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Introduction

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Introduction

Maurits Ebben and Louis Sicking

The ambassador has long been considered the main figure in diplomatic relations, from the Middle Ages to modern times.¹ Resident ambassadors, first appearing in Italy by the end of the 15th century, began to be employed by other European states around 1500 and “have been considered the most characteristic officers of Western diplomacy ever since.”² It is therefore not surprising that the ambassador and his duties have been the principal focus of the historiography on diplomacy, even though interest in diplomacy is no longer limited to Europe or the western world.³ Due to the overarching shadow of ‘the state,’ the study of other actors in international relations has been neglected.

In the Middle Ages and the early modern period—together called pre-modern times—international relations were by no means monopolized by the state or the sovereign. Many individuals, (interest) groups, and administrative units maintained contacts independently of states and princes and were actors in a wide diplomatic field. Consuls acting on behalf of various commercial groups supported the interests of merchants trading in foreign countries. Missionaries of various Latin Christian orders or of different Christian denominations were working according to their own policies, independently of princes, or in cooperation with them. Spies were infiltrating the courts of Europe in order to secretly gather information. These various groups tended to have an interregional and most often also transnational orientation. They acted as quasi-officials representing local, regional, or central rulers and states to whom they provided services and by whom their mediating position was sanctioned. A growing multitude of individuals of various backgrounds was engaged in collecting political and other information which they offered to sovereigns and others. They often operated on a temporary basis for one prince or client, then for another, and were able to

1 D. Queller, *The Office of Ambassador in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: 1967); G. Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy* (London: 1955); M.S. Anderson, *The Rise of Modern Diplomacy, 1450–1919* (Harlow and New York: 1993).

2 Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy*, 55.

3 E.g. N. Drocourt ed., *La figure de l'ambassadeur entre mondes éloignés. Ambassadeurs, envoyés officiels et représentations diplomatiques entre Orient islamique, Occident latin et Orient chrétien (XIe-XVIIe siècle)* (Rennes: 2015).

provide many types of information, for which they drew on a network of international contacts.

The present volume, offering the results of a conference held at Leiden University's Institute for History on 29 and 30 September 2016, focuses on the questions of how and why these individuals—consuls, missionaries, and spies, together referred to as non-state agents⁴—who were not formally tied to a state or a prince, could play a role in diplomacy. How should their role in 'international' affairs in medieval and early modern times be understood? These questions are, first of all, relevant for historiographical reasons. Second, they may also contribute to a better understanding of current developments in diplomacy and international politics. Over the last few decades, historical research—in the context of the so-called new diplomatic history—has shown that state diplomacy in premodern times was not the sole determining factor in Europe's international relations.⁵ The so-called Westphalian system has been dismissed as a myth, and historians now recognize that 19th- and 20th-century preoccupations with the modern nation state have anachronistically been applied to the previous period.⁶ This focus on the nation state and Westphalia explains to a large extent the traditional emphasis on the resident ambassador. It is now generally accepted, however, that diplomatic relations were established, maintained, or suspended by a whole range of formal and

4 See the contribution of John Watkins to this volume.

5 J.-M. Moeglin and S. Péquignot, *Diplomatie et "relations internationales" au Moyen Âge (IXe-XVe siècle)* (Paris: 2017); N. Jaspert and J. Kolditz, "Christlich-Muslimische Aussenbeziehungen im Mittelmeerraum. Zur räumlichen und religiösen Dimension mittelalterlicher Diplomatie," *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung* 41 (2014), 1–88; M. Ebben and L. Sicking, "Nieuwe diplomatieke geschiedenis van de premoderne tijd. Een inleiding," *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 127 (2014), 541–552; J. Hennings and T.A. Sowerby eds., *Practices of Diplomacy in the Early Modern World c. 1410–1800* (London: 2019); T.A. Sowerby, "Early Modern Diplomatic History," *History Compass* 14 (2016), 441–456; H. von Thiesen, "Diplomatie vom type ancien: Überlegungen zu einem Idealtypus des frühneuzeitlichen Gesandtschaftswesens," in: H. von Thiesen and C. Windler eds., *Akteure der Aussenbeziehungen: Netzwerke und Interkulturalität im Historischen Wandel* (Cologne: 2010), 492–503; B. Tremml-Werner and D. Goetze, "A Multitude of Actors in Early Modern Diplomacy," *Journal of Early Modern History* 23 (2019), 407–422; C. Windler, *Missionare in Persien. Kulturelle Diversität und Normenkonkurrenz im globalen Katholizismus, 17.-18. Jahrhundert* (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: 2018).

6 D. Croxton, "The Peace of Westphalia of 1648 and the Origins of Sovereignty," *The International History Review* XXI.3 (1999), 569–582; H. Duchhardt, "Das 'Westfälische System': Realität und Mythos" in: von Thiesen and Windler eds., *Akteure der Aussenbeziehungen*, 393–402; A. Oslander, "Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Westphalian Myth," *International Organization* 55 (2001), 251–287; P.M.R. Stirk, "The Westphalian Model and Sovereign Equality," *Review of International Studies* 38 (2012), 641–660; B. Teschke, *The Myth of 1648: Class, Geopolitics and the Making of Modern International Relations* (London and New York: 2003).

informal actors or agents. Their importance, next to and beyond the role of the traditional ambassador, compels us to make them an integral part of diplomatic studies. All these actors represented a wide variety of political and other entities including—besides states—cities, city leagues, religious orders, or companies. Accordingly, numerous forms of premodern diplomacy coexisted.

Although we make a distinction between state and non-state actors, it is not our intention to create a misleading binary view that opposes two kinds of actors, nor do we want to contrast formal and informal actors or professional and non-professional diplomats. On the contrary, we are convinced that a non-state actor-oriented approach will demonstrate how diffuse and porous boundaries between formal or public and informal or non-state agents were in the early modern context. Ultimately, this volume attempts to redefine the diverse group of participants in premodern diplomacy and to gain a better, richer, and denser understanding of their practices, commitments, and interests.

We recognize that the use of the term non-state actors when studying premodern times is not without criticism. To speak of non-state actors in a time before the emergence of the modern state is anachronistic, as is a discussion of international relations in times without nations and without the use of the term diplomacy, which only reluctantly took hold in the later 18th century. Yet, we should not allow fear of anachronism to push us into the arms of antiquarianism, as John Watkins warns us in his chapter of this volume. The early modern world was a “confusing welter of states, imperial hegemons, and a myriad of non-state players,” with its own typical structural complexity. This does not mean, though, that proven modern concepts cannot help us understand the premodern world, especially if these concepts were used in more or less similar terms at the time.⁷ Abraham de Wicquefort, for example, made a clear distinction between persons with a public function at the service of a monarch and those without such an office, between those who represented a monarch or other sovereign authority and those who did not. Thus, in his opinion, consuls were not diplomats because they represented the interests of a group of a monarch’s subjects, merchants and traders.⁸ Wicquefort’s views on the non-state diplomat were not widely shared. In premodern times, there was a lively discussion about who could be considered diplomats and who could not. Early modern theorists of international law were very specific in their views on the legal status and protection that a particular category of diplomatic actors should enjoy. These categories included consuls, missionaries, and spies, who,

⁷ See Watkins’ and Fedele’s chapters.

⁸ A. de Wicquefort, *The Ambassador and his Functions*, book 1, trans. J. Digby (London: 1719), 7, 40–41.

we are convinced, were of significant importance in premodern diplomacy. Therefore, they constitute the principal object of study in the present volume.

The focus on non-state actors in premodern diplomacy has its present-day counterpart, as becomes very clear in Tom Fletcher's *The Naked Diplomat* on power and politics in the digital age. According to this former British ambassador to Lebanon, "diplomacy matters more than ever in the Digital Age, and not just to diplomats."⁹ The internet brings non-state actors into the conversation. "A proliferation of organizations now competes with diplomats ..."¹⁰ NGOs—sometimes, like the Worldwide Fund for Nature, representing millions of members—use their weight while lobbying and campaigning as non-state actors. The digital world also "raises the role and importance of unofficial intermediaries." Informal advice and mediation by academics or retired officials become more important because of their specific knowledge and experience. Successful negotiations increasingly rely on understanding the interplay between private and public sectors. In this twilight zone non-state agents operate.¹¹ Among them we find clergymen and spies. The role of the clergy in diplomacy is not limited to the past. Apart from the pope, who for example played a role in negotiations between Cuba and the USA, one can point to diplomatic negotiations in Northern Ireland and South Africa that were preceded by secret conversations mediated by a priest.¹² The prestige of the pope and other prelates as moral and politically impartial leaders is still an important factor in diplomatic negotiations. Spies have not lost their relevance to contemporary diplomacy either. On the contrary, while the age of James Bond—when there was no doubt as to who was the enemy—may be over, information- and intelligence-gathering is more important than ever in a world which has entered the era of the internet and cybercrime.

If Fletcher's book points to one thing from a historical perspective, it is that present-day diplomacy can no longer be understood in terms of the grand narrative of the development of the modern nation state. The same holds true for premodern diplomacy, as more and more historians now recognize. Isabella Lazzarini's recent book on Italian early-Renaissance diplomacy, covering the 1350–1520 period, offers a beautiful illustration of this view and is the first overall study of the topic since Garrett Mattingly's classic *Renaissance Diplomacy*. She considers diplomacy as a complex process characterized by multiplicity

9 T. Fletcher, *The Naked Diplomat: Understanding Power and Politics in the Digital Age* (London: 2016), 7, 9.

10 Fletcher, *Diplomat*, 16–17.

11 Ibidem, 172, 173 (citation), 178, 223.

12 Ibidem, 173.

and flexibility. Political agents, from kingdoms, republics, and duchies to communities, minor lords, and military captains, were carrying out “a balancing act between conflict and communication. In order to reduce the risks posed by open conflicts, diplomatic relations became more a process than an event: accompanied by a growing flow of more or less reliable information, practices of negotiation opened, maintained, and controlled a host of communication networks thanks to the work of diplomatic agents whose origin, nature, competences, and status varied according to context and time.”¹³

Who were these people? In Lazzarini’s early Renaissance Italy there were ambassadors as well as a great variety of other diplomatic agents, including a whole range of people having occasional diplomatic tasks: members of the clergy, military captains and *condottieri*, artists, scientists and merchants, and last but not least, women. She emphasizes that this broad range of diplomatic agents corresponds with the wide array of powers and polities, “the flexibility of their duties and the long-lasting coexistence of different roles with diplomatic responsibilities.”¹⁴

The three types of non-state agents selected for this volume—consuls, missionaries, and spies—will be discussed in three sections which, in order to complement the emphasis on diplomatic practice, are preceded by a section on diplomatic theory and literature in both premodern and modern times, offering a framework within which the three types of agents and their diplomatic activities can be considered.

In this first section, John Watkins is responsible for what is the most programmatic contribution to this volume. While recognizing that “modern understandings and expectations overdetermine our accounts of the past,” he argues that we “need to explain why a more robust understanding of state and non-state agency in premodern Europe matters.” The premodern world anticipated in many respects the complexities of the current diplomatic landscape, including the hold of business over political power, the rebirth of the city state, and power shifts away from states to individuals.¹⁵ Watkins strongly recommends that more research be done on relations between non-state agency and emerging legal consciousness, and he explains “how non-state agency points to larger theoretical concerns that continue to engage the international

13 I. Lazzarini, *Communication and Conflict: Italian Diplomacy in the Early Renaissance, 1350–1520* (Oxford: 2015), 263; idem, “Renaissance Diplomacy,” in: I. Lazzarini and A. Gamberti eds., *The Italian Renaissance State* (Cambridge: 2012), 425–443.

14 Lazzarini, *Communication*, 123–145 (citation 125). See also Moeglin and Pequignot, *Diplomatie*, 401–411.

15 Fletcher, *Diplomat*, 222–223, 225.

community.” Among other things, he shows how early modern theorists of international law struggled with questions which also occupy present-day international legal scholars.

That awareness of the existence of non-state agents and their importance for diplomacy next to and beyond the classic ambassador is not new, is also shown by Dante Fedele in his contribution on the plurality of diplomatic agents in premodern literature on the ambassador. He demonstrates convincingly that despite its attempts to limit diplomatic activity to the ambassador as the only official agent, premodern diplomatic theory could not avoid considering the other figures who were very often entrusted with essential tasks in the diplomacy of the time and whose roles inevitably raised questions among legal and political thinkers. Some of the actors treated in the literature on the ambassador are priests and mendicant friars, heralds, merchants, consuls, and secret agents, thus encompassing all three categories emphasized in the present volume. Early modern writers on the ambassador and other agents of diplomacy were well aware of the importance and usefulness of the latter and of the ambiguity of their role, as is shown by the 17th-century debate on whether consuls should enjoy diplomatic immunity. Those who still consider the Treaties of Westphalia as the birth of the modern state system must take notice of another conclusion drawn by Fedele’s research, namely that it was not until 1750 that the sovereign state would be strictly defined in diplomatic theory as the exclusive legitimate actor in international relations.¹⁶

Both Fedele’s and Watkins’ contributions point to the prominence of non-state agents in diplomacy. While the principal aim of this volume is the study of other diplomatic agents, besides ambassadors, a related goal is to overcome and cross the classic dichotomy between medieval and early modern in order to discover continuities and changes in the activities of non-state agents with diplomatic functions. Therefore each of the three sections contains a medieval as well as an early modern contribution.

Consuls appear both in the medieval and early modern periods as representatives of merchant communities abroad, often known as nations. The formal distinction between consuls representing a merchant nation (*electus*) and those being sent by a city or prince (*missus*) has now been deconstructed, as both types have coexisted for centuries, in the Middle Ages and in the early modern period.¹⁷ Their presence seems to have been most prominent

16 See also: Ch. Windler, “From Social Status to Sovereignty—Practices of Foreign Relations from the Renaissance to the *Sattelzeit*” in: Hennings and Sowerby eds., *Practices of Diplomacy*, 254–262.

17 M. Grenet, “Consuls et ‘nations’ étrangères: état des lieux et perspectives de recherche,” *Cahiers de la Méditerranée* 93 (2016), 25–34.

in the medieval and early modern Mediterranean area.¹⁸ Along the Atlantic coasts of Europe they also were sometimes called consuls—a name given, for instance, to the representatives of the Portuguese nation in Bruges in the 15th century¹⁹—but they could also be referred to as governors, as the representatives of English merchants in 14th-century Brabant and 15th-century Zealand were called.²⁰ In the Hanseatic world a *Vogt* (plural: *Vögte*) was the equivalent of a consul. In spite of the different names given to representatives of merchant communities, they all covered similar tasks and functions: they had both an internal responsibility to the community, including administrative tasks, and an external responsibility, such as representing the community towards the local authorities. In this latter capacity the consul or his equivalent came to play a role in diplomacy. The early modern history of the consular institution is often studied in close connection with the history of diplomacy, with a focus on the integration of the consulate into the diplomatic apparatus of the state. Attention has been paid to the effects of increasing state control on the consular institution, while the effects of consular practices on the foreign policy of the home country have been grossly neglected. This was due in particular to the belief of international theorists that the consul did not have any diplomatic status and was no more than a sidekick of sorts of the ambassador. In practice, however, the consular institution evolved in the grey area between diplomacy, commercial history, and

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- 18 Jaspert and Kolditz, "Christlich-Muslimische Aussenbeziehungen," 46–49; O. Constable, *Housing the Stranger in the Mediterranean World: Lodging, Trade, and Travel in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: 2003), 112, 133–138, 193–196, 281–286. An early modern equivalent focusing on the spatial aspects of trading stations and their representatives: W. Kaiser ed., *La loge et le foundouk. Les dimensions spatiales des pratiques marchandes en Méditerranée, Moyen Âge—époque contemporaine* (Paris: 2014). In recent years there has been a vast interest, mainly in France, in early modern consuls and consulates: J. Ulbert and G. Le Bouëdec eds., *La fonction consulaire à l'époque moderne. L'affirmation d'une institution économique et politique (1500–1800)* (Rennes: 2006); S. Marzagalli ed., *Les Consuls en Méditerranée, agents d'information (XVIe–XXe siècle)* (Paris: 2015); A. Bartolomei, G. Calafat, M. Grenet, and J. Ulbert eds., *De l'utilité commerciale des consuls. L'institution consulaire et les marchands dans le monde méditerranéen (XVIIe–XIXe siècles)* (Rome and Madrid: 2017); S. Marzagalli and J. Ulbert eds., *Les consuls dans tous leurs états: essais et bibliographie (avant 1914)*, *Cahiers de la Méditerranée* 93 (2016).
- 19 Most recently L. Sicking, "The Medieval Origin of the Factory or the Institutional Foundations of Overseas Trade. Towards a Model for Global Comparison," *The Journal of World History* 31: 2 (2020), 295–326.
- 20 N.J.H. Kerling, *Commercial Relations of Holland and Zealand with England from the Late 13th Century to the Close of the Middle Ages* (Leiden: 1954), 137–138.

international law with its own dynamics and influence on local authorities and state policy.²¹

Louis Sicking discusses the role of late medieval *Vögte* on the Scania peninsula in present-day southwestern Sweden, then under Danish authority. At the time, it was one of the main international markets of northern Europe, thanks to the important herring fisheries located there. Hanseatic merchants involved in the trade at Scania were represented, mostly per city, by a *Vogt*. Eventually these urban communities came to be spatially limited in so-called *vittes*, seasonal settlements of Hanseatic towns with their own separate jurisdictions.²² Each *vitte* had its own *Vogt* or governor who, among other things, represented the merchant community toward the Danish king. Sicking's contribution focuses on the spatial development of the *vittes* of the towns of Holland and Zealand, on the count of Holland and Zealand's interference with the appointment of *Vögte*, and on the latter's involvement in conflict management at Scania. He thus shows how space, agency, and conflict management were closely related in a seasonally densely populated area where some 30 Hanseatic cities were represented by *Vögte*, who were indispensable when problems needed to be solved, among each other's merchants and with the local Danish authorities.

Maurits Ebben investigates the position of consuls in the diplomatic network of the Dutch Republic as defenders of the interests of Dutch merchants and as quasi-public officials. Although consuls did not enjoy diplomatic status, which corresponds with Fedele's conclusion based on diplomatic literature of the period, Dutch practice—at least in Spain between the Peace of Munster (1648) and 1661—shows that consuls were not mere defenders of commercial interests, but also supplied economic, political, and military intelligence to the States General. They were a vital connecting element in Dutch diplomacy and could affect the States General's policies by exerting influence both on politicians at home and on Dutch diplomats abroad. Ebben considers the position of the consuls in the States General's diplomacy to be typical of the intricate

21 H. Leira and I.B. Neumann, "The Many Past Lives of the Consul," in: J. Melissen and A.M. Fernández eds., *Consular Affairs and Diplomacy* (Leiden and Boston: 2011), 225–246; G. Poumarède, "Consuls, réseaux consulaires et diplomatie à l'époque moderne," in: R. Sabbatini and P. Volpini eds., *Sulla diplomazia in età moderna. Politica, economia, religione* (Milan: 2011), 193–218; Ch. Windler, *La diplomatie comme expérience de l'autre: consuls français au Magreb, 1700–1840* (Geneva: 2002).

22 C. Jahnke, *Das Silber des Meeres. Fang und Vertrieb von Ostseehering zwischen Norwegen und Italien (12.–16. Jahrhundert)* (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: 2000). See also C. Jahnke, "The Medieval Herring Fishery in the Western Baltic," in: L. Sicking and D. Abreu-Ferreira eds., *Beyond the Catch: Fisheries of the North Atlantic, the North Sea and the Baltic, 900–1850* (Leiden and Boston: 2009), 157–186, 176.

relations of Dutch governmental institutions and the interests of the Dutch commercial community. Consuls were not elected by the local commercial community abroad, but nominated by leading Amsterdam merchants. Although officially appointed by the States General, they did not act as their representatives. They did, however, have contacts with both the States General in The Hague and with the Dutch ambassador in Madrid, which points to a close connection between consular and diplomatic services.

Missionaries as diplomats is the theme of the next section, in which Jacques Paviot and Felicia Roşu discuss, respectively, the role of mendicant friars in the 13th-century Mongolian empire and that of Jesuits in 16th-century Muscovy, Poland-Lithuania, and the Holy Roman Empire. Members of the clergy had come to play important roles in diplomacy ever since the rise of Christianity.²³ They offered dignity, solemnity, and a superior knowledge of Latin. Their promise of chastity made them suitable for delicate missions, like checking the fertility of a young princess, and their religious habit offered them additional immunity. When religious and military orders were founded, princes started using their members to carry out diplomatic tasks. Their prestige, their 'transnational' networks, their discretion, and their relative neutrality made them attractive for diplomatic service. Often the same men rendered diplomatic services to different princes. Mendicant orders in particular, mainly Franciscans and Dominicans, became responsible for an important part of diplomatic activity. They were experienced travellers and could use the houses of their orders during their journeys. It is thus no coincidence that popes chose mainly Dominicans and Franciscans for their embassies to the Mongols, as Jacques Paviot's contribution explains. The Dominican Julian of Hungary (1237–1238) and several papal envoys—the Franciscan John of Plano Carpini and the Dominicans Andrew of Longjumeau and Ascelin of Cremona (1245–1247)—had to collect information about a people so far unknown in Europe. Secular powers also used mendicants for diplomatic missions, but in the late Middle Ages their share in such tasks eventually declined. For most official diplomatic meetings, however, prelates continued to be used, for example at the congress of Arras in 1435.²⁴

23 T. Tanase, "*Jusqu'aux limites du monde.*" *La papauté et la mission franciscaine, de l'Asie de Marco Polo à l'Amérique de Christophe Colomb* (Rome: 2013); J.D. Ryan ed., *The Spiritual Expansion of Medieval Latin Christendom: The Asian Missions* (Farnham: 2013); R. Po-Chia Hsia, *A Companion to Early Modern Catholic Global Missions* (Leiden and Boston: 2018); D. Alden, *The Making of an Enterprise: The Society of Jesus in Portugal, Its Empire, and Beyond 1540–1750* (Stanford: 1996).

24 Moeglin and Péquignot, *Diplomatie*, 393–399.

The successive missions of Dominicans and Franciscans turned out to be mainly missions of intelligence and did not have a representative character. This was primarily due to the fact that the Mongol leaders did not accept Christian envoys as representatives of a sovereign monarch and considered foreign envoys mere messengers. In spite of many frustrated attempts, some mendicant friars did persist and eventually were able to lay the foundations for diplomacy based on representation. Before the end of the 13th century the Franciscan Jean de Montecorvino was sent to Peking and stayed at the palace of Temür Öljeitü Kahn, who considered him an official representative of the most important sovereign of Christianity, namely the pope.²⁵ The development and institutionalization, strictly framed by the pope, of missionary activity would reach its apogee in the 16th century with Jesuits crossing the continents, but started in the 13th and 14th centuries. Missionaries and bishops became official papal representatives abroad and were treated as such by khans and other foreign princes outside Latin Christendom. This representation became an important function of papal imperial aspirations, which resulted in the development of a central church administration, a development initiated in the 13th century in clear rivalry with the Holy Roman Emperor. Khans were not the only non-Latin rulers to accept the idea of representative envoys. Shortly after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, for example, the Ottomans allowed the Venetians to send a diplomatic representative—the first permanent European representative—to their newly conquered metropolis.²⁶

Roşu shows the inevitable interplay of religion, politics, and diplomacy in missionary activities as well as the multiple identities of the diplomat and his personal autonomous touch in diplomatic operations. In her contribution on the missionary and diplomatic operations of the Italian Jesuit Antonio Possevino (1533–1611), two instances are discussed in which he mediated between eastern-European secular rulers. In the first case—between Russia and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which had been at war for decades—the pope, who had engaged Possevino as mediator, had a personal interest: he was hoping to bring the former warring powers into an alliance against the Ottomans. The mixture of politics and religion becomes clear at different intertwined levels. The second instance concerned mediation in a territorial conflict between Poland-Lithuania and the Habsburg Emperor Rudolf II, which turned out to be particularly complicated for Possevino as he had developed

25 T. Tanase, "Les envoyés pontificaux en Orient au XIIIe siècle : ambassadeurs ou missionnaires ?," in: Drocourt ed., *La figure de l'ambassadeur*, 19–32, 28.

26 J.D. Tracy, "The Habsburg Monarchy in Conflict with the Ottoman Empire: A Clash of Civilizations," *Austrian History Yearbook* XLVI (2015), 1–28, 21, 25.

a close friendship with the Polish king. He used this good relationship to promote Catholicism and to advance the influence of his order in Transylvania, the king's home country. Roșu's study reveals that a clergyman such as Possevino could play a variety of roles in premodern diplomacy, whether at the service of a secular or a religious ruler. Instead of being a docile instrument of his superiors, he proved to be a conscientious individual who did not refrain from following his own political and religious convictions. Rather than carrying out obediently the instructions of his superiors, Possevino exemplified the non-state agent who remained true to his own priorities.

Jean-Baptiste Santamaria's and Alan Marshall's contributions constitute the last section on premodern intelligence, espionage, and diplomacy. Diplomacy involves representation, negotiation, and information gathering. The first element is primarily public while the latter two rely mostly on discretion and confidentiality. Secrecy is thus an essential aspect of diplomacy.²⁷ Early modern and contemporary espionage have attracted considerable scholarly attention, contrary to medieval spies.²⁸ This is now rapidly changing. Espionage has become a very popular topic—in part thanks to the vast interest in the history of information—and medievalists have taken notice.²⁹ No typical portrait of the medieval spy emerges from the existing literature. Variety predominates: members of the clergy, women, merchants, servants, minstrels all have served as spies or gatherers of secret information. Foreigners, especially expatriate men and women, probably formed the most notable group among those used for espionage. When spying in their homeland they had obvious advantages because of their knowledge of the area and of the language.³⁰

27 J. Black, *A History of Diplomacy* (London: 2010), 14; Fletcher, *Diplomat*, 118–119.

28 L. Bély, *Espions et ambassadeurs au temps de Louis XIV* (Paris: 1990) and idem, *Les secrets de Louis XIV: mystères d'État et pouvoir absolu* (Paris: 2013); N. Akkerman, *Invisible Agents: Women and Espionage in Seventeenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: 2018); A. Hugon, *Au service du Roi Catholique. "Honorables ambassadeurs et divins espions." Représentation diplomatique et service secret dans les relations hispano-françaises de 1598 à 1635* (Madrid: 2004); A. Marshall, *Intelligence and Espionnage in the Reign of Charles II, 1660–1685* (Cambridge: 1994); Recent examples of studies on medieval espionage and intelligence: N. Bock, H. Simonneau, and B. Walter, "L'information et la diplomatie à la fin du Moyen Âge. L'exemple de Picquigny (1475)," *Publications du centre européen d'études bourguignonnes* 53 (2013), 149–164; B. Léthenet, "Le renseignement. Une communauté au service du duc de Bourgogne (1407–1435)," *Publications du centre européen d'études bourguignonnes* 57 (2017), 77–87; Moeglin and Péquignot, *Diplomatie*, 645–671; J.-B. Santamaria, *Le secret du prince. Gouverner par le secret, France Bourgogne XIIIe-XVe siècle* (Ceyzérieu: 2018).

29 E.g. A. Silvestri, "Ruling from Afar: Government and Information Management in Late Medieval Sicily," *Journal of Medieval History* 42 (2016), 357–381.

30 Moeglin and Péquignot, *Diplomatie*, 653–657.

Santamaria explains that late medieval spies often were versatile. They combined espionage with diplomacy or other tasks. He argues that reliance on men connected to several networks—which in medieval society most often were ecclesiastical, noble, and urban networks—allowed them to use their versatility and gave their work a transnational character. Noble families, for instance, often had estates and other possessions in different countries. They came under growing pressure when the power of princes rose and clergymen, nobles, and city dwellers were pressured into choosing their allegiance. What exactly this meant for the spies recruited from these networks is an interesting question that needs further research.

Alan Marshall in his contribution on clandestine information, espionage, and intelligence raises the question of whether there actually were professional spies in premodern Europe, rather than people spying. There clearly was a lot of espionage and all kinds of people were spying. A great variety of men and women received compensation for their secret services, but not as permanent, official employees or agents of a national secret service. Failing a mature secret service, European rulers and statesmen tended to resort to more fluid and flexible solutions to meet the need for covert information and fill this lacuna by hiring private persons for spying activities. These individuals, obviously no actors on the highest levels of society, were very useful to the official diplomat, mostly of noble birth, who could not lower himself to the dirty work of spying. Outsourcing these tasks was a common practice. Marshall demonstrates with his close study of the White brothers how such agents were able to meet both the secret and public needs of princes and statesmen for information, and contributed as inevitable ‘secret wheels’ to the smooth running of the early modern diplomatic machine.

At the end of this introduction, what can be said in general about the non-state actor and his diplomatic activities in premodern times—in particular about consuls, missionaries, and spies? At first glance, the three types who figure so prominently in this volume do not seem to have had much in common, because of their distinct ‘professional backgrounds.’ Variety seems to have been a major characteristic both in the Middle Ages and in the early modern period. Yet, on the diplomatic scene they bear remarkable similarities. It is no exaggeration to state that most of the individual protagonists who appear in the last six chapters have similar capacities and talents, mostly in the area of negotiation, representation, and information gathering, as well as shared characteristics.³¹

31 M. Keblusek and B.V. Noldus eds., *Double Agents: Cultural and Political Brokerage in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden and Boston: 2011), 7, 8, 158.

The multiple loyalties and shifting sympathies of many non-state actors are typical examples of their behaviour. The White brothers' volatile interest in French, Spanish, or English rulers was extreme but not uncommon, and even missionaries such as Antonio Possevino who pretended to be impartial, could cherish different loyalties. Consuls worked simultaneously at the service of different interest groups, commercial organizations, local commercial communities, merchant houses, and governmental institutions without neglecting their own business. Most of them were very mobile people who travelled throughout different parts of Europe and beyond and had a network of correspondents and agencies at their disposal. They possessed personal talents and qualities—command of languages, networking capabilities, and specialized interest in and knowledge of cultures, religions, and ethnic groups, as did the missionaries to eastern Europe and Asia. Concerning these aspects of the non-state actor we notice continuity or at least parallels between medieval and early modern consuls, missionaries, and spies.

The multifaceted nature or fluidity of consuls, missionaries, and spies and their tasks is striking in both the medieval and early modern case studies. The boundaries between formal, or public, and informal were fluid, as demonstrated by the previously mentioned aspects of loyalty and volatility. The *Vögte*, for example, represented the merchant communities of Hanseatic cities on the Scania peninsula, yet at the same time had close connections with the city magistrates and in some cases served as their representatives. The count of Holland and Zealand even named the *Vogt* of the town of Zierikzee at some point to be the representative of all Hollanders and Zealanders in Scania. Using available urban agents at a higher regional level reflects the count's pragmatism and must have served his own purposes as well. The same may be said about members of missionary orders who, because of their presence and widely recognized stature in a specific foreign region, were employed by rulers as useful temporary official delegates or as unofficial personal agents.

Because of the overarching shadow of 'the state' in all things diplomatic, traditional Diplomatic History has neglected the study of any actors other than state diplomats in international relations. The studies in the present volume, ultimately, demonstrate that state diplomacy in premodern times has not been all-determining for Europe's international relations. By taking consuls, missionaries, and spies as illustrative cases, these studies open up new perspectives on the influence of non-state actors on European diplomacy in premodern times. Non-state actors were indispensable intermediaries who facilitated diplomatic relations and were integral to diplomatic information and negotiation. What also matters is that their knowledge, experience, methods and procedures, their personal interests and networks, separately or linked to

those of their principals, have contributed significantly to shaping the practice and culture of premodern diplomacy and left their mark on it.

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