

Introduction

In the first decade of the sixteenth century, Paride Grassi (1450–60–1528), master-of-ceremonies at the papal court, wrote a treatise on the ambassadors of the Roman curia. *De Oratoribus Romanae Curiae* was Grassi's attempt to codify a vital figure in Roman politics: the diplomat. Resident ambassadors had been tolerated in Rome for some decades, but the institutions of diplomacy were far from fully formed. Grassi, tasked with creating order in the ceremonial world of the curia, tried to fix them but struggled. After listing the princes of Europe in order of precedence, Grassi added a marginal note: *alibi legitur* ('elsewhere, one reads') and an alternative order. His uncertainty is testimony to the effort he and his contemporaries had to make to get to grips with the new diplomacy. He left his manuscript unfinished, but, even had he completed it, the text would still have been provisional. This was a period of transition, though those powers favoured by the ceremonialists' official orders – the *Ordo Regum* and *Ordo Ducum* – preferred to claim it was not.

The shifting diplomatic practices that so taxed Grassi are the subject of this book. It tracks Rome's rise as a centre for diplomacy from the middle of the fifteenth century to the 1530s, beginning with the re-establishment of a single papacy in the city and continuing through decades first of relative peace on the Italian peninsula and then of devastating war. This period, a little short of a century, saw a substantial expansion of permanent resident diplomacy in Europe. Rome, as the seat of the Catholic Church, attracted the largest group of envoys of any European court. As a 'supranational' centre for European diplomacy – indeed, Europe's last such centre until the twentieth century with its League of Nations, United Nations and European Community – Rome was in many ways exceptional. The popes were simultaneously spiritual overlords of Christendom and temporal princes ruling the Papal States of central Italy. That gave their diplomacy a distinct character. Yet the court of the Renaissance popes had much in common with its secular counterparts. Like other European courts, it became more settled and more

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magnificent in this period. Against this backdrop the popes' policy on resident diplomacy in Rome moved from unofficial toleration in the mid-fifteenth century to ceremonial assimilation in the early years of the sixteenth. My study concludes at the point when the Sack of 1527, the Reformation and the rise of Spanish power on the Italian peninsula changed the contours of European diplomacy, creating new problems and dilemmas for its personnel.

While it has long been accepted that resident diplomacy came into being in this period, the details of its development are sketchy. This book aims to explain and account for the shape of this new institution in Rome and the trends in its practices. It outlines and analyses the key elements of the resident ambassador's role, both in formal, ceremonial spheres of power and in the all-important informal arenas for diplomacy. Three paintings of ambassadors from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century sum up the diplomatic activities that I discuss. Vittore Carpaccio's *Stories from the Life of St Ursula* series (1495–1500) shows envoys in their ceremonial context. In *The Ambassadors Depart* (Figure 1), English ambassadors, in an imagined court environment, are taking their leave from Brittany. In Rome, the detail of such ceremonies was first codified precisely at the time Carpaccio was working. But Carpaccio does not depict only the formalities of embassy. He shows us its many informal aspects too. In the background, to the right, courtiers chat and gossip. At the centre back, a secretary takes notes. These men were important in diplomacy.

Secretaries also appear in Sebastiano del Piombo's portrait of Ferry Carondelet, Margaret of Austria's envoy to Rome (1510–12).¹ Portrayed in the canonical role of the ambassador, despatching news, Carondelet does not work alone but alongside others. Though the office of ambassador might appertain to an individual, his collaborations were all-important. In the most famous portrait of Renaissance ambassadors (Figure 2), that by Hans Holbein, Jean de Dinteville, on the left, personifies the magnificence of his prince, Francis I of France.

The Sebastiano and Holbein paintings draw our attention to the two personae of the Renaissance ambassador. In the former, he appears as his own agent, an actor in gathering news, in organising his staff, in despatching information. In the latter, he represents another: the prince who has sent him abroad. The peculiar nature of the ambassador as a figure simultaneously embodying his prince and acting on his own behalf makes him an important case-study through which to reflect on the nature of the

¹ Sebastiano del Piombo, *Portrait of Ferry Carondelet and His Secretaries*, 1510–12; Oil on panel, 113 × 87 cm; Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid.

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Figure 1: Vittore Carpaccio, *The Departure of the English Ambassadors*, from the *St Ursula* cycle, 1498; Oil on canvas, 280 × 253 cm, © Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice, Italy/Bridgeman Images.

early modern 'self'. It is evident from the sources that envoys made a distinction between their own 'self' and their representation of their principal. His profession and his period gave the diplomat reason to simulate and dissimulate, and when circumstances demanded, he could manipulate these two selves. The ambiguity inherent in an ambassador's dual persona allowed him to do so all the more effectively.

Most studies of early modern diplomacy focus on the diplomatic corps of a particular prince or republic. This one assesses diplomacy as it went

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Figure 2: Hans Holbein the Younger, *Jean de Dinteville and Georges de Selve* ('*The Ambassadors*'), 1533; Oil on oak, 207 × 209 cm; © National Gallery, London.

on at a receiving court, where envoys from across Europe and beyond cooperated and conspired. As a consequence, the picture it paints is less tidy, more ad hoc than a survey of a single polity's outgoing envoys might produce. The rather chaotic terminology for diplomats – in Italian, the terms *ambasciadore* and *oratore* were used interchangeably – reflects that they were unstable, poorly defined figures.² Likewise, and particularly in the early part of our period, the lines between special, resident and permanent envoys were not always clear. The diplomatic practices I explore are characterised by change and fluidity. The paradox is that they take place in a political context of European courts becoming more tightly organised, and more serious about formalities. Recent studies of court ceremony have shown its importance to early modern politics.

² Gary M. Bell, 'Tudor-Stuart diplomatic history and the Henrician experience', in Robert L. Woods et al. (eds), *State, Sovereigns and Society in Early Modern England: Essays in Honour of A. J. Slavin* (Stroud: Sutton, 1998), pp. 25–43 (p. 35). The authors of the contemporary treatises on diplomacy, writing in Latin, use the classical term 'legatus'.

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Here, I assess the ambassador's ceremonial role alongside his negotiating and newsgathering, aiming to integrate these perspectives into a holistic picture of the diplomat's activities.

To understand the nuances of developments in Rome I have focused on practices of diplomacy. My decision to investigate the diplomatic practice of resident ambassadors rather than 'the resident ambassador' as an institution follows Daniela Frigo's argument in a wide-ranging and convincing article on the role of the ambassador in the early modern period that during the sixteenth century diplomacy should be regarded as a *prassi*, that is, a usual procedure, or a series of practices adopted as circumstances required.³ While the 'institution' of 'ambassador to Rome' came into being in a number of states during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, at the receiving court, the institution – of course, rather different according to the nature of the home state – was established only with reference to the world of ceremony. The remainder – indeed the majority – of the envoy's work can only be discerned through a study of his activities. In an entertaining memoir of his career, the twentieth-century Canadian diplomat Kenneth P. Kirkwood commented:

History is normally the account of great affairs of state; and most diplomats' memoirs and reminiscences deal in part with historical episodes and affairs of state in which they had some small and passing role. But, in the way of life, there are also the sidelines of diplomatic life, the trivial and the comic, the incidentals and diversions – though each may have some unapparent significance. Dining is of importance in diplomacy, and wining; and cocktails have taken the place of the important old coffee shops.⁴

Like diplomats' memoirs and reminiscences, the traditional type of diplomatic history was concerned with 'great affairs'. However, I agree with Kirkwood that in the many sidelines of embassy life, it is possible to find details of importance. This is true to this day, but it is particularly true of the Renaissance, a period in which diplomacy was never an individual's sole occupation and a distinction between 'public' and 'private' makes little sense.

Though this is principally a book about diplomacy, through this prism it also sheds light on society and culture in Renaissance Rome. It highlights the cosmopolitan nature of the city and its centrality to European politics, exploring its physical space as well as its symbolic world. It

³ Daniela Frigo, 'Corte, onore e ragion di stato: il ruolo dell'ambasciatore in età moderna', in Frigo (ed.), *Ambasciatori e nunzi. Figure della diplomazia in età moderna* (= *Cheiron* 30 (1998)), pp. 13–55 (p. 47).

⁴ Kenneth P. Kirkwood, *The Diplomat at Table: A Social and Anecdotal History Through the Looking-Glass* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press, 1974), p. 3.

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points to Rome's importance as a centre for the exchange of news. It shows how the development of a more princely model of papal government affected other rulers' interactions with the curia. It situates these developments in the context of the Italian wars and the shifting nature of European monarchy. In short, it emphasises Rome's importance in European political life. As a centre for diplomacy, Rome was in some ways unusual and in other ways quite typical of a European court. Whereas in most courts diplomats arrived to represent a principal who they regarded as equal to their host prince, the popes' spiritual and juridical role made the court of Rome distinctive. The role of ambassadors in seeking out benefices for their home country was particular to the curia, as was the figure of the cardinal-protector. Rome's liturgical ceremony did not have precise parallels elsewhere, although the competition for precedence within it certainly did. There is perhaps some resemblance to the Imperial court, where representatives of numerous princes might gather, but the number of ambassadors in Rome was substantially higher (see Chapter 1). On the other hand, as the largest diplomatic centre in Europe, Rome functioned as a meeting-place for ambassadors across the continent and as a consequence was a fulcrum for the refinement of diplomatic practices. Foreign commentators certainly thought that the Italian states were particularly developed when it came to the conduct of diplomacy, though not always in a good way. In the general functioning of resident diplomacy – through information-gathering, gift-giving, hospitality, and so forth – Rome was probably not very different from other places. Diplomacy is and was, by its nature, an international phenomenon.

In its adoption of methods from social and cultural history, this book responds to recent calls for a 'new diplomatic history' that sets out to investigate ambassadorial activity 'from below'.⁵ The precise nature of the 'new diplomatic history' is still being worked out, but studies over the past twenty years have employed a variety of methodological approaches including prosopography, biography and literary history.⁶ In many cases, however, these works aim to illuminate not so much diplomatic practice as a variety of other issues relating to the early modern state and political

⁵ On the 'new diplomatic history', see John Watkins, 'Toward a new diplomatic history of medieval and early modern Europe', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 38 (2008), 1–14, the introduction to Frigo, *Ambasciatori e nunzi*, p. 7, and Lucien Bély, 'La naissance de la diplomatie moderne', *Revue d'histoire diplomatique* 3 (2007), 271–94 (p. 272).

⁶ Franca Leverotti, *Diplomazia e governo dello stato: I "famigli cavalcanti" di Francesco Sforza (1450–1466)* (Pisa: Gism-ETS, 1992); Toby Osborne, *Dynasty and Diplomacy in the Court of Savoy: Political Culture and the Thirty Years' War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Timothy Hampton, *Fictions of Embassy: Literature and Diplomacy in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2009).

culture. Indeed, the turn in diplomatic history was foreshadowed by developments in broader scholarship on politics and the state, and the increasing attention paid by historians to what Giorgio Chittolini has described as ‘privatistic’ political forces.⁷ Nonetheless, they collectively mark an important turn away from diplomatic history as an account of high political negotiating towards a more nuanced picture of diplomacy as a social structure or practice. Alongside this shift, there has been a significant re-assessment of diplomacy in Renaissance Italy. While traditional historiography, most notably the work of Garrett Mattingly, privileged developments in the Italian republics, recent studies have emphasised the significance of Milan and the ‘small states’ of Mantua and Ferrara in diplomatic innovation. Mattingly’s thesis (in his 1955 book, *Renaissance Diplomacy*) is that fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Italy saw a ‘modernisation’ process in terms of inter-state relations, and that this was centrally driven by the city-states of Florence (in the fifteenth century) and subsequently Venice.⁸ At the heart of this process lay the development of resident diplomacy. As Joseph P. Huffman has pointed out in an excellent introduction to the broader historiography of diplomacy, ‘the Anglo-American historiographical tradition was built around Whig notions of state building and modernization’.⁹ Mattingly was one of many American historians to work in a historiographical context that saw the republican tradition of Renaissance Italy as an ancestor of modern American republicanism, an approach now regarded as problematic.¹⁰ At the Princeton Bicentennial Conference on The University and its World Responsibilities in 1947, he argued that North Americans were ‘Western Europeans... a subsection of a great society called Western Civilization’. The history of the United States could not be detached from that of Europe.¹¹ Nonetheless, despite some questionable assessments of the importance of Venice and

⁷ Julius Kirshner (ed.), *The Origins of the State in Italy, 1300–1600* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), especially Giorgio Chittolini, ‘The “Private”, the “Public”, the State’, pp. 34–61 (pp. 40–1).

⁸ Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973). For an appreciation of Mattingly’s work and the background to the writing of *Renaissance Diplomacy*, see J. H. Hexter, ‘Garrett Mattingly, Historian’, in C. H. Carter (ed.), *From the Renaissance to the Counter-Reformation: Essays in Honor of Garrett Mattingly* (New York: Random House, 1965), pp. 13–28.

⁹ Joseph P. Huffman, *The Social Politics of Medieval Diplomacy: Anglo-German Relations (1066–1307)* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), pp. 5–6.

¹⁰ Anthony Molho, ‘The Italian Renaissance, made in the USA’, in Molho and Gordon S. Wood (eds), *Imagined Histories: American Historians Interpret the Past* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 263–94.

¹¹ Leo Gershoy, ‘Garrett Mattingly: A personal appreciation’, in C. H. Carter (ed.), *From the Renaissance*, pp. 7–12 (p. 11).

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Florence in diplomatic developments, his work remains valuable.¹² In fact, he identified many of the points that later scholars have refined. His observations on the early innovations in Milan and Mantua, for example, have been elaborated into much wider studies of the diplomacy of these northern states. In particular, extensive work on the diplomacy of Francesco Sforza has emphasised the importance of the new regime in Milan in developing diplomatic practices in the middle of the fifteenth century.¹³

More generally, in recent years, there has been something of a reaction to the quest for the ‘modern’ in Renaissance diplomacy. Riccardo Fubini has described the ‘outdatedness of the traditional approach’ in terms of its focus on the resident ambassador as ‘the key element in the transition from medieval to modern’.¹⁴ In her study of the diplomacy of Mantua and Modena, Daniela Frigo has argued that the resident ambassadors employed by the rulers of these small states were not so much ‘modern’ as ‘part of a network of relations that was feudal in character’.¹⁵ In relation to English diplomacy, Gary M. Bell has weighed in with the conclusion that Henry VIII ‘handled affairs in a most personal and “medieval” fashion’.¹⁶ While this process of re-assessment is timely and welcome, there is a certain danger in replacing the maxim that Renaissance diplomacy was ‘modern’ with the maxim that it was ‘medieval’ (and, presumably, became ‘modern’ at some later stage). It may be possible to say, for example, that certain diplomatic practices of this period look more ‘feudal’ than others, but in general I take the view that it is more important to situate them in the context of contemporary values and understandings than to impose what is bound to be an artificial line between medieval and modern diplomacy.

¹² For one problematic passage on Florence and Venice, see Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy*, p. 76.

¹³ The work of Ilardi, Margaroli and Leverotti on Milan has been important in this regard, as has that of Lazzarini and Frigo on Mantua and Modena. Paul M. Dover has argued for the importance of Neapolitan innovation in his ‘Royal diplomacy in Renaissance Italy: Ferrante d’Aragona (1458–1494) and his ambassadors’, *Mediterranean Studies* 14 (2005), 57–94.

¹⁴ Riccardo Fubini, ‘Diplomacy and government in the Italian city-states of the fifteenth century (Florence and Venice)’, in Daniela Frigo (ed.), *Politics and Diplomacy in Early Modern Italy: The Structure of Diplomatic Practice, 1450–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 25–48 (p. 25). See also, on this question, his ‘L’ambasciatore nel XV secolo: Due trattati e una biografia (Bernard de Rosier, Ermolao Barbaro, Vespasiano da Bisticci)’, *Mélanges de l’école française de Rome. Moyen Age* 108 (1996), 645–65.

¹⁵ Daniela Frigo, ‘“Small states” and diplomacy: Mantua and Modena’, in Frigo (ed.), *Politics and Diplomacy*, pp. 147–75 (p. 152).

¹⁶ Bell, ‘Tudor-Stuart diplomatic history’, pp. 37–8.

Envoys' letters have been an important source for this study, but there are, of course, a number of problems in the interpretation of diplomatic correspondence.¹⁷ The ambassadors, aware of the importance of their mission, took care to portray themselves and their work in the best possible light; the surviving letters, furthermore, tend to be those written about political developments. Nonetheless, details they provide of such things as entertainment or the role of servants, although marginal to the main content, can be exploited to provide a picture of the everyday functioning of diplomacy and its apparently minor figures. This process of 'reading across' the correspondence, as opposed to treating it in Rankean fashion as a source of information about events, has led to a variety of new insights. A series of treatises on the office of ambassador, written in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, such as those of Ermolao Barbaro and Étienne Dolet, have been the starting point for numerous studies of diplomatic theory.¹⁸ They remain a useful prescriptive source; moreover, by reading between the lines, it has been possible to discern some of the authors' preoccupations and anxieties about diplomacy. An important counterpoint to these treatises has been Paride Grassi's *De Oratoribus Romanae Curiae* (On the Orators of the Roman Curia), which was written principally between 1505 and 1509, but worked on up until at least 1516, while its author was papal master-of-ceremonies.¹⁹ While Grassi's diary is relatively well-known as a historical source (though it has never been published), this treatise has received little scholarly attention,

¹⁷ Filippo de Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 57–70.

¹⁸ Betty Behrens, 'Treatises on the ambassador written in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries', *English Historical Review* 51 (1936), 616–27. A broader but very dated survey is in J. J. Jusserand, 'The school for ambassadors', *American Historical Review* 27 (1922), 426–64. Some of the key documents are published in V. E. Hrabar, *De Legatis et Legationibus Tractatus Varii* (Dorpat, 1905). More recent analyses are in Fubini, 'L'ambasciatore nel XV secolo', and Maurizio Bazzoli, 'Ragioni di stato e interessi degli stati. La trattatistica sull'ambasciatore dal XV al XVIII secolo', *Nuova Rivista Storica* 86 (2002), 283–328.

¹⁹ Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vaticani Latini 12270 is the only surviving sixteenth-century copy of the manuscript. It is in several hands, with additions by the author. There are also two seventeenth-century copies, BAV, MS Vat. Lat. 12409 and BAV, MS Barberini Latini 2452. A description of the manuscripts is contained in Marc Dykmans, 'Paris de Grassi II', *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 99 (1985), 383–417 (pp. 400–3), the second part of a three-part biographical and bibliographical article on de Grassi, the other sections of which are 'Paris de Grassi', *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 96 (1982), 407–82 and 'Paris de Grassi III', *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 100 (1986), 270–333. An edition was published just as the revisions to this book were completed: Philipp Stenzig (ed.), *Botschafterzeremoniellam Papsthof der Renaissance: Der Tractatus de oratoribus des Paris de Grassi* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2014).

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except in relation to its comments on African ambassadors.²⁰ It furnishes vital keys for interpreting diplomatic conduct at the papal court, particularly in relation to questions of ceremony, precedence and gift-giving. The diary of Grassi's successor Biagio Martinelli, covering the period 1518–40, and similarly unpublished, has also been a useful source in terms of establishing the ceremonial elements of diplomatic practice during this period, as has the better-known Burchard.²¹ The *Commentaries* of Pope Pius II and a treatise on the benefits of the Roman Curia by Lapo da Castiglionchio both give valuable insights into curia diplomacy in the mid-fifteenth century.²² A travel account by English embassy herald Thomas Wall, records of the corruption trial of Cardinal Benedetto Accolti, maps and census returns add to our understanding of the social world of diplomats in Rome. I should note that this book grew out of research that focused in the first instance on the activities of English representatives in Rome, and I hope readers will forgive a bias towards English sources in certain chapters. A wider, comparative study of the practice of different nations in Rome (not least the Spanish, whose influence grew through this period) is certainly desirable, but must wait for another day.²³ Moreover, only from about 1490 onwards were resident ambassadors officially tolerated at the papal court, so the bulk of the discussion concerns the second half of the traditional 'Renaissance Rome' period.

The book is divided into two parts. Part I introduces the political context for the development of resident diplomacy in Rome and sets out the chronology. Chapter 1 explains the historical context: the re-establishment of a single papacy in Rome after decades of schism, the forty-year peace between the Italian states and, after 1494, the outbreak of war on the Italian peninsula, drawing in all the major European powers. Chapter 2 discusses how contemporaries understood the figure

²⁰ Kate Lowe, "'Representing" Africa: Ambassadors and princes from Christian Africa to Renaissance Italy and Portugal, 1402–1608', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 17 (2007), 101–28 (p. 119).

²¹ BAV, MS Vaticanani Latini 12276: Biagio Martinelli da Cesena, *Diario 1518–1532*, and BAV, MS Barberini Latini 2799: Biagio Martinelli da Cesena, *Diario 1518–1540*. Johann Burchard, *Liber Notarum*, ed. Enrico Celani, 2 vols (Città di Castello: Lapi, 1906).

²² Pius II (Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini), *I Commentarii*, ed. Luigi Totaro, 2 vols (Milan: Adelphi, 1984); English references to *Secret Memoirs of a Renaissance Pope*, ed. Leona C. Gabel, trans. Florence A. Gragg (London: The Folio Society, 1988). Lapo da Castiglionchio the Younger, *De Curiae Commodis*, in ed. Christopher S. Celenza, *Renaissance Humanism and the Papal Curia: Lapo da Castiglionchio the Younger's De Curiae Commodis* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999).

²³ Anna Maria Oliva, 'Gli oratori spagnoli a Roma tra fine Quattrocento e primo Cinquecento', in Portia Prebys (ed.), *Early Modern Rome*, pp. 706–11, proposes some lines of research in relation to Spain in this period.