is the case of fifteenth-century Milan, which has been studied for some time²⁷ and is now the focus of recent studies²⁸ which, besides describing the features, functions and recruitment procedures of the Sforza ambassadors, suggest further methodological criteria for the study of diplomatic apparatuses. As Leverotti writes, historians of the evolution of diplomatic institutions too should always bear in mind that it is the ‘history of men’ that provides the key to the weight, significance and development of institutions, including diplomatic ones.²⁹ More than ever before, therefore, it is necessary to return to the documentary sources. Only these, Margaroli declares,³⁰ enable us to follow the progress of individual missions, to measure the coherence between a legation’s goals and the results achieved, and to assess the choice of the most suitable ambassador, thereby reconstructing the overall workings of the diplomacy pursued by a state or a prince.

The figure of the ambassador, too, which certain historical works of

²⁶ For his individual studies see the notes to Fubini’s contribution in this book. Many of his essays have been collected in *Italia quattrocentesca. Politica e diplomazia al tempo di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, Milan, 1994.

²⁷ L. Cerioni, *La diplomazia sforzesca nella seconda metà del Quattrocento e i suoi cifrari segreti*, Rome, 1970; ‘Gli Sforza a Milano e in Lombardia e i loro rapporti con gli Stati italiani ed europei (1450–1535)’, conference proceedings (Milan, 18–21 May 1981), Milan, 1982. For the previous period see also G. Soldi Rondinini, ‘Ambasciatori e ambascerie al tempo di Filippo Maria Visconti (1412–1426)’, *Nuova Rivista Storica*, 49 (1965), pp. 313–44.

²⁸ F. Leverotti, *Diplomazia e governo dello stato. I ‘famigli cavalcanti’ di Francesco Sforza (1450–1466)*, Pisa, 1992; Margaroli, *Diplomazia e stati*.

²⁹ Leverotti, *Diplomazia e governo*, p. 10.

³⁰ Margaroli, *Diplomazia e stati*, p. 11.

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the past invested with an aura almost of sacredness, has been more realistically evaluated by recent studies which draw directly on the sources. Thus, alongside the most celebrated missions – often entrusted for the purposes of propaganda to ‘literati’ ambassadors (Bembo, Castiglione, Tasso, Ariosto, and many others) – these studies have elucidated the patient day-to-day work carried out by envoys, secretaries, chancellors, and informers. Behind the pomp that surrounded the Renaissance ambassador on solemn occasions, his function was often and much more realistically viewed as a sort of ‘honoured’ espionage. In his *Dizionario filosofico-politico-storico*, the Genoese Andrea Spinola assured his readers that ‘spying on the designs and secrets of princes is the proper business of ambassadors, and especially of residents’.³¹ More recent works have therefore emphasized the diverse and sometimes conflicting nature of the protagonists of Italian diplomacy: the *famuli cavalcanti* of Ludovico Sforza, the communal orators, the papal nuncios, the ambassador men of letters despatched by the princely courts, the jurists engaged in the most sensitive negotiations, the secretaries, the residents, as well as the secret envoys, informers and spies.³² However, only when we have more complete biographies, and more detailed analyses of negotiations and diplomatic missions, will it be possible to provide a better description of the political culture and functions of the ambassador, undertake comparative study of the Italian states between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, and thereby gain clearer understanding of Italy’s contribution to the formation of modern diplomacy, which lies not only ‘upstream’, so to speak, in its fifteenth-century origins, but also in the Venetian model of relations, in the political praxis of the Roman court, and in the ‘courtly’ style that one of the most celebrated ambassadors and men of letters of the Renaissance, Baldassare Castiglione, elaborated and codified on the basis of first-hand experience.³³

The aim of this book is to contribute further to this revival of studies on political history and diplomacy, and to provide a synthesis of problems, methods and results. The studies just discussed, in fact, highlight the wide variety of problems raised by investigation into diplomatic sources,

³¹ Quoted in P. Preto, *I servizi segreti di Venezia. Spionaggio e controspionaggio: cifrari, intercettazioni, delazioni fra mito e realtà*, Milan, 1994.

³² On French diplomacy see L. Bély, *Espions et ambassadeurs au temps de Louis XIV*, Paris, 1990.

³³ On the Europe-wide impact of Castiglione’s book see A. Quondam, ‘Introduzione’ to B. Castiglione, *Il libro del cortegiano*, Milan, 1981. For a rather different reading of the celebrated text see W. Barberis, ‘Introduzione’ to B. Castiglione, *Il libro del cortegiano*, Turin, 1998. See also B. G. Zenobi, *Corti principesche e oligarchie formalizzate come ‘luoghi del politico’ nell’Italia dell’età moderna*, Urbino, 1993.