ENVOYS AND POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN THE LATE ANTIQUE WEST, 411–533

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EMBASSIES AND POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN THE POST-IMPERIAL WEST

INTRODUCTION

Embassies were ubiquitous, constant, and crucial during the break-up of the late Roman West and the establishment of the first medieval kingdoms in the fifth and early sixth centuries. The conduct of political communication through formal conventions was a shaping force in this period of change, more frequent if less obvious than warfare. This study examines the literary monuments for the envoys who carried out the task of communication. Their story brings to the fore new aspects of political processes in the late and post-imperial world. Late antique embassies present uninterrupted continuations of Greco-Roman public oratory and administration, functioning in new and complex circumstances. The patterns of communication traced by envoys reveal a wide range of participants in political affairs. Envoys had long been the voice of cities and provinces to imperial authorities; in late antiquity, municipal envoys spoke not only of taxation and civic honours, but also of war and peace. Envoys now became also, as one himself put it, the 'voice of kings': with the rise of a multiplicity of states, rulers required forms of representation not needed by emperors in earlier centuries.[1] Many constituents of the western polities employed envoys as their instruments, participating in classical conventions of communication which remained common to all regions and all parts of society in the West, long past the fragmentation of political boundaries. Rewards accrued to those who successfully undertook embassies, either on palatine service or for local communities. Their missions moulded both the grand and the local politics of the late antique West.

Embassies were important cumulatively. Regularity and ubiquity of political communication, constantly sustaining relations among the gamut of participants in public life, characterise the role of embassies in the politics of the West. Sources, however, often present narratives of embassies

[1] Senarius, *Epitaph*, line 4.

as dramatic and pivotal moments; so too do many modern studies, which incorporate embassies into their accounts and analyses of political events. It is not usually acknowledged that the relatively few embassies attested by our sources represent only a small fraction of the constant flow of legations in the period, and that embassies were so common an event as to be generally ignored by contemporary authors. As a result, specific embassies which appear in the sources are often misinterpreted by modern commentators by being presented as outstanding; modest events are turned into decisive moments of history. Such reconstructions wrongly interpret the specific case; but they also misconstrue the general functioning of political processes and communication in the period. A 'diplomatic history' of the fragmentation of the Roman West would be profoundly revealing, but the materials available are very inadequate for the task. The same envoy cited above, a court servant of Theoderic king of Italy, states that he himself undertook twenty-five legations for the king; narrative sources do not record this many embassies for the whole of Theoderic's reign, though more embassies are attested to and from the Ostrogothic court than any other western centre of power.[2] Not only is there a lack of anything like a representative record of the number of embassies exchanged, but the nature of the available sources does not lend itself to a reconstruction of political events. Most western texts which mention legations were not intended as records of the issues negotiated, but as eulogistic monuments to the individuals who carried out the onerous task of the embassy.

This study seeks to turn this emphasis to an advantage, by focusing not on 'diplomacy' but on its agent, the envoy. The sources foreground the political and social patterns which determined the conduct of legations, rather than the issues of negotiation. Examining these patterns offers valuable insight into the role of communication in the unravelling of imperial authority in the West, a role traditionally overshadowed by communication's counterpart, military force.[3] Because many of the sources are formally eulogistic, they are examined in the chapters below as much through literary as historical analysis, in order to reveal the ways in which the undertaking of embassies fulfilled social functions.

[2] Senarius, *Epitaph*, line 9.

[3] For the identification of communication as a new field of research in late antique and medieval history, see Marco Mostert (ed.), *New Approaches to Medieval Communication* (Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy 1; Turnhout, 1999), esp. 15–37, 193–297; Michael McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy: Communications and Commerce, AD 300–900* (Cambridge, 2001), esp. 15–19. The study of political communication is a complement, not an alternative, to the study of warfare; cf. the salutary comments of Bernard S. Bachrach, *Early Carolingian Warfare: Prelude to Empire* (Philadelphia, 2001), ix.

Envoys and political communication

Embassies and envoys were important during the fragmentation of the West because disunity gives rise not only to conflict but also to communication. Throughout antiquity, relations among the Mediterranean states and neighbouring powers had been managed by peaceful communications and alliances as well as by warfare. For several centuries, when the entire Mediterranean basin was subject to the Roman empire, formerly independent regions interacted politically with each other only little, looking primarily towards their common master, the emperor or his provincial representatives. In the fifth century AD, however, the western half of the empire was divided into several autonomous regions under the control of monarchs, the barbarian kingdoms.[4] The political unity of the empire was replaced by a multiplicity of powers, and constant political interaction again became necessary throughout these former parts of the empire. Political communication and negotiation were the inevitable products of the break-up of the empire, and were fundamental to the nature of the barbarian kingdoms and of the Roman empire in the fifth and early sixth centuries.

Relations between the fifth-century states were undertaken in a variety of ways, some continuing classical practices unchanged, others products of their time. The empire and the kingdoms established formal alliances which, to the extent that they can be understood from the limited sources, resemble the truces, defensive and offensive alliances, and 'friendships' of the Greek states and the Roman republic.[5] Hostages, as in classical antiquity, were held in order to facilitate cultural and political ties as much as to provide sureties.[6] Pseudo-familial ties, including both marriage alliances among royalty and military and civilian elites, and 'adoption-in-arms' of one ruler by another, were a new development in imperial foreign affairs, influenced or imported by the influx of barbarian aristocracies. The function of these alliances, however, was appreciated by Romans, not least because of traditional Mediterranean practices of aristocratic marriage ties

[4] Despite its pejorative overtones and Romanocentric perspective, I find 'barbarian' the most convenient label for these states; it has the virtue of being a contemporary term. The designations 'successor' and 'post-Roman states' are only superficially more neutral; they imply a break and new start which down-plays the cultural and other continuities from imperial to early medieval times. 'Post-imperial', restricting discontinuity to the form of overarching political structure, is more appropriate. 'Germanic' is quite misleading; see Michael Kulikowski, 'Nation versus Army: A Necessary Contrast?' in Andrew Gillett (ed.), *On Barbarian Identity: Critical Approaches to Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages* (Studies in the Early Middle Ages 4; Turnhout, 2002), 69–70 n. 2.

[5] For overviews of recent work on *foedera*, see Walter Pohl (ed.), *Kingdoms of the Empire: The Integration of Barbarians in Late Antiquity* (The Transformation of the Roman World 1; Leiden, 1997), with papers by Pohl, Wirth, Heather, and especially Chrysos.

[6] David Braund, *Rome and the Friendly King: The Character of the Client Kingship* (London 1984), 12–16; A. D. Lee, 'The Role of Hostages in Roman Diplomacy with Sasanian Persia', *Historia* 40 (1991), 366–74.

and adoption, and the ancient concept of 'kinship diplomacy', in which ties were established between cities or states through the manufacture of common descent from prominent historical peoples.[7] Baptismal sponsorship constituted a new, Christian form of kinship diplomacy which was to have a vigorous continuity throughout the Middle Ages.[8]

The most basic instrument in all forms of contact, however, was the envoy, the individual who acted as an authority's representative, and so as the vehicle for communication. Even formal, diplomatic letters were of secondary importance to the envoys who bore them as their credentials and as overtures to their speeches. The political shifts of the fifth century rode upon the pronouncements and persuasions of countless, largely unrecorded representatives dispatched by emperors, kings, generals, bishops, cities, and provincial councils. Examining these individuals reveals how embassies shaped the framework of events during the fifth century, and how the demands of communication and negotiation among the western powers were impressed upon their careers as court officials, clergy, or provincial magnates.

Embassies were *legationes* in Latin, πρεσβείαι in classical Greek; envoys *legati* (also, by the mid-sixth century, *legatarii*) or πρέσβεις. Each term had also a wider range of meanings.[9] There was, however, no classical term equivalent to the familiar modern word 'diplomacy', although the word has classical origins.[10] Formalised management of relations among authorities was so ubiquitous a feature of classical and late antique civilisation

[7] Ekkehard Weber, 'Die trojanische Abstammung der Römer als politisches Argument', in Eckart Olshausen and Hildegard Biller (eds.), *Antike Diplomatie* (Wege der Forschung 462; Darmstadt, 1979), 239–55; C. P. Jones, *Kinship Diplomacy in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MA, 1999); Andrew Erskine, *Troy between Greece and Rome: Local Tradition and Imperial Power* (New York, 2001), esp. 256 (on the Trojan origins of the Franks).

[8] Joseph H. Lynch, *Christianizing Kinship: Ritual Sponsorship in Anglo-Saxon England* (Ithaca, 1998), 205–28 on sponsorship by emperors and kings of other rulers. A somewhat different example: Nikephorus, *Short History*, ed. and trans. Cyril Mango (Corpus fontium historiae Byzantinae 13; Washington, DC, 1990), IX: under the direction of the emperor Heraclius, Constantinopolitan nobles sponsor their visiting 'Hunnic' counterparts.

[9] I.e. *legati* (literally, 'the ones sent or appointed') was a standard term for military commanders during the Roman republic and early empire; *legationes* and *legatarii* were also used for legacies and heirs. On the adoption of *legatus* as the term for envoys (replacing the early republican, and partly religious, term *orator*): Jerzy Linderski, 'Ambassadors Go to Rome', in E. Frézouls and A. Jacquemin (eds.), *Les Relations internationales* (Paris, 1995), 457–66. The original sense of πρέσβεις as 'seniors' or 'elders of a council' was retained in late antiquity, and applied also to Christian presbyters.

A Gothic term for 'embassy' is shown by the glosses for πρεσβεία and the verb πρεσβεύειν in the New Testament: *airus* and *airinon*, cognate with modern English 'errand'; the sense is closer to the Latin than the Greek (*airus* also glosses ἄγγελος in its root sense of 'messenger'); Luke XIV. 32, XIX.14; Corinthians V.20; Ephesians VI.20 in *Die Gotische Bibel*, ed. Wilhelm Streitberg, I 2nd edn, II 3rd edn (Heidelberg, 1919; repr. Heidelberg, 1960).

[10] On 'diplomacy', see e.g. Jones, *Kinship Diplomacy*, 17–18.

that no one context for the deployment of these skills was distinguished with a separate title. The individual envoy's talents in communication were a part of his *paideia*, his exertions in undertaking an embassy one aspect of *negotium*; relations between states or other authorities constituted one facet of *res publica*.

The modern word 'diplomacy' has several connotations which are anachronistic or misleading in the context of this study. It can mean the instruments of the modern system of international relations which originated in the high-medieval contact between Venice and Byzantium, developed in France during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and further evolved under the aegis of the League of Nations and United Nations in the twentieth century. These instruments and conventions include foreign policy formulated by centralised national governments, bureaucratic control of foreign affairs, permanent overseas consulates, career diplomats, international conventions, and diplomatic recognition as an exclusive acknowledgement of sovereignty. Many of these aspects of modern diplomacy have counterparts in the ancient and medieval world, but none was institutionalised as they are in the modern world. 'Diplomacy' can also mean, more generally, 'warfare by other means' (reversing Clausewitz's dictum): not a cynical statement but an accurate summary of the deployment by states of non-combatant means to achieve security or hegemony, a constant and intrinsic complement to actual military engagement. Diplomacy, in this sense, is strategic; it embraces for example payment of subsidies to client polities, or involvement in the domestic politics of another state in order to support an allied regime. It also includes the exploitation by states of the potential of their military force as leverage for negotiating their aims.[11]

Many of the embassies examined below set out to achieve 'diplomatic' purposes in this latter sense; the negotiations of the Gothic king of Italy, Theoderic, with the eastern emperors to achieve recognition of his rule, and with other western kings to prevent armed conflict, are examples. But for other legations, the implications of our term 'diplomacy' as the conduct of state-to-state relationships are inappropriate. Some of the most interesting embassies of which we have record, particularly in saints' *Vitae*, were dispatched not from heads of state but from local communities such as provincial cities. Their aims were to negotiate with authorities on

[11] For the interrelationship between warfare and these types of diplomacy, see e.g. Hugh Elton, *Warfare in Roman Europe AD 350–425* (Oxford, 1996), 175–98; John Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World, 565–1204* (London, 1999), 36–9, 277–9. The observations of Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire from the First Century AD to the Third* (Baltimore and London, 1976), e.g. 1–5, remain instructive, even if his thesis of a 'grand strategy' is not accepted.

behalf of their citizens; by and large, such provincial bodies had no military counterpart to their supplications. Other levels of public authority such as bishops, generals, and senior officials, barred from participation in modern diplomacy by the concept of national sovereignty, also dispatched and received embassies on important political issues. There is no differentiation in vocabulary between 'internal' embassies, such as provincial legations to government magistrates, and communications between heads of state; indeed, some of the most dramatic and detailed accounts of embassies describe 'internal' rather than 'foreign' embassies. The conventions which governed these 'internal' embassies also determined legations between rulers; as discussed below, these conventions directly continued Roman administrative practices. In order to avoid the distracting modern associations of the word 'diplomacy', that term is avoided here, as much as possible, in favour of the phrase 'political communication'.[12] This term should be taken to encompass formal contact between parties of various levels of authority concerning public matters. It too imposes on ancient sources a terminology reflecting modern interests, but it has this virtue at least, that it avoids referring implicitly to an established set of concepts which are anachronistic to the period being studied.

The temporal limits of this study are the years 411 and 533, beginning with the establishment of the first barbarian kingdoms in the West, those of the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves in Spain; and ending with the commencement of Justinian's wars in North Africa, Italy, and Spain. These dates delineate a distinct phase of the history of the western Mediterranean which, for the purposes of this study, had two salient characteristics. On the one hand, continuity of Roman cultural and administrative patterns provided the modes of political communication: embassies, audiences, declamations, and letters. On the other hand, this was a period of incremental political change as first parts, then all of the West passed under the government of new monarchies, reaching a brief period of equipoise before Justinian's brusque intrusion. The frequent lurches in political boundaries generated new causes for contact and new combinations of parties in communication. Envoys were special actors in the politics of this time. Embassies and political communication were important in the post-Justinianic West also, as the many references to legations

[12] By the same token, the term 'envoy' is to be preferred to 'ambassador'; both are representatives dispatched by a principal, but conventionally 'ambassador' refers to a permanent resident in the recipient's realm, rather than an agent travelling between parties; *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1989), I, 382 s.v. 'ambassador' § 2; V, 316 s.v. 'envoy 2'. The institution of ambassadorial residence arguably originates in late antiquity with papal *apocrisiarii* at Constantinople (see below, chapter 6 at nn. 208–12), but this was the exception rather than the rule. 'Envoy' more closely approximates the terms *legatus* and πρέσβυς.

in the *Histories* of Gregory of Tours and the *Chronicle* of Fredegar demonstrate; evidence from the later sixth century is drawn upon below for comparative purposes.[13] But the envoys of the Merovingian period travelled between relatively stable political blocs.[14] Their predecessors in the long fifth century grappled with traditional tools in situations of recurrent novelty.

The geographic scope of this study is the former western provinces and Constantinople. It is not a study of 'Constantinople *and* the West'; it is a central characteristic of the period that political communication was multilateral, not radiating from one imperial centre. The former western provinces, though divided among a multiplicity of states, shared with each other and with the east Roman empire a common history and culture which included, among other things, uniform practices of political communication. In an important sense, negotiations among the various states, including the eastern imperial court, were not foreign relations but the internal negotiations of a cultural and diplomatic bloc.[15]

Political communication throughout this bloc was conducted within a variety of contexts, both geopolitical and social. To modern eyes, these contexts include both foreign relations and internal governmental administration, but those distinctions do not necessarily hold fast for the period of transition between empire and kingdoms. It is useful to sketch the major routes of communication discussed in the following chapters. At the highest level of administration and formality, the courts of the two halves of the late Roman empire communicated through formal channels including embassies, in order to maintain the complex relationship between two centres representing one authority. As the western provinces, and finally Italy, came under the rule of multiple kings, the role of the western emperor in this relationship was assumed by the barbarian courts, especially that of the kingdom of Italy; the propaganda of the Ostrogothic king Theoderic refers to *utraeque res publicae*, East and West.[16]

A second venerable and formal channel of communication was that between the Roman empire and the empire of Iran, which the Romans referred to as Persia, ruled and reinvigorated by the Sassanian dynasty since the early third century. Throughout the fifth and sixth centuries, the forms by which relations between the two 'superpowers' were conducted evolved, developing more elaborate diplomatic concepts and

[13] On Gregory and Fredegar: below, chapter 6.

[14] Notwithstanding the internal divisions of the Merovingian kingdom into *Teilreiche*: Ian Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms, 450–751* (London, 1994), 54–5, 60–3, 88–101.

[15] Cf. Garth Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, 1993), 6 on the Byzantine and Islamic 'commonwealths'.

[16] Cass., *Variae* 1, 1.4; cf. Maximianus (below, n. 82): *geminum . . . regnum*.

procedures.[17] Rome's dealings with Persia affected political relationships and diplomatic practice in the West; the appeal of the Ostrogoths, besieged in Italy by Belisarius in the late 530s, to the shah Chosroes I for help is only the most dramatic example.[18]

With the fragmentation of the western provinces and establishment of smaller, autonomous kingdoms, established routes of internal communication, from imperial centre to provinces, were superseded by multilateral relations between imperial and royal courts – multilateral, because not only did the imperial courts and their senior civil and military magistrates in the provinces conduct relations with each of the new states, but each new kingdom negotiated with its peers also. To call these states 'foreign' to the empire is misleading: all parties recognised the cultural, political, and demographic continuities shared by the imperial East and the post-imperial West, and though the ruling elites of each kingdom were distinguished – by Romans – with barbarian labels, this did not preclude administrative and social ties operating across the nominal borders.[19]

The imperial government had always needed to attend to relations with barbarian groups outside its borders. During the course of the fifth century, the rise to power of the Hunnic khanate made dealings with European barbarians high priority. Contacts with the Huns were characterised by extreme sensitivity to the niceties of diplomatic procedure.[20] Again, patterns of communication were not restricted to contact between the two imperial courts and the Hun leadership; apart from the semi-independent relations with the Huns conducted by the *magister militum* Aetius, the Huns were also involved in a complex network of alliances and conflicts with the rulers of the new western kingdoms. In 451, Attila turned his attention from the imperial provinces in the Balkans towards the West; later writers record his pretexts of war as an alliance with the Vandals in North Africa, a quarrel with the Goths of Toulouse, involvement in factional disputes within the Frankish nobility in northern Gaul, and a claim to marriage with the Theodosian dynasty.[21] The western kingdoms were constantly in contact not only with each other and with the imperial court, but also with groups outside former imperial territories. In the collection of the official correspondence which he had

[17] R. C. Blockley, *East Roman Foreign Policy: Formation and Conduct from Diocletian to Anastasius* (ARCA Classical and Medieval Texts, Papers and Monographs 30; Leeds, 1992).

[18] Procopius, *Wars* II, 2.1–11, 14.11; VI, 22.17–20. Cf. the hyperbole of Sid. Ap., *Ep.* VII, 9.5, *Carm.* 45–54.

[19] The interrelationship between 'Roman' and 'barbarian' identities (and populations) in this period is a topic of valuable if controversial debate; see Patrick Amory, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy, 489–554* (Cambridge, 1997); and the papers in Gillett (ed.), *On Barbarian Identity*.

[20] E.g. B. Croke, 'Anatolius and Nomus, Envoys to Attila', *Byzantinoslavica* 42 (1981), 159–70.

[21] Jordanes, *Get.*, 184–6; Priscus, *Fr.*, 20–1.

written for the Ostrogothic rulers of Italy, Cassiodorus prominently displays diplomatic letters to rulers, giving pride of place equally to eastern emperors, kings governing former imperial provinces, and rulers beyond imperial boundaries.[22]

Warfare constituted a specific venue for foreign diplomacy. In late antiquity as before, generals in the field possessed a certain latitude in dealing with enemy powers. Few battles were fought to extinction; after a demonstration of resources and an initial trial of strength, commanders were in a position to negotiate a settlement, to establish a truce and perhaps the framework for a permanent agreement. This authority was an important element in the foreign relations of the fifth century, when military engagements were sometimes resolved by permanent settlement of barbarian groups on Roman soil. The activities of generals represent an extension of imperial authority in foreign affairs.

Within the empire, the Christian church employed means to communicate between its major and peripheral centres, and with secular authorities, derived from the conventions of civic embassies. Bishops regularly dispatched envoys to communicate with other ecclesiastical and secular authorities; the only extant set of instructions to envoys written under the later Roman empire are those of Pope Hormisdas to clerics sent to the emperor Anastasius in 515 and 519.[23] The role of embassies within the Church itself and between the Church and secular rulers is a complex issue which is not treated in full here; it calls for a separate study. Here may it suffice to note that these points of contact, too, comprise what contemporaries called *legationes* and *negotium*. Very likely, some of the twenty-five embassies declared by Theoderic's envoy, mentioned above, consisted of journeys to the bishops of Rome and perhaps to Constantinople in order to resolve Church schisms, alongside the representations to hostile western kings which the same envoy certainly undertook.[24]

Of all the contexts within which political communication operated, it is most important for this study to stress the domestic: the many aspects of late Roman society and government which were regulated by negotiations conducted through envoys according to recognised conventions. Imperial provinces were administered not only through centralised bureaucratic machinery, but also by constant interchange between provincial cities and their imperial or royal rulers. Provincial approaches to the imperial court always retained the forms of foreign embassies. The Senate of

[22] See chapter 5, below.

[23] *Collectio Avellana*, 116 (with *Collectio Avellana*, 115, 116a, 116b); 158 (= Hormisdas, *Indiculi* of 515, 519). John Matthews, 'Gesandtschaft', trans. R. Werner-Reis, *Reallexicon für Antike und Christentum* x (Stuttgart, 1977), 675–84. See below, chapter 6, pp. 227–30.

[24] Below, chapter 5.

Rome, too, dispatched formal legations to the emperors. 'Such embassies, undertaken by leading citizens on behalf of their communities, are among the best-attested civic functions of Roman society.'[25] The civil administration of the empire has been viewed as 'a diplomatic system', and the constant traffic of petitions and rescripts between the provinces and the court as 'internal embassies', equivalent to the empire's communications with other nations.[26]

In the fifth century, the internal diplomacy of provincial administration became the interstate communication of the western kingdoms. Provincial bodies now played a role in negotiating the major political and military changes of the period, alongside imperial and royal courts, generals in the field, and ecclesiastical networks. In antiquity and the Middle Ages, communication with foreign powers was not the exclusive right of governments. The following description of the later Middle Ages well outlines the situation in late antiquity:

> The right of embassy was not spoken of in theory or regarded in practice as diplomatic representation, a symbolic attribute of sovereignty. It was a method of formal, privileged communication among the members of a hierarchically ordered society, and its exercise could be admitted or denied according to the relations of the parties concerned and the nature of the business at hand.[27]

When the barbarian monarchs assumed control of the West, most administrative structures and patterns of authority remained intact. New centres of authority were superimposed over late Roman society without displacing the existing network of communication. Provincial communities negotiated not only with their barbarian rulers but also, as before, with imperial authorities; provincial bishops under non-Catholic kings appealed to the bishop of Rome to settle schisms within the orthodox church. Following the paths and practices of traditional provincial embassies, the negotiations of these bodies were as important to the political development of the fifth century as the actions of monarchs.

Emperors and kings wielded immense authority, and foreign policies, like internal ones, may often have reflected the personal outlook of individual monarchs. The *rapprochement* of Theodosius I with the Goths in the Balkans, Marcian's avoidance of war with the Vandals, and Justinian's aggression towards the same barbarians, were all policies divergent from those of their immediate predecessors, described by contemporary

[25] John Matthews, 'Roman Life and Society', in John Boardman *et al.* (eds.), *The Oxford History of the Classical World* (Oxford, 1986), 754.

[26] Fergus Millar, 'Government and Diplomacy in the Roman Empire during the First Three Centuries', *International History Review* 10 (1988), 352–7.

[27] Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy* (Boston, 1955; repr. New York, 1988), 23.

writers as the initiatives of each emperor. Nevertheless, though emperors and kings may have been the source of foreign policy, many officials and private persons were involved in its implementation. The ruling elites of the provinces in which the new kingdoms were situated also shaped the course of events, by accepting or rejecting annexation, and by their relations with the new rulers. A constant stream of emissaries between the imperial palace, officials in the provinces, military commanders, royal courts, ecclesiastical sees, cities, and provincial assemblies formed the context in which political events occurred. The intentions of monarchs can only be seen at a distance through official propaganda and the record of their deeds. But the experience of several individuals of a more modest position, who served as envoys or drafted diplomatic correspondence, can be fleshed out by close examination of literary sources, providing an insight into the nature of communication throughout the West, rather than a reconstruction of central policy.

THE FRAMEWORK AND CONVENTIONS OF EMBASSIES IN THE CLASSICAL WORLD

Though the circumstances giving rise to political communication in the fifth- and early sixth-century West were new, a millennium of exchanges between political powers throughout the Mediterranean world lay behind the forms and conventions of late antique embassies. The practices of the fifth and sixth centuries are best appreciated in the light of two earlier periods of Mediterranean civilisation, classical Greece and the early Roman empire. The forms and patterns of communication developed in these periods were the basis for the practices in the different political conditions of the fifth and early sixth centuries.

Classical Greece

Despite the intellectual adoption of a biblical past by Christian writers, the late Roman empire remained culturally and politically the product of classical civilisation.[28] Late antique conventions of communication had a cultural pedigree leading back to the Greek city states of the fourth and fifth centuries BC.[29] Embassies were among the most common political

[28] Biblical past: e.g. most bluntly, Gregory of Tours, *Hist*. I. Averil Cameron, 'Remaking the Past', in G. W. Bowersock, P. Brown and O. Grabar (eds.), *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World* (Cambridge, MA, 1999), 1–20.

[29] For the following: Dietmar Kienast, 'Presbeia', *RE* Suppl. XIII, 499–628; D. J. Mosley, *Envoys and Diplomacy in Ancient Greece* (Historia Einzelschriften 22; Wiesbaden, 1973); Frank Adcock and D. J. Mosley, *Diplomacy in Ancient Greece* (London, 1975); and Matthews, 'Gesandtschaft', 653–85.

phenomena in the classical Greek states. The multiplicity of Greek powers, their alliances and leagues, the extension of the Athenian empire, and contacts with Persia, Macedonia, and Rome necessitated a constant interchange of emissaries. Greek historical writing after Thucydides evolved into 'diplomatic history' in order to embrace the development of the whole Hellenistic world.[30]

The practices for dispatching and receiving embassies, πρεσβείαι, in Athens are naturally the best recorded. Like most public business, foreign affairs were first considered by the Athenian council, before being put to the general assembly. Foreign envoys arriving in Athens were received by the city council; after consideration of the issues raised, they were permitted to address the general assembly. The council provided recommendations for a response, which, though not binding on the general assembly, usually were followed. For reasons of expediency, formation of foreign policy and the selection of envoys to represent the city were often delegated by the assembly to the council. The envoy, 'authorised by the council and the people', executed the formal decrees of these bodies. Consequently, envoys were subject to public audit, and to punishment for failure to adhere faithfully to their briefs or for corruption.[31]

The legal position of the envoy was customary but extraordinary. Few statutory requirements other than a minimum age (usually thirty)

See also: Coleman Phillipson, *The International Law and Custom of Ancient Greece and Rome*, 2 vols. (London, 1911); V. Serguiev, 'La diplomatie de l'antiquité', in M. Potiemkine (ed.), *Histoire de la diplomatie*, trans. X. Pamphilova and M. Eristov, I (Paris, 1953), 7–76; a series of articles by D. J. Mosley, including 'The Size of Embassies in Ancient Greek Diplomacy', *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 96 (1965), 255–66; 'Greeks, Barbarians, Language, and Contact', *Ancient Society* 2 (1971), 1–6; 'Diplomacy and Disunion in Ancient Greece', *Phoenix* 25 (1971), 319–30 (a number of Mosley's articles are collected and translated into German in *Antike Diplomatie*); E. Frézouls and A. Jacquemin (eds.), *Les Relations internationales* (Paris, 1995); Anthony Bash, *Ambassadors for Christ: An Exploration of Ambassadorial Language in the New Testament* (Tübingen, 1997); and Jones, *Kinship Diplomacy*, 17–80.

[30] Charles William Fornara, *The Nature of History in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Berkeley, 1983), 33–4.

[31] Pierre Briant, 'La Boulè et l'élection des ambassadeurs à Athènes au IVe siècle', *Revue des Etudes Anciennes* 70 (1968), 7–31; Adcock and Mosley, *Diplomacy in Ancient Greece*, 165–70; Matthews, 'Gesandtschaft', 656. On the passage of topics for debate from the Athenian *boulé* to the *ekklesia*: P. J. Rhodes, *The Athenian Boule* (Oxford, 1972), 52–81; Mogens Herman Hansen, *The Athenian Assembly in the Age of Demosthenes* (Oxford, 1987), 35–7. Delegation of responsibility for foreign affairs to the *boulé*: Hansen, *The Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes* (Oxford, 1991), 264–5. On public audit (*euthynai*) and charges of corruption during an embassy (*parapresbeia*): Mosley, *Envoys and Diplomacy*, 39–42; Kienast, 'Presbeia', 577–8; Mogens Herman Hansen, '*Rhetores* and *Strategoi* in Fourth-Century Athens', *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 24 (1983), repr. in his *The Athenian Ecclesia* II (Copenhagen, 1989), cited here, 28–9; Hansen, *Athenian Assembly*, 69. The prosecution and (successful) defence speeches in a charge of *parapresbeia* are preserved in Demosthenes, *Oration 19: De falsa legatione*, in *Demosthenes* II, trans. C. A. Vince and J. H. Vince (LCL; London, 1926) and Aeschines, *Oration 2: De falsa legatione*, in *The Speeches of Aeschines*, trans. Charles Darwin Adams (LCL; London, 1919); see also Hyperides, *Oration 4: In Defence of Euxippus*, in *Minor Attic Orators* II, trans. J. O. Burtt (LCL; London, 1954), cc. 29–30, summarising a charge of *parapresbeia*, related to that brought against Aeschines, against Philocrates.

restricted the choice of an emissary. Unlike other public functionaries, Greek envoys did not hold a formal office, an ἀρχή. No restrictions prevented the reappointment of a former envoy, or limited the duration of his appointment, which terminated when he returned from his mission. Whereas holders of most Athenian offices ideally were selected by lot, envoys were chosen by election in the assembly. Only generals were similarly free from the standard restrictions surrounding public offices.[32]

Though envoys did not enjoy the status of generals, neither were they mere functionaries. On return from their mission, envoys reported to the council and assembly, and made recommendations. Their addresses were considered of equal standing to those of *rhetores*, movers of proposals in the council or assembly, and were therefore an important part of the Athenian political process. Envoys were held responsible for the policies they advocated, and were liable to the penalties applicable against *rhetores*. They were also subject to the same public audit which all holders of public office were obliged to undergo at the expiry of their term. Envoys were thus treated simultaneously as special agents, as politically influential public speakers, and as civic office holders.[33]

Considerations of domestic and foreign politics determined the selection of an envoy. Election was first an acknowledgement of popular respect for the individual concerned. The envoy's knowledge of the recipient state, and his existing contacts with influential persons there, was the main practical consideration in selection; where possible, envoys were chosen for their influence in the state to which they were to be sent. An individual who had introduced a motion concerning another power was eligible to be chosen as the envoy to implement the resultant decree.[34]

Practices for the reception of foreign envoys were customary and formal but, in contrast with later states and Rome in particular, characterised by little ceremonial and minimal public expense. Neither the dispatch nor the reception of envoys seems to have been marked by public formalities. Envoys could expect to receive the customary courtesies of hospitality,

[32] Mosley, *Envoys and Diplomacy*, 39–49; David Stockton, *The Classical Athenian Democracy* (Oxford, 1990), 105–7.

[33] Phillipson, *International Law and Custom* I, 343–6; Mosley, *Envoys and Diplomacy*, 78–9; Hansen, '*Rhetores* and *Strategoi*', 29–31, 32 §9. Processes against *rhetores*: Mogens Herman Hansen, 'The Athenian "Politicians", 403–422 BC', *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 25 (1983), repr. in his *Athenian Ecclesia* II, 9–10. An example of an envoy's address to the assembly on return from a mission: Andocides, *Oration 3: On the Peace with Sparta*, in *Minor Attic Orators* I, trans. K. J. Maidment (LCL; London, 1941); cf. Demosthenes' statement of the responsibilities of an envoy, *Oration 19: De falsa legatione*, cc. 4–5. Note that the (lost) collection of public speeches made in the late fifth century BC by Demetrius of Phalerum included both the speeches of *rhetores* in the assembly and the addresses of envoys: *RE* IV.2, 2829–30.

[34] Mosley, *Envoys and Diplomacy*, 43–9; Adcock and Mosley, *Diplomacy in Ancient Greece*, 157; Hansen, '*Rhetores* and *Strategoi*', 30.

divinely sanctified by Zeus Xenios, extended to other guests, but these were generally proffered by private individuals, not the state. No accommodation, transport, or provisions were provided at the public expense of the receiving state. Except in Sparta, foreign envoys appear to have enjoyed the complete freedom of movement available to all other visitors. Many customary acts of hospitality, in particular the giving of gifts, were not observed by the public authorities because of the potential implication of bribery. Only at the conclusion of his business could an envoy expect to attend a formal meal as guest of the state to which he had been sent. Otherwise, the envoy had either to provide for himself, supplementing with his own resources the minimal amounts paid to him by his own state for expenses, or to look to the hospitality of a local citizen.

Hospitality could be extended by an individual with whom the envoy had prior personal contact, through either business or familial connections, and with whom he shared the obligations of guest-friendship. A more formal institution which could provide for the wants of envoys was *proxenia*. A *proxenos* was a citizen of one state, recognised by a second as a representative of its interests; for example, a Theban citizen who was granted *proxenia* by Athens would extend hospitality to Athenians visiting Thebes on private or official business, and would be expected to advocate policies friendly to Athens in the Theban assembly. *Proxenia* remained an essentially private institution, for although, in this example, the grant of *proxenia* was an official action on the part of Athens, it did not formally involve the council or assembly of Thebes. In regard to diplomatic communication, *proxenoi* provided assistance to envoys from the state to which they were connected, and might be chosen to act as envoys to that state because of the prestige they already enjoyed there. They might also wield a special authority influencing policies towards the other state.[35]

A second institution which affected the conduct of diplomacy was the tradition of heralds. Originating before historic times, the herald's office was essentially religious; though heralds performed functions on behalf of their communities, they were not officers of state. Their functions were hereditary, in Athens passing through the family of the *Kerykes*, in Sparta through the *Talthybioi*. In the fifth and fourth centuries BC, heralds were most associated with the formalites of warfare, delivering declarations of war and petitioning for the recovery of the dead and wounded. Religious sanctions protecting heralds in times of war did not extend to regular envoys; nevertheless, envoys were often conveyed

[35] F. Gschnitzer, 'Proxenoi', *RE* Suppl. XIII, 629–730; Kienast, 'Presbeia', 581–7; Adcock and Mosley, *Diplomacy in Ancient Greece*, 160–3.

between belligerents under the safe conduct of heralds.[36] Even without the protection of heralds, however, envoys were usually considered to be protected from mistreatment by the common consent of all states, though the origin of this moral force is unknown.[37]

The framework within which embassies were carried out in ancient Greece was ultimately religious and private, not official or governmental. Though dispatched and received by the general assembly, their tasks were not undertaken as part of an office. The reception and treatment of foreign envoys was determined by obligations of hospitality or private connections, and in times of war the religious sanctions of heralds protected envoys. There was little involvement of government in facilitating communications between states.

Elements of this framework continued into later Hellenistic and Roman times. The moral protection of envoys' inviolability, considered to be part of *ius gentium* in Roman jurisprudence, is evidenced by both Roman and barbarian rulers.[38] Even under the bureaucratic late Roman state, embassies were performed as special commissions, not as the duties of an office. But there are few parallels to the private and religious context of Greek embassies in late antiquity.[39]

The conventions governing the selection of envoys and the execution of their commissions, however, show much greater continuity from classical to late antiquity. Though any citizen of the democratic Greek states was theoretically eligible for selection as an envoy, the choice was for the most part restricted to the wealthiest members of society. Practical considerations played a part in this restriction. Envoys were chosen for their familiarity and contacts with a foreign state; this implied foreign commercial interests, or other connections generally limited to the wealthy elite (an occasional exception was made for actors, whose trade carried them to all parts of Greece). Social patterns were important in other ways. Leading citizens sought election to an embassy for the prestige associated with the appointment. Participation in embassies was an important expression of citizenship by the leading members of the community. A large proportion of the politically active citizens of Athens served on diplomatic missions. A list of some 368 known politically active individuals

[36] Mosley, *Envoys and Diplomacy*, 84–7; Adcock and Mosley, *Diplomacy in Ancient Greece*, 152–4; J. Oehler, 'Keryx 2', *RE* XI.1, 349–57; von Geisau, 'Talthybios 2', *RE* IV A.2, 2090.

[37] Mosley, *Envoys and Diplomacy*, 81–92; Adcock and Mosley, *Diplomacy in Ancient Greece*, 184; Matthews, 'Gesandtschaft', 657.

[38] Phillipson, *International Law and Custom* I, 70–9, 328, 331–4; A. M. von Premerstein, 'Legatus', *RE* XII.1, 1134–5; Matthews, 'Gesandtschaft', 659. In late antiquity: below, chapter 6, at nn. 181–94.

[39] The language of guest-friendship, *xenia*, is used by Procopius, *Wars* III, 9.5: guest-friendship of the Vandal prince Hilderic and Justinian, then still *magister utriusque militiae*.

from fourth-century BC Athens shows that the sixty-seven recorded *strategoi* rarely served as envoys; but almost a third of the remaining 300-odd rhetors did, fifteen of them undertaking three or more embassies. These proportions are an indication as much of the honour associated with embassies as of the frequent need for diplomatic interchange.[40]

The need for oratorical skills also tended to restrict candidacy to the better-educated aristocracy. The task of envoys was 'political advocacy', the persuasive promotion of the proposals of their state, rarely participation in actual negotiation. Diplomacy 'by conference', the meeting of representatives authorised to negotiate a settlement, was little practised, and even so-called plenipotentiaries, *autocratores*, were empowered only to reach agreements within previously defined limits.[41] The task of advocacy should not be underestimated, however, for it involved more than the mere communication of the decisions of one state to another. The letters borne by envoys, which served as their proof of credence, probably only related the assembly's decree in sparse style.[42] It was the envoy's task to persuade his recipient to agree with his own state's proposals.

The importance of formal rhetorical training in this task of persuasion can be seen in the change of personnel selected as envoys from the fifth to the fourth centuries BC. In the early fifth century BC, most Athenian envoys were current or former generals; a century later, as a result of increased professionalism, embassies were dominated by *rhetores*, including 'professional' politicians, philosophers, and other figures trained in eloquence. Many fourth-century generals never served on an embassy, and almost no lesser military figures did.[43] Oratorical skill was established as the essential element of the envoy's duty: 'Odysseus . . . [was] . . . the mirror of a diplomatist, eloquent and resourceful.'[44] The association of eloquence and diplomatic representation was maintained throughout antiquity.

[40] Mosley, *Envoys and Diplomacy*, 43; Adcock and Mosley, *Diplomacy in Ancient Greece*, 158; Matthews, 'Gesandtschaft', 658. Athenian political figures: Hansen, '*Rhetores* and *Strategoi*', 32–64.

[41] D. J. Mosley, 'Diplomacy by Conference: Almost a Spartan Contribution to Diplomacy?', *Emerita* 39 (1971), 187–93; Mosley, *Envoys and Diplomacy*, 14, 30–8 (on plenipotentiaries); Adcock and Mosley, *Diplomacy in Ancient Greece*, 155 (quote); Matthews, 'Gesandtschaft', 656. For a statement of the relative responsibilities of the envoy and the assembly: Andocides, *Oration 3: On the Peace with the Spartans*, c. 41.

[42] Mosley, *Envoys and Diplomacy*, 21.

[43] Mosley, 'Diplomacy and Disunion', 321; *Envoys and Diplomacy*, 21–9, 43; Adcock and Mosley, *Diplomacy in Ancient Greece*, 10, 126–7; Kienast, 'Presbeia', 590–6; Matthews, 'Gesandtschaft', 657. *Rhetores* and *strategoi* as envoys: Hansen, 'Athenian "Politicians" ', 20–1. Only seven of the sixty-seven fourth-century BC *strategoi* in the prosopographical list of Hansen, '*Rhetores* and *Strategoi*', 32–64, are attested as serving as envoys. Known Attic and Spartan envoys are listed in Kienast, 'Presbeia', 595–628.

[44] Adcock and Mosley, *Diplomacy in Ancient Greece*, 9.

Envoys and political communication

Republican and imperial Rome

Diplomatic relations under the Roman empire, up to the battle of Adrianople, were conducted within substantially different political and administrative frameworks from that of the classical Greek cities. But the mode of comunication, the Greek model of the envoy as an eloquent advocate, persisted throughout the Roman imperial period into late antiquity. These conventions affected not only embassies to foreign powers, but also internal embassies among communities and authorities within the empire.[45]

Even before its imperial expansion, republican Rome played an important part in the diplomatic traffic of the Mediterranean world. According to Varro and other antiquarians, the earliest Roman relations with other polities were conducted within a religious framework; both the conduct of embassies and the conclusion of treaties were carried out by priests of the college of *fetiales*. By the late republican period, this framework was long superseded, the *fetiales* retaining only a ceremonial religious role in the conclusion of treaties. Roman political dominance shifted the conduct of interstate relations from a quasi-religious sphere to a more explicitly military and state context. The Roman state exercised greater control over embassies than did the Greek cities. Envoys of allied states were supported at state expense; those of enemy powers had to seek permission to enter Roman territory, were excluded from the central precincts of the city itself (within the *pomerium*), and sometimes were required to travel under Roman escort. Unlike the Greek cities, only the Senate received foreign envoys, not the assemblies of the *populus Romanus*. Though in the early republic the *populus* voted on prosecuting war or concluding peace treaties, foreign policy was primarily the domain of the Senate.[46]

[45] For the following: in addition to Matthews, 'Gesandtschaft', 660–72 and Kienast, 'Presbia', 587–90: von Premerstein, 'Legatus', *RE* XII.1, 1133–41; Fergus Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World (31 BC – AD 337)* (London, 1977), 341–55; Millar, 'Emperors, Frontiers, and Foreign Relations, 31 BC to AD 378', *Britannia* 13 (1982), 1–23; 'Government and Diplomacy'; Richard J. A. Talbert, *The Senate of Imperial Rome* (Princeton, 1984), 408–30; John F. Matthews, 'Hostages, Philosophers, Pilgrims, and the Diffusion of Ideas in the Late Roman Mediterranean and Near East', in F. M. Clover and R. S. Humphreys (eds.), *Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity* (Madison, WI, 1989), 29–49; Linderski, 'Ambassadors Go to Rome' and Jean-Louis Ferrary, '*Ius fetiale* et diplomatie', in Frézouls and Jacquemin (eds.), *Les Relations internationales*, 411–32; Elton, *Warfare in Roman Europe*, 175–98; Jones, *Kinship Diplomacy*, 81–121; Richard Duncan-Jones, *Structure and Scale in the Roman Economy* (Cambridge, 1990), 100–6.

[46] Polybius, *Histories* III, trans. W. R. Paton (LCL; London, 1923), VI, 13, 6–8; Theodore Mommsen, *Römisches Staatsrecht*, 3rd edn, III.1 (Leipzig, 1887; repr. Graz, 1952), 590–606, 1147–73; Erich S. Gruen, *The Hellenistic World and the Coming of Rome* (Berkeley, 1984), I, 203–49, esp. 231–44; Arthur M. Eckstein, *Senate and General: Individual Decision-Making and Roman Foreign Relations, 264–194 BC* (Berkeley, 1987), xviii–xx.

The founding of the principate altered the political framework of Roman foreign policy making and diplomatic practice. The power of the triumvirs was recognised by neighbouring rulers, whose representatives sought out the *imperator* best able to offer Rome's favour, rather than the Senate. Octavian's monarchy stabilised the situation, establishing a single individual and sequence of successors whom 'client' kings and dynasts could approach. Until the mid-second century, the Senate continued occasionally to receive foreign envoys, and was advised, and sometimes consulted, on the emperors' dealings with other powers. This involvement appears to have been little more than a formal acknowledgement of the Senate's republican responsibilities. Augustus' *Res gestae* displays the shift in real authority. The Senate formally voted the emperor authority to conclude treaties in the mid-first century, a right possibly confirmed at each succeeding imperial accession. By the early third century, the Senate's former role in the creation and execution of foreign policy was a matter of nostalgia.[47]

The emperors' control of foreign relations was only one consequence of the true basis of their authority, the exclusive control of the army. Military force, actively employed or used indirectly as coercion, was the determining factor in international relations; the military authority concentrated in the person of Augustus and his successors inevitably bestowed the central role in foreign relations upon the emperors.[48] Just as they acted as commander-in-chief of the army, so the emperors alone received foreign representatives or rulers, and dispatched responses. From the late second century, the 'irreducibly personal character' of the emperors' command of military and diplomatic functions increased, as the delegation of special commands to lesser generals became uncommon. The imperial court was relocated from the Italian heartlands to the northern and eastern borders, the scene of the emperors' major campaigns, and from the time of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, sharing of imperial authority between co-emperors, each situated on a different frontier, became

[47] *Res gestae divi Augusti*, in *Documents Illustrating the Reigns of Augustus and Tiberius*, ed. Victor Ehenberg and A. H. M. Jones, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1955), cc. 31–3; cf. *ibid*., chap. 7, 'Foreign Kings', 101–4; G. W. Bowersock, *Augustus and the Greek World* (Oxford, 1965), chap. 4, 'Kings and Dynasts', 42–61; Millar, 'Emperors, Frontiers, and Foreign Relations', 4–5 and n. 25, citing Cassius Dio LII, 31.1 on the former role of the Senate, 11–12; Millar, 'Government and Dipomacy', 348–51, 366–8; Talbert, *Senate of Imperial Rome*, 425–30. On Roman relations with foreign nations under the early empire: Luttwak, *Grand Strategy*; Braund, *Rome and the Friendly King*; Lynn F. Pitts, 'Relations between Rome and the German "Kings" on the Middle Danube in the First to the Fourth Centuries AD', *Journal of Roman Studies* 79 (1989), 45–58.

[48] Luttwak, *Grand Strategy*, 2–3; J. B. Campbell, *The Emperor and the Roman Army, 31 BC–AD 235* (Oxford, 1984), 348.

common. At the same time, the rare reception of foreign representatives by the Senate ceased.[49]

Not only did the emperor receive foreign envoys: he also often acted as the representative of the empire to hostile or allied peoples. The meeting on the Danube between the emperor Valens and the Gothic leader Athanaric in 369, and that of Valentinian I and the Alamanni king Macrianus on the Rhine five years later, are indicative of the military–diplomatic practices of the second to fourth centuries: personal confrontations between emperors and foreign leaders at one of the three riverine frontiers (Rhine, Danube, and Euphrates) of the empire.[50] Such meetings obviated diplomacy. The emperor's presence dispensed with the need for representation, and the location of the confrontation on or within the empire's borders avoided the projection of a Roman presence into foreign territory. Initial contacts between the adversaries preceded these meetings, but only as the battlefield diplomacy of antagonists in close proximity, not on-going negotiation at a distance. Of course, emperors were not necessarily present on the frontiers of the empire for every settlement; but even alliances and treaties negotiated by leading generals seem to have required subsequent personal ratification between the emperor and highly ranked representatives of the other party in person.[51]

It seems likely that frequent political communications other than military conflicts between the empire and the many powers adjacent to its frontiers must have existed. Certainly, imperial frontiers hosted constant communication in the form of trade.[52] There is, however, remarkably little evidence from the late second to the fourth centuries of diplomatic communication, or of responses to foreign states from the political centre of the empire. Rather, initial and perhaps most contact was presumably carried out by provincial governors and especially frontier military

[49] Millar, 'Emperors, Frontiers, and Foreign Relations', 14–15, 23 (quote); Millar, 'Government and Diplomacy', 375–7; Campbell, *The Emperor and the Roman Army*, 317–62.

[50] Valens: Amm. Marc. XXVII, 5.9; Themistius, *Orationes*, ed. H. Schenkl, G. Downey, and A. F. Norman, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1951), I, *Or.* 10.201–6. Valentinian I: Amm. Marc. XXX, 3.5. Cf. the negotiations concluding the caesar Julian's campaign against the Chamavi in 358, held on the banks of the river Meuse; Eunapius, *Fr.*, 18.6. A later example of negotiations conducted from mid-stream of an (albeit temporary) water border: Nikephorus, *Short History* VI: the emperor Heraclius and the Persian general Shahin parlay from their ships on the Bosporus in 615; cf. *Chronicon Paschale, 284–628 AD*, trans. Michael Whitby and Mary Whitby (TTH 7; Liverpool, 1989), s.a. 615. Millar, 'Emperors, Frontiers, and Foreign Relations', 14; Millar, 'Government and Diplomacy', 369.

[51] Elton, *Warfare in Roman Europe*, 183.

[52] C. R. Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: A Social and Economic Study* (Baltimore, 1994), 113–31; Peter S. Wells, *The Barbarians Speak: How the Conquered Peoples Shaped Roman Europe* (Princeton, 1999), 224–58.

outposts. It is perhaps not solely the result of the sources' silence that foreign relations under the empire appear to be 'Romanocentric'. Even in its relations with newly powerful Sassanian Iran, the imperial government seems not to have maintained regular communications. Before the relatively well documented fourth century, there are few examples of imperial emissaries dispatched to foreign peoples, and it has been argued that much of the contact which did occur between Roman and Persian territories was essentially the outcome of private initiatives such as religious pilgrimage rather than of formal government initiatives.[53] Nevertheless, the fourth-century evidence suggests that the use of civilian and military officials, and also private individuals, as envoys to Persia and to the northern barbarians was a standard if not frequent practice in times of military confrontation.[54]

Four factors involved in the selection of the emperors' envoys to foreign rulers are illustrated in the accounts of Ammianus Marcellinus and Eunapius of Sardis of two embassies sent in 358 by Constantius II to the shah Shapur II, concerning Persian claims to Mesopotamia and Armenia.[55] The first embassy, consisting of the *comes rei militaris* Prosper, the *tribunus et notarius* Spectatus, and the philosopher Eustathius, failed to deter Shapur's preparations for war; a second mission, comprising the former *comes domesticorum* Lucillianus and the *tribunus et notarius* Procopius, was no more successful.

Just as generals were often sent as envoys to former antagonists in fifth-century BC Greece, so the choice of the two military officers, the *comites* Prosper and Lucillianus, probably exploited their military experience with the Persians. Lucillianus at least had previously commanded troops against

[53] Evidence of contacts from early to late empire: Monica Affortunati, 'Ambasciatori germanici in Italia dal II sec. a.C. al II sec. d.C', in Barbara and Piergiuseppe Scardigli (eds.), *Germani in Italia* (Rome, 1994), 105–15 (for northern European tribes). Primarily 'private' nature of Roman contacts with foreign regions: Matthews, 'Hostages, Philosophers, Pilgrims', esp. 45 (though several of the 'informal' factors of contact discussed operated under a governmental umbrella, i.e. hostages, and the Christian missionaries supported by the emperor Constantius II). Roman–Sassanian relations to fourth century: Benjamin Isaac, *The Limits of Empire: The Roman Army in the East* (Oxford, 1992); M. H. Dodgeon and S. N. C. Lieu (eds.), *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars, AD 226–363: A Documentary History* (London, 1991); for attested embassies: 17, 19–20 (Alexander Severus), 131–4 (Galerius).

[54] Millar, 'Emperors, Frontiers, and Foreign Relations', 5–6 (to the list at n. 36 of fourth-century evidence of Roman envoys, add Claudian, *Cons. Stil.* I, 51–68: Stilicho's mission to Persia *c.* 383), 18; Millar, 'Government and Diplomacy', 370–2.

[55] Amm. Marc. XVII, 5.1–15, 14.1–3 (first embassy); XVII, 14.3; XVIII, 6.17 (second embassy); Eunapius, *Vitae sophistarum*, ed. G. Giangrande (Rome, 1956), VI, 5–10, trans. in Philostratus and Eunapius, *Lives of the Sophists*, trans. Wilmer Cave Wright (LCL; London, 1921), 395–9. See also *Consularia Constantinopolitana* (MGH AA 11), s.a. 358: Persian envoys visit Constantinople in April 358.