PART I

THE LATE REPUBLIC AND THE PRINCIPATE

CHAPTER 1

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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I. INTRODUCTION

The study of Roman international relations and attitudes to war and peace in the late Republic and the Principate poses fascinating problems. While there are many excellent modern studies of specific aspects there are few scholarly works which attempt an overview.[1] In part this may be because no Greek or Latin literature of the period discussed these themes in an extended or systematic fashion. A modern appreciation has to draw on material scattered in literary, epigraphic, papyrological, numismatic and artistic sources.

It is vital not to elevate what have become, since the Renaissance,[2] the norms of Western diplomacy to the status of universal practices and attitudes. We have to 'forget about' or, at least, question the existence in Rome of various things which we tend to regard as timeless: diplomatic archives and experts, topographical maps, continuity of relations between states (permanent embassies and the like) and proactive policies, even coherent and explicit policies at all. The preconditions which underpinned the emergence of the Western norms (a multiplicity of stable polities which recognized their broadly comparable levels of political power and cultural attainment) did not exist for Rome in this period. As we shall see, Roman ways of thinking about the Roman empire and its neighbours largely precluded the creation of structures similar to those of the post-Renaissance West.

To understand Roman international relations we must first look at the ideological frameworks within which they operated.

II. IDEOLOGY: EMPIRE AND OUTSIDE

Three logically incompatible views of the empire were available to its inhabitants. It encompassed the whole world, the best areas of the world or just part of the world.

[1] Millar (1982), (1988) and Mattern (1999) are general studies of diplomacy. Braund (1984) contains much of use. Shaw (1986) and Talbert (1988) provide specific studies. Bederman (2001) is the latest in a line of over-legalistic studies. For modern works on war and peace see section X below.

[2] Mattingly (1955).

Jupiter in Virgil's *Aeneid* famously promised the Romans 'empire without end'.[3] The idea that the Romans had conquered the whole world was not confined only to poetry. Philo described the Romans ruling over all the earth and sea.[4] This view was bolstered by Roman conceptions of the nature of their empire. It ran where Roman power ran. It did not just consist of provinces directly administered by Rome, but also of 'client' states.[5] The Romans had strong expectations about how the ruler of a 'client' state should behave.[6] He should control his subjects, not intrigue with peoples hostile to Rome, not harm other Roman 'clients' or Roman provinces and if they were wanted he should provide troops and material for Roman campaigns. If he fulfilled these expectations Rome would probably support his rule. If he were very favoured, Rome would approve his choice of successor. There was always a tendency for Rome to try and absorb 'client' states into provinces, especially in the east. The process, however, was not all one way. Some 'provincialized' peoples were given back to 'client' rulers. It would be wrong to talk of an abandonment of the client system. The Romans always attempted to turn the peoples beyond their provinces into 'client' states. The feeling that 'client' states were part of the empire was supported by the language and practice of Roman diplomacy. Subject peoples, on any objective view inside the empire, were called allies (*socii*), with whom Rome had friendship (*amicitia*) and with whom Rome observed diplomatic protocol. The same terms and forms were employed with 'client' peoples to our eyes outside the empire.[7] Furthermore from the early second century BC the Romans, like the imperial Chinese, could consider any diplomatic approach by another people as evidence of their submission to Rome.[8]

The second, to us rather more plausible, view was expressed distinctively by Greeks within the empire. The Romans held all the earth that was worth having and maybe a bit more besides.[9] This was compatible with the belief that the empire was hedged round with strong defences (e.g. Aristid. *Or.* 26.81–2).

The third view, in contrast, saw imperial expansion as inherently glorious and to be continued.[10] This was often expressed as regret for missed opportunities. The whole world would have fallen if Julius Caesar had not been forced to abandon his Gallic campaigns (Dio Cass. 44.43.1). Again

[3] Virg. *Aen.* 1.278–9; cf. 6.781–2; and Ov. *Fast.* 2.688.
[4] Philo, *Leg.* 8; cf. the heading of Augustus, *Res Gestae*; Plin. *HN* 3.5; Dio Cass. 73.24.2.
[5] Richardson (1991); Lintott (1993) 22–44.
[6] Luttwak (1976) 20–40; Braund (1984); Millar (1993).
[7] Millar (1988) 352–6. The archive wall at Aphrodisias preserves the most illuminating dossier of imperial correspondence to an 'allied' city within the empire: Reynolds (1982).
[8] E.g. Augustus, *Res Gestae* 26–33; Suet. *Aug.* 21.3; Badian (1958) 8–9 on early second-century change. This ideology makes a Roman embassy to China unlikely: Campbell (1989) 373 n. 21; Peyrefitte (1989) on Chinese attitudes.
[9] Whittaker (2000) 299.
[10] Brunt (1990b) 96–109, 288–323, 433–80.

the emperor Maximinus Thrax would have reached the Ocean if not for a revolt (Herodian 7.2.9). Or it could all be put down to the inertia of some emperors.[11]

The Romans seem incurious about the realities of the world outside. We hear of only a handful of official expeditions gathering information beyond the empire,[12] and it was thought that increased geographic conquest would normally bring knowledge.[13] It appears that the Romans tended to think not in terms of blocks of territory ('cartographic thinking') but in the linear terms ('odological thinking') of coasts, rivers, roads or mountain ranges.[14] The products of this 'odological thinking' were written and pictured itineraries (lists of towns and stopping places along roads) and *periploi* (lists of ports of call for coastal voyaging).[15] It seems that it was these, rather than topographical maps, that were employed in strategic thinking (*SHA Alex. Sev.* 45.2–3). The east with its urban centres linked by roads and with the Rivers Euphrates and Tigris flowing away from the empire was thus easier to comprehend than the unurbanized north.[16]

'Map consciousness' and geographic knowledge in general may have been low but they could affect thinking about interstate relations. The inhabited world was thought to stretch twice as far east–west as north–south, with the northern coast of Europe considered a straight line.[17] Such ideas underlie Agricola contemplating an invasion of Ireland because it was 'halfway between Britain and Spain' (Tac. *Agr.* 24), and Herodian's complaint that the Romans concentrated on the northern frontier at the expense of the eastern because the Germans were virtually adjacent neighbours to the Italians (6.7.5).

The frontier of the empire could be seen as a moral barrier.[18] Inside were the arts, discipline and humanity (*humanitas*). Outside were wildness, irrationality, savagery and barbarity (*barbaritas*).[19] In large measure the identity of a civilized member of the empire consisted in being the opposite of a barbarian. But there were tensions and ambiguities in Roman thinking. It was recognized that barbarians were not all the same. Those in the north were generally stupider but more ferocious than those in the east.[20] Some barbarians, northern or eastern, could be thought of as good and wise. Dio Chrysostom wrote up the Dacians as natural philosophers.[21]

[11] E.g. Tac. *Ann.* 4.32; Flor. 1 *praefatio.* 8; Herodian 1.6.7–9.
[12] Rawson (1985) 256–7; Austin and Rankov (1995) 30–1.
[13] Millar (1982) 18; cf. Sherk (1974) 534–62 and, a more positive view, Syme (1988).
[14] A view pioneered by Janni (1984); followed by Lee (1993b) 86–90 and Brodersen (2001) 7–21. See Nicolet (1991) for a different view.
[15] Brodersen (1995); cf. Salway (2001) 22–66. [16] Lee (1993b) 87–90.
[17] Mattern (1999) 41–66. [18] Alföldi (1952) 1–16.
[19] Woolf (1998) 54–60 for an overview; Ferris (2000) for these ideas in art.
[20] Balsdon (1979) 59–64.
[21] Sidebottom (1990) 180–204 on Dio; Momigliano (1975) on the phenomenon in general.

There was a tension between established traditions about barbarians and new information. Cassius Dio (67.6.2, cf. 69.15.1) called the Dacians by that name as it was what they called themselves, although he was aware that some Greek writers called them Getae (as had Dio Chrysostom), the name of a tribe known to the Greeks in classical antiquity.

From some stances the barrier could almost vanish. Some whole peoples in the empire could be portrayed as barbarous, as Herodian did the Phoenicians (5.3.3–8, 5.5.3–10).[22] Indeed, the non-élite, whatever their ethnicity, could be seen as being like barbarians.[23]

Ludicrous as such ethnic stereotyping appears to us, it shaped Roman diplomacy. One of the two reasons Marcus Aurelius sent away empty handed an embassy of the Iazyges was that 'he knew their race to be untrustworthy' (Dio Cass. 72.13.1).

III. DECISION MAKING: GOVERNMENT AT ROME

Under the Republic the legal ratification of war and peace depended on a vote of an assembly of the Roman people.[24] Diplomacy, however, was the preserve of the Senate, which both received and sent embassies.[25] As Polybius commented (6.13.7–8), this could lead foreigners to assume that the Senate was the sole government of Rome. The strength of feeling, at least among senators, that the Senate as a body should conduct interstate relations is shown by the outrage generated when popular politicians (such as Tiberius Gracchus and Publius Clodius) removed it from the process.[26] Individual senators could have important unofficial roles to play. As patrons they were expected to further the diplomacy of their foreign clients, and when abroad they might stay with kings.[27] Some kings kept agents in Rome, and legislation embodied justifiable fears that senators might be bribed.[28] Conversely some senators loaned money to kings.[29]

Under the Principate this all changed. Now the emperor was the ultimate decision maker. He was expected to consult a body of advisors (his *consilium*). But the *consilium* was an informal group consisting of whomever he chose to invite and he could overrule its opinion.[30] Embassies now went to and from the emperor. Only once under the Principate, in AD 24, do we hear of the Senate receiving and sending an embassy (Tac. *Ann.* 4.26). Yet there was an expectation that the Senate should have a role, if only a

[22] Cf. Dio Cass. 79.27.1 on Moors. [23] Shaw (2000) 375–6.
[24] Lintott (1999) 197, 201; it may be that the Senate took over these functions in the late Republic.
[25] Millar (1988) 340, 367.
[26] Stockton (1979) 67–9 for Tiberius Gracchus; Braund (1984) 24 for Clodius.
[27] Badian (1958) 154–67; Braund (1984) 16.
[28] Badian (1968) 64; Braund (1984) 59–60; Austin and Rankov (1995) 93.
[29] Braund (1984) 59–61. [30] Crook (1955).

Figure 1.1 Coin depicting Trajan presenting a Dacian to a senator.

formal one, in diplomacy. In 23 BC Augustus introduced eastern envoys to the Senate, which referred the matter back to him (Dio Cass. 53.33.1–2).[31] The expectation of senatorial involvement is made clear by a coin depicting Trajan presenting a Dacian to a senator[32] (see fig. 1.1).

We last hear of an embassy being presented to the Senate in the reign of Commodus.[33] We can thus assume special pleading when in the early third century AD the senator Cassius Dio, in a programmatic speech, argued that foreign envoys should be taken before the Senate (53.31.1).

It was always customary for the emperor to inform the Senate of his diplomatic activity. Marcus Aurelius sent details of all his treaties except that with the Iazyges, when Avidius Cassius' revolt forced him to make peace against his will (Dio Cass. 72.17.1). After foreign envoys no longer appeared before the Senate emperors continued to send details of their diplomacy. In AD 218 Macrinus was criticized for sending an edited version of his treaty with Parthia (Dio Cass. 79.27.1–3).

As from the start the emperor had the legal right to make war or peace;[34] the role of the people was confined to that of spectators at diplomatic spectacles (see below, section VIII).

The transition from Republic to Principate brought changes in the types of individuals who unofficially mattered in diplomacy. The new order is revealed in the terms of a will made by Herod, king of Judaea. He left 1,000 talents to Augustus and half that sum to be divided between Augustus' wife Livia, the imperial children, imperial friends (*amici*) and imperial freedmen.[35] The great senatorial houses, which under the Republic had acted as patrons for foreign rulers (e.g. the Gracchi and the Attalids of Pergamum) were no longer central: indeed as Tacitus (*Ann.* 3.55)

[31] Talbert (1984) 420. [32] BMC vol. III. p. 65, no. 244, plate 13.14; Talbert (1984) 428.
[33] Talbert (1988) 137–47. [34] Talbert (1984) 429.
[35] Joseph. *BJ* 1.646; *AJ* 17.146. Under the Principate individuals other than the emperor could only act as patrons to communities within the empire; see Eilers (2002) on Greek cities

makes clear, such contacts could bring senators into danger from suspicious emperors.

It is debatable how informed the level of diplomatic discussion was in the emperor's *consilium*.[36] As we have seen, the *consilium* was an informal body to which the emperor could invite whomever he wished. We do not hear of invitations to specialists on foreign affairs in specific areas or in general. Again there is no trace of an imperial secretary devoted to foreign affairs. Treaties with foreign powers were recorded (see below, section IX) and clearly some archives existed for such matters as grants of Roman citizenship.[37] Yet evidence for any archive devoted to diplomatic affairs remains elusive. Without accurate topographical maps diplomatic debate must have been conducted in terms of the prevailing 'odological thinking' about geography and ethnographic understanding (see above, section II). It has been pointed out that Cassius Dio was an imperial advisor as well as historian. Debate in the emperor's *consilium* thus might be judged to have been at the same vague level as it was in Cassius Dio's history.[38] Yet this could be to ignore the conventions of ancient literary genres. As Cassius Dio's contemporary, Herodian, states (2.15.6–7), works of history should not get bogged down in superfluous detail. Debate which led to decision making in foreign affairs may have been rather more precise than its reflection in literary works, but it still should not be thought of as producing a sophisticated grand strategy close to modern versions.[39]

IV. DECISION MAKING: DISTANCE AND TIME

Given the huge size of the empire, factors of distance and time determined how closely central government could control the diplomatic activities of its governors on the frontiers. A glance at a modern topographical map of the empire would suggest that the interior lines of communication offered by sea travel would have been utilized. Yet this was not the norm. Even though there were fleets stationed in the Mediterranean during the Principate,[40] they do not seem to have been used regularly for official communications.[41] On occasions we find emperors using merchant shipping (Dio Cass. 65.9.2a). Sea travel was largely seasonal and often dangerous. Probably more important, it was highly unpredictable.[42] A death sentence

[36] Millar (1982), (1988) are fundamental.
[37] Millar (1988) 359–61; Ando (2000) 80–130 gives a thorough discussion of archives within the empire, but does not address foreign diplomacy.
[38] Millar (1982) 3.
[39] The view of Luttwak (1976) that the Romans did produce a rational grand strategy comparable to modern ones has found few followers: Ferrill (1991b); Wheeler (1993). Against: Mann (1979); Millar (1982); Whittaker (1996); Mattern (1999).
[40] Starr (1941); Reddé (1986). [41] Millar (1982) 10–11.
[42] Duncan-Jones (1990) 7–29; cf. Horden and Purcell (2000) 137–43, 564–6.

from Caligula in Rome for the governor of Syria was three months en route, arriving twenty-seven days after news of the emperor's death (Joseph. *BJ* 2.203; *AJ* 18.305).

The relative reliability of land communication was the preferred option. Augustus is said to have introduced a system of runners (Suet. *Aug.* 49), but if it was ever implemented it was soon abandoned. The Principate relied on the imperial post (*cursus publicus*), a system where those with official authorization (*diplomata*) could requisition horses and vehicles from either private sources or official posting stations (*mansiones*).[43] It has been estimated that the average speed of this system was about 50 miles a day, although for urgent messages it could have managed up to 160 miles a day.[44]

In the Roman world diplomacy could be thought of as an activity requiring speed. It was a literary cliché that diplomatic letters hurried to their recipient,[45] But to our eyes diplomacy was often conducted in a leisurely way. Although Trajan had clearly announced his intentions of campaigning against Parthia and raised new legions for the war, it was not until he reached Athens that Parthian envoys came to him, and then he prevaricated, saying he would do all that was proper when he reached Syria (Dio Cass. 68.17.2–3).

The sometimes leisurely nature of diplomacy can be accounted for by the nature of ancient warfare. It was both seasonal, rarely being conducted in the winter, and slow-moving, ancient armies usually only moving at a speed of about 15 miles a day.[46] There was often no need for diplomacy to hurry. Time delays could be turned to Roman advantage. A governor of Moesia Inferior told an embassy of the Carpi to come back in four months for an answer to give him time to consult Gordian III.[47]

V. DECISION MAKING: GOVERNORS ON THE FRONTIERS

Under the Republic Rome had a measure of control over its governors on the frontiers. Customarily it was the Senate which assigned provinces to senatorial magistrates or ex-magistrates, and decided the level of their funding and the numbers of troops. The Senate debated any treaties entered into by governors, and ultimately the people voted on decisions of war and peace. Governors could be tried on their return to Rome and in the late Republic laws attempted to govern their behaviour.[48]

[43] Casson (1974) 182–90; Kolb (2001) 95–105. [44] Ramsay (1925) 63–5.
[45] E.g. Juv. 4.147–9; cf. Herodian 6.2.1, 6.2.3, 6.7.2–3.
[46] Lee (1993b) 90–101, seasonal; Luttwak (1976) 80–4, slow moving.
[47] Petrus Patricius (Peter the Patrician), fr. 8 (*FHG* IV.186–7); Millar (1982) 11.
[48] Lintott (1993) 43–50, 97–107.

In the middle Republic, although levels of control varied, the general consensus among the senatorial élite and between it and the people meant that the system worked well: governors seldom did things which were disapproved of at home.[49] Things were often different in the late Republic. While it was ever more invoked, consensus both among the élite and between the élite and the people to some extent failed. From within the Senate emerged popular politicians (the *populares*) who distinctively ignored it and appealed direct to the people and at times intervened in foreign affairs.[50] Connected to this, and in part caused by the huge size of the empire, a special type of command was instituted, covering a wide geographic area and capable of remaining for several years in force.[51] As a result the Senate had little control over some of the great dynasts in the last century BC. The process can be well illustrated from the career of Pompey. *Populares* tribunes of the plebs persuaded the people to vote Pompey special commands against the pirates (in 67 BC) and Mithridates (in 66 BC). After his defeat of Mithridates, Pompey created two new provinces (Syria and Pontus) and greatly enlarged another one (Cilicia) as well as making treaties with a large number of 'client' states. On his return to Rome in 62 BC Pompey demanded that all his actions be put to just one vote in the Senate. This extraordinary demand provoked furious opposition but, after Pompey had entered into the political friendship (*amicitia*) with Julius Caesar and Crassus known to modern historians as the first triumvirate, it was forced through in 59 BC.[52]

Under the Principate all governors, whether notionally appointed by the Senate or acting as deputies (legates) of the emperor, acted to some extent under the auspices of the emperor.[53] It seems that from the beginning of the Principate all governors on taking up their posts received instructions (*mandata*) from the emperor.[54] Modern opinion is divided as to whether these soon ossified into a formulaic pattern[55] or they continued to contain specific instructions.[56] Whichever was the case, governors might receive specific instructions during their term. Tiberius sent Vitellius, his governor of Syria, detailed instructions on making a treaty with the king of Parthia (Joseph. *AJ* 18.96–105). Sometimes governors are seen asking for guidance before acting. Paetus, the governor of Syria, wrote to Vespasian, possibly with false information, before acting against Antiochus of Commagene (Joseph. *BJ* 7.219–44). Lack of imperial instructions made a good excuse for inactivity. Corbulo refused to invade Armenia without orders (Tac. *Ann.* 15.17). Arrangements that a governor made with a foreign power were only provisional until the emperor's later decision. Even Paetus' agreement with

[49] Eckstein (1987) xxi, 319–20. [50] Wirszubski (1950) 39–40. [51] Wirszubski (1950) 61–5.
[52] Seager (1979) 50–5, 72–87. [53] Millar (1992) 313–28.
[54] Millar (1992) 314–17, 642–3; Burton (1976) 63. [55] Millar (1982) 8–9.
[56] Potter (1996) 49–66.

the Parthians that no Roman should enter Armenia, a thing so disgraceful that Tacitus assumes it was invented to blacken Paetus, depended on Nero's acceptance.[57] At times governors merely acted as conduits to the emperor. Pliny as governor of Bithynia–Pontus did not accede to a procurator's request to hold up an embassy to Trajan from the king of Pontus.[58]

Sometimes governors are presented as acting on their own initiative. Tacitus thus portrays the actions of his father-in-law as governor of Britain.[59] An inscription celebrating the achievements of Tiberius Plautius Silvanus records him as governor of Moesia, among other things, bringing kings previously unknown to the Romans to do reverence to the Roman standards, accepting hostages and deterring a king of the Scythians from hostile actions.[60] But to take these at face value might be to be misled by the rhetoric. They vaunt the achievements of their subjects and seek to place them in the tradition of Republican governors. To include instructions from an emperor would be to undercut these aims. Governors were aware that they had less freedom of action than their Republican predecessors. Corbulo, on being recalled from a campaign against the Chauci, famously exclaimed 'how fortunate were the Roman commanders of old' (Tac. *Ann.* 11.19–20; Dio Cass. 61.30.4–5). Making war without the emperor's permission carried the death penalty.[61]

It may be that any attempt to find the normal level of independent action of governors is doomed to failure. Several variable factors would determine a governor's independence: the perceived importance of an issue, the more important being referred straight to the emperor, the less so being dealt with initially by the governor; the pressing nature of the issue, the more pressing being more likely to be handled at once by the governor; the governor's own desire for independent action; and finally the governor's perception of the character of the emperor and relationship with him.

VI. IMPLEMENTATION

In Roman eyes it should have been barbarians who initiated diplomatic activity. Part of Sulla's good fortune was held to be that he was the first Roman approached by a Parthian envoy (Plut. *Vit. Sull.* 5.4). Especially in wartime it was considered an act of weakness to start negotiations. Herodian

[57] Tac. *Ann.* 15.16. Presumably treaties made by the emperor's legates only became valid 'as if passed by the Senate and people' (Dio Cass. 60.23.6) after imperial endorsement.

[58] Plin. *Ep.* 10.63, 64, 67. As with Paetus and Antiochus above, this reminds us that central government only knew what it was told, and at times its agents told it different things.

[59] Tac. *Agr.*; Millar (1982) 9.

[60] *ILS* 986; translated in Sherk (1988) no. 64; discussed by Millar (1982) 7–8 and Mattern (1999) 162–3.

[61] *Dig.* 48.4.3; Talbert (1984) 428.